



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Communicating Sustainable Initiatives

A qualitative study of how fashion brands can communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers.

by Kärolin Mikkal & Agnieszka Karolina Nawrot

Master's Programme in
International Marketing
and Brand Management
2020/2021

Supervisor: Annette Cerne

Examiner: Veronika Tarnovskaya

Abstract

Keywords: CSR communication, sustainability, fashion industry, consumer types, greenwashing, attitude-behaviour gap

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to provide an understanding of how fashion brands can communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers. The research is focused on the company's perspective of the communication process. However, it also considers different types of consumers, their needs and expectations.

Theoretical Perspective: The literature review examines the key concepts and phenomena within sustainability in this industry. Next, it briefly covers the brand identity, as it is a crucial element of every successful communication strategy. It is followed by the literature focused on consumers and their different types. In this part, the concepts such as attitude-behaviour gap, diversity of consumers perceptions, and different types of sustainable and fashion consumers are introduced. The next part covers sustainability communication and its key elements.

Methodology: This study has taken a qualitative research approach and focused on the abductive strategy in order to combine existing findings and develop it to extend the knowledge regarding CSR communication and different types of consumers. The process included twofold material collection stages. Firstly, three focus groups with consumers were conducted. They were followed by five semi-structured in-depth interviews with the experts in the field of sustainability communication.

Findings: The findings introduce in more detail different types of fashion consumers and their expectations. This reveals a variety of elements consumers consider important in CSR communication, such as brands' values, content about education, added benefits and value for money. Moreover, findings confirmed the key aspects of sustainability initiatives are authenticity, transparency and honesty. Brands must consider the complexity of consumers and adjust the message content and channel accordingly.

Theoretical Contribution: This thesis contributes to existing literature on CSR communication and different types of consumers. Further, this work adds to previous literature on key elements of message content, by suggesting the necessity of educational topics. Additionally, it shows the change and increasing importance of social media as a communication channel.

Managerial Contribution: This research guides practitioners through the communication process presented in the theoretical framework, emphasising the importance of defining brand identity as a first step. The study further indicates that in order for CSR communication to be successful it needs to be adjusted according to different types of consumers. Brands should focus on similar elements consumers appreciate the most, such as value for money, quality and transparency, while still considering the needs of each type individually.

Acknowledgements

This Master thesis is the final part of our Master's programme in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University School of Economics and Management in Sweden. Due to COVID-19, this past year has been challenging for all of us. However, despite the fact that our programme was fully online, all the courses were extremely interesting and engaging. That is why we would like to start by thanking our lecturers and professors for all the effort they have put in and all the knowledge they have shared with us. More particularly, we would like to thank our supervisor Annette Cerne for her guidance and support throughout the whole process. Moreover, we would like to express our gratitude and thank our participating experts that took the time for the interviews. Thank you for your openness and valuable insights. Finally, we want to thank our friends and families, who have supported us during the entire year. Thank you for always being there for us!

Lund, 29th of May 2021



Kärolin Mikkal



Agnieszka Karolina Nawrot

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Problematisation	3
1.3 Research Purpose	4
1.4 Intended Contribution	5
1.5 Outline of the Thesis	6
2 Literature and Theoretical Review	7
2.1 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry	7
2.2 Brand Identity	9
2.3 Consumers	11
2.3.1 Types of Consumers	12
2.4 Sustainability Communication	15
2.4.1 Message Content	16
2.4.2 Communication Channels	19
2.6 Theoretical Framework	20
3 Methodology	24
3.1 Research Philosophy	24
3.2 Research Approach	25
3.2.1 Qualitative Strategy	25
3.2.2 Abductive Strategy	26
3.3 Research Design	26
3.4 Data Collection Method	28
3.4.1 Focus Groups	28
3.4.1.1 Sampling of Focus Groups	29
3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews	30
3.4.2.1 Sampling of Semi-Structured Interviews	31
3.5 Time Horizon	32
3.6 Data Analysis	33
3.7 Validity and Reliability	34
4 Findings	36
4.1 Consumers' view	36
4.1.1 Social Consumers	36
4.1.2 Sacrifice Consumers	39
4.1.3 Self Consumers	41
4.2 Practitioners' view	44
5 Analysis and Discussion	52
5.1. Themes Emerging from the Analysis	52
5.1.1 Brand	52
5.1.2 Authenticity & Transparency	53
5.1.3 Social Media & Importance of Physical Stores	54
5.1.4 Needs	55
5.1.5 Added Value	56

5.1.6 Education	58
5.1.7 Consumers	58
5.2 Discussion	60
6 Conclusion	65
6.1 Theoretical Implications	66
6.2 Managerial Implications	67
6.3 Limitations and Future Research	68
References	69
Appendix A - Focus Groups Topic Guide	79
Appendix B - Post Example Screenshot	80
Appendix C - Semi-Structured Interviews Topic Guide	81
Appendix D - Semi-Structured Interviews Interviewees	83

List of Figures

Figure 1: Outline of the thesis (own illustration)	6
Figure 2: Theoretical Framework (own illustration)	21
Figure 3: Outline of the Research Process (own illustration)	27

1 Introduction

This section provides the background of the research by highlighting the growing demand for sustainability and its increasing importance, especially in the fashion industry. Moreover, the problematisation showcases the need for research that would investigate how fashion brands can clearly communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers. Based on the problematisation, the research purpose and research question have been established. Finally, the chapter concludes with the intended contribution that this study wants to bring to the field of the research.

1.1 Background

The world around us is changing rapidly, and so is our consumption behaviour. We no longer base our purchasing decision solely on accessibility, price, and quality. Our decision-making processes are becoming increasingly complex due to the rising number of factors that influence them (Caruana, 2007). Nowadays, consumers are becoming more and more aware of the impact that their purchases have on the environment. That is why one of the factors that is progressively important in consumers' eyes is sustainability.

Sustainability is a part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Ashrafi, Adams, Walker & Magnan, 2018). According to van Marrewijk (2003), CSR is a concept where the firms take certain actions to incorporate environmental and societal concerns into business actions and interactions with the stakeholders. However, some authors claim that this concept emerged to improve companies' reputation (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Hence, it can indicate that the companies' initiatives might not be a result of genuine care for the environment or/and society, but they might be driven purely by the need to improve the companies' image.

Nevertheless, sustainability and sustainable initiatives have a growing importance for consumers. In 2018, roughly 83% of adults in Mexico, 63% in Italy, and 45% in the USA admitted that they became more concerned about sustainability over the last 12 months (Statista, 2018). Furthermore, according to the Global Monitor 2019 Report (D'Hond, 2020), 65% of respondents find it important for brands to be committed to making society better. Additionally, younger generations tend to be more aware of the impact of both their purchases and the brands they buy from. Nearly 60% of people from Generation Z in the USA and Canada prefer to choose environmentally sustainable products (Statista, 2019). Therefore, companies have a growing pressure to have a flawless reputation, especially in terms of sustainability (Ernest-Jones, 2020).

However, implementing sustainability into a company's identity is merely the beginning of the process. Consumers look for the authenticity and credibility of the company's claims. Otherwise, it can be perceived as greenwashing (Kolster, 2016). Therefore, every message sent by a company is closely evaluated by consumers. Do the firm and its brands care about their consumers, and the world in general, or is it just a self-interested business? Is the brand involved in any social initiatives or is socially conscious (Clark, 2020)? According to the study, 68% of online consumers in the USA and UK would not buy from a brand with poor or misleading corporate social responsibility (Ernest-Jones, 2020). Therefore, each action, or its lack, influences the brand image. Consumers quickly create brand perception; however, it is very hard to change it later.

One of the most interesting cases of sustainability can be found in fashion. It is the second most polluting industry in the world (UN News, 2019), and the pressure to be sustainable cannot get higher than for fashion brands (D'Souza, 2015). According to The Business Research Company (2020), the global ethical fashion market is expected to grow from nearly \$6.35 billion in 2019 to \$9.81 billion in 2025 and \$15.17 billion in 2030. Furthermore, online searches for "sustainable fashion" tripled between 2016 and 2019 (Cheng, 2019). Hence, the demand for broadly understood sustainability is rapidly increasing. The companies have noticed the positive impact that these kinds of initiatives can have on their brand image and sales and responded with various projects and solutions such as H&M Conscious, or Zara Join Life.

Nevertheless, fashion companies still have a lot of catching up to do with the growing demand for sustainable clothing. The brands that fail to adjust to new ethical trends can face serious problems, which can be seen by Forever 21's bankruptcy (Cheng, 2019). This teen retailer was incredibly successful, nevertheless, as it was mentioned before, new generations such as Millennials and Generation Z demand more sustainable apparel. The company did not notice this shift, which led to its failure. However, one of the key problems that the industry needs to face in the first place is how to define sustainable fashion. According to Dawkins (2004), sustainable apparel brands quite often do not know how to create an effective communication strategy, which is crucial to evoke engagement and consequently influence the purchase decision. The Vice President at CK and Tommy Hilfiger admitted that there is no common language for how to communicate sustainability in the apparel industry and that most companies struggle with communicating their ethical initiatives with consumers (Cheng, 2019). Therefore, in the midst of the growing demand for sustainable fashion, defining and communicating sustainable initiatives to consumers is currently one of the biggest problems for apparel brands.

1.2 Problematisation

The demand for sustainability has been driven by consumers indicating that environmental problems are the foremost among business issues (D'Souza, Taghian & Khosla, 2007). However, as it was mentioned before, sustainable fashion brands often struggle with creating an effective communication strategy (Dawkins, 2004). A reason for this can be that the fashion industry has not agreed on industry-wide definition and standards of sustainability. This results in barriers that keep consumers from accepting the production of sustainable products (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of clarity around sustainability with the increased demand for it can result in a process known as “greenwashing”. It can occur when a company’s sustainable or green image is not in compliance with its actual performances regarding sustainability (Seele and Gatti, 2015). Therefore, it is essential for companies to understand how to communicate their sustainable processes without it being perceived as greenwashing.

However, even though the demand for sustainable fashion is increasing, existing literature has identified that consumers have an attitude-behaviour gap (Niinimäki, 2010; Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). This means there is a gap between how consumers think and actually act. Therefore, despite the fact that their attitude towards sustainability is positive, their final purchase does not reflect that. This is a crucial factor to consider when studying sustainability communication. Moreover, it is important to mention that there is an attitude-behaviour gap amongst companies as well, however, for this thesis, this phenomenon is considered from the consumers’ perspective.

The literature on brands’ sustainability communication looks at the importance of how a company can communicate its CSR effectively. An effective CSR communication can be understood as communication that improves consumers’ perception of the company and reduces their scepticism (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Furthermore, Dawkins (2004) argues that companies need to consider that different audiences have different expectations and needs, and thus respond differently to the message. Existing literature emphasizes the necessity of clear and consistent communication of companies’ core values through the message (Nandan, 2005). Moreover, the communication about sustainability needs to be authentic in order for consumers to perceive it credible (Andrea, 2019), as brand authenticity is considered to be a critical factor for the success of the brand (Hernández- Fernández & Lewis, 2019). However, there is a lack of guidance on how to implement sustainability messages into communication strategy (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Thus, it suggests a need for more research on the development of a sustainability communication strategy. Consequently, if a company fails to do these things it is perceived as greenwashing by the consumers (Kolster, 2016).

Furthermore, the current literature sees consumers as a homogeneous group often divided by socio-demographic characteristics (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics & Bohlen,

2003). However, consumers cannot be considered as one big group, since their consumption habits are strongly guided by their beliefs (Holt, 2012). Therefore, socio-demographic elements such as age and gender are not the only things companies need to consider. Moreover, recent literature on sustainability has introduced the concept of different consumers and their reaction to corporate communication (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Various authors have proposed different types of sustainable consumers (e.g. Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005; Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Park & Ha, 2012). Nevertheless, all the types perceive sustainability differently (McNeill & Moore, 2015). It might be due to the fact that consumers evaluate the companies' messages through the prism of their own subjectivity (Nandan, 2005). Additionally, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) argue that consumers encode the message sent by the brand based on their life experience and personal characteristics, this makes them perceive brand image differently. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned before, the literature on communication has a rather homogeneous view on consumers and tends to not distinguish between various types of them (e.g. Kapferer, 2012; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Hence, it shows the need for further research regarding sustainability communication and how to adjust it to different types of consumers.

To conclude, as sustainability in the fashion industry is seen as a growing trend, it is clear that fashion brands need to deal with the growing pressure to be sustainable. Nevertheless, brands seem to be struggling with defining and communicating their sustainable initiatives. Furthermore, there is a lack of a clear framework on how a fashion brand can communicate its sustainable projects and identity. Additionally, the communication of the company's CSR considering the complexity and diversity of the consumers and their needs has received scant attention. Thus, it is crucial to develop a process that would give fashion companies guidance on how to clearly and effectively communicate their sustainable initiatives to various types of consumers. Therefore, this indicates a need for further research that would study CSR communication in the fashion industry and consider various types of consumer.

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to extend the current literature in terms of how fashion brands can communicate their sustainable initiatives. Moreover, given the fact that the literature acknowledges different types of consumers, it is also crucial to consider them, while establishing communication. Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to answer the following question:

How can fashion brands communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers?

Hence, the study is focused on the company's side of the communication process and investigates the process of creation of the message content and how to establish it to make it appealing to the consumers. Therefore, it entails different aspects of communication such as channel, communication elements, the ratio between fashion and sustainability content. Nevertheless, it takes a closer look at different types of consumers, their needs and expectations.

1.4 Intended Contribution

Answering the proposed research questions aims to broaden the existing literature on CSR communication in the fashion industry. Furthermore, as the topic of sustainability is increasingly more popular in the fashion industry this paper shows that brands need to meet the consumer demand for sustainability. Findings from this study provide theoretical as well as practical contributions taking a company's perspective.

Theoretical contributions aim to expand the knowledge of how fashion companies can establish a message about their sustainable projects that are perceived as authentic and credible by different types of consumers. By doing that the paper adds to the existing literature on different types of fashion consumers. It confirms existing knowledge and adds how different consumer types value messages on sustainability differently and how their expectations towards a fashion brand vary. Furthermore, this paper offers a simplified framework on CSR communication combining the Sender-receiver Model by Kapferer (2008), the Communication Model by Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) and the Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The framework shows how different types of fashion consumers perceive the messages differently depending on the content and channel. As current literature has mostly considered consumers as one, this framework differentiates from others, providing valuable insights on how different consumer types perceive the brand image differently.

The paper provides practical contributions to marketers on how to communicate the company's sustainable efforts effectively within the fashion industry. It acts as a guide showing which elements companies should pay attention to when constructing a message and choosing a channel where to distribute it. The findings of this paper benefit practitioners with knowledge of what consumers expect from communication, what types of channels they use and what they perceive as authentic. Together all this is valuable to know in order to build an authentic brand through communication.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

As presented on Figure 1, this paper has six main parts. In **Chapter 1**, the background regarding sustainability and the fashion industry has been introduced. Furthermore, the problematisation section pointed out the need for further research on how fashion brands can clearly communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers. Based on it, the research purpose, research questions, and intended contribution have been established. **Chapter 2** lays the theoretical ground for this thesis. It covers topics such as: sustainability in the fashion industry, brand identity, consumers, and sustainability communication. The literature review section concludes with the presentation of a theoretical framework. The next chapter, **Chapter 3**, illustrates the research philosophy, approach, design, data collection method, time horizon and data analysis strategy. Moreover, it includes the reflection regarding the quality of the research and chosen methods. The findings from the empirical data collection are presented in **Chapter 4**. Next, they are analysed and supported by integrating relevant literature in **Chapter 5**. This chapter also includes the discussion of the findings and provides answers to the research question. Finally, in **Chapter 6**, the thesis concludes with theoretical and managerial implications, as well as with limitations and suggestions for future research.



Figure 1: Outline of the thesis (own illustration)

2 Literature and Theoretical Review

In this chapter, the previous literature and theories that are important to answer the research question are revised. Due to the fact that the topic of this thesis revolves around sustainability communication in the fashion industry, the first sub-chapter introduces the key concepts and phenomena within sustainability in this industry. The second sub-chapter briefly introduces the brand identity, as it is a crucial element of every successful communication strategy. Moreover, since this thesis investigates how sustainable initiatives can be successfully communicated to various types of consumers, the next sub-chapter discusses the consumers and their types. In this part, concepts such as attitude-behaviour gap, diversity of consumers perceptions and different types of sustainable and fashion consumers are being introduced. The next sub-chapter covers the relevant literature regarding sustainability communication and its key elements: message content and communication channels. Finally, the last part introduces the Theoretical Framework that is based on the mentioned literature.

2.1 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

To begin the research on sustainability in the fashion industry, it is crucial to first understand what it means. Currently, the fashion industry lacks a common understanding of what sustainability is (Berg, Hedrich, Ibanez, Kappelmark, Magnus & Seeger, 2019; Farley Gordon & Hill, 2014). Therefore, it has a variety of definitions where some consider only environmental factors and others take into account ethical issues as well (Davies, 2015). Sustainability in the fashion industry is often used as a synonym for eco, green, ethical, slow (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019) and organic (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2014). The United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (The Brundtland Commission, 1987). This definition seems to be the most widely used one. Nevertheless, there are several initiatives for fashion companies to participate in to guide the industry towards being more sustainable. Such as, in 2009 the Copenhagen Fashion Summit launched a sustainability program called The CEO's Agenda, which acts as a guideline for fashion company CEOs (Gazzola, Pavione, Pezzetti & Grechi, 2020). Furthermore, prior to the 2019 G7 summit 32 major apparel companies have agreed to a set of shared environmental sustainability objectives (Berg et al., 2019). This shows a direction where the fashion industry is heading.

Moreover, the fashion industry is known to be greatly unsustainable, as it is one of the biggest polluters in the world (Moorhouse & Moorhouse, 2018; Becker-Leifhold, 2018). Current business models, where trends are rapidly changing (Gordon & Hill, 2014), prices and quality

are low, push consumers to have unsustainable consumption behaviours (Niinimäki, 2012). Therefore, encouraging companies to continue with these business models. In particular, the consumption of fast fashion is getting more attention for being highly unsustainable (McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, Giesler and Veresiu (2014) argue that the responsibility to make ethical decisions has shifted from companies to consumers. This means that companies can continue to choose to have unethical and unsustainable production processes and give consumers the responsibility to choose whether to purchase from these brands or not. This process is called responsabilisation and it comes from neo-liberal discourses, where responsibility is seen as something to be shared within economically rational actors, who compare different actions before making a decision (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). However, as consumers are given the possibility to assess and make self-determined decisions the responsibility will shift onto the decision-maker themselves. For this reason, companies need to keep in mind that even when communicating their sustainable performances, it is in the hands of consumers to make the decision to support the brand or not.

Nevertheless, it seems consumers are trying to make companies take the responsibility to act ethically and sustainably as well, as the demand for more sustainable fashion is increasing (Berg et al., 2019; Khandual & Pradhan, 2019; Lehmann, Arici, Robinsom, Kruse & Taylor, 2020). The pressure for companies to be socially responsible and sustainable is growing (Gruber, Kaliauer, & Schlegelmilch, 2015). It comes from consumers demanding companies to be more transparent on environmental and social performances (Gazzola et al., 2020; Lehmann et al., 2020). This is further seen from the term “sustainable fashion” being one of the most extensively used phrases in the fashion industry now (Khandual & Pradhan, 2018).

Companies have noticed the demand as well as the benefits of being more sustainable. They are reacting to it by developing sustainable product lines and supporting social initiatives. According to Fletcher (2014), the key to the industry’s future success lies in reducing its environmental and social effect. This has led to a rise and growth of new business models, such as second-hand stores, repairing and renting (The State of Fashion, 2019; Armstrong, Niinimäki, Kujala, Karell & Lang, 2015). However, according to CEO Agenda (2020), companies are not making the changes to be more sustainable fast enough in order to balance out the negative environmental and social impacts the fashion industry has. Thus, in order to counterbalance the destructive impact, the fashion industry has on the environment, it is critical that companies act on it now.

Moreover, often this demand leads to companies marketing their sustainable initiatives without actually acting on these. This is known as greenwashing (Saha & Darnton, 2005). Dahl (2010) describes it as a “practice of making unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability or environmental friendliness in an attempt to gain market share”. Furthermore, Seele and Gatti (2015) researched different ways of defining greenwashing. The study showed that even though different researchers translate it in their own ways, the most commonly used definition is by Oxford English Dictionary: “Disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image” (n.d., cited in Seele & Gatti, 2015). However, it is important to consider that greenwashing lies in the eyes

of the observer, and thus is influenced by the relationship between expectations, messages and perceptions (Seele & Gatti, 2015). Therefore, it is dependent on how consumers translate the communicated messages on sustainability. However, greenwashing itself is not a new phenomenon, however, with the rising demand for sustainable products from consumers the practice of greenwashing has been more and more common (Dahl, 2010). It can appear in different forms. Such as, mislabelling products, using vague terminology or even making irrelevant claims (ed. Strähle, 2017). However, it is important to note that fashion brands often use their own labels and certifications to claim sustainability, making it difficult for consumers to tell the credibility of it. Thus, Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018) argue that it is important to implement internationally recognised certifications as third-party certifications are perceived as more trustworthy. Moreover, greenwashing can appear with the process of responsabilisation (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014) as well, where companies seem to try to deviate attention and responsibility away from themselves. In order to communicate sustainability successfully, companies need to be aware of what consumers might consider as greenwashing to avoid that.

Furthermore, companies have noticed that communicating their environmental policies can increase market share and positively affect consumers' public perceptions (Ramus & Montiel, 2005). Therefore, many companies have started to develop sustainable clothing lines, such as H&M and Zara. However, as there is no common definition and understanding of sustainability companies can still easily get away with non-action. This can further encourage the practice of greenwashing. In order to avoid greenwashing Alevizou and Oates (2016) argue that it is critical for the fashion industry to define sustainable fashion.

In order to become more sustainable, fashion companies need to start being more innovative and implement sustainable designs (Niinimäki 2012; Armstrong et al., 2015). However, this alone is not enough. Nandan (2005) argues that companies need to communicate their sustainable identity in order to succeed. Brand identity and sustainability communication will be further discussed later in this chapter.

2.2 Brand Identity

Corporate brand identity describes how a brand sees itself from the inside, and it is connected to its core values and beliefs (Kapferer, 2012; Urde 2013). It is important for companies to define their brand identity as this makes a brand unique and stand out from others (Nandan, 2004; Upshaw, 1995) giving the company a competitive advantage. Moreover, when it comes to the fashion industry, a brand is considered sustainable when it is transparent, authentic (Gazzola et al., 2020) and has sustainability in its' core values (Biloslavo & Trnavčević, 2009). Additionally, for sustainably conscious consumers a brand that has CSR activities in its core will appear more sincere (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007), since consumers often expect the brands to have the same values as their own (Gazzola et al., 2020). Thus, it is

important for companies to consider implementing sustainability into their brand identity and core values. Further, taking into consideration that the demand for sustainability is increasing it gives more merit for companies to incorporate sustainability into brand identity.

Literature shows that for companies to be successful with CSR communication it is important to integrate it with company's branding activities (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2013) as well as with general communication strategies (Roberts, 1996). Moreover, branding around sustainability can change how consumers look at the brand and its products. Thereupon, a more positive perception can result in increase of profits (Brown & Dacin, 1997), whereas negative perceptions can result in disbelief of the quality of products and reduce the purchase intent (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Furthermore, (Ottman, 2011) argues that by creating sustainable branding strategies a company can avoid its actions being perceived as greenwashing. Moreover, it is not possible for brands to target sustainable and conscious consumers anymore without having sustainability in its branding strategy (Ottman, 2011).

Furthermore, Ottman (2011) introduces five strategies how companies can establish credibility for their sustainable branding activities: walk your talk, be transparent, do not mislead, enlist the support of third parties and promote responsible consumption. Companies need to not only communicate their sustainable initiatives but also act on these. This means that they need to be committed and show their consumers how these initiatives are performed in reality. Moreover, companies need to be clear, when they use terms implying the product is recyclable or sustainable. Consumers need to be informed what such terms really mean. Misleading them can have long term effects resulting in consumer's distrust. Additionally, it gives more credibility to the company if its sustainable acts are confirmed by impartial third parties, such as certifications. Furthermore, if a brand promotes responsible consumption it evokes more trust in consumers towards its sustainable initiatives. However, when a company continuously promotes unsustainable consumption habits, consumers can perceive its sustainable actions to be insincere. By following all of the five strategies a company can increase their credibility for branding and marketing campaigns as well as overall trustworthiness.

Nevertheless, when a brand lacks to incorporate CSR into its core values, consumers are less likely to identify with the brand, engage in advocacy behaviours for the brand, be loyal to the brand and to show resilience towards the brand (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). Thus, when a company has sustainability at its core consumers are more likely to have positive perceptions of the company. However, when a company is caught lying about its sustainable identity it will have long-term consequences, such as consumers' distrust (Strähle & Köksal, 2015).

From existing literature, it is clear that defining brand identity is critical for the success of the company. This is especially crucial for brands that want to attract sustainable conscious consumers. Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007) argue that a brand that has higher CSR levels than its competitors will also attract consumers with higher CSR awareness. Furthermore, with the increasing importance of sustainability in the fashion industry companies need to

adjust their identities according to the demand. However, firms need to keep in mind that their perceived sustainable identity is only seen as authentic when it is set in the company's core values. Therefore, brand identity is necessary to consider in order for companies to communicate sustainable initiatives successfully.

2.3 Consumers

The most important concept connected to consumers is brand image. According to Nandan (2005), it represents all the impressions of a product in the minds of consumers, and the set of beliefs that they have regarding a particular brand. This definition is supported by both Keller (1993), who sees brand image as the way consumers perceive a brand, that is mirrored by the brand associations in their memory, and Kotler (1988, p.197), who views it as a set of beliefs that one has regarding a brand. Moreover, Hernández-Fernández and Lewis (2019) connect brand authenticity with brand image, which is a construct of brand individuality, brand consistency, brand continuity, perceived value and brand trust. Hence, each author mentions different characteristics of this concept. That is why there is no common theoretical framework on brand image (Mindrut, Manolica & Roman, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is another aspect of consumers' personality that is crucial to consider. We are all different and we perceive our environment in different ways. Therefore, we tend to evaluate a company's message through the prism of our subjectivity (Nandan, 2005). This claim is supported by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), who stated that each person perceives brand image differently, as they encode the brand messages through the prism of their life experiences and specific characteristics. Hence, consumers can have various images of the same brand. However, companies can influence brand image in consumers' minds, as they can shape their desires and brand associations that combined, create a brand image (de Chernatony, 1999).

Furthermore, many researchers (e.g. Chan & Wong, 2012; Joergens, 2006; Shen, Wang, Lo & Shum, 2012) tried to understand the motives for consumers to buy sustainable items. One of them is Davies (2015), who investigated what makes consumers want to buy sustainable fashion. The author mentions six factors that drive consumers' sustainable purchases, these are self-expression, self-esteem, responsibility, protecting the planet and a sense of accomplishment. The motive of self-expression is also discussed by Belk (1988), who claims that our possessions play a major function in expressing our identities. Additionally, when it comes to the motive of protecting the planet, it is in line with Elkington and Hailes (1988, cited in Peattie, 2001), who discuss the concept of a green consumer, who avoids products that endanger the environment and others, create unnecessary waste, and that are connected to animal cruelty. Moreover, Peattie (2001) has introduced the green purchase perception matrix. It shows the relationship between the level of compromise and confidence that consumers can make while choosing between sustainable or unsustainable options. The author states that

products that offer clear environmental benefits and require little compromise, as well as the ones that offer good performance, marginal environmental benefits for less money, are unlikely to struggle in the market. Nevertheless, products that ask for more compromise from the consumer's side, need to instill more confidence among potential buyers about their environmental benefits. Hence, they need to have a more convincing case. Finally, according to Davies (2015), consumers associate sustainable clothing with the following attributes: long-lasting (quality and fashion-wise), unique styles, natural materials, environmentally friendly, recycled, available, and no sweatshops, which confirm values found by Jägel, Keeling, Reppel & Gruber (2012). Therefore, in order to attract sustainable consumers, fashion companies should incorporate these attributes into their communication.

The attitude towards sustainability and brands' sustainable initiatives is one thing. Nevertheless, the final purchasing behaviour can be significantly different. Thus, another important aspect is the consumer's attitude-behaviour gap. It can be understood as the discrepancy between consumers' sustainable beliefs and the way they act. Therefore, they are sustainable-conscious and they expect sustainable initiatives from fashion companies. Nevertheless, they tend to choose the unsustainable option (Beard, 2008). There are various reasons for that such as price, availability, trust, and lack of transparency or information regarding sustainable options (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). Moreover, many consumers remain sceptical regarding the authenticity of a company's actions, as they do not know which ones are genuine in their sustainability claims (Beard, 2008; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). Furthermore, when it comes to the fashion industry, consumers might be reluctant to buy sustainable items due to the product design, as they find them not fashionable and trendy (Beard, 2008). According to Joergens (2006), it proves that when buying new clothing, consumers' personal needs and motives take precedence over ethical/sustainable issues. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned before, due to various personalities and backgrounds, we perceive things differently. Hence, our behaviour varies and it also depends on our subjective judgment of the messages and signals sent from the companies.

2.3.1 Types of Consumers

There is a visible complexity of consumers' behaviours, especially when it comes to sustainability. Nowadays, consumption cannot be solely explained by socio-demographic factors like income or age, but it requires a wider socio-cultural and social-psychological perspective (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). That is why in order to be able to establish direct marketing communication, the companies are trying to identify homogeneous consumer groups based on various factors (Green, Carmone & Wachspress, 1976). Many authors have researched this topic and have introduced different groups of consumers.

The most basic division into two types of sustainable consumers is seen in the work of authors such as Gruber, Kaliauer and Schlegelmilch (2015) or Park and Ha (2012). The latter paper sees sustainable consumers, as **green product purchasers**, and **green product non-purchasers**. According to Park and Ha (2012), various studies suggest that pro-environmental

behaviour should be viewed from both behaviour motivated by anticipated desirable outcomes, and pro-social behaviour perspectives, as they are not only guided by attitude variables but also by norms and social identity. Moreover, the research investigates the psychological characteristics and behavioural intentions towards sustainability of both consumers' groups. The green product purchasers showcase more pro-social, pro-environmental values, and they are more altruistic and open to change (Stern, Dietz & Guagnano, 1995). Furthermore, the research has shown that this group has more positive cognitive and affective attitudes, stronger social pressure and personal obligation and greater intention to perform sustainable actions than non-purchasers. Finally, consumers with previous experience in pro-environmental initiatives and practices can easily engage in other pro-environmental disciplines compared with consumers without such experiences (Park & Ha, 2012). Therefore, it is harder to encourage non-purchasers to incorporate sustainability into their daily lives and purchasing decisions.

Moreover, Gruber, Kaliauer and Schlegelmilch (2015) have introduced two other types of consumers that are strongly connected to previously mentioned groups. The first type includes consumers, who are already interested in sustainability and might look for information regarding the company's CSR projects. In order to reach them, companies should use more subtle channels (e.g. online pages or reports) to inform this audience about the CSR initiatives, as they provide an opportunity to find more in-depth information and concrete facts, which they find the most interesting. Furthermore, the second group are people that do not have a strong attitude towards sustainability. However, they still might be positively influenced by it if they are provided with the right knowledge regarding the company's projects. According to the authors, this type of consumer is harder to reach. Hence, large-scale communication through e.g. social media, and television, is crucial to inform this group about a company's sustainable projects. The message should be regularly supported by external institutions such as governmental and non-governmental organisations, to add credibility to it (Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015). This indicates a need for different communication methods for every type of sustainable consumer.

A broader view on types of sustainable consumers has been introduced by Gilg, Barr and Ford (2005). Based on three sets of criteria: environmental values and concerns, socio-demographic variables, and psychological factors, they established four types of green consumers: **committed environmentalists**, **mainstream environmentalists**, **occasional environmentalists** and **non-environmentalists**. The most interesting take away from this research is that consumers, who are less sustainable-conscious share completely different values to those who are significantly involved. Additionally, there is a visible difference in the perception of price between all groups. While making a purchase, the committed environmentalists do not consider price to be an important factor, and they tend to put little emphasis on wealth and personal influence. Whereas the attitude towards price is significantly different for the non-environmentalist group (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005).

When it comes to sustainable-conscious consumers, Balderjahn, Peyer, Seegebarth, Wiedmann & Weber (2018) have investigated this group of consumers and introduced six

new types based on the review of two product classes: consumer goods and fashion products. The authors mention that the current research on types of sustainable consumers is focused on distinguishing between a low and high level of concern. Nevertheless, there is a need for a study that considers the existence of different patterns among sustainable consumers' groups (Balderjahn et al., 2018; Verain, Bartels, Dagevos, Sijtsema, Onwezen & Antonides, 2012). According to the authors, consumer's sustainable behaviour is connected to three main factors: sustainable consciousness and social and financial factors. The sustainable-conscious consumers appreciate collaborative consciousness and spend a significant amount of money on sustainable clothing. Nevertheless, they tend to have below-average incomes. Conversely, the non-sustainable conscious consumers usually have an above-average income. However, even though they have little concern regarding sustainability, they buy more sustainable clothing than average, which might indicate the opposite attitude-behaviour gap - a reverse concern-behaviour gap (Balderjahn et al., 2018). It shows that despite a lack of interest in sustainability, these individuals might still purchase green items, which creates an opportunity for fashion brands.

The researchers have extracted many sustainable consumer groups that have been mainly based on consumers' attitudes towards sustainability, price and society. Nevertheless, from the perspective of this research, the most interesting approach has been presented by McNeill and Moore (2015), who investigated the fashion industry. They introduced three types of fashion consumers that are similar to the ones presented by Verain et al. (2012). The first group consists of '**Self** consumers'. They exhibit little to no concern about sustainable fashion and have a positive attitude toward fast-fashion brands. These consumers are not very influenced by others' opinions; hence, they are the most difficult market for sustainable clothing. Moreover, they purchase in second-hand shops usually to save money, or to find something unusual, which might indicate the price-sensitivity and individualism of this group, which is confirmed by Gilg, Barr & Ford (2005) and Gilg, Barr & Ford (2005). Furthermore, Self consumers are more likely to prioritise price and turn-over of items over every other factor, which makes it even harder for sustainable companies to reach them. Nevertheless, the research indicates that these consumers might buy sustainable clothing if the pressure of others leads to the purchase for the item's fashion purposes, not functionality (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

The second type of fashion consumer is the '**Social** consumer'. This group is becoming increasingly concerned with sustainable issues. Therefore, it exhibits a positive attitude towards sustainable fashion. Nevertheless, the behaviour of these consumers is often inconsistent with their attitudes, as they have many barriers to fully embrace it such as unawareness and a perceived lack of social acceptance for sustainable fashion. However, Social consumers are highly concerned with norms of behaviour and opinions of others. Hence, they hold the biggest potential as a market for sustainable clothing. Therefore, to reach Social consumers and create awareness, mass and social media should be considered as the primary medium. Moreover, for this group, the price is not the biggest concern, as they are willing to pay more for items that they strongly desire, which is important information for fashion companies (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

The last type of consumer is the **‘Sacrifice’ consumer**. These consumers are highly concerned with the environment. Their behaviour is consistent with their attitudes. Nevertheless, they have an internal conflict between the desire to be fashionable and the desire to reduce consumption. However, they are the group with the least barriers to purchase sustainable clothing and are therefore an ideal market to lead the movement of sustainable fashion. Nonetheless, Sacrifice consumers do not impulse-buy fashion items, and they do not follow the fashion seasons. Moreover, this group reflects a certain scepticism towards the industry’s motives. Hence, gaining trust should be the main goal of fashion companies that want to target this group. Furthermore, they actively seek information and external audits, which should be available on companies’ websites to support it (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Each of the groups views fashion in conflicting ways and therefore, should be targeted differently. That is why companies should adjust their communication to include the needs of all consumer groups.

2.4 Sustainability Communication

Existing literature introduced various types of consumers, and discussed how they all perceive sustainability differently. A company’s communication and marketing can influence consumer behaviour and they are often affected by it subconsciously. The information consumers correlate to the company results in how they react to its products (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Additionally, the more people have been exposed to the information the more they are influenced by it (Cialdini, 1984). Even though environmental issues around the fashion industry have already become the centre of communication messages for fast fashion brands (Rutter, Armstrong & Cano, 2017), brands are still not doing it efficiently enough (Dawkins, 2004).

Moreover, Gray and Balmer (1998) define corporate communication as a collection of messages through different types of media by which the company conveys its identity to different groups of stakeholders. It is a connection between the company’s identity and image. As this thesis focuses on how companies can communicate their sustainable initiatives, it is important to note that communicating brands’ CSR practices can give it a strategic advantage (Smith, 2003). Furthermore, communication has an important role in guiding consumers towards more sustainable consumption habits (Vehmas, Raudaskoski, Heikkilä, Harlin & Mensonen, 2018).

Existing literature on communication relies on Kapferer’s (2012) Sender-receiver model. It shows the relationship between the sender, message and the receiver. However, the model is rather simplistic and does not consider the complexity of consumers. Another well-known communication model is the one by Shannon and Weaver (1949). It claims that the strength of the communication lies in the feedback from the receiver. Further, this model introduces “noises” which can be various factors that might distract the message. Originally the authors

saw them as physical disruptions during the transmission process. Nevertheless, they can be treated as all the external factors that influence communication. Therefore, when a company is communicating its message, there can be several external factors that affect it that need to be taken into consideration when planning a communication strategy. However, this model provides a rather general understanding of the process, just like with the sender-receiver model, it does not consider the complexity of consumers.

Du and Bhattacharya (2010) have further researched CSR communication and the different elements that affect it. The authors introduced a more compound CSR communication model, which addresses the key challenge of sustainability communication: generating favourable CSR attributions. Furthermore, it is different from other previously mentioned models as this considers different message contents, channels, stakeholder characteristics as well as company characteristics and different outcomes of the communication. This model introduces different types of messages (initiatives, commitment, impact, motives) that CSR communication can deliver as well as different types of channels (CSR reports, corporate websites, media coverage, word-of-mouth) it can be done through. Moreover, the authors argue that companies need to consider the different characteristics of stakeholders (stakeholder types, issue support, social value, orientation) and the company itself (reputation, industry, marketing strategies) when planning a communication strategy. This model is critical in understanding these key factors that need to be considered in order to communicate brands' sustainable initiatives.

2.4.1 Message Content

According to Dawkins (2004), there is a growing pressure on companies to incorporate more CSR into their corporate activities. Nevertheless, establishing CSR communication that satisfies all stakeholders is not easy, as the companies might face several challenges. First of all, consumers often do not perceive the corporate message as genuine and credible, and they are suspicious regarding real motives behind companies investing in corporate responsibility (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Dawkins, 2004). That is why many consumers tend to connect sustainable initiatives with greenwashing (Kolster, 2016). Secondly, the attitude-behaviour gap also creates a significant challenge for companies, as they do not know how to effectively communicate so that the gap would not occur. As it was mentioned in the Consumers section of this report (p. 11), consumers can have a positive attitude towards sustainability and sustainable products. Nevertheless, their behaviour does not reflect it (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). Hence, the companies need to find a way to convince them and overcome the gap through effective communication (D'Souza, 2015; Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018). Third of all, the fashion companies struggle to find the right balance between content about fashion and sustainability (Biondi, 2019). According to Friestad and Wright (1994), when a message is too focused on social issues, consumers are more likely to be suspicious of the true motives of a company. Furthermore, not all fashion consumers care about CSR (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch & Gruber, 2011). Hence, to attract different types of consumers and be

perceived as more credible, it is crucial to include various types of content and have a good ratio between fashion and sustainable messages. Finally, most of the consumers are not the Sacrifice type, which means that they are not willing to give up on certain things in the name of being more sustainable (Beard, 2008; Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015). Moreover, they want to know what they can gain through a sustainable purchase, what is the added value (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015). Therefore, companies cannot be focused on sustainability as the only benefit or feature of their brand (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

Since CSR communication is a delicate matter that can backfire, it is crucial to consider various stakeholders' needs and overcome their hesitations towards sustainable initiatives (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). That is why CSR communication requires a clear strategy that incorporates the mentioned issues (Dawkins, 2004).

Authors mention several solutions that can solve the potential problems that the communication might raise:

Transparent and Clear Message

If a message with very good content is not clear for consumers, it will not be effective (Morsing & Spence, 2019). Therefore, the very first thing that companies need to ensure is that their CSR communication is coherent and consistent (Nandan, 2005), transparent (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018), and clear (Morsing & Spence, 2019).

Authenticity and Credibility

According to Pérez (2019), authenticity of the message can improve its credibility. Moreover, Dawkins (2004) highlights the importance of credibility of communication. The author states that to ensure the credibility of a message, companies' initiatives need to be aligned with their corporate behaviour as a whole and have to be consistent. Otherwise, their CSR communication might be seen as greenwashing or as "a smokescreen for unethical behaviour" (Dawkins, 2004). Furthermore, there are several ways through which companies can increase the authenticity and credibility of their CSR communications. Firstly, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) suggest that a message should not simply highlight the company's involvement in a specific CSR cause, but it should include information such as commitment to a cause, the impact it has, why this specific initiative (motives), explanation of the fit between the company's business and the cause. Secondly, there is no authenticity and credibility without transparency. The companies have to be honest and genuine with their intentions, as consumers are already suspicious (Dawkins, 2004). Hence, only through complete transparency, they can gain consumers' trust (Dubink, Graafland & van Liedekerke, 2008). Finally, according to Schmeltz (2012), consumers prefer communication that is personally relevant, factually based, explicit and precise, which helps to decrease the scepticism. Furthermore, the use of communication that is traditionally perceived as credible e.g. reports, can also increase the credibility of the message (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Highlight Added Value

As it was mentioned before, usually consumers want something ‘more’ than just sustainable items. They want to know their added value. Hence, it raises the question of how sustainability can provide this ‘more’ to the consumers. Most sustainability marketing only sells sustainability. Except for this, the only possible added value is the feel-good or guilt-free factors (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015), which is confirmed by de Chernatony, Harris and Dall’Olmo Riley (2000), who state that the key sustainable added value is the emotional value. Nevertheless, nowadays, it is not enough. That is why the companies need to highlight the item’s additional features, not only its sustainable aspects. The report by Futerra Sustainability Communications and BSR (2015), proposes that only a consumer-based value proposition regarding sustainability can create a successful product with genuine intentions and appealing campaigns. Hence, it presents three value types that consumers consider while making a purchase, these are: functional (value for money, efficiency), emotional (feeling of happiness, self-worth), and social (sense of belonging, cool) benefits.

Balance between content about Fashion and Sustainability

The companies are struggling to find the right ratio between fashion and sustainable content. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned before, consumers want something ‘more’ from sustainable items. According to McNeill and Moore (2015), due to the high importance of identity construction for consumers, the need to be fashionable usually outweighs the driver to be sustainable. Hence, it is important not to be solely focused on eco aspects. According to Grace (2015), communication regarding fashion should be prioritised over sustainable content. The social and environmental issues should be just an added benefit while making a purchase, not the main driver. The author calls it “passive activism”. The companies should strive to show that they are engaged in various sustainable initiatives and that by buying their products, the consumers are also doing it (Grace, 2015).

Informative Communication

Since most of the consumers do not actively seek information on corporate responsibility (Dawkins, 2004), CSR communication needs to be highly informative (Schmeltz, 2012). Moreover, information also helps to ensure the credibility of the message (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004) and by providing factual data it can be perceived as more valuable (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015). However, according to Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018) using too much information in fashion communication can be a distraction for consumers. Nowadays, they have access to various communication channels and they can choose for themselves what type, and how much information they want to access. Therefore, the companies need to carefully design their narrative to make it appealing to potential consumers (Dawkins, 2004; Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018).

Language

When it comes to vocabulary, Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018) have researched the specific words used in CSR communication. According to the authors, the words such as: eco, green and fair trade, are perceived positively and are seen as trustworthy, as consumers connect

them with a good way of living. Moreover, the research has pointed out several words that should be avoided. Firstly, the word 'ethical' brings the feeling of distrust with the fashion system, and scepticism towards a company. Secondly, the word 'organic' is often misused which is why it is also connected to the feeling of distrust. Finally, the word 'sustainability' is perceived as complex and "too large a task for the individual use" which is why it also brings negative feelings (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018). Additionally, according to Grace (2015), most of the time, consumers do not understand this word and it seems too vague. Therefore, the companies that want to attract more types of consumers than just sustainable-conscious ones, should look for a more universal language and think about creative ways to tell sustainable stories in different ways (Grace, 2015).

Furthermore, except for the elements mentioned above, Dawkins (2004) highlights the importance of adjusting the CSR communication to different types of consumers. It is because each of them has different expectations, needs and therefore, respond differently to the various CSR communication channels. Hence, companies need to tailor their communication strategies to match these differences (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). For more information about types of consumers, please refer to the Types of Consumers section of this paper (p. 12).

2.4.2 Communication Channels

The choice of communication channel is one of the key elements when building a communication strategy (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Furthermore, brands are using different types of channels, such as online, face-to-face, verbal and nonverbal channels to communicate with consumers and create shared sustainability initiatives (Allen, 2016). For example, non-verbal communication channels can be the environment of the physical store (Rapoport, 1982). However, online channels, such as social media, are now the most used channels to connect with consumers (Han, Henninger, Apeageyi & Tyler, 2017; Rutter, Armstrong & Cano, 2017) and communicate sustainable initiatives (Rutter, Armstrong & Cano, 2017; Dawkins, 2004; Da Giau, Macchion, Caniato, Caridi, Danese, Rinaldi & Vinelli, 2016). Moreover, using different online channels can help brands to share information about its sustainable practices (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009). Furthermore, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) argue that different stakeholders might react differently depending on the communication channel. Thus, a company can choose a different social media channel depending on the audience it wants to reach.

Social media has brought new ways of communicating with consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Da Giau et al., 2016). In particular, it has given brands the opportunity to interact and have a dialogue with consumers, and to convey brands identity. Furthermore, the benefit of using social media is that it is a low-cost communication channel (Sogari, Pucci, Aquilani & Zanni, 2017). Additionally, it is highly accessible and gives brands the possibility to gather data about their consumers. By utilising social media as well as other online media for communication, it is possible for brands to reach a bigger audience. Furthermore, with the

increasing popularity of social media Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) argue about the importance of word-of-mouth as a communication channel. This informal channel amongst consumers can serve as a powerful way to communicate brands sustainable initiatives. This is further supported by Mangold and Faulds (2009), who argue that consumers trust interpersonal communication more than information coming from the marketers. Thus, consumers can influence each other's purchasing decisions on social media. Therefore, it is important for companies to have a positive image on the marketplace (Strähle, & Köksal, 2015) as it heavily influences word-of-mouth marketing.

Nevertheless, social media is not the only important online channel. Brands need to communicate their sustainable initiatives through its websites (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014; Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015; Fulton & Lee, 2013). In particular, consumers are interested to see sustainability reports, information about sustainable certifications and awards (Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015). Furthermore, research by Morsing and Schultz (2006) shows that when it comes to CSR communication consumers prefer to seek it through “minimal release” channels such as annual reports and websites, compared to traditional advertising. However, this study was conducted on Scandinavian consumers and emphasizes that the choice of a channel may vary depending on the country or region. Nevertheless, when seeking information from the brand's website it is crucial to consider that the information presented there might be biased.

Moreover, if brands choose not to communicate their sustainable initiatives, consumers will get that information through other channels, such as word-of-mouth (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2008). This is crucial for brands to keep in mind when planning a communication strategy, as they will not be in charge of the influence that indirect communication has. Furthermore, without implementing sustainable initiatives into communication strategies, brands risk consumers not being aware of its sustainable practices.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

In order to summarise and structure the key findings of the literature review, the theoretical framework has been established. It shows the relationship between the main elements of the research question and the literature regarding communication, CSR in the fashion industry, and types of consumers. The process of communication in the model is based on the Sender-receiver Model by Kapferer (2008), CSR Communication Model by Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) and Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). However, it includes additional factors such as three types of fashion consumers by McNeill and Moore (2015). This theoretical framework is rather simplistic. Nevertheless, it showcases the key elements that are crucial for CSR communication in the environment of the fashion industry.

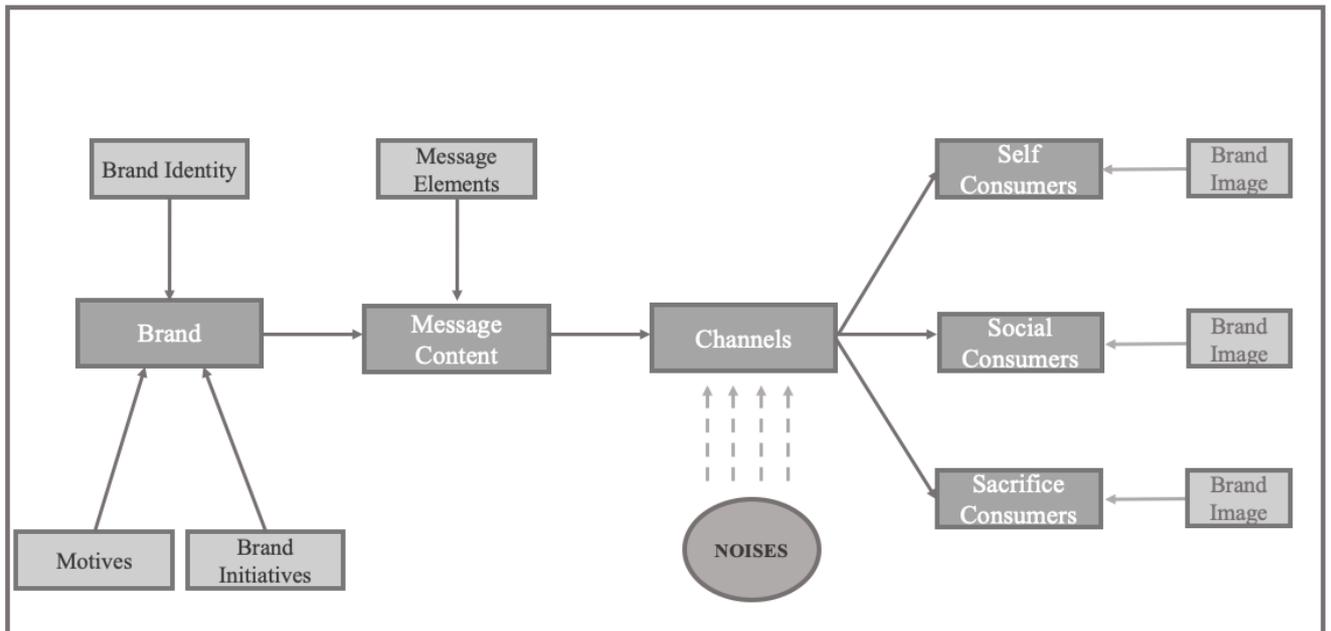


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework (own illustration)

The process starts with a brand. It includes the intrinsic motives that drive the company to pursue CSR/sustainable projects, the CSR initiatives, and the general brand identity connected to sustainability. According to the research, it is crucial to have genuine motives (Biloslavo & Trnavčević, 2009), be authentic (Gazzola et al., 2020), and have CSR in the core values (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007), to be perceived as a sustainable and credible brand.

The next step is the formulation of the message content. Based on the literature, there are six key message elements that need to be incorporated into the content to avoid the potential problems that the communication might raise. These are: transparency (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018), authenticity and credibility (Dawkins, 2004; Pérez, 2019), added value (de Chernatony, Harris & Dall’Olmo Riley, 2000), finding a balance between content about fashion and sustainability (Grace, 2015), making communication informative (Schmeltz, 2012), and language (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018). Each of them has been introduced in detail in the Message Content section of this report (p. 16).

According to Dawkins (2004), it is important to adjust the CSR communication to different types of consumers. Hence, this research will be focused on three types of fashion consumers introduced by McNeill and Moore (2015), and their needs:

The first type – **Self consumers** can be seen as non-sustainable consumers from the literature. This type can be characterised as highly price-sensitive (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005; McNeill & Moore, 2015). They are more individualistic and are mainly focused on individual needs (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015; Park & Ha, 2012), which is why they look for added value in products and might make a purchase for item’s fashion purposes (McNeill & Moore, 2015). It is harder to convince them to undertake CSR initiatives (Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015; Park & Ha, 2012). However, they might be positively influenced towards sustainability if provided with the right knowledge regarding the

company's projects (Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015). Thus, in the communication, this group is mainly looking for value for money and added value.

The second type – **Social consumers** are highly dependent on others and their opinions. They are increasingly interested in sustainability. Nevertheless, they often exhibit an attitude-behaviour gap (Beard, 2008), due to lack of information and perceived lack of social acceptance. Hence, the communication needs to be focused on education and collectivity, as Social consumers are highly concerned with social norms (McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, this group exhibits the biggest potential as a market for sustainable clothing. They are not price-sensitive and are willing to pay more for the desired item. Which means that they strongly follow trends and their needs are solely focused on social acceptance (McNeill & Moore, 2015) and the sense of belonging (Belk, 1988). Therefore, to reach this group, it is important to build the message around awareness, social norms, and trends.

The last type – **Sacrifice consumers**, or sustainable-conscious consumers according to different authors (e.g. Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015; Park & Ha, 2012). They are pro-social (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005; Stern, Dietz & Guagnano, 1995), open for change (Stern, Dietz & Guagnano, 1995) people, who are not price-sensitive (Balderjahn et al., 2018; Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005). This type puts little emphasis on personal influence (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005). Additionally, they are willing to pay more for sustainable products. Nevertheless, they look for truly authentic and credible brands (Beard, 2008). That is why Sacrifice consumers have a strong need for information (Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015) and they will easily see if a company is genuine in its initiatives. Hence, the primary need of this group is to find a truly sustainable and authentic brand.

Each type of consumer has its own image of a brand. It is a synthesis of various messages such as brand name, visual symbols, products, advertisements, sponsoring, articles (Kapferer, 2008), and company's reputation (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). The public judges those messages through the prism of their subjectivity, by using their interpretations and responding differently to brands (Kapferer, 2008). Moreover, according to Keller (2013), brand image is the consumers' perceptions about the brand, mirrored by the associations held in their memory. These associations can be brand attributes (features that characterise a product) or brand benefits (consumer's personal values and meanings around the product). Consumers form brand associations in various ways, factors that are important to consider are the strengths, favourability, and uniqueness of the association (Keller, 2013).

When it comes to the Channel. The literature provides some valuable information regarding the best ways in which companies can reach each type of consumer. For the Self consumers, it is recommended to use large-scale communication through social media and TV, and a message supported by the external, credible governmental and non-governmental institutions (Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015). Additionally, to ensure credibility, the company can also choose to use reports as a communication channel (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Moreover, the Social consumers should be reached through their social circle. The literature highlights the importance of word-of-mouth (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010), which can be

the most effective method to reach this group. Hence, the use of mass and social media as the primary medium is recommended (McNeill & Moore, 2015), as well as, influencers. Finally, for the Sacrifice consumers, Gruber, Kaliauer and Schlegelmilch (2015) suggest the use of more subtle channels such as company website and reports to inform them about the CSR initiatives, and potential added value of products, as these channels, provide concrete and credible information that this group is looking for. Nevertheless, it raises the question that needs to be addressed in this research, whether message content and communication channels should be adjusted and sent separately to different consumers' types.

Moreover, according to Shannon and Weaver (1949) and Kapferer (2008), during the transmission of a message, thus in the Channel stage, a message can be distracted or affected by various factors, which are called "noises". They have an impact on communication flow. In the original work, Shannon and Weaver (1949) see the noises as physical disruption during the transmission process. Nevertheless, they can be treated as all the external factors that can distract or affect the communication process (Kapferer, 2008). Finally, they can have either a positive or negative impact on communication.

Due to the limited scope of the research and the focus on message creation process, noises and brand image factors will not be researched in this study.

3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological choices made in order to answer the given research question. It is divided into seven main sections. Firstly, the research philosophy is being discussed. This section also explains the reasons behind the choice of relativist and social constructivism positions. Secondly, the research approach is presented and the choice of qualitative and abductive strategy is justified. Thirdly, the research design is introduced. Fourthly, the data collection method describes in detail the guideline and reasoning behind the collection of the empirical material including the sampling. Fifthly, the time horizon of the research is discussed. Followed by the sixth section, which includes the detailed descriptions of the analysis process. The chapter finishes with a discussion regarding validity and reliability of the research.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The first step towards establishing a methodology is to create a clearly defined research paradigm (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research philosophy is connected to all the assumptions and beliefs that a researcher makes about the reality and the development of knowledge. Moreover, the philosophical assumptions help the researcher to understand the research question, research design, and how to analyse and interpret the data (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007).

The first philosophical assumption is ontology. It is focused on the nature of reality and existence (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). It raises the questions regarding the way the world operates and the commitment to particular views (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). There are two key positions within ontology – relativism and realism. The first one claims that there is no truth and reality is a social construct that is created through discourses. Hence, the reality seen from a relative perspective is subjective. The latter position sees reality as independent from perception and science matter, and is based on facts. Thus, there is only one objective truth (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This thesis explores sustainability communication that aims at various consumers, by looking at different companies and by using various data collection methods. Additionally, multiple perspectives, theories and approaches have been considered. Therefore, this research paper is following a relativist ontology.

The second philosophical assumption is epistemology and it is connected to what “constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study” (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). It is focused on showing the researchers the ways of enquiring into the physical and social worlds.

Moreover, just like with ontology, it consists of two positions – positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The first one sees the social world as an external construct that can be measured objectively through sensation, intuition and reflection. Conversely, social constructionism views the outside world as subjective and it is based on social constructs. Furthermore, people are determining the reality (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This research takes the social constructivism position, as the various aspects of the reality researched through this thesis are rather subjective. It is due to the fact that they are influenced by people, relationships between them, and their surroundings.

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Qualitative Strategy

There are two types of research methods that are most widely used: qualitative methods and quantitative methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). These differ from each other by data collection techniques and analysis processes (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). Quantitative methods focus on numerical data and this is mostly gathered through questionnaires. In contrast, qualitative methods focus on non-numerical (such as photos and videos) and textual data. The data can be gathered through different types of qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations. Furthermore, researchers can either combine these methods or decide to use either qualitative or quantitative methods (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007).

This study takes a qualitative research approach. The aim of this thesis was to gather a deeper understanding of how companies can communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers. Using qualitative research methods is perfect for answering such an open question as why (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This gave an opportunity to ask questions if and why agencies think communication should be adjusted according to different types of consumers, as well as explore why consumers use the communication channels they do. Moreover, the openness and flexibility allowed for in-depth explanations from respondents. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow more exploring, open-ended questions and answers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) and flexibility when gathering and analyzing data (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The proposed research question will be answered from a company's perspective. Thus, it was important to gather data directly from companies to gain an understanding of their expertise. Adopting qualitative methods, allowed to gather data about companies' experiences, as it is more focused on non-numerical data (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). Furthermore, using qualitative methods gave a possibility to observe visual messages and language used in the communication process (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). However, since

consumers are the target of the communication, it is necessary to include what they find important. Therefore, data was additionally gathered directly from consumers to understand their point of view. However, this was supported by existing literature, which provided background information on different types of fashion consumers. This type of input gives an overview of consumers' needs and expectations when it comes to fashion brands communicating their sustainable actions.

Therefore, a qualitative strategy was chosen as this type of open approach gave the authors the possibility to conduct an exploratory study on the under-researched area of how to communicate sustainable practices to different types of consumers.

3.2.2 Abductive Strategy

When it comes to the link between theory and literature, there are three major theories mentioned in the literature – inductive, deductive and abductive (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The first one is connected to generating theory from data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, the researcher collects data and establishes a theory based on the results of the data analysis. Whereas the deduction is focused on testing the existing theory, that is why it is the right method when researching topics that are widely covered by literature (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). Moreover, this approach is a linear process. Thus, the hypothesis is formulated based on existing research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The third approach combines the two previously mentioned approaches. Abduction is the process that looks for patterns and structures (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It moves between theory and the empirical material in order to find new relationships and variables (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

This thesis is following the abductive approach. The theory was used to gain an understanding regarding the concepts of sustainability in the fashion industry, types of consumers, and CSR communication. Next, the empirical material was collected and coded in accordance with theory. In general, the aim was not to test an existing theory, nor to create a new one, but to combine existing findings and develop it to extend the knowledge regarding CSR communication and different types of consumers.

3.3 Research Design

The research design “provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, it reflects the choice regarding the specific elements of the research, as well as their priority (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, this section showcases the structure of the research to answer most effectively the research question (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

In order to answer the research question ‘*How can fashion brands communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers?*’, it was crucial to gain the understanding regarding consumers’ needs, as well as, about the process of creation and communication of the message. Hence, the research was more focused on the company’s perspective. Nevertheless, to create a message that is perceived positively, it was crucial to also unveil consumers’ expectations. That is why two main methods of empirical data collection have been chosen.

Firstly, the literature introduces three types of fashion consumers. This division is based on their level of concern regarding sustainability. Moreover, since these consumers have different goals, needs and perspectives, it is crucial to communicate them differently. The literature provides great details regarding specific characteristics of each group. Nevertheless, it was important to find out whether the findings from the literature will be confirmed by consumers. Hence, the two focus groups of four participants and one of three have been conducted. In general, the aim was to understand consumers’ perspective of CSR communication, and unveil their needs and expectations regarding. The use of this method allows to observe people’s interactions and their reactions, which provides a depth of understanding (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Secondly, in the next stage, the research was focused on the company’s perspective. Thus, how the message is established, which are the key message elements, and how to communicate it successfully. That is why the five semi-structured interviews with experts from the communication agencies have been conducted. They provided insights about communication experts’ experience, and histories. Additionally, due to the fact that interviewees had previously worked with various companies, the interviews produced diverse data regarding many different companies. Moreover, they took place after the focus groups, as it was important to ask the expert about the main findings, and about their thoughts, and perspective on it.



Figure 3: Outline of the Research Process (own illustration)

3.4 Data Collection Method

3.4.1 Focus Groups

The focus groups were the first stage in the empirical data collection phase. Due to the nature of the research and three distinguished groups of consumers that were studied, a focus group was considered the most suitable method to gain an understanding regarding consumers' perspective. Moreover, there is a concept of the so-called Group Effect connected to focus groups. It refers to its interactive part, and the possibility for participants to ask questions and explain things to each other. This effect can help to strengthen the quality of gathered responses. Furthermore, the main advantage of a focus group is that it offers a collection of views and a balance of various opinions (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001). This aspect was especially important for this research.

In total three focus groups, one per each type of consumer, have been conducted. Before each of them, the participants were asked for consent to record the discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, they were provided with information regarding the research and the structure of the discussion. Next, the focus groups started with the ice-breaking activities, which helped the participants to get to know each other a bit and to loosen the atmosphere (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The discussions were structured based on the topic guide (see Appendix A). Hence, each focus group has started with more general questions, leaving the most sensitive ones to the end, and finishing with closing comments that were meant to make the respondents feel appreciated (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Throughout each discussion, the used language was rather informal in order to avoid creating a distance and to not frighten the participants with academic language (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), which helped to create an environment for an open discussion.

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), the quality of focus groups is tightly connected to the group dynamics, which highlights the importance of the moderator. This person makes sure that each participant can freely express him-/herself, and that possibility to speak up is distributed equally. For this study, one of the researchers was assigned to the role of the moderator and asked questions from the topic guide and kept to the schedule. While the other one was the assistant moderator, whose main task was to manage the structure of the discussion and keep it on the right path. Moreover, the low involvement of the researchers during the conversations, allowed the respondents to be more open and steer the discussions towards the directions that they found interesting. Thus, the focus groups were guided but not controlled (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The three focus groups took place on 23.04 (12:00-12:50), 26.04 (17:30-18:10), 28.04 (11:30-12:10) via Zoom, and lasted from 35 to 45 minutes. Therefore, before the interviews with the

communication experts. The results of the discussions were primarily analysed and used as one of the topics during the interviews.

3.4.1.1 Sampling of Focus Groups

Before the data collection phase had begun, it was crucial to find the appropriate sample. Collecting data from the sample enables the researchers to make statements about a larger group than the original sample (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). According to Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2007), there are two types of sampling: probability and non-probability techniques. When it comes to the focus groups, the latter has been chosen, explicitly the purposive sampling. It is when the researcher has a clear idea of what kind of sample is needed to match the purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007).

Considering the fact that the research was focused on three types of consumers based on McNeill and Moore (2015), there was a need to find three separate consumer groups. For the detailed descriptions of each type, please refer to the Theoretical Framework (p. 20). The first sample had to represent the Sacrifice consumers, thus, the sustainable consumers that are willing to pay a lot for more sustainable variants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus group had been planned to take place online. Hence, there were no criteria regarding the geographic location of the sample. That is why the search was conducted via Facebook. Moreover, gathering data through Facebook groups from strangers assured the data was unbiased. A post that included the description of the study and the desired sample was published in two groups regarding sustainability: ‘Sustainable Living’ (74,000 members), and ‘Sustainable Living & Design’ (358,000 members). For the content of the post please refer to Appendix B. Six people responded to the post, from which four were asked to participate in the focus group. They were all selected based on the description of the Sacrifice consumers, and their availability. Eventually, three people participated in the focus group, as one had problems with the internet connection.

The samples that represent the second group, the Social consumers, hence, the consumers that follow the crowd and trends, and the last group, the Self consumers, so the ones that are not sustainable-conscious, were searched using three platforms. Firstly, through ‘Style & Fashion’ Facebook group (425,000 members), where the post regarding the research and the description of the Social and Self consumers was posted. It provided the details about each type of consumer and asked whether the reader identified with any of them. Secondly, the same post was published on the LinkedIn accounts of the researchers. In total, ten people responded, from which eight (four people per consumer type) were asked to participate in the focus groups.

Due to the nature of the research, and the larger population that was targeted, the main aim was to create a diverse, unbiased and heterogeneous group of participants. This enabled a broad and active discussion with various opinions. That is why the researchers did not look for the participants within their network, as it could influence the diversity and lack of bias in the groups. Moreover, in order to ensure the diversity of views, they were not chosen based

on being consumers of a specific company. It ensured a variety of opinions and experiences. Nevertheless, looking for the participants outside the network made it more difficult to gather a representative sample. Additionally, with this approach it was more likely that people did not show up for the focus groups, which did happen during this research. However, eventually the discussions were incredibly informative and diverse, and resulted in many interesting findings.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview method was chosen, as it gives access to the information in a context that would have been difficult to get otherwise (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Moreover, data gathered through interviews was considered reliable as well as relevant to proposed research questions (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). The main focus was to collect data straight from communication and branding experts and to understand how they approach creating these sustainable messages. As a result, communication agencies were chosen to gather data from a company's perspective. Nevertheless, the data from the company's perspective could have been gathered directly from fashion companies. However, agencies have more experience with different types of companies as well as with different types of consumers. Some of these agencies were focused specifically on sustainability communication and branding, thus they gave valuable expertise to how different companies have done it. Therefore, they have also witnessed difficulties a company can face when trying to communicate its sustainable practices. Even though the goal was to explore sustainability communication in the fashion industry, the key activities remain similar regardless of the industry. Moreover, communication agencies act as a third party for the companies, thus the information from them has not been altered to fit any narrative a fashion company itself might like to have. The information gathered from agencies provides this study with valuable knowledge on how to create a message on sustainability that attracts different consumers. Therefore, communication agencies seemed to be an appropriate choice.

Qualitative interviews can take three different approaches: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured or in-depth interviews (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). This paper uses a semi-structured approach. For this type of interview, researchers prepared themes and questions to conduct the interviews, however, these were not set in stone and varied depending on the respondent (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). This allowed the researchers of this study to have a naturally flowing conversation with the participants. Furthermore, they were able to ask additional questions depending on the respondents' answers in order to get a more clear understanding. Using open-ended questions encouraged the respondents to speak about their own experiences with sustainability communication. Conducting semi-structured interviews after the focus group interviews gave the possibility to gain a better understanding of how and if companies take into consideration consumers' expectations and whether they incorporate these into their communication campaigns.

Before conducting the interviews the topic guide (see Appendix C) was prepared with questions and topics the interviews needed to cover. It included opening questions, questions about the topic and closing questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). By following the topic guide, it was possible to gather information on topics such as sustainability, communication, consumers expectations, message content and choice of channel, all keeping in mind the fashion industry. Moreover, it provided a structure that helped to be more time-efficient and avoid unnecessary questions. Nevertheless, the questions and their order remained open-ended, considering the specific agency and their expertise. Additionally, as the interviews with agencies took place after the focus groups with consumers, it was possible to ask questions regarding the results, thus, the consumers' needs and perspective.

All of the interviewees were sent a list with questions prior to the interview to ensure they had enough time to think through their answers. Moreover, the respondents were asked to sign the consent form and for the consent to record the interviews. The audio recordings were later transcribed, sent to interviewees for approval and used in the analysis. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom between the 4th and 8th of May 2021. The main reason for that was the COVID19 pandemic. However, interviewing remotely was also more time and cost-efficient. Moreover, it allowed to reach the respondents from different geographical locations that normally would not be possible. Furthermore, since the participants and the researchers are from different countries the interviews were conducted in English. On average the interviews lasted 25 to 45 minutes each. Additionally, for all of the interviews, both researchers were present. This allowed for one researcher to conduct the interview, while the other was able to take notes. Lastly, as mentioned before, all of the audio recordings of the interviews were later transcribed to get a better overview of the data.

3.4.2.1 Sampling of Semi-Structured Interviews

When it comes to the interviews, a non-probability sampling technique was used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Moreover, similarly to the focus group interviews, purposive sampling was chosen.

The sample was made up of communication agencies. These were chosen to gather data regarding a company's perspective on CSR communication. The sample of agencies was a mix of firms that focus on sustainability communication and the ones which are not directly oriented on sustainability. It ensured that they have experience with both sustainable and not sustainable consumers, which is important as this paper is studying how brands can communicate their sustainable initiatives to different consumer types. This kind of sample gave a wider view of how experts in the field of communication work with sustainability communication strategies and campaigns. By understanding how they approach this helped to identify key elements in building a successful strategy for communicating sustainability.

The sample of agencies was selected by searching for communication agencies that have experience in the fashion industry. The research for agencies was based on three criteria: operating in Europe or the United States, reputable clients and experience in the fashion

industry. Firstly, the location was narrowed down in order to have a sample of agencies that work in similar market conditions. Secondly, agencies with recognisable and reputable clients were chosen, since this gives credibility and reliability to the agency. Furthermore, if the agency had previously worked on a well-known communication or marketing campaign, it was considered as a plus. This gave a chance to ask specific questions regarding the campaign, further deepening the knowledge of consumer feedback. Lastly, experience and previous clients in the fashion industry were considered important requirements, as this shows the agency has industry-specific knowledge. Even though communication about sustainability can be similar irrespective of the industry, it is still crucial for the agencies to have knowledge of the fashion industry to make it feasible to study for this paper. As a result of the search for communication agencies, 57 companies were identified to fit the sample. The next step was to find the right contact person within the agencies. Employees working in communication, marketing and branding were considered. The contact information was found through agencies' websites and LinkedIn profiles. Following that, these agencies were contacted through email or directly via LinkedIn. Eight agencies responded from where five agencies were chosen to interview. The chosen sample of experts gave a necessary overview of communicating sustainability and factors to consider in order to do it successfully. The list of interviewees can be found in Appendix D.

3.5 Time Horizon

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007), in order to establish the research process, it is crucial to consider the time horizons. It helps to identify how the data is collected and to shape the time frame of the research (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007).

There are two main approaches to the time horizon. Firstly, the researcher can choose to conduct a research that is a "representation of events over a given period", which is called the longitudinal time horizon, or that is just a "snapshot" taken at a particular time, which is a cross-sectional horizon (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007).

Due to the limited time frame that has been given for this project, the research can be described as a "snapshot" taken at a particular time. Moreover, it includes only one observation. Hence, the subject was not researched again in order to investigate whether the results might have changed over a specific period. Therefore, for this thesis, a cross-sectional approach was used.

3.6 Data Analysis

The process of the analysis of the empirical data was considered to be one of the most time-consuming phases of the research. It is due to the fact that the material was gathered from two data sources: three focus groups and five interviews. The overall analysis process was divided into two parts: findings and data analysis. These were kept separate in order to give the reader a clear overview of findings from different sources. Moreover, by keeping them separate it would make it easier for future researchers to compare the findings.

The first stage of the analysis was connected to the focus groups. As it was mentioned before, the primary analysis of results has been performed prior to the interviews, to ask the experts about them. The empirical material collected during the focus groups was transcribed and initially sorted per type of consumers. Next, the data was cut and sorted using the line-by-line method, as it is considered to be the most suitable technique for large amounts of data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The initial analysis of the material from the focus groups, combined with the literature regarding types of consumers, provided a solid base to establish questions regarding consumers that were then used during the interviews.

During the second stage, the interviews were transcribed. Then the data was conditioned to the thematical sorting to make it more graspable. It helped to find the recurring elements and views (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Therefore, the starting point of the analysis process of the material from the interviews were seven initial themes – *Sustainability in the Fashion Industry*, *Brand Identity* (including Greenwashing and Attitude-Behaviour Gap), *CSR Communication* (including Strategies and Goals, Barriers, Message), *Communication Channels*, and in general the *Consumers*. They determined the criteria for the selection of relevant empirical data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, the more thorough analysis of the material from the focus groups has also been started by using the similar themes as for the interviews with the experts. These were: *Attitude towards sustainability and fashion*, *Expectations and Needs*, *Communication*, and *Communication Channels*. The findings per each consumer type were separated to ensure that each group is analysed separately. Additionally, the predefined themes have helped to assure the consistency in the data analysis process.

The first sorting occurred digitally using NVivo. It was initially done separately for the data from focus groups and interviews. The parts from the transcriptions that did not fit into any theme were excluded. The remaining quotes were categorised into previously mentioned themes. Additionally, the several rounds of sorting were performed in order to improve the categorisation. Taking time to get to know the material allows to create detailed structure of the empirical content, which helps to achieve clarity and stability of the research (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

The next stage was conceptualisation. It was also a step during, which data from both interviews and focus groups were combined. Moreover, the conceptualisation was done by

looking for patterns among the codes by identifying the similarities, differences, and how they affect each other (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Finally, once the most significant codes have been established, the focused re-coding has been performed by coding and re-coding large amounts of data with a limited number of more detailed codes, to define the essential codes (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In the end, all the themes were identified with the codes assigned to each of them, which create a clear picture of the findings from the empirical data. In total, seven themes were identified: *Brand, Authenticity & Transparency, Social Media & Importance of Physical Stores, Needs, Added Value, Education, and Consumers.*

3.7 Validity and Reliability

To assure the quality of the research, a level of relevance and credibility needs to be achieved (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). However, these characteristics are only applicable to measure the quality of quantitative research (Kvale, 1994; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Even though qualitative research has been argued to not be scientific enough and lacks the ability to make generalizations (Kvale, 1994), there are still ways to measure the quality of the research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) introduce two criteria to measure the quality of a qualitative study: trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Credibility is concerned with how plausible and acceptable the findings of this paper are (Bryman & Bell, 2007). There are two techniques that show credibility: triangulation and respondent validation. For this paper, credibility is shown through triangulation. This is when data is gathered in multiple ways through multiple sources in order to increase the accuracy (ed. Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004). Credibility was established by gathering data through semi-structured interviews from five communication agencies and from three focus-group interviews. Moreover, triangulation comprises also the use of different perspectives (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Hence, the data was gathered from both the company's and consumer's point of view, giving this study even more credibility.

Transferability refers to characteristics that show to what extent the findings can be adapted in different contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As qualitative studies are often unique in their contexts, Geertz (1973) introduces the creation of thick description, in order to establish transferability. Thick description is about providing a detailed database for the readers in order to let them make the decision whether it is possible to transfer the finding into another time, population or situation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). To do that the paper is provided with detailed descriptions of choice of method and data collection processes. The researchers provided reasoning why this data was relevant in order to answer the research question. As a result, this aims to give the reader a clear understanding of the whole research process. Nevertheless, the choice of the sample for communication agencies could decrease the

transferability of the study. The agencies were mostly based in Europe and one in the United States, thus, these findings might not be applicable in other parts of the world. However, many of those agencies are global firms, which have experience with companies all over the world.

Dependability of the research shows whether the findings are consistent and if they could be repeated at another time (Guba & Lincoln 1994). To ensure dependability, an auditing approach was taken. That means detailed records about each process of the study were saved and made accessible, such as selection of samples, interview transcripts and data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Chapter 3 provides a transparent overview of the research process, while chapter 4 gives a detailed description of the analysis process. Moreover, transcripts of the interviews were saved and can be made accessible by request. However, it is important to note, that as sustainability in the fashion industry is a growing trend, consumers can adapt to these changes fairly quickly and therefore change their opinions. Nevertheless, the researchers have done everything in order to ensure dependability.

Confirmability shows researchers' objectivity towards the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This means, for this study, the researchers have acted in good faith without allowing their personal values to interfere with the research and its findings. To ensure confirmability, the interviews were conducted without asking any leading questions in order to avoid reflecting researchers' own beliefs onto participants. Moreover, this study uses the investigator triangulation method, which means more than one researcher was involved in the data analysis process in order to analyse data from several perspectives (ed. Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004). This study was conducted by two researchers, who at first looked at the data separately and then discussed and compared the findings together in order to develop a broader understanding of the data.

The second criterion is **authenticity** (Guba & Lincoln 1994). It is about the fairness and wider impact of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In other words, it is about ensuring that the findings represent different viewpoints of the social setting of the study. However, the emphasis on the wider impact of the study has been found controversial. To provide fairness, both consumer and company's perspectives were covered by having done interviews with communication agencies and consumers of fashion companies. All of the participants were given equal opportunity to express their opinions.

Ethical Considerations are mainly about the privacy of participants and morality of the findings (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007). To ensure privacy, all the personal information of the participants is protected and not published, providing them anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, participants have been informed about the background and purpose of the study, giving them the necessary details to make a decision to participate. As mentioned before, the interviewees were asked for consent to be recorded as well as signed a consent form agreeing to take part of the study. By taking these steps, the participants can be sure their personal information is safe and the answers they provided during interviews are not misused.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the main findings based on the empirical data. It is divided into two main sections: Consumers' view, which discusses the findings from the focus groups, and Practitioners' view that covers findings from the interviews with the experts. The structure within each section is guided by main concepts that emerged from the literature review. Moreover, due to the large volume of empirical data collected, the analysis of findings is presented separately in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

4.1 Consumers' view

4.1.1 Social Consumers

Attitude towards sustainability and fashion

The participants view sustainability in the fashion industry as something that is connected to multiple aspects such as materials, working conditions, transparency of supply chain, production process, durability, and quality of clothing. Furthermore, they perceived sustainable clothing as rather expensive, and that it lacks choice. Additionally, some participants highlighted that it used to be much easier to make a sustainable choice, as nowadays, there is much more information and awareness regarding sustainability, which makes it harder for consumers. Moreover, when asked about their assessment of the current situation of sustainability in fashion, they have all noticed certain improvements in this matter. However, the participants perceived it rather negatively. They see it as a complicated issue, as it is unclear what is really sustainable, which is mainly due to the lack of transparency and greenwashing.

“There's more sustainable choices, but also a lot of companies are abusing the concept of sustainability and greenwashing. I think it's like very, very unclear what the state really is” (Participant 4, Focus Group - Social Consumers)

However, some participants acknowledged that it is better to buy something that is only partially sustainable than something that is not sustainable at all. Especially, if somebody has a limited budget e.g. as a student. That is also why one of the participants mentioned that the industry should try to make sustainable clothing available for everyone.

Expectations and Needs

When presented with a description of Social consumers, the contributors partially agreed with it. Nevertheless, they said that they depend on the opinions of others but it does not affect everything they do:

“I don't also need the approval of my surrounding people. But then again, if I have it, that's good.” (Participant 5, Focus Group – Social Consumers)

“Yeah, I agree. You don't need it, but still, it kind of makes you feel better in the end.” (Participant 4, Focus Group – Social Consumers)

The participants saw others and their behaviours more as a motivation. For example, if somebody puts a lot of effort into sustainable behaviour, they feel inspired to be more sustainable themselves.

Moreover, when it comes to the expectations, the Social consumers from the focus group look for transparency and honesty: *“No brand is really perfect, but I think it's important to be transparent and not lie about anything, or brainwash, or whatever.”* (Participant 4, Focus Group – Social Consumers). Hence, they want to have access to information regarding the company's initiative on the website. Furthermore, most of the participants highlighted the importance of price. However, they acknowledged that it might be due to the fact that they were students. Nevertheless, they expect the highest quality and the balance between price and quality.

Additionally, the participants admitted that they valued brands that at least try to pursue some sustainable initiatives, as they think:

“(...) it's like better than nothing. Because, if you get the choice between I don't know, H&M that was doing something, probably not out of like... for many reasons and not for the consumers, but it's still something. And if you got in comparison brand that is doing absolutely nothing, I would still more choose the brand is doing something.” (Participant 4, Focus Group – Social Consumers).

One participant mentioned that she believed that only big companies can make real change in the world, as they can introduce sustainability to many people.

Communication

One concept connected to sustainability that was often mentioned by the participants was the phenomenon of greenwashing. In order to evaluate a company's messages and avoid greenwashing, the participants *“investigate the brands”* (Participant 6, Focus Group – Social Consumers) and their actions using Google and the website called Good on You, where they can find information regarding how green a brand really is. Moreover, some participants admitted that they also checked the companies' goals and how concrete they are, as they perceive vague facts, as a hint that it might be greenwashing.

When it comes to the type of message that Social consumers expect from the companies it is tightly connected to honesty and clarity. “(...)I think it's important to communicate, oh, ‘we're not the perfect, sustainable brand, but we're making these steps’”. (Participant 4, Focus Group – Social Consumers)

The participants require fact-based communication, based on credible sources. Furthermore, they said that they appreciated when companies admit that there is room for improvement:

“(...)’we're not perfect yet, like nobody is really perfect but we are trying and we're like working on this’. So I thought that was also like, that makes the brand more like, sympathetic”. (Participant 3, Focus Group – Social Consumers).

Moreover, the participants mentioned several elements that they would like to see in the messages from the fashion brands. The first one is the price. However, as it was mentioned before, the participants highlighted the fact that they were students. Hence, they are more price-sensitive. In general, they are willing to pay a bit more for a justified price. Nevertheless, it needs to be explained why this specific product is worth this kind of money. Hence, its added value. Additionally, the participants admitted that they would not buy inexpensive clothing because it would be suspicious. Secondly, they want to know whether the item is truly sustainable. Finally, all of the participants said that they would appreciate clearer sizing and more diversity in the way the products are presented on the models.

“(...)having models of like different body types. So not only like the 175 centimeters, size 36, but maybe also, somebody who has like a size 40 or 44, or something like that, that would also be nice(...)” (Participant 3, Focus Group – Social Consumers).

Communication Channels

When participants were presented with the information regarding the preferred communication channels for the Social consumers according to the literature, they all agreed with it. Nevertheless, they admitted the crucial role of social media and influencers. When it comes to social media, the participants mentioned Instagram, as the main source of information regarding companies' projects. Additionally, this platform is the place where they find their inspirations from friends and influencers. Two participants also mentioned YouTube and the YouTubes as a source of knowledge regarding sustainable brands. Finally, they admitted that they fully trust influencers and their judgment due to the fact that they have more knowledge, and that they are honest, as they usually reflect on past selves.

“And if they say that something is good, I'm, like, sustainable or whatever, then I have no reason to question it. Because they're honest with the viewers. Like, that's the biggest thing with me. They always always, like, reflect on their past selves, and mistakes they have made on the story and this makes it like, I can relate to that.” (Participant 5, Focus Group – Social Consumers).

4.1.2 Sacrifice Consumers

Attitude towards sustainability and fashion

The participants who related the most to the Sacrifice consumer type agreed that sustainability in the fashion industry has to do with economical, ecological and social aspects. Moreover, they agreed that when talking about it within the fashion industry all steps of the supply chain had to be considered, such as working conditions, design and production waste. Additionally, all participants emphasised that sustainability to them means buying timeless and classical pieces that you could wear for a long time.

When asked about the current situation in the fashion industry regarding sustainability, the participants found that it is going in a more positive direction, since the number of startups and small companies to tackle the problem has been increasing. Moreover, one participant said she felt the awareness around sustainability in the fashion industry had increased: *“I think that in the last few years, and especially during corona, the awareness has increased, and many people tried to buy less or buy secondhand or buy sustainable clothes.”* (Participant 3, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers). However, the overall situation is still perceived negatively by them. Additionally, one participant acknowledged that the fashion industry could never be fully sustainable. *“I think overall, the fashion industry never can be sustainable, because it just can't, making textiles is so wasteful.”* (Participant 4, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers).

Expectations and Needs

The sacrifice consumer type is really pro-social, open to change and willing to pay more for sustainable products. All of the participants identified with this description and agreed with it. However, one participant mentioned that she could not fully commit to sustainable brands as she was a student. However, she still chooses to purchase clothes in a sustainable way and prefers to shop from second hand stores.

Furthermore, they all value quality and long-lasting items the most. One participant brought up how clothes from previous generations have lasted longer. Other participants agreed to that, saying they also wear clothes from their parents. In addition to quality, one participant mentioned that for her it is important to dress according to her own values: *“I really care about my values, and I want to dress according to that, so I want to buy sustainable things.”* (Participant 4, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers). Moreover, they found that brands they have decided to purchase from should have the same values as their own. One participant also said that for them it is important to look at how many collections the brand releases within a year. If it was one collection per season they would find it suspicious. On the other hand, another participant mentioned that four collections per year was still acceptable for her. Furthermore, two participants mentioned the importance of different sustainable labels the products could have. However, one respondent emphasised that all of these labels could not be easily trusted: *“But in the end, I think it's really difficult to go the entire chain and only rely on one label, I don't really trust all of the labels (...).”* (Participant 4, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers).

Communication

The most important things they needed to see from a brand were “(..) *that they promote transparency, that they talk about where it's produced and what kind of material.*” (Participant 3, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers). These consumers really prefer to have engagement about transparency, where brands talk about their suppliers and how products are produced. Moreover, they prefer brands who produce locally, and as all of the participants were from Europe this was their preferred choice. Additionally, the participants found messages about used materials the most appealing to them. Furthermore, some of them mentioned they liked to have messages that are educational for them: “*I really enjoy when there's a little bit of education in there.*” (Participant 3, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers).

When asked about how they evaluate whether a brand is greenwashing, all the participants agreed that transparency was the key. It is important for them to see information about production on the brand's website. Nevertheless, all of the participants had their own ways of how they evaluated whether a brand is greenwashing. Key factors they look for are: the amount of sales, materials, price, consistency and amount of collections per year. One participant said that if the price is low, she is sure the product was not made in a sustainable way. Furthermore, the high amount of sales and collections is perceived as greenwashing. They looked for consistency in information, as this showed if a brand was authentic or not. Moreover, one participant said she is reading reports and always looks for keywords to make sure whether a brand is greenwashing its activities.

Communication Channels

Participants were presented information about what are the most common communication channels for the sacrifice type according to the literature – company websites and CSR reports. All of the participants agreed that these were the most used channels where they got their information about brands. Nevertheless, participants also mentioned that they additionally got their information from social media, by seeing how a brand represents itself. However, one participant said that they do not follow fashion brands on social media that much, because they do not wish to be influenced. Additionally, one participant mentioned their preferred channel is listening to podcasts: “*I also sometimes checkout brands when I hear them talked about on podcasts, for example. So podcast is for me the new channel for everything.*” (Participant 4, Focus Group - Sacrifice Consumers). However, when asked about the effect social media influencers have on their decision making, they agreed they did not trust them. One participant said, when an influencer promotes something to be sustainable, they would still do a background search for the company. Moreover, some participants mentioned that smaller sustainable brands often do not have budgets for using influencer marketing, therefore, thus they tend not to trust them.'

4.1.3 Self Consumers

Attitude towards sustainability and fashion

In general, the participants perceive sustainability as “*the way of living to leave as small of a footprint as you can*” (Participant 3 - Focus Group – Self Consumers), a movement connected to preservation of biodiversity. Nevertheless, they also noticed its more social and economic parts and for most of them it was the most important aspect of sustainability:

“(...)it's also not only about the ecological footprint that we have, but also the social and economical as well, that our needs that we have as human beings also meet the needs of the for example, the economy and also social aspects in life” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

“But I also think it's very important with social sustainability, that we know that when I purchase something, I know that this is kind of ethically created, that I know that it's not child labor. That is the most important sustainability aspect for me.” (Participant 5 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

When it comes to sustainability in the fashion industry, some participants admitted that they are not sure what it actually means, as there is no clear definition. Moreover, they said that sustainability in this market varies greatly per company and depends where we would look, as high-end fashion is perceived as more sustainable. However, they saw sustainability as an increasingly trendy topic for fashion companies that try to highlight their sustainable and environmentally friendly projects but the participants said that there was lack of transparency for most of the companies, as they did not see a lot of details regarding what had been done. Hence, it is seen as a trick to get more profit.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that he sees sustainability, as a way to sell more products but also to help consumers feel better about themselves:

“But at the end, I think that some people don't don't care that much. They just buy it just because it sounds nice and you feel better about yourself maybe in a way, but at the end it's not as an important factor when buying fashion, clothes” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

Expectations and Needs

The participants agreed with a description of the Self consumers provided by the literature. They especially highlighted the search for added value and price sensitivity, as key factors. Each of them has a set of needs and factors that they consider while making a purchase and they are more important than its sustainable aspect: “*The sustainable factor won't trigger purchase in me. So I would choose the one that actually brings me more value.*” (Participant 6 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

“So I think it's not that sustainability is not important (..), but it's just not the factor what we look into especially when it comes to fashion and clothing as well. For me, I look if I like it, and if it looks good. And that's important for me, the other aspects are not really important.” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

For some it was quality, materials, and for others it was style. However, none of them considered sustainability as an important factor. It is seen just as a bonus: *“(...) but I don't really care that it's sustainable to be honest, because I do it because it's better for me.”* (Participant 5 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

When asked about what would convince them to buy from a sustainable brand, the participants said that they would purchase green products only if they fit their needs (material, quality, style wise), and would not be much more expensive than a non-sustainable option. Nevertheless, they admitted that they would not buy an item because it was sustainable but due to the fact that it fit their needs and expectations. Moreover, one participant said that he would be convinced to buy something more sustainable if a brand would be very transparent and have a big, global project connected to sustainability that he would be passionate about. Lastly, another participant mentioned that she would be more inclined to purchase something sustainable if her favourite brand starts to offer these kinds of clothing. She said it is because she had trust in that brand and she knew it would fit her expectations.

Communication

When it comes to the communication, the participants look for attractive visuals that catch attention. They want to know what a brand is currently doing or how clothes look on other people. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of visual messages, as they find them more appealing and engaging. The participants also look for a communication that will immediately catch their attention in a creative and interesting way:

“(...) if I don't find it attractive in the first few seconds, I kind of disregard it right away unless I'm really looking for something specific.” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

“I think visual is very important. Because if they send me a newsletter, oh that is what they're doing for sustainability. I won't read it, I will delete the email right away. But if it's something like a quick 10 second video or so on Instagram, then I will look at it. And if it's interesting, I will look into it more.” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

Furthermore, after the visual message attracts the consumers, the participants said that later the communication should provide information regarding a product and what is its added value. Additionally, one participant mentioned that it is crucial to find a balance between visuals, inspirations, sustainability, and quality content.

Moreover, the key message elements that the Self consumers from the focus group want to see are: quality, influencers, lifestyle, brand concept, heritage and history, people behind a brand, and a company culture. One of the examples was Donatella Versace:

“(...) what I find interesting is always like, what the people on the top in those brands are, for example CEO. For example, Versace always has Donatella her face somewhere. And I find that interesting, because then it's like, you see that it's not only a company, but it's a whole brand of all family connections and traditions. And the history part of it is interesting to see, how they developed from years to years, and how they change and look in the future as well.” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

When asked about greenwashing, they admitted that they did not really know what it is. That is also why they have not really noticed it. The participants said that in general, they believed the companies they purchase from.

“(...) for me, it's it's very unfamiliar and I I suspect the companies do it but I feel that (...) they think it triggers purchase but for me at least I have never noticed that and this hasn't been the reason to purchase. Even if they do it, it's not very effective on consumers like me.” (Participant 6 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

Communication Channels

The participants strongly prefer visual advertising. Thus, they said that social media is the best channel to reach them, especially, Instagram. However, they appreciate all kinds of visual communication such as billboards, bus stop ads, shop windows etc, and find it the most compelling:

“(...) if I see something nice in a window or so then I will go into it and look (...) but that's how I usually buy my clothes. I don't think if I want this or this unless I really need it, I just go walk around and if there's something I like that and go in and check it and I most probably will buy it. But it's the visual part I think that easily attracts me and then it fits me then I will I will go for it.” (Participant 4 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

All of the participants said that they usually made a purchase by just seeing something in a shop or shopping window. They also tend to buy clothes offline. Hence, the visual aspect of the communication is crucial to reach these consumers. Moreover, the participants treat social media as a source of inspiration, not a place to make a purchase.

“I might mention social media but I don't know how much it has actually affected me because I might click and scroll around but I'm actually never buying online and I'm not shopping for fun that much and if I want to do it then just going to thrift shops but if I go to some bigger and main shops then I would just look around and buy something on sale.” (Participant 3 - Focus Group – Self Consumers).

Finally, when asked about influencers, they said that they did not think that they were easily influenced. Nevertheless, they might be influenced by influencers who they identify with. Hence, the ones with a similar way of living, needs, and lifestyle. However, in general they said that they would never buy a product that had been promoted by influencers, as they know it was sponsored. But if they know that some recommendation is genuine then they might consider it.

4.2 Practitioners' view

Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

All of the experts view sustainability in the fashion industry as a rapidly growing trend that is going to completely change the market, since it is unstoppable “*There’s no way back, this trend is going to be stronger and stronger*” (Interviewee 1). In general, sustainability is currently one of the most popular selling points. As for its origins, the practitioners see this trend as a consumer-driven phenomenon. Due to the “*looming (...) threat of climate change*” (Interviewee 1), the policymakers are working on more sustainable solutions. These changes in policies are being noticed by society that is also trying to change. Nevertheless, all of the experts view young generations, such as Generation Z and Millennials, as the key change-makers: “*(...)these generations are the driving [force] behind, behind this trend and the driving force of it.*” (Interviewee 1)

They want to be more sustainable and brands’ values and their purposes are crucial for them. According to some interviewees, consumers are well informed, especially after the Rana Plaza factory tragedy, and controversies around burning clothes and working conditions that occur in the fashion industry. Thus, they expect changes from fashion brands. One interviewee admitted that consumers have a certain power over brands. Hence, the companies should carefully listen to their audience: “*(...) I feel like it's important to just listen, people in the capitalistic system, they vote with their money, right? So I think it's super important to see how the trend is going.*” (Interviewee 2)

The practitioners were also asked about two phenomena connected to the fashion industry that had been mentioned in the literature and by the consumers during the focus groups:

Greenwashing

According to the experts, the brands are accused of greenwashing when they make it look like they care about sustainability. Nevertheless, it is only a marketing strategy that is meant to attract more clients and bring profit. Nowadays, consumers have an access to “*abundance of information*” (Interviewee 1), hence, it is easy for them to spot greenwashing: “*So I think we as customers know that it's not a quick fix. And if it looks like a quick fix, there's something wrong, then you don't believe it anyway.*” (Interviewee 3)

That is why all the practitioners view authenticity, as a crucial part of any brand that does not want to be accused of greenwashing or making false claims. Consumers expect from the company honesty and authenticity that is based on real actions and plans. According to two interviewees, consumers prefer brands that openly admit that they are not 100% sustainable. However, they are trying and working on it. Furthermore, they will quickly spot brands that are not completely honest and authentic:

“They might not be sustainable in everything they do, then be honest about it and say: ‘we are 10% right now, but we aim to go 80%’. They should do that instead of saying ‘we are 80%’ and not being it because it will be, I mean, that won't hold for long.”
(Interviewee 3)

Another important piece of advice on how to avoid greenwashing is to move from talking and bragging about sustainable initiatives to enabling and helping consumers to act sustainably. Brands should provide them with the right choice and option to do it.

“Because I think the problem about greenwashing is that you put on that hero cape. Whereas if we actually just go out there and say: ‘change is difficult, and it's a two-way street, if you want to change, we want to change, we give you the options, we want to encourage you, we want to nudge you to do to get through right choices’. I don't think people will have the same problem with being accused of greenwashing.”
(Interviewee 4)

In order to do so, it is important to first try to understand where consumers are heading, and have a clear purpose and vision. The sustainable part of a brand needs to be change- and consumer-driven and not profit-driven. Moreover, it has to be a crucial element of the company's strategy.

Finally, transparency has been mentioned as one of the most important factors when it comes to preventing greenwashing, which is also connected to honesty. However, one of the experts said that transparency was a rather vague term and he was more leaning towards simplicity. It is due to the fact that transparency is not necessarily simple, nor actionable. In order to make sure that the message is clear and there is no communication barrier, it is crucial to translate it so that it is simple and actionable. Hence, transparency needs to go along with simplicity.

Attitude-behaviour Gap

The next phenomenon connected to the fashion industry and sustainability is the attitude-behaviour gap. According to the practitioners, the main cause of it is that most of the consumers priorities price, delivery and free return over sustainability, as they *“want to be sustainable but convenience comes first”* (Interviewee 1). Convenience plays an important role in the creation of the attitude-behaviour gap, as for example, many brands are available only online. Nevertheless, consumers want accessibility, and want to feel the fabrics and appreciate the quality. Thus, companies should think about how to make their products more convenient and closer to the regular consumers' budgets. Moreover, some experts have mentioned education as the way to avoid the attitude-behaviour gap. Consumers might not be

fully ready to be sustainable, as it is not easy, nor convenient. Hence, companies should educate them regarding the importance of being greener and provide them with tools to become more sustainable. Both consumers and brands should cooperate and start with small steps that eventually turn into systematic sustainable-conscious attitude and behaviour: *“Small steps, small changes in daily habits, small changes in business practices, I think that this is the way to go, gradual evolution, not revolution.”* (Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, one interviewee suggested that the attitude-behaviour gap should be tackled through communication. That is because usually it is a matter of choice between paying a higher price for higher quality, sustainable clothing, or settling for a non-sustainable item that is also cheaper. Therefore, it is important to communicate and educate consumers. They should know that they do not need to follow all the trends and can buy less, better quality clothing that is sustainable and will last longer:

“But, I think it is more important to communicate how people do not need so many (...). Or as a fashion brand to communicate that all you need are some basic items and you will be fine. You don’t have to jump on every trend that comes. To focus more on lasting clothes.” (Interviewee 5)

Brand Identity

The experts view brand identity as something that should start from clearly defining the brand’s vision, values, purpose, target group, goals, and philosophy. Factors such as price, quality and convenience compared to the company's competitors should be also considered. In general, the company needs to ask itself the “why” question and try to understand what the brand is about. Moreover, the practitioners see values and goals as the most important starting points. They should be timeless, clear and easy to communicate. The company should later *“(…) try to do everything according to these goals.”* (Interviewee 1). Additionally, these goals and values should be understood and shared by all the employees and departments: *“The brand itself and its employees must know what the brand stands for and why it is the brand it is.”* (Interviewee 5)

Furthermore, a brand is nothing without its consumers. That is why when establishing a brand identity, a company needs to first invest a significant amount of time into gaining the understanding regarding their target group, what connects the brand with them, and what are their desires. For example, one of the interviewees said that younger generations are looking for brands that have a purpose that goes beyond making profit:

“(…)the research shows that (...) especially young people, same Generation Z and millennials, they are looking for purpose driven brands. So (...) these generations are looking for brands not only to sell them stuff, but to do good things while selling that stuff.” (Interviewee 1)

Nowadays, being simply sustainable is not enough, as consumers look for authentic stories. Hence, the experts highlighted again the importance of transparency, and authenticity. Brand needs to have a bigger purpose than just to earn money. It needs to evolve over time together

with its consumers. The companies have the power to change our behaviour and make more sustainable choices. Thus, they should use it to make a real, positive change. That is what one of the experts called a “transformational difference”. Currently, it is less about showing off and having a higher purpose. Now, it is important to try to make a real change and have a clear vision on how to do it: “(...)today I would say is kind of transformational difference. So it's really much more about the difference that the brand can create in your life.” (Interviewee 4)

CSR Communication

As sustainability in the fashion industry has been an increasing trend, the experts agree that communicating it has also been on the rise. Moreover, some of them pointed out that companies who are not doing it, will have a problem in the future. Furthermore, one interviewee explained that new emerging brands that have sustainability in the core, already have a better position in the marketplace regarding sustainability: “Some of the newer upcomers, have a better position there because they start out challenging that from the beginning.” (Interviewee 3)

In order to start working with a new brand it is important to know more information about the brand, such as: brand identity (values, personality), target groups, vision and their competitors. Three of the experts mentioned that when working on a communication strategy for a new brand, it is crucial to understand what the brand wanted to achieve with it. To start working with a new brand, practitioners wanted to know as much as possible about the brand, who they are and how they are operating. One interviewee pointed out that for him it is important to work with different departments of the company, in order to have a clear understanding of how the company operates. This helps to avoid miscommunication with consumers. Furthermore, one practitioner said that she is only working with brands she could trust. Therefore, she makes sure that she has all the information about the supply chain and materials in order to understand whether it is a truly sustainable company. The honesty and trust between the communication agency and fashion brand are of high importance: “I want to have a very honest way of doing business. So I only work with honest people.” (Interviewee 2)

Strategies and Goals

When asked whether there are any specific strategies for communicating sustainability the answer was that it depended on different factors. One practitioner said that they always take it case by case, and there is no certain blueprint that they would always use. However, another expert mentioned there are three main strategies they mostly use when it comes to communicating sustainable initiatives – story branding, story scaping and challenger branding. They are all focused on telling the story and the purpose of the brand and brands wanting to change something. Furthermore, companies should look at consumers as heroes of the story, not themselves, since consumers are the ones who want to be more sustainable. Brands should be seen as a resource for consumers in order to be more sustainable. Nevertheless, two interviewees said that classical communication principles apply for communication about sustainability as well.

“... it needs to be simple, it needs to be emotional, needs to be actionable, it's actually really not that difficult, which is kind of laughable when you see how many people does mistakes in their space.” (Interviewee 4)

Moreover, the strategies brands use to communicate their sustainable initiatives vary depending on their end goals.

“So the common goal, I guess, could be that it should be possible to combine selling fashion and still be sustainable somehow.” (Interviewee 3)

However, since fashion companies are still a business, their main goal is to get sales. One interviewee said that it is rather expensive to make the supply chain fully sustainable, and when a company has done it they see it as an unique selling point for them and want to communicate it.

Barriers

There are several barriers for communicating CSR that were mentioned by the experts, such as the higher pricing of sustainable garments and their actions being perceived as greenwashing. Even though sustainability has become more trendy, the general public is still not that invested in the topic. Thus, the higher price tag often puts people off. Moreover, consumers do not believe everything they see, hence, they are used to doubting what companies say they are doing. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, companies' actions being interpreted as greenwashing is a big struggle for many. Furthermore, the fashion industry is focused on the latest trends, and the same goes for the innovation within the industry. Sustainable innovations are moving fast, and if brands cannot keep up with them, it could be seen as a barrier. However, one interviewee mentioned that sustainability has already become mainstream, which means it is harder for brands to stand out with their sustainable initiatives: *“But I think sustainability now is also a status quo. So so it is getting really hard to to stand out within that crowd.” (Interviewee 3).*

Media and people often do not care about sustainable projects, unless it is something big and people see it makes a difference, such as a company going carbon neutral. This shows it is not enough to just be sustainable in order to have a competitive advantage.

Message

The message content depends on what companies want to communicate. When it comes to communicating CSR, they need to say how consumers or the society would benefit from it. Moreover, the experts emphasised the importance of showing the consumers the added value of the potential sustainable purchase. People want to see what are the additional benefits of buying sustainable garments. That is because consumers prefer values that are immediate and practical. Therefore, they are more likely to purchase sustainable clothes with a practical function. Additionally, one interviewee pointed out that according to his research 29,4% of campaigns that motivate consumers work better, rather than the ones that talk about their own accomplishments. Thus, communication campaigns focused on motivating people are likely to have more positive feedback. Furthermore, consumers have a need to rationalise their

purchases, especially when it comes to more expensive purchases. That is why once they see the added value, it is easier to rationalise the purchase.

“The beauty of human being is that we know how to rationalise. And we're very good at it. So, do you want an iPhone? You will buy an iPhone. You'll find and find 10 reasons buy it” (Interview 1)

Additionally, when a brand is communicating their sustainable initiatives it is important to let the consumers know why they are doing that. For example, when they are supporting a social movement, they need to show the reason why they chose this project or perhaps how it is connected to their business, as it adds credibility and authenticity to it.

The majority of the experts said that the message should be adjusted to different types of consumers. For example, highly sustainable consumers might not need that much persuading as would other types. Furthermore, some people might care more about fashion than highly sustainable consumers, thus messages with visuals of clothes are of higher importance to them. One interviewee pointed out that digital innovations have made adjusting communication to different target groups easier. Nevertheless, another expert mentioned that the message should be the same for everyone. She felt that otherwise the brand would lose its audience when they would divide it into different smaller groups.

Moreover, two interviewees said that for brands which have sustainability in their core it is also incorporated into every communication message. On the other hand, brands with some CSR initiatives have messages about sustainability just as an addition to general communication. The content should be simple and easy to understand for consumers. However, the message should always be backed up with actions:

”.. you can talk about where you want to go and the journey you want to move on and so on, then back it up with the actions. But it's, I mean, it's not easy. And it's not enough just to come up with a fancy slogan if there's nothing behind.” (Interviewee 3)

Furthermore, the message needs to be honest and transparent. If a brand is not 100% sustainable with certain processes, the practitioners recommend to communicate it honestly to their consumers as well as to show that they are working towards it. People appreciate honesty, even if the company is not yet fully sustainable:

“They might not be sustainable in everything they do, then be honest about it and say, ‘we are 10% right now, but we aim to go 80%’. They should do that instead of say[ing] ‘we are 80%’ and not being it because it will be, I mean, that won't hold for long.” (Interviewee 3)

Moreover, one expert highlighted the importance of words and how they are used. Using vague terms could potentially confuse the targeted audience. Additionally, the message should always be educational to consumers, but in a fun way. It is important that the message

should be about what the clothes are made out of, who made the clothes and what is the quality. Furthermore, it is important to talk about the story behind the brand and its founders.

Lastly, companies need to have a balance in message content. The practitioners pointed out that when it comes to sustainability many fashion brands are listening only to highly sustainable consumers, while seeming to forget other consumer groups. However, not all people are interested only in content about sustainability and prefer to have it more about fashion. Therefore, it is important to have a balance between sustainability and fashion content.

Communication Channels

The practitioners said that communication channels should be adjusted to the target group. Nevertheless, they advised to focus on social media, especially Instagram. Additionally, a company should also consider working with influencers, as they are becoming increasingly important for the younger generations. Moreover, one of the experts mentioned that truly sustainable brands should highlight their sustainable initiatives on their websites, social media accounts and every single press release. In general, all the PR actions and campaigns should reflect their sustainable identity. Finally, one of the interviewees said that companies tend to put too much focus on mass media and there is a need for more groundwork. Hence, he recommends starting the communication from the stores and staff. The employees should be educated about the brand and products and know about their sustainable features in order to answer all the questions from the consumers. Furthermore, the stores and the visuals inside them should be used as a communication channel that inspires and promotes sustainable behaviour. The same goes for products. Labels provide a great way to communicate with consumers, as they tend to believe what is written on them: *“People believe what's written on the products, even though it's not as regulated as people might think it is. So, that's a really good channel.”* (Interviewee 3)

When it comes to the message, the experts believe that it should be adjusted to every channel separately, as each of them works differently. The core message can remain the same. Nevertheless, it needs to be changed depending on the medium and its purpose:

“Definitely adjusted, because every channel works in a different way. The main message and the base should stay the same, but the other messages can be a bit different but still support the main message.” (Interviewee 5)

Consumers

The majority of interviewed experts admitted that it is crucial to educate consumers. By doing that, brands give people the resources and tools to make more conscious and sustainable decisions. Educating consumers about social and environmental sustainability can be done through communication campaigns or different events, such as conferences. The educational content can be about the small hacks, which help people in their daily lives or it can be on a bigger level about systemic challenges. However, one practitioner said that even though the content should be educational, it should also be entertaining.

The experts were presented with descriptions of the three fashion consumer types and findings about them from the focus group interviews. However, it is important to say that the majority of the interviewees mentioned similar groups already beforehand:

“First one are the ones who want to be righteous and the ones who want to save the world. So you talk about zero impact to the environment and then about the great fashion. Then you have people who like to dress well. Then you focus on dressing well and the fashion angle and then you of course, the second part of the sentence you mentioned that it's also, say saving the environment” (Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, one interviewee suggested that Social consumers are the biggest group (around 60%), while Sacrifice consumers are the smallest group (5-10%), the rest were suggested to be Self consumers. Nevertheless, the sizes of these consumer groups could differ depending on the country. This can be for example related to the average level of earnings, as people who earn more are also willing to spend more. However, one expert said that many companies have divided their consumers into age groups, rather than by similar characteristics. Nonetheless, companies need to consider the different types of fashion consumers and target them differently. For example, the Sacrifice consumer type was seen by the experts as the group that asks the important and often uncomfortable questions. Brands need to be ready to answer these questions, however, they cannot focus only on these consumers, otherwise, they might not attract other target groups. Furthermore, companies need to keep in mind that consumers are becoming more aware of the processes in the fashion industry. Therefore, it is essential to have an honest and authentic conversation with them.

Additionally, one interviewee pointed out that according to his research 29,4% of campaigns that motivate consumers to work better, rather than the ones that talk about their own accomplishments. Thus, communication campaigns focused on motivating people are likely to have more positive feedback. Nevertheless, if consumers do not see the immediate value in sustainable initiatives by the brands, and are not willing to purchase, the brand might stop doing these initiatives. Therefore, it is important to show how consumers benefit from these sustainable initiatives or more sustainable production methods. As mentioned before, if the product adds value to the consumer they are more likely to support the brand. For example, changing to more environmentally friendly fabric dyeing processes would be less harmful to the workers, the environment and for the person who wears the clothing. Therefore, it is in the hands of consumers to guide companies towards more sustainable habits and production methods: *“I think that's the only way to preserve the planet is to educate consumers.”* (Interviewee 2)

5 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter analyses and discusses the findings gathered through the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The analysis combines theory from existing literature with data from the empirical study. This is done through seven themes that emerged from the analysis. These are: Brand, Authenticity and Transparency, Social Media and Importance of Physical Stores, Needs, Added Value, Education and Consumers. Each theme is analysed separately in order to understand what should be communicated to which type of consumers and where. The next part of the chapter discusses the findings based on the process introduced in the theoretical framework. This part aims to make practical recommendations to brands how to efficiently communicate sustainable initiatives. The combination of key findings with relevant literature presented in Chapter 2 provides sufficient knowledge to answer the research question.

5.1. Themes Emerging from the Analysis

5.1.1 Brand

Before any communication strategy is created, a company needs to first clearly define its identity (Nandan, 2004). Both literature and the experts view brand identity as something connected to its core values and beliefs (Kapferer, 2012; Urde 2013). That is why according to the latter group, the process of establishing an identity should start from clearly defining the brand's vision, values, purpose, target group, goals, and philosophy. They especially highlighted the importance of values and goals, which should be timeless, clear and easy to communicate and be the starting points of every strategy and project. Additionally, it is crucial to make sure that these goals and values are understood and shared by all the employees in all the departments. Moreover, factors such as price, quality and convenience, compared to the brand's competitors should be also considered. The company needs to ask itself the "why" question and describe how it sees itself from the inside (Kapferer, 2012).

Consumers, on the other hand, expect from the brands: authenticity, transparency, honesty, and access to information that would help them to evaluate whether they are genuine. The practitioners admitted that a brand is nothing without its consumers. Hence, when establishing a brand identity, it is crucial to first put an effort into gaining an understanding regarding the target group and its desires.

When it comes to sustainability, both literature and experts agree that it needs to be incorporated into the brand's core values (Biloslavo & Trnavčević, 2009). If it is not,

consumers are less likely to identify with a brand and be loyal to it (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). Hence, consumers are more likely to have a positive perception of a company that has sustainability in its core. Nevertheless, if it is caught lying about its sustainable identity or initiatives, it can be viewed as greenwashing and lead to long-term consequences like for example consumers' distrust (Strähle & Köksal, 2015).

Finally, the practitioners said that being simply sustainable is not enough, as consumers look for authentic stories. That is why they recommend focusing on having a bigger purpose than just to earn money and admit that the primary motive behind sustainable initiatives should not be profit. This claim is confirmed by the literature that states that a positive perception of genuine actions can increase profits (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Conversely, the negative perception can result in disbelief and reduce the purchase intent (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Hence, the company should first try to make a real change and when consumers see it is not profit-driven and it has genuine motives, then the profit will follow.

5.1.2 Authenticity & Transparency

These characteristics were mentioned extensively in the literature, as well as by consumers, and the experts. The literature suggests that fashion brands, who want to engage in sustainable initiatives need to be authentic and transparent and have it in their brand identities (Gazzola et al., 2020). Moreover, according to Pérez (2019), authenticity has a direct impact on the perceived credibility of a brand. Whereas, other authors claim that there is no authenticity and credibility without transparency (e.g. Dawkins, 2004; Dubbink, Graafland & van Liedekerke, 2008). Thus, these concepts are interdependent. Furthermore, the literature sees the increase in sustainable initiatives, as an outcome of consumers demanding companies to be more transparent (Gazzola et al., 2020; Lehmann et al., 2020). That is why only through complete transparency and authenticity, companies can gain consumers' trust (Dubbink, Graafland & van Liedekerke, 2008). Both the experts and consumers agreed with that. The latter group, regardless of their level of engagement in sustainable behaviour, admitted that they do not like to be lied to and that they look for authenticity and transparency.

Moreover, both literature and practitioners mentioned that consumers do not trust brands easily (e.g. Ottman, 2011). It is due to the fact that many of them are focused on profit and are engaged in greenwashing practices. Consumers usually evaluate the corporate message and investigate whether it is credible and whether the real motives behind it are genuine (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Dawkins, 2004). Considering the fact that nowadays, consumers are well-educated and have access to an abundance of information, which was highlighted by the experts, they are able to easily distinguish whether a company is genuine in its initiatives.

Nevertheless, all of the sources mention similar ways of how to avoid being accused of greenwashing. Firstly, the literature and practitioners admitted that the message should be transparent (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018), and clear (Morsing & Spence, 2019). However, one of the experts said that transparency should mean simplicity, as consumers need to

understand a message in order to evaluate it correctly. Secondly, all the sustainable initiatives and actions need to be consistent and aligned with corporate behaviour as a whole (Dawkins, 2004; Nandan, 2005). Hence, the CSR communication has to be coherent (Nandan, 2005). Thirdly, all of the sources emphasised the importance of backing up the promises with actions. Consumers do not want to hear empty words of promise, they want to see the real outcomes of the projects or initiatives that would prove that a company is genuine (Friestad & Wright, 1994). That is why Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) suggests that a message should include information such as commitment to a cause, the impact it has, why this specific initiative (motives), explanation of the fit between the company's business and the cause, which add credibility to the whole process. Fourthly, both consumers and experts said that companies should be completely honest with their audience. If they are not 100% sustainable they should admit it. According to the consumers, it is better for a company to admit that they want to improve and they are working on it but they are still not entirely sustainable than to lie about it. Transparency and honesty regarding every step of the process, from the production to the communication, are expected but also rewarded by the consumers. Since they would prefer to buy from a not completely sustainable brand that is also 100% honest about it, as it increases the trust and credibility. Finally, all the parties have agreed that including concrete facts in the communication is the crucial factor to be perceived as an authentic and transparent brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). It is due to the fact that consumers perceive facts as solid proof. Thus, they prefer communication that is factually based and precise, as it helps to decrease scepticisms (Schmeltz, 2012)

To conclude, authenticity and transparency need to be the funding blocks of any CSR communication that wants to avoid greenwashing. It is due to the fact that no company can successfully communicate their sustainable initiatives without being completely honest, transparent, and authentic about it, as consumers are well-educated and have access to an abundance of information, which allows them to quickly see through ingenuine companies.

5.1.3 Social Media & Importance of Physical Stores

When it comes to the communication channels, the literature highlights their importance, as one of the key elements when building a communication strategy (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Shannon & Weaver, 1949), and mentions different channels for every consumer type introduced by McNeill and Moore (2015). Nevertheless, the findings from the focus groups indicate the superior role of social media.

All of the consumer groups admitted that social media are an important communication channel for them. Both, Social and Self consumers see social media as a source of inspiration. Especially, the first group admitted that Instagram and YouTube are the most important channels for them. Self consumers appreciate the visual aspect of social media more, whereas Social ones use it as a medium to find inspiration from friends and influencers. Furthermore, the importance of this channel was also confirmed by the literature, which sees it as the most-used channel to connect with consumers and communicate sustainable initiatives (e.g. Rutter,

Armstrong & Cano, 2017; Dawkins, 2004; Da Giau et al., 2016). The key benefits of social media are that it gives brands the opportunity to have a dialogue with consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012), it is a low-cost communication channel, that is highly accessible and gives a possibility to gather data about consumers (Sogari et al., 2017). Moreover, influencers were mentioned by both types, as an effective way to promote a product or a brand. This is due to the fact that both influencers and friends are treated as reliable sources of information. Thus, consumers trust their recommendations. The literature also highlights the importance of word-of-mouth, as a communication channel (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Since consumers trust interpersonal communication more than information coming from the market, it is crucial for brands to incorporate influencer marketing into their communication strategy (Faulds, 2009).

Additionally, the bigger importance of social media for consumers than presented in the research by McNeill and Moore (2015), might be due to the fact that it was published in 2015. Nowadays, social media, especially Instagram and YouTube, play a much bigger role in our lives.

Nevertheless, except for social media, the participants in the focus groups have also mentioned other communication channels that match the ones mentioned by the authors. The Sacrifice consumers use the companies' websites and CSR reports, along with Instagram pages to evaluate how sustainable they really are, and how they represent themselves. The Social group relies on social media and their surroundings. Whereas, Self consumers also value the physical stores. As it was mentioned before, this group appreciates visual advertising, and since they tend to buy offline, they see stores as an important communication channel. The visuals that target them should express their needs, desires, and lifestyles that they would like to have. The crucial role of physical stores was also mentioned by one of the experts. He highlighted the importance of not forgetting about the groundwork and recommends starting any communication strategy from the stores and staff. Since many consumers buy clothes offline, it is important to use the stores and the visuals inside as a communication channel and can inspire and promote sustainability.

Finally, most of the practitioners said that when it comes to the message, it should be adjusted to each type of consumer, and to every channel separately. This is due to the fact that every channel works differently. Hence, the core message can remain the same. However, it should be changed depending on the medium and its purpose.

5.1.4 Needs

The literature discussed that each consumer group has different needs when it comes to fashion consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015) and how they prioritise their personal needs over sustainable issues (Jorgens 2006). When these needs are not met, it can lead to an attitude-behaviour gap, where the positive attitude towards sustainable products is not reflected in consumers' behaviours (Beards, 2008). All the experts agreed that it is critical to

close the gap through communication. Therefore, companies need to take steps in order to do it and meet consumers' needs (D'Souza, 2015; Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018).

According to the empirical findings and literature, the most important elements based on what consumers evaluate brands are: price, accessibility, transparency (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015) and convenience. The need for affordable price is a crucial factor amongst all consumer types, including the highly sustainable consumers. All of them feel the need to rationalise the price of a product and it is easier to be done if the product matches their needs. Nevertheless, for Sacrifice consumers it is easier to justify the higher price, since for them sustainability is the first thing they look for in fashion brands.

Moreover, accessibility was especially important for Self and Social consumers. For them, the shopping experience should be as convenient as possible and they prefer going to physical stores to online shopping. They do not necessarily need their clothing to be sustainable (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch & Gruber, 2011), thus, they most probably will not put extra effort into buying them. Hence, in order to make the shopping experience comfortable, the experts recommended companies to offer free deliveries and returns. Therefore, when sustainable apparel companies want to cater to these consumers, they need to make it accessible and convenient to them.

Furthermore, consumers wanted to have clear and transparent communication. As mentioned before, transparent information regarding a brand's sustainable performances is crucial. However, not all consumer types base their purchase decision on it. While Sacrifice consumers base their purchase decision on whether a brand is being transparent with its sustainable initiatives, Social and Self consumers do not. Even though they appreciate it, it is not of the highest importance to them. Therefore, as argued by Grace (2015) brands should find a balance in their communication between fashion and sustainability content. The empirical findings support that, as Sacrifice consumers valued communication about sustainability and used materials more than about fashion trends. In contrast, Self consumers wanted to see more fashion and style related content, as they want to feel inspired.

To sum up, consumer purchase decisions are significantly influenced by their personal needs. When brands are communicating their sustainability, they also need to consider that the message should target consumers' different needs. Once these needs are met, they are more likely to make the purchase. Furthermore, the study identified additional needs consumers have, such as added value and benefits for themselves. This will be further discussed in the next theme.

5.1.5 Added Value

The key theme that emerged from empirical findings is the Added Value. This was highly mentioned by the practitioners and consumers themselves. De Chernatony, Harris and Dall'Olmo (2000) argue that emotional value is the key added value for consumers. However,

today emotional value is not enough and more recent literature introduced three types of value propositions that consumers consider: functional, emotional and social benefits (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015). Consumers would like to see how they or society benefits from purchasing sustainably made clothing, thus among sustainability it is important to communicate the added value of a product.

Moreover, the experts found, companies need to show to the consumer the immediate value they get from a more sustainable product. As can be drawn from empirical findings, the added value of a product is something different for all consumers, it could be style, quality or materials. Sustainably conscious consumers buy new items only when they really need something and they do not make emotional purchases. They are looking for high quality and timeless design that would last them for a long time without exploiting others and the environment. Therefore, the added value for them is the guilt-free factor (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015) and the quality of the clothes. However, since sustainability itself is not a primary factor to all consumer types, companies need to communicate their other benefits as well (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). That is why to target Social and Self consumers, it is especially important to communicate additional values besides sustainability. Similarly to the Sacrifice type, Social consumers also look for quality in clothing. However, they are more price sensitive and that is why the experts highlighted the need to communicate the link between higher price and quality. Brands need to show them that spending more money for quality clothing items will benefit them in the long run as they last longer than garments from fast fashion brands. Regardless, they follow fashion trends more (McNeill & Moore, 2015) and find the assortment of sustainable clothing rather dull. Empirical findings indicated Social and Self consumers would like to wear clothes that are fashionable and affordable. Hence, the added values for them are good appearances and affordable price. Moreover, as Self consumers are the least interested in sustainable fashion, they are also less willing to pay a higher price for it. Even though they might be aware of sustainable initiatives they still want to know what they can gain from them (Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR, 2015) since sustainability is just a bonus for them. It was especially emphasised by Self consumers, that if they have a choice between two similar products, they will choose the inexpensive one over the more sustainable and expensive product. This further accentuates that they need to see how they can gain from purchasing this item. This is why it is critical for brands to emphasise the different benefits a product has. This helps Self consumers to rationalise the purchase and makes them more likely to support brands with sustainable initiatives.

Furthermore, it is crucial for brands to communicate the added value of sustainable products. However, when doing that they have to keep in mind that the different consumer types find different things beneficial to them. Moreover, when a brand wants to cater to different consumer groups they need to learn how to balance the different elements in communication, such as fashion inspiration, price and sustainability.

5.1.6 Education

Another theme that emerged is the education of consumers. Its importance was especially highlighted by the experts. Nowadays, companies are able to change the behaviour of their consumers and convince them to be more sustainable. Therefore, the practitioners see there an opportunity for a transformational change, where brands are less focused on themselves and shift their attention towards making a real change through educating their consumers. It could be done through various ways such as campaigns, events, reports, or conferences. Moreover, the content that is meant to educate can be focused on high-level systemic challenges, but also on the small daily life hacks. Nevertheless, in any case, it should be entertaining.

Furthermore, the Sacrifice consumers from the focus group have also mentioned that they like when the messages that come from a brand have educational elements. The literature, on the other hand, sees the communication that is focused on educating their audience, as a possible solution that can help to close the attitude-behaviour gap for some consumers (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Hence, implementing the educational elements to the communication strategy can be extremely beneficial for a company.

5.1.7 Consumers

An extensive amount of literature on communication focuses on consumers as one big homogenous group. However, all consumers evaluate brands' messages through the prism of their own subjectivity (Nandan, 2005) and have a different brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). That is why, the majority of experts highlighted the importance of adjusting the CSR communication to different types of consumers, rather than keeping it the same for all of them. The reason for that is, each consumer group has different needs and expectations from fashion brands.

McNeill and Moore (2015) introduced three types of fashion consumers: Self, Social and Sacrifice consumers, which were the base of this study. According to the authors, the first group - Self consumers, have very little concern about sustainability in the fashion industry, and have a positive attitude towards fast fashion brands. Empirical findings show this is due to them not completely understanding what sustainability is. Moreover, the consumers said they see companies using it as a way to increase earnings. Thus, they tend to be sceptical if the sustainable initiatives brands have been actually authentic. These consumers are individualistic and care more about their personal needs (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consumers from the focus group said that they often do buy clothes from second hand stores, which is known to be a sustainable way of shopping, however, they do it due to price sensitivity and the possibility of finding unique items. Nonetheless, they are unlikely to purchase from brands just because of their sustainable initiatives. This finding was supported by McNeill and Moore (2015), suggesting this is the most difficult market for sustainable companies. Nevertheless, the consumers might choose to purchase from these brands when

they offer them additional value or feel pressured by other people. Thus, the findings showed they appreciate communication that would inspire them or explain what they could gain from a more sustainable garment.

The second type - Social consumers have a positive attitude and are increasingly concerned with sustainability in the fashion industry (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Therefore, they have the highest market potential for sustainable fashion brands. However, due to their lack of knowledge, and social acceptance on sustainability, the attitude-behaviour gap has a high probability of occurring. The findings of this study show that these consumers are price-sensitive, which is in contradiction with the literature suggesting otherwise (McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, they have the willingness to pay more, if the purchase is justified. Hence the need for added value and rationalising the buying decision, which was further discussed in the theme Added Value. Furthermore, empirical findings confirm the literature that these consumers value others' opinions (McNeill & Moore, 2015), although consumers said they do not let it affect their decisions.

Lastly, Sacrifice consumers are highly sustainable and conscious when it comes to fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015). They are pro-social and willing to invest more time and money into finding clothing that lasts them for a long time. This description was further confirmed by the consumers from the focus group interview. Nevertheless, empirical findings indicated that the price sensitivity varied. This depended a lot on what stages of life they are, for example, are they employed or students. Moreover, brands that wish to target this consumer group, need to have sustainability in their branding strategy (Ottman, 2011). Since these consumers are looking for truly authentic brands that care about social and environmental issues. Furthermore, the literature showed they do have the desire to be fashionable. On the other hand, findings from focus group interviews revealed that they do not care about being fashionable, and rather want to wear classical and timeless pieces made out of quality that would be long lasting. Hence, they are not following the latest trends. These consumers highly value communication about product's quality, production methods and when it is educational for them.

It is important to keep in mind that literature introduces the extreme cases of each consumer group. Therefore, it is not surprising that empirical findings were not fully in accordance with it. However, the significance of price was mentioned throughout all focus group interviews. It shows that all consumer groups to some extent are sensitive to higher prices. This is vital for brands to know, as it shows that consumers are not willing to always pay a higher price even when it comes to sustainable products. Therefore, the higher price needs to be justified.

Additionally, the empirical findings showed the complexity of individuals. Hence, it is important to approach them differently. This is why companies are trying to divide consumers by their similarities (Green, Carmone & Wachspress, 1976). One expert mentioned that many companies are dividing consumers into groups by their age. However, it is argued that segmenting consumers by socio-demographic factors is no longer working and a wider socio-cultural and social-psychological take is required (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). On account

of this, the majority of interviewed experts agreed that the communication message and channel should be accustomed to different consumer groups based on their needs and expectations.

To conclude, sustainability in the fashion industry is of different importance to everyone. Moreover, their motives and preferences about it vary. Therefore, they cannot be targeted with one message nor one channel, and it is necessary to adjust these according to the consumer type.

5.2 Discussion

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question:

How can fashion brands communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers?

Seven themes have emerged from the empirical material. They are all connected to different aspects of the CSR communication process. Moreover, each of them has helped to gain the understanding regarding how to effectively communicate sustainable initiatives to different types of fashion consumers.

The following section will discuss the findings. They are organised based on the communication process depicted in Theoretical Framework (p. 20) Hence, it starts with the company's side, its sustainable initiatives, motives and the creation of brand identity. Then moves to the message creation stage, followed by the choice of communication channel. Finally, the last stage consists of message receivers. Thus, the three types of fashion consumers by McNeill and Moore (2015) and their needs.

Brand

The first stage of the communication process is the most important one, as it is a building block for the whole process. It starts with a company clearly defining its identity (Nandan, 2004). It includes issues such as: core values, goals, beliefs, visions, purpose target group, and philosophy, which a company should clearly define for itself. However, the findings show that the most important concepts connected to brand identity are goals and core values (Kapferer, 2012). They should be timeless, clear, easy to communicate, and shared by all the employees. Additionally, when a company wants to communicate sustainable initiatives it is important to have it in the brand's core values in order to be perceived positively by consumers.

Once the brand identity is established, a company can work on its sustainable initiatives. Each action or project is based on identity, and intrinsic motives. The latter is especially important when it comes to CSR communication. The consumers expect authenticity, transparency and

honesty. Hence, if a brand does not have genuine motives, it might backfire, as consumers tend to evaluate the companies' true motives (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Dawkins, 2004). Moreover, if they are caught lying or deceiving about their sustainable identities or initiatives, it can be perceived as greenwashing and lead to consumers' distrust or boycott (Strähle & Köksal, 2015).

That is why authenticity and transparency are the key aspects of any effective CSR communication. The findings show that consumers look for authentic stories. Hence, the company should not create any sustainable initiative that has profit as the main motive behind it. It should rather start by having a higher, genuine purpose in mind such as the urge to make a change. When consumers notice the authenticity behind a company's action, they will have a positive perception of it, which in return will bring a profit (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Whereas, the negative perception can result in disbelief and reduce the purchase intent (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Therefore, according to findings, in order to create a communication that is perceived positively, a company needs to ensure that it considers five issues. Firstly, the message should be transparent (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018), and clear (Morsing & Spence, 2019), which can be achieved by, for example, making sure that the content is simple so that consumers can evaluate it easily. Secondly, sustainable initiatives and actions need to be consistent, and aligned with corporate identity as a whole (Dawkins, 2004; Nandan, 2005). Thirdly, it is crucial to back up the promises with actions. Thus, to present the outcomes of the projects by including detailed information and facts that add credibility to the whole process (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Fourthly, the empirical data suggested that consumers expect complete honesty from the companies. Therefore, they prefer when a company acknowledges that they are not fully sustainable but they want to improve and they are working on it. It can be reached by implementing a pledge for complete transparency and honesty regarding every step of the process. Finally, something that was mentioned before, no communication can be authentic without providing concrete facts to its audience (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Hence, all the messages sent by a company need to be factually based and precise, as it helps to decrease scepticisms (Schmeltz, 2012).

Message

The second stage of the communication process is focused on the message content. Both findings and literature have pointed out several elements that should be incorporated into the CSR message. Firstly, the companies should create content that is educational for their consumers. The findings pointed out that they like to learn about sustainability and innovations in the industry. Additionally, educating consumers is crucial in order to raise awareness about social and environmental issues the world faces. One way to do that would be to honestly talk about the standard and sustainable production methods in the garment industry. The education content should be interesting and entertaining, yet informative, and should focus on high-level systemic challenges, but also on the small daily life hacks.

Secondly, while creating a message, the companies have to consider different needs of their consumers. The specific needs and expectations of each consumer type can be found in the 5.1.7 Consumers section of this report (p. 58). Nevertheless, it is important to note that for all of them, price played an important role, along with quality, which is often associated with sustainable items. Therefore, it brings an opportunity for the companies. They can use their communication to explain to consumers why the higher price is justified. For example, by saying that more expensive, sustainable clothing means higher quality, hence, they are long lasting. Thus, the garments might be more expensive but due to their superior quality they will last long and be more affordable in the end. This type of narrative can convince a more price sensitive consumer to purchase sustainable clothes. Additionally, the companies should find a balance between content about fashion and sustainability, as different groups of consumers prefer different types of content. Therefore, they should not be focused on only one type, as it would limit the size of the audience that would find it appealing and interesting.

Thirdly, the CSR communication should highlight what are the added values of green products, as many consumers treat sustainability as just a bonus. For the Sacrifice group, the sustainable aspect of the gourmet is already a sufficient value to make a purchase. Whereas, for Social consumers the added value would be social acceptance and being trendy. Thus, the message content should be focused on these aspects. Finally, Self consumers only buy clothes that fit their needs, the rest is just a bonus. Nevertheless, they are attracted by visuals that present their desired lifestyles. That is why added value is especially important for them. Hence, the communication that targets Self consumers should be especially focused on creating a desire and highlighting the added values and benefits that come with a purchase.

Finally, as it was mentioned in the Brand section (p. 52), in order to be perceived as authentic and transparent, communication needs to induce concrete facts and information that would add credibility. Thus, a message about the brand's sustainable initiatives should be always simple and easy to understand. This will ensure the authenticity and honesty of the communication.

When a brand is constructing a message on sustainable initiatives all of these four elements need to be included in order to do it successfully. Moreover, as findings show each consumer group expects and wants different things from fashion brands. Therefore, they cannot be targeted with one message and the content needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Communication Channel

Once the brand identity is clearly defined and the message is ready, a company needs to choose the right communication channel to reach its target group. The findings indicate that each message should be adjusted to every type of channel, as they all work a bit differently. Thus, the main idea can remain the same. However, the remaining parts should be adjusted. Moreover, in order to target three types of fashion consumers, the companies should mostly focus on social media. Especially Instagram and YouTube. Social media is a low-cost communication channel that is highly accessible and gives a possibility to gather data about

consumers (Sogari et al., 2017). Moreover, both Social and Self consumers see it as the main source of inspiration. Therefore, its visual aspect is very important and needs to play an important role, while establishing a communication strategy. Additionally, the companies should also use influencer marketing, as these consumers view them as a reliable source of information. Since consumers trust interpersonal communication more than information coming from the market (Faulds, 2009), influencers can be a powerful tool when it comes to CSR communication.

Nevertheless, brands should also use the channels that are specific for each consumer type, as supportive communication channels. Therefore, the Sacrifice consumers want to see the concrete facts regarding sustainable initiatives at the companies' websites and CSR reports, along with Instagram pages. Furthermore, except for social media, the Social group relies heavily on their surroundings. Hence, word-of-mouth, affiliate marketing and review promotion could be considered as additional communication channels. Finally, the Self consumers put a strong emphasis on a visual promotion. They tend to purchase offline and value the physical stores. That is why the effective way of reaching them would be the use of billboards, bus stop advertising and shopping windows advertisements that would immediately draw their attention. The visuals or advertisements should express their intrinsic needs, desires, and lifestyles that they would like to have.

Consumers

The entire communication process needs to be established while keeping in mind the three different types of fashion consumers introduced by McNeill and Moore (2015): Self, Social and Sacrifice. As previously said, they all need and expect different things from a fashion brand. Therefore, companies need to target them individually, by adjusting communication to meet their expectations. Thus, it is important to look at each group individually.

Firstly, to cater to Self consumers, brands need to focus on visual communication. However, at the same time, they need to highlight the added value of sustainable garments, as it is crucial for these consumers. Secondly, in order to target Social groups, companies need to show them the value for money. Especially, emphasising the higher quality of sustainably made clothing. Moreover, by explaining to them that sustainably made items can last longer, they are more likely to make a purchase. Lastly, the Sacrifice consumers have a high willingness to buy from sustainable brands. However, as they are also ready to put more effort into researching the company's background, the brands need to be authentic and ready to answer their questions. Companies should have information about their production, used materials and workers on their websites, as this is the place where they gather their information from. In order to gain their trust, brands have to be honest and transparent.

The findings confirm existing literature (Dawkins, 2004), that CSR communication needs to be adjusted to different consumer groups. It can be done by for example finding similarities between them for example needs for facts, educational content, and information regarding added values. By doing that, companies can combine similar consumer needs into one message. However, since each consumer type is so different, it is also important to include the

messages that target the specific key needs and expectations per type. As it ensures that the communication is appealing and effective for all of them. Hence in summary, the CSR communication in the fashion industry should include messages that combine the similarities among three types of consumers, but also messages that target each type separately and directly.

6 Conclusion

This thesis has explored the concept of CSR communication and how fashion brands can communicate their sustainable initiative to different types of consumers. More precisely, the three types of fashion consumers introduced by McNeill and Moore (2015). Due to the fact that CSR communication is a vast topic encompassing various concepts (e.g. Gray and Balmer, 1998), and despite considering different types of consumers, the scope of this research was mainly focused on the company's perspective as it targeted the communication and message creation processes. That is why in order to gain a better understanding regarding the topic of CSR communication from this perspective, the following research question has been used:

How can fashion brands communicate their sustainable initiatives to different types of consumers?

The empirical data was collected through focus groups with three types of fashion consumers, and interviews with experts. Based on the analysis of collected data and literature, seven themes have emerged that are connected to the communication process: (1) *Brand*, (2) *Authenticity & Transparency*, (3) *Social Media & Importance of Physical Stores*, (4) *Needs*, (5) *Added Value*, (6) *Education*, and (7) *Consumers*.

In summary, CSR communication is a complex process. Nevertheless, the findings pointed out some ways in which the companies can improve it, make it more effective and appealing for different types of consumers. Firstly, the fashion companies should start by establishing a clear brand identity. This concept includes various issues that a company needs to consider. However, the most important ones are goals and core values that should be timeless, easy to communicate and shared by all the employees. Moreover, the key aspects connected to a brand and its initiatives that were highlighted by both literature and empirical data are: authenticity, transparency and honesty. As without genuine motives a company can be accused of for example greenwashing, which leads to a negative brand perception. Secondly, when it comes to the message content, it needs to: educate the consumers about sustainability and innovations in the industry, include various needs of different types of consumers, highlight the added value of sustainable products to attract less sustainable-conscious consumers, and include concrete facts and information to be perceived as authentic and transparent. Thirdly, the research highlighted the importance of social media for all three types of consumers. Especially Instagram and YouTube. Therefore, they should become the main communication channels. Additionally, the findings also mentioned physical stores as an important way of communication. Hence, their value should not be underestimated. Finally, this thesis was focused on three types of fashion consumers. The empirical data

confirmed their distinctive characteristics and needs introduced by the literature. Nevertheless, most importantly, the findings have highlighted the importance of adjusting the message content to different types of consumers to be able to target their needs and expectations more precisely. Hence, it is recommended to establish a communication strategy that includes both messages that combine the similarities among three groups, but also messages that target each type separately.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This thesis introduced the following theoretical contributions:

First of all, this research enhances the existing literature on the importance of brand identity in the communication process by highlighting the relationship between them. Clearly defined corporate brand identity is the founding block for any communication strategy (Kapferer, 2012; Urde 2013). Moreover, the findings confirmed that authenticity and transparency are crucial while establishing an identity, which strengthens the studies by Dawkins (2004), Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007) and Gazzola et al. (2020).

Second of all, in addition to existing literature on key elements of the message content that was researched by for example Dawkins (2004), D'Souza (2015) and Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018), this work contributes to it by adding and underlying the importance of educational content. Hence, the CSR communication strategy should include the messages that are meant to educate the consumers regarding sustainability and its importance.

Third of all, this thesis contributes to the existing knowledge on communication channels by arguing for a strong role of social media. This channel has been mentioned by multiple authors (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Da Giau et al., 2016; Sogari et al., 2017). However, McNeill and Moore (2015) introduced different preferred communication channels per consumer type. Social media was mentioned as one of the channels of Self and Social consumers. Nevertheless, according to this research, its importance is superior over other channels, and it is a case for all three consumer types. This discrepancy might be due to the fact that since the study by McNeill and Moore was published in 2015, social media has become even more important in consumers' lives.

Most importantly, this research contributes to previous literature on CSR communication and different types of consumers. The latter field acknowledges various groups of sustainable consumers (e.g. Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005; Gruber, Kaliauer & Schlegelmilch, 2015; Park & Ha, 2012). Nevertheless, the literature on communication treats consumers as a rather homogeneous group. This thesis was focused on three types of fashion consumers by McNeill and Moore (2015). However, the findings have shown the importance of adjusting messages to different groups of consumers and considering reaching them not only through social

media but also through their preferred communication channels. Hence, it proves that while considering communication strategy, consumers cannot be seen as one entity and should be divided based on certain similarities.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings further confirmed that sustainability in the fashion industry is on the rise and increasingly more important for brands to act on. Moreover, companies who focus on sustainability now, will have a competitive advantage.

The developed framework and findings of this study work as a guide to practitioners when building a CSR communication strategy or campaign. The framework presents all the vital elements that are needed for a successful sustainability communication. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of companies defining their brand identity, as it is the foundation of the communication process. The findings showed that grasping brand identity is vital in order to build a strong CSR communication strategy. Therefore, this thesis suggests starting the process with defining and understanding the identity of the brand.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis contributes with further knowledge about three types of fashion consumers. This presents companies with information to understand the complexity of consumer nature. This is necessary, since the research confirmed the importance of adjusting CSR communication to different types of consumers. By understanding their needs and expectations brands can tailor sustainability communication to match them.

Furthermore, the findings of this paper can help the practitioners with practical recommendations on how to communicate sustainable initiatives efficiently and avoid their actions being perceived as greenwashing. Firstly, a brand is more likely to receive positive feedback if it is seen as authentic and transparent. To do that, companies need to be genuine with their sustainable initiatives. Hence, there must always be actions and facts backing up their words. Based on the findings, it is strongly advised not to make meaningless statements about sustainability, to not be perceived negatively. Secondly, the companies need to adjust their communication strategy to different types of consumers. Therefore, it is important to understand how to approach each group. It includes finding a right balance between content about fashion and sustainability, as each type has different preferences. Moreover, the research showed a variety of channels they use, such as social media, company websites and physical stores. Nevertheless, the findings emphasised the importance of social media to all consumers. Thus, it is proposed that companies need to focus on social media as the main communication channel, while still keeping in mind the other ways of communication and why they are used by consumers. Lastly, since all of the consumers use the channels for different purposes, it is important to understand what type of content they want to see there. Therefore, the message should cater each type individually while still considering the similarities of them all. Brands need to focus on the elements that people value the most, such

as value for money, transparency, education and quality. Through the right channel and specifically adjusted content, companies are more likely to reach the targeted consumer group. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that at the same time the communication needs to be consistent and clear throughout them all.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study shows how multifaceted sustainability communication is, however due to the limited scope of this research, not all aspects were studied in detail. This thesis focused on the three fashion consumer types proposed by McNeill and Moore (2015) as these are based on both fashion and sustainability. However, it is important to note that there could be even more types. Hence, one of the major limitations of this paper is that it is focused only on company's perspective. It would be interesting to do further research on consumer's perspective. Even though consumers were interviewed, they were not asked to evaluate specific messages to understand their reactions. Moreover, this paper analysed only a small number of consumers, who were already presented with the descriptions of each consumer type to see if they identify with any of them. Interviewing more consumers could reveal people who do not fit into any of the suggested categories. Thus, more interviews could lead to different conclusions and uncover additional fashion consumer types which are beneficial for brands to know. Furthermore, by investigating consumers, it would allow to further understand the reasons and how to avoid the attitude-behaviour gap when it comes to sustainable fashion. Therefore, future research on CSR communication in the fashion industry is suggested from the consumers' perspective by investigating a bigger population in order to better understand them.

Secondly, this thesis looked at communication channels in general, to understand what are the preferred ones for each consumer type. However, it would be interesting to study different channels in detail and evaluate how they work. The findings indicated social media as a communication channel that is widely used by all consumers. Despite the fact that they use it for different reasons, the importance of it was mentioned by all groups. Understanding to what extent each type uses different social media platforms would be valuable for companies to know when communicating their sustainable initiatives. Furthermore, as the importance of the digital world is increasingly growing it is recommended to further study social media as a CSR communication channel.

Lastly, another interesting finding that was highlighted by both the practitioners and consumers was the importance of educational content about social and environmental matters. This paper shows that consumers appreciate informative content, however, it remains unclear if it affects their behaviour. Studying it more closely would allow to understand how it influences the purchase decision regarding sustainability. Therefore, future research on educational sustainability communication is advised.

References

- Alevizou, P. J. & Oates, C. J. (2016). What Is Sustainable Fashion?, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp.400–416.
- Allen, M. (2016). *Strategic Communication for Sustainable Organizations*, [e-book] Cham: Springer International Publishing, Available Online: <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-18005-2> [Accessed 2 April 2021].
- Armstrong, C. M., Niinimäki, K., Kujala, S., Karell, E. & Lang, C. (2015). Sustainable Product-Service Systems for Clothing: Exploring Consumer Perceptions of Consumption Alternatives in Finland, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol. 97, pp.30–39.
- Ashrafi, M., Adams, M., Walker, T. & Magnan, G. (2018). ‘How Corporate Social Responsibility Can Be Integrated into Corporate Sustainability: A Theoretical Review of Their Relationships’, *The International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, vol. 25, no. 8, pp.671–681.
- Balderjahn, I., Peyer, M., Seegebarth, B., Wiedmann, K.-P. & Weber, A. (2018). The Many Faces of Sustainability-Conscious Consumers: A Category-Independent Typology, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 91, pp.83–93.
- Beard, N. D. (2008). The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer: A Luxury Niche or Mass-Market Reality?, *Fashion Theory*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp.447–467.
- Becker-Leifhold, C. V. (2018). The Role of Values in Collaborative Fashion Consumption - A Critical Investigation through the Lenses of the Theory of Planned Behavior, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol. 199, p.pp 781-791.
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp.139–168.
- Berg, A., Hedrich, S., Ibanez, P., Kappelmark, S., Magnus, K.-H. & Seeger, M. (2019). Fashion’s New Must-Have: Sustainable Sourcing at Scale, CPO Survey, McKinsey & Company, Available Online: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/fashions%20new%20must%20have%20sustainable%20sourcing%20at%20scale/fashions-new-must-have-sustainable-sourcing-at-scale-vf.ashx>.
- Bhattacharya, C. B. & Sen, S. (2004). Doing Better at Doing Good: When, Why, and How Consumers Respond to Corporate Social Initiatives, *California Management Review*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp.9–24.
- Bick, R., Halsey, E. & Ekenga, C. C. (2018). The Global Environmental Injustice of Fast Fashion, *Environmental Health*, vol. 17, no. 92.

- Biloslavo, R. & Trnavčević, A. (2009). Web Sites as Tools of Communication of a “Green” Company, *Management Decision*, vol. 47, no. 7, pp.1158–1173.
- Biondi, A. (2019). The Challenges of Building a Socially Conscious Brand, *Vogue Business*, Available Online: <https://www.voguebusiness.com/companies/socially-conscious-brand-challenges-fashion-sustainability> [Accessed 30 March 2021].
- Brown, T. J. & Dacin, P. A. (1997). The Company and the Product: Corporate Associations and Consumer Product Responses, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp.68–84.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2007). *Business Research Methods*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods*, 4th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. & Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative Marketing Research*, London: Sage Publications.
- Caruana, R. (2007). A Sociological Perspective of Consumption Morality, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 6, no. 5, pp.287–304.
- Chan, T. & Wong, C. W. Y. (2012). The Consumption Side of Sustainable Fashion Supply Chain: Understanding Fashion Consumer Eco-fashion Consumption Decision, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp.193–215.
- Cheng, A. (2019). More Consumers Want Sustainable Fashion, But Are Brands Delivering It?, Available Online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andriacheng/2019/10/17/more-consumers-want-sustainable-fashion-but-are-brands-delivering-it/?sh=23dc16ad34a5> [Accessed 12 March 2021].
- Cialdini, R. B. (1984). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Harper Business., Harper Business.
- Clark, S. (2020). Does Your Brand Experience Align With Your Customer Experience?, Available Online: <https://www.cmswire.com/customer-experience/does-your-brand-experience-align-with-your-customer-experience/> [Accessed 4 February 2021].
- Da Giau, A., Macchion, L., Caniato, F., Caridi, M., Danese, P., Rinaldi, R. & Vinelli, A. (2016). Sustainability Practices and Web-Based Communication: An Analysis of the Italian Fashion Industry, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp.72–88.
- Dach, L. & Allmendinger, K. (2014). Sustainability in Corporate Communications and Its Influence on Consumer Awareness and Perceptions: A Study of H&M and Primark, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 130, pp.409–418.
- Dahl, R. (2010). Green Washing Do You Know What You Buy?, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 118, no. 6, pp.246–252.

- Davies, I. (2015). The Values and Motivations behind Sustainable Fashion Consumption, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 15, no. 2.
- Dawkins, J. (2004). Corporate Responsibility: The Communication Challenge, *Journal of Communication Management*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp.108–119.
- de Chernatony, L. (1999). Brand Management Through Narrowing the Gap Between Brand Identity and Brand Reputation, *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 15, no. 1–3, pp.157–179.
- de Chernatony, L., Harris, F. & Dall’Olmo Riley, F. (2000). Added Value: Its Nature, Roles and Sustainability, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 34, no. 1/2.
- D’Hond, R. J. (2020). From Purpose-Driven to Purpose-Doing, Available Online: <https://www.kantar.com/inspiration/brands/from-purpose-driven-to-purpose-doing> [Accessed 10 March 2021].
- Diamantopoulos, A., Schlegelmilch, B. B., Sinkovics, R. R. & Bohlen, G. M. (2003). Can Socio-Demographics Still Play a Role in Profiling Green Consumers? A Review of the Evidence and an Empirical Investigation, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 56, no. 6, pp.465–480.
- Dobni, D. & Zinkhan, G. M. (1990). In Search of Brand Image: A Foundation Analysis, *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp.110–119.
- D’Souza, C. (2015). Marketing Challenges for an Eco-Fashion Brand: A Case Study, *Fashion Theory*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp.67–82.
- D’Souza, C., Taghian, M. & Khosla, R. (2007). Examination of Environmental Beliefs and Its Impact on the Influence of Price, Quality and Demographic Characteristics with Respect to Green Purchase Intention, *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp.69–78.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B. & Sen, S. (2007). Reaping Relational Rewards from Corporate Social Responsibility: The Role of Competitive Positioning, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp.224–241.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing Business Returns to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Role of CSR Communication, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, vol. 12, no. 1.
- Dubbink, W., Graafland, J. & van Liedekerke, L. (2008). CSR, Transparency and the Role of Intermediate Organisations, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 82, no. 2, pp.391–406.
- Dubois, A. & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic Combining: An Abductive Approach to Case Research, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 55, no. 7, pp.553–560.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P. (2015). *Management & Business Research*, 5th edn, London: Sage Publications.

- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research, *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp.532–550.
- Ernest-Jones, S. (2020). CSR Trends That Can Make or Break a Brand, *GWI*, Available Online: <https://blog.globalwebindex.com/marketing/csr-trends-2020/> [Accessed 10 March 2021].
- Evans, S. & Peirson-Smith, A. (2018). The Sustainability Word Challenge: Exploring Consumer Interpretations of Frequently Used Words to Promote Sustainable Fashion Brand Behaviors and Imagery, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp.252–269.
- Farley Gordon, J. & Hill, C. (2014). *Sustainable Fashion: Past, Present, and Future*, 1st edn, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Flick, U., Kardorff, E. von & Steinke, I. (eds). (2004). *A companion to qualitative research*, [e-book] London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, Available Online: <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781848605237> [Accessed 15 April 2021].
- Friestad, M. & Wright, P. (1994). The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp.1–31.
- Fulton, K. & Lee, S. (2013). Assessing Sustainable Initiatives of Apparel Retailers on the Internet, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp.353–366.
- Futerra Sustainability Communications & BSR. (2015). *Selling Sustainability. Primer for Marketers.*, Futerra Sustainability Communications, Available Online: https://www.wearefuterra.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FuterraBSR_SellingSustainability2015.pdf.
- Gazzola, P., Pavione, E., Pezzetti, R. & Grechi, D. (2020). Trends in the Fashion Industry. The Perception of Sustainability and Circular Economy: A Gender/Generation Quantitative Approach, *Sustainability in Fashion Brands*, vol. 12, no. 7.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, pp.3–30.
- Giesler, M. & Veresiu, E. (2014). Creating the Responsible Consumer: Moralistic Governance Regimes and Consumer Subjectivity, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 41, pp.840–857.
- Gilg, A., Barr, S. & Ford, N. (2005). Green Consumption or Sustainable Lifestyles? Identifying the Sustainable Consumer, *Futures*, vol. 37, no. 6, pp.481–504.
- Grace, P. (2015). 5 Ways to Make Sustainability Sexy for Millennials, Available Online: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/5-ways-to-make-sustainabi_b_7575102 [Accessed 1 April 2021].

- Gray, E. R. & Balmer, J. M. T. (1998). Managing Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation, *Long Range Planning*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp.695–702.
- Green, P. E., Carmone, F. J. & Wachspress, D. P. (1976). Consumer Segmentation via Latent Class Analysis, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp.170–174.
- Gruber, V., Kaliauer, M. & Schlegelmilch, B. (2015). Improving the Effectiveness and Credibility Of Corporate Social-Responsibility Messaging: An Austrian Model Identifies Influential CSR Content and Communication Channels, *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 57, no. 4.
- Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.105–117.
- Han, S. L.-C., Henninger, C. E., Apeageyi, P. & Tyler, D. (2017). Determining Effective Sustainable Fashion Communication Strategies, in *Sustainability in Fashion: A Cradle to Upcycle Approach*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.127–149.
- Hernández-Fernández, A. & Lewis, M. C. (2019). Brand Authenticity Leads to Perceived Value and Brand Trust, *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp.222–238.
- Holt, D. B. (2012). Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 644, no. 1, pp.236–255.
- Jägel, T., Keeling, K., Reppel, A. & Gruber, T. (2012). Individual Values and Motivational Complexities in Ethical Clothing Consumption: A Means-End Approach, *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 28, no. 3–4, pp.373–396.
- Joergens, C. (2006). Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 10, pp.360–371.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (2008). *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*, 4th edn, London: Kogan Page Publishers.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (2012). *The New Strategic Brand Management: Advanced Insights and Strategic Thinking*, 5th edn, London: Kogan Page Publishers.
- Kaplan, A. M. & Haenlein, M. (2012). Social Media: Back to the Roots and Back to the Future, *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp.101–104.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp.1–22.
- Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*, 4th edn, Pearson.

- Khandual, A. & Pradhan, S. (2019). Fashion Brands and Consumers Approach Towards Sustainable Fashion, in S. S. Muthu (ed.), *Fast Fashion, Fashion Brands and Sustainable Consumption*, [e-book] Singapore: Springer, pp.37–54, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1268-7_3 [Accessed 27 March 2021].
- Kolster, T. (2016). Everybody's Talking about Sustainability, but No One's Really Doing It!, *Thomas Kolster*, Available Online: <https://thomaskolster.com/everybodys-talking-about-sustainability-but-no-ones-really-doing-it/> [Accessed 12 March 2021].
- Kotler, P. (1988). *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning and Control*, Englewood Cliffs, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kumar, V. & Christodouloupoulou, A. (2014). Sustainability and Branding: An Integrated Perspective, *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp.6–15.
- Kvale, S. (1994). Ten Standard Responses to Qualitative Research Interviews.
- Lehmann, M., Arici, G., Robinsom, F., Kruse, E. & Taylor, A. R. (2020). CEO AGENDA 2020, Available Online: <https://www.globalfashionagenda.com/publications-and-policy/ceo-agenda-covid-19-edition/> [Accessed 27 March 2021].
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Denzin, N. K. (2003a). Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief, [e-book] Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, Available Online: <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1561524> [Accessed 15 April 2021].
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Denzin, N. K. (2003b). Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief, [e-book] Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, Available Online: <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1561524> [Accessed 15 April 2021].
- Mangold, W. G. & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social Media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix, *Business Horizons*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp.357–365.
- McNeill, L. & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable Fashion Consumption and the Fast Fashion Conundrum: Fashionable Consumers and Attitudes to Sustainability in Clothing Choice, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp.212–222.
- Mindrut, S., Manolica, A. & Roman, T. (2015). Building Brands Identity, *Procedia Economics and Finance*, vol. 20.
- Moorhouse, D. & Moorhouse, D. (2018). Designing a Sustainable Brand Strategy for the Fashion Industry, *Clothing Cultures*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp.7-12(12).
- Morsing, M. & Schultz, M. (2006). Corporate Social Responsibility Communication: Stakeholder Information, Response and Involvement Strategies, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp.323–338.

- Morsing, M. & Spence, L. J. (2019). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: The Governmentality Dilemma of Explicit and Implicit CSR Communication, *Human Relations*, vol. 72, no. 12, pp.1920–1947.
- Nandan, S. (2005). An Exploration of the Brand Identity–Brand Image Linkage: A Communications Perspective, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp.264–278.
- Niinimäki, K. (2012). Proactive Fashion Design for Sustainable Consumption, *Nordic Textile Journal*, vol. 1, pp.60–69.
- Öberseder, M., Schlegelmilch, B. & Gruber, V. (2011). “Why Don’t Consumers Care About CSR?”: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Role of CSR in Consumption Decisions, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 104, no. 4, pp.449–460.
- Ottman, J. A. (2011). The New Rules of Green Marketing Strategies, Tools, and Inspiration for Sustainable Branding, [e-book] Sheffield [England]; San Francisco, Calif.: Greenleaf Pub.; Berrett-Koehler, Available Online: <http://www.books24x7.com/marc.asp?bookid=41250> [Accessed 13 April 2021].
- Park, J. & Ha, S. (2012). Understanding Pro-Environmental Behavior: A Comparison of Sustainable Consumers and Apathetic Consumers, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 40, no. 5.
- Peattie, K. (2001). Towards Sustainability: The Third Age of Green Marketing, *The Marketing Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp.129–146.
- Pérez, A. (2019). Building a Theoretical Framework of Message Authenticity in CSR Communication, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp.334–350.
- Pomering, A. & Dolnicar, S. (2009). Assessing the Prerequisite of Successful CSR Implementation: Are Consumers Aware of CSR Initiatives?, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 85, pp.285–301.
- Porter, M. E. & Kramer, M. R. (2011). Creating Shared Value: How to Reinvent Capitalism and Unleash a Wave of Innovation and Growth, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 89, no. 1/2, pp.62–77.
- Prasad, A. & Mills, A. J. (2010). Critical Management Studies and Business Ethics: A Synthesis and Three Research Trajectories for the Coming Decade, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 94, no. S2, pp.227–237.
- Ramus, C. A. & Montiel, I. (2005). When Are Corporate Environmental Policies a Form of Greenwashing?, *Business & Society*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp.377–414.
- Rapoport, A. (1982). The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Nonverbal Communication Approach, The University of Arizona Press.

- Rennstam, J. & Wästerfors, D. (2018). *Analyze! : Crafting Your Data in Qualitative Research*, Studentlitteratur AB.
- Roberts, J. a. (1996). Will the Real Socially Responsible Consumer Please Step Forward?, *Business Horizons*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp.79–83.
- Rutter, C., Armstrong, K. & Cano, M. B. (2017). The Epiphanic Sustainable Fast Fashion Epoch: A New Fashion Ethical Fashion Mandate, in *Sustainability in Fashion: A Cradle to Upcycle Approach*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.11–30.
- Saha, M. & Darnton, G. (2005). Green Companies or Green Companies: Are Companies Really Green, or Are They Pretending to Be?, *Business and Society Review*, vol. 110, no. 2, p.pp 117-157.
- Saunders, M., Thornhill, A. & Lewis, P. (2007). *Research Methods for Business Students*, 4th edn, [e-book] Harlow: Pearson, Available Online: [/content/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/us/en/higher-education/product.html](#) [Accessed 7 April 2021].
- Schmeltz, L. (2012). Consumer-Oriented CSR Communication: Focusing on Ability or Morality?, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 17, pp.29–49.
- Seele, P. & Gatti, L. (2015). Greenwashing Revisited: In Search of a Typology and Accusation-Based Definition Incorporating Legitimacy Strategies: Greenwashing Revisited, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp.239–252.
- Sen, S. & Bhattacharya, C. B. (2001). Does Doing Good Always Lead to Doing Better? Consumer Reactions to Corporate Social Responsibility, *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp.225–243.
- Shannon, C. E. & Weaver, W. (1949). *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, [e-book] University of Illinois Press, Available Online: <http://raley.english.ucsb.edu/wp-content/Engl800/Shannon-Weaver.pdf>.
- Shen, B., Wang, Y., Lo, C. K. Y. & Shum, M. (2012). The Impact of Ethical Fashion on Consumer Purchase Behavior, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp.234–245.
- Smith, N. C. (2003). *Corporate Social Responsibility: WHETHER OR HOW?*, California: The Regents of the University of California.
- Sogari, G., Pucci, T., Aquilani, B. & Zanni, L. (2017). Millennial Generation and Environmental Sustainability: The Role of Social Media in the Consumer Purchasing Behavior for Wine, *Sustainability*, [e-journal] vol. 9, no. 1911, Available Online: <http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/9/10/1911> [Accessed 2 April 2021].
- Statista. (2018). Growing Concerns about Sustainability Worldwide between 2016 and 2017, *Statista*, Available Online: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/1011875/population-concerned-environmental-changes-by-country/> [Accessed 15 March 2021].

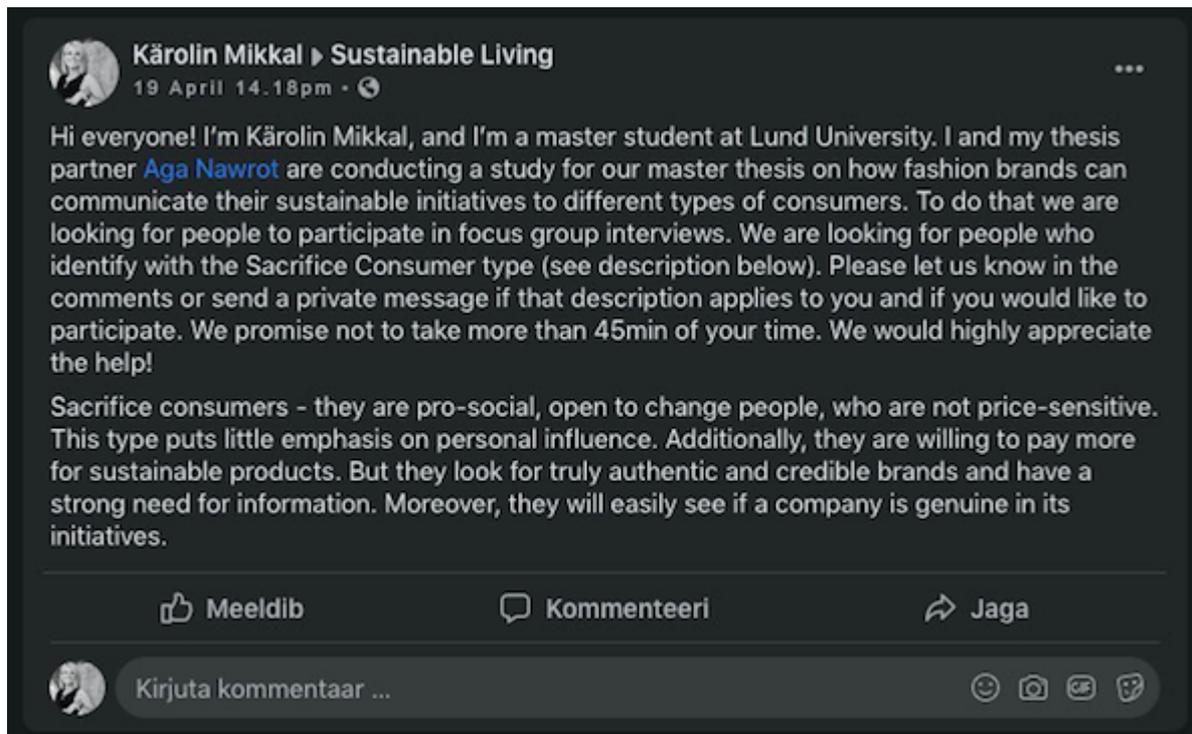
- Statista. (2019). Gen Z Preference for Environmentally Sustainable Products in Canada and the United States in 2019, *Statista*, Available Online: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/1056493/gen-z-consumers-who-prefer-environmentally-sustainable-products-canada-and-us/> [Accessed 15 March 2021].
- Stern, P. C., Dietz, T. & Guagnano, G. A. (1995). The New Ecological Paradigm in Social-Psychological Context, *Environment and Behavior*, vol. 27, no. 6, pp.723–743.
- Strähle, J. (ed.). (2017). *Green Fashion Retail*, Singapore: Springer.
- Strähle, J. & Köksal, D. (2015). Impact of Brand- and Country Image on the Perception of Sustainability in the Fashion Business, *International Journal of Business and Commerce*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp.25–28.
- Terlau, W. & Hirsch, D. (2015). Sustainable Consumption and the Attitude-Behaviour-Gap Phenomenon - Causes and Measurements towards a Sustainable Development, *International Center for Management, Communication, and Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp.1–16.
- The Brundtland Commission. (1987). *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press.
- The Business Research Company. (2020). Sustainable Fashion Market Analysis Shows The Market Progress In Attempt To Decrease Pollution In The Global Ethical Fashion Market 2020, *GlobeNewswire News Room*, Available Online: <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/10/28/2116073/0/en/Sustainable-Fashion-Market-Analysis-Shows-The-Market-Progress-In-Attempt-To-Decrease-Pollution-In-The-Global-Ethical-fashion-Market-2020.html> [Accessed 10 March 2021].
- UN News. (2019). UN Launches Drive to Highlight Environmental Cost of Staying Fashionable, *UN News*, Available Online: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1035161> [Accessed 10 March 2021].
- Upshaw, L. B. (1995). *Building Brand Identity: The Strategy for Success in a Hostile Marketplace*, New York: J.Wiley.
- Urde, M. (2013). The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 20, no. 9, pp.742–761.
- van Marrewijk, M. (2003). Concepts and Definitions of CSR and Corporate Sustainability: Between Agency and Communion, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp.95–105.
- Vehmas, K., Raudaskoski, A., Heikkilä, P., Harlin, A. & Mensonen, A. (2018). Consumer Attitudes and Communication in Circular Fashion, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp.286–300.
- Verain, M. C. D., Bartels, J., Dagevos, H., Sijtsema, S. J., Onwezen, M. C. & Antonides, G. (2012). Segments of Sustainable Food Consumers: A Literature Review, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp.123–132.

Appendix A - Focus Groups Topic Guide

- **Ice breakers:**
 - Ask for consent to record
 - The purpose of the interview:
 - Master thesis in marketing
 - What the study is about and background information
 - Inform about anonymity
 - Ensure that there is no right or wrong
 - Encourage them to elaborate their answers and be open for the discussion
- **Sustainability in the Fashion Industry:**
 - What does sustainability mean to you?
 - What are your thoughts on sustainability in the fashion industry?
- **Needs and expectations**
 - *Inform about what the literature says about this type of consumers*
 - Do you agree with the given description? Why or why not?
 - What is important for you while choosing a fashion brand?
 - What type of engagement do you expect from the fashion brands you follow?
 - Would you buy or follow sustainable fashion brands or brands that are engaged in sustainable initiatives? Why?
 - When choosing a fashion brand, what are the things you look at?
 - What are your expectations towards the fashion brands?
- **CSR Communication**
 - What type of messages do you expect from the fashion brands?
 - What kind of elements do you appreciate in the CSR communication
 - What type of messages do you find the most appealing for you?
- **Message Channel**
 - *Inform about what the literature says about preferred channels for this type of consumers*
 - Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
 - What type of media channels do you use?
 - Through which channels should fashion brands reach you?
- **Concluding questions:**
 - Is there anything you would like to add?
 - Do you have any questions?
 - Thank for the participation

Appendix B - Post Example Screenshot

The following post was published at “Sustainable Living” and “Sustainable Living & Design” Facebook groups. The posts for Self and Social consumers were the same except for the description of each type. They were shared at “Style & Fashion” Facebook group, LinkedIn profiles of the researchers and LUSEM network on WhatsApp.



Appendix C - Semi-Structured Interviews

Topic Guide

- **Ice breakers:**
 - Ask for consent to record the interviews
 - Tell the interviewee about ourselves
 - The purpose of the interview:
 - Master thesis in marketing
 - What the study is about
 - Inform about anonymity
 - Ensure that there is no right or wrong
 - Encourage them to elaborate their answers
- **Sustainability in the Fashion Industry**
 - How common is it for fashion brands to communicate their sustainable initiatives?
 - How has the focus on sustainability in the fashion industry changed over the years, from a communication perspective?
 - According to you, what brands can do to avoid being accused of greenwashing?
 - How do you approach closing the attitude-behaviour gap?
- **Brand (identity, motives, initiatives)**
 - What parts of brand identity are important in order to build a successful communication strategy?
 - According to you, what are the key differences between an identity of a sustainable brand, and the one that only has sustainable initiatives?
 - When you start working with a new brand, what information is crucial to know about the brand (e.g. values, motives, goals)?
- **CSR Communication (message elements, message content, channels, strategy)**
 - When starting with a new project what do you start with?
 - Do you have any specific strategy to communicate sustainable initiatives? If yes, does it differ from a regular strategy?
 - According to you, what are the main barriers in communicating sustainability for fashion brands?
 - What are the key differences in communication of a sustainable brand compared to a “regular” brand that has some sustainable initiatives?
 - What are the most common goals for your clients when it comes to communicating sustainability?

- Where do you recommend brands to communicate their sustainable messages? What are the best communication channels for this?
- Should the same message be used for all the channels? Or should it be adjusted?
- According to you, what are the key message elements that should be included into communication?
- How does the communication in the fashion industry regarding sustainable initiatives need to be designed to be effective or appealing to the consumers?
- According to you, is there any ratio between the amount of fashion and sustainable content that a brand should keep?
- What do you think is the strategic foundation for an effective communication of sustainability?
- Do you think that communication should be adjusted to different types of consumers? Why?
- **Findings from the focus groups:**
 - *Describe the process and key findings*
 - What do you think about it? Does it surprise you?
 - Do you feel that you include these needs in your communication strategies?
- **Concluding questions:**
 - Is there anything you would like to add?
 - Do you have any questions?
 - Thank for the participation

Appendix D - Semi-Structured Interviews Interviewees

Participant	Focus	Location	Date	Duration	Where?
Interviewee 1	Sustainability Fashion	Lithuania	04.05.2021	40:00	Zoom
Interviewee 2	Sustainable Fashion	USA	04.05.2021	25:00	Zoom
Interviewee 3	Sustainable Fashion	Denmark	05.05.2021	45:00	Zoom
Interviewee 4	Sustainability	Denmark	06.05.2021	40:00	Zoom
Interviewee 5	Sustainability	Estonia	08.05.2021	35:00	Zoom