

Communicating for Sustainable Consumption:

Lessons from consumer-focused sustainability marketing in the
food-product sector

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Abstract

There is a growing demand from policy makers for businesses to help close the consumer intention-action gap for sustainable product choice and strengthen the green economy. Moreover, there is increased interest from consumers in brands that are transparent about their environmental impact. This is not least the case for the focus sector of this study, food products, an industry responsible for around a quarter of global GHG emissions. Communication directed at the public is understood to be an essential component in encouraging sustainable consumption. However, if marketing professionals are to disseminate environmental practices successfully, they need comprehensive tools and knowledge to do so. The purpose of this study is to contribute to an identified gap in the existing literature about what strategies are used, as well as challenges faced, by current sustainability communications pioneers in the food-product sector. The findings will help equip practitioners to successfully communicate their sustainability credentials to consumers and thereby increase sustainable consumption. The two research questions for this study are, 1. Which strategies are applied and challenges faced by leaders in consumer-focused sustainability communications in the food-product sector? 2. What can be learned from key examples of sustainability communications in the food-product sector about how brands encourage consumers to choose sustainable products? The questions are answered using a multiple case study approach. Five Swedish food-product brands were selected and interviews were carried out with key communications and sustainability practitioners at each. In addition, content analysis was performed on a piece of sustainability communications from each company. The findings reveal that brands must first define their company type in order to establish what communications tack will lead to increased sustainable consumption. Once this is established, there are approaches that are more suited to one company type than another. Ultimately a brand's actions and *actual* sustainability profile must match up to what they communicate.

Keywords: sustainability communication, behaviour change, food systems, sustainable consumption.

Executive Summary

The impact of human activity on the planet is indisputable. Since pre-industrial times, global temperatures have risen by 1°C (IPCC, 2018). It is predicted that temperatures will increase to 1.5°C in the next 10-30 years, going beyond which will have detrimental impacts on life on earth (IPCC, 2018). Many aspects contribute to climate change and one is the food on our plates. Food systems, including agriculture, production, processing, transport and distribution, are estimated to account for around a quarter of total global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (IPCC, 2019).

A part of tackling this issue is to make more sustainable food choices available (Grunert et al., 2014). However, encouraging people to opt for these foods above their more impactful counterparts is challenging. While many consumers say they would like to be more sustainable, their actions tell a different story. This is known as the intention-action or attitude-behaviour gap, where consumers, for example, say they would choose sustainable products but in reality do not (Gleim & J. Lawson, 2014), (Park & Lin, 2020).

Communication about the sustainable attributes of a brand or product has been described as an essential tool in solving these issues and closing the gap (Allen, 2016). The need for businesses to inform consumers about the environmental performance of their products has also been raised from a policy perspective. One example of this is the European Commission's 2021, *Green Consumption Pledge Initiative* (GCP), which highlights the need for marketing sustainable goods and raising awareness amongst consumers about the impact of their purchasing behaviour.

With an increased pressure from policy makers, businesses must find effective and engaging ways to talk about sustainability and encourage sustainable consumption. How are today's food-product brands pushing the boundaries of communicating sustainability? How do marketing professionals have to think differently from traditional approaches to successfully shift consumer behaviour? Where is the line between saying too much and greenwashing and saying too little and missing the opportunity to inform consumers? These are some of the questions this study seeks to answer, thereby adding to the body of existing research on Sustainability Communications (SC). It will add fresh insights from leading sustainability and communication professionals at Swedish brands, on their experience of best practice, challenges and opportunities for SC in the food-product sector.

Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to provide practitioners in the food-product and related sectors, with insights to develop successful strategies for business-to-consumer (B2C) SC.

The research questions are:

RQ 1 - What strategies are applied and challenges faced by leaders in consumer-focused sustainability communications in the food-product sector?

RQ 2 - What can be learned from key examples of sustainability communications in the food-product sector about how brands encourage consumers to choose sustainable products?

Methodological Approach

A case study approach was followed with five companies listed in the 2020 Sustainable Brand Index (SBI) for Sweden. To narrow down the research, a focus was put on the food-product sector. This is a pertinent industry to examine as it is a considerable contributor to GHG emissions globally, and the fact that purchasing food is a common activity adds to its relevance

and relatability. The five companies selected as case studies were ICA Sweden, IKEA Food Services, Kung Markatta, Oatly and Saltå Kvarn.

Interviews were a core method used, and a total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners from the case study organisations, as well as with an independent sustainability communications strategist. To answer RQ2, content analysis of an example of existing sustainability communication from each of the case-study companies was conducted. This helped to place the insights from the practitioners into an in-practice context.

Findings from both the interviews and communication materials were analysed within a theoretical framework that developed out of the existing literature. Nine frameworks for successful sustainability communications were identified in the literature and from them seven common themes emerged to form the framework. The themes were: *Reputation & Transparency, Education & Awareness, Social, Framing, Storytelling, Simplification, Technical.*

Main Findings

RQ 1 - What strategies are applied and challenges faced by leaders in consumer-focused sustainability communications in the food-product sector?

Two differing approaches emerged from the findings about the reasons SC is needed; boosting company reputation and creating actual change to meet climate targets. These could be seen as drivers that can and should work in symbiosis – the company becomes more attractive by communicating their sustainability initiatives, more consumers choose their products and a greater shift to sustainable consumption and climate change mitigation is achieved.

Another tension point is between saying too much about sustainability and saying too little. Brands hold back information about sustainability for various reasons; one being they are fearful that saying too much might highlight bad sustainability. Further, brands don't want to over-promise on sustainability development and because company size and reputation can lead to conservatism. The downplaying of sustainability and giving way for more salient consumer values is also an intentional strategy to increase sustainable consumption.

The idea of normalisation was raised in regard to terms, such as plant-based versus vegan. The suggestion is that sustainability needs to be normalised and associated with accepted behaviours to be taken up by a larger audience. This strategy can be applied within the food and other sectors when naming products, moving away from terms that have connotations with “marginal” behaviour as opposed to the norm.

The interviews revealed a push and pull between making information technical and keeping it simple. One brand is trailblazing in its climate footprinting approach, while the others are cautious of this both in terms of its potential to confuse the consumer and the possibility for it to be misconstrued. There was a consensus, however, that there needs to be an integrated and global framework for calculating the climate impacts before brands can consider using it.

RQ 2 - What can be learned from key examples of sustainability communications in the food-product sector about how brands encourage consumers to choose sustainable products?

Several of the interviewees mentioned theming communications to cater to consumer interests, particularly around subjects like packaging and plastics, this was not overtly evident in the material itself. In fact, issues like biodiversity and climate change were more evident in most

cases. However, these issues were not raised in isolation, but with an action-orientated message to encourage people to change their behaviour.

Intrinsic values such as health, taste and price were discussed as key attributes to communicate over and above sustainability. However, where intrinsic values are highlighted, a majority of the campaigns examined also include an extrinsic point of reference, noting the impact on the environment and a collective future, for example.

Tailoring communications material to the platform it is published on was important, particularly avoiding too much information at the point of purchase where consumers do not have time to process it. In this regard, the idea of signalling sustainability at the point of purchase could be useful. The opportunities that e-commerce scenarios offer in terms of being able to provide sustainability information when consumers are in a mindset to digest it, should be considered.

Two of the communication material examples inspired a notion of communal/group action, rather than putting a focus on individual responsibility, using phrases such as “together we can make a difference.” There was no evidence of so-called “prevention” framing or using negative or fear-inducing messages about the environment, rather most of the brands presented a framing with messaging about the positive environmental impact you can have by choosing the product.

The communications material demonstrated some use of materiality data. Despite many of the interviewees expressing caution and concern about the use of data and figure, there is evidence of this being done in the material, so perhaps they are further ahead in this than they realise.

A suggested approach for SC depending on company type

One of the main findings was that there is no single approach to SC and the way it is approached depends on brand type. Drawing on insights from the interviews and data about the companies, including year formed, size and target group, a suggestion is made about first determining company type and consequently the approach taken to SC. Three company types are suggested, *Challengers* – have a specific range of products, innovators and market changers, daring, have a specialised target group, medium/large enterprise and a relatively young company. *Reliable Constants* - a staple in people's every day, trustworthy and reliable, have a generalist target group, large enterprise and an older established company. *Eternal Ecos* - historically based on organic, sustainable or ecological principles, trusted in this area, have a loyal, long-term specialist target group, small/medium enterprise and established, older brand. Once a company type (or combination of types) is identified, recommendations for SC are made for that specific type. Therefore, the main finding of this paper is not that you should do A and not B in your SC strategy, but rather if you are company type X you should do A and if you are company type Y you should do B.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While companies need to identify the optimal way to do the talking, their actions and *actual* sustainability profiles must match up. Where rankings such as the Sustainable Brand Index show how successful companies have been in convincing consumers of their sustainability credentials, the question remains of how sustainable they are beyond the consumer eye level. There is a need for brands to close the intention-action gap for consumers, but also the possibility of a communication-action gap for themselves.

Recommendations to practitioners who wish to establish or strengthen a SC strategy include:

- Begin by establishing your brand type and scope out what bearing aspects like company size, history, target group and goals could have on your approach.
- Once this has been established you can create a strategy that aligns with your brand considering the following areas:

Reputation & Transparency:

Challenger - Use transparency as a way to start conversations. Reputation is built on pushing boundaries.

Reliable Constant – Much of your sustainability information is more suited to other stakeholders. Consumers don't need as much information; they trust you because of your market.

Eternal Eco - Being transparent is part of your ethos, but don't rely on the good memory of older customers; make your sustainability ethos clear for new, younger target groups too.

Education & Awareness:

Challenger – Use your platform to educate an audience that is hungry for information.

Reliable Constant – Don't try to tell people what to do or feel, use subtle nudges and actions.

Eternal Eco – Use your reputation and interested target group to communicate the issues they can contribute to by engaging with your brand and beyond.

Social

Challenger – You are not the norm, but you can capture a growing audience who are interested in the change that is needed to combat climate issues and influence the industry as a whole.

Reliable Constant – Make sustainability normal, avoid use of terms related to marginal behaviour.

Eternal Eco – Create a sense that there is a way to make a difference together.

Framing

Challenger – You have a strong brand tone so extend this to your SC. Don't be afraid of communicating the environmental issues being faced and what you are doing to solve them

Reliable Constant – Your consumer group are more interested in what your product offers them personally, so make sustainability a secondary level.

Eternal Eco – Focus on sustainability but not at the expense of other important values to your target group. Focus on the positive impact on the planet that your products have.

Storytelling

Challenger – Use creativity, uniqueness and humour as a way to engage.

Reliable Constant – Use creativity but also brevity, consumers do not have the time to digest a lot of information. Put extended sustainability information further away from point of purchase.

Eternal Eco – Use the story of your product and your supply chain to engage customers as this is where you shine and what your target group is interested in.

Simplification

Challenger – Use labelling and signals to indicate sustainability. But don't water down the information too much.

Reliable Constant – Tell consumers the facts but make them digestible and comparable.

Eternal Eco – Make issues more tangible by relating to people in the supply chain or local impacts.

Technical

Challenger – Don't shy away from communicating hard data, push the boundaries of what you can do with LCAs and materiality analysis in consumer communications.

Reliable Constant – Only use facts and figures if they are easy to understand and comparable.

Eternal Eco – Technical data isn't necessary or correct for your target group, talk about the issues rather than presenting numbers.

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Abbreviations

B2C – Business to consumer

GHG – Greenhouse gas

KM – Kung Markatta

LCA – Life cycle analysis

SBI - Sustainable Brand Index

SC - Sustainability communications

SK – Saltå Kvarn

1 Introduction

Human activity continues to contribute to climate change with a 1°C rise in global temperatures since pre-industrial levels (IPCC, 2018). It is estimated that this trajectory will continue, reaching 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 with a risk of reaching 2°C, the effects of which will be detrimental to life on earth (IPCC, 2018). Food systems, including agriculture, production, processing, distribution and consumption, are reported to account for between 21 and 37 per cent of total global anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (IPCC, 2019).

The production and availability of sustainable choices in the food-product sector is considered an important contributor in tackling climate change (Grunert et al., 2014). This is exemplified by a recent European Union strategy, *Farm to Fork*, which addresses the challenges of sustainable food systems and acknowledges that current food consumption patterns are unsustainable from not just a health perspective, but an environmental one too (European Commission, 2020). Further, a lack of information about sustainability has been identified as a key barrier to consumer choice of sustainable food products (European Commission, 2020) and a contributor to a perceived lack of availability (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). It has also been found to be a significant contributor to the intention-action gap, (also referred to as the attitude-behaviour or green gap) for sustainable product choice (Gleim & J. Lawson, 2014) (Park & Lin, 2020). This phenomenon sees consumers having the ambition, or self-view, that they will choose sustainable products, but this is not reflected in their actual purchase behaviour (White et al., 2019). In Sweden, research on the green gap, suggests that while 77% of consumers are worried about the environment, just 18% feel they are as sustainable as they would like to be. Further, 33% of consumers would like to become more sustainable (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021).

Effective sustainability communication (SC), or sustainability marketing, has been cited as being an essential part of businesses strategy (Guyader et al., 2020) and communication directed at and easily available to consumers is needed to encourage sustainable choices, lessen levels of consumption (Guyader et al., 2020) and close the green gap (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021). Allen (2016) goes further, stating that “*effective communication is absolutely essential*” (p. 1) in responding to the challenges posed by global warming. The importance of SC is also exemplified by a current four-year MISTRA research project at Uppsala University, Sweden. The programme sets out its vision for 2035 stating that, “*effective environmental communication will underpin Sweden’s transformation to a more sustainable society, acting as an internationally recognised model of critical and change oriented communication that is socially legitimised and inclusive*” (SLU, n.d., p. 2). SC was also the subject of the 2021 annual report published by Miljömärkning Sverige (Ecolabelling Sweden), titled “The Communication Issue”. Ecolabelling Sweden is the organisation responsible for two of the main eco-labels in Sweden – Svanen (The Nordic Swan) and the EU Eco label.

The need for businesses to not only create sustainable products and systems, but also to inform consumers about environmental performance is also raised from a policy perspective. For example, in the European Commission’s 2021, *Green Consumption Pledge Initiative*, a voluntary agreement that appeals to companies to take an affirmative pledge to produce products with a low carbon footprint. In his address at the launch of the pilot phase of the programme, European Commissioner, Didier Reynders made it clear that, “*without resolved commitment from businesses, progress will not be made and without consumers choosing to shop sustainably progress will not be made*” (European Commission, 2021b). The programme emphasises the need for companies to market sustainable goods and raise awareness amongst consumers about the impact of their consumption choices. Three out of the five pledge areas relate to promotion and communication: Increase the sale of sustainable products or services; Commit part of the corporate public relations expenditure to the promotion of sustainable practices; Ensure information provided to consumers concerning the company and product carbon footprints is

easy to access, accurate and clear (European Commission, 2021a). Again, the European Commissioner, emphasized that “*consumers can only make the right choice if there is enough information available*” (European Commission, 2021b).

1.1 Problem Definition

As discussed, the need to close the apparent intention-action gap for sustainable product choice, not least in the food-product sector, and strengthen the green economy, is backed by growing pressure from policy makers on businesses to communicate their sustainability profiles to consumers. This leaves companies needing to discern what is considered best practice when it comes to communicating sustainability and how this is best applied in the context of their particular brand and target audience.

There have also been indications from the marketing industry that companies need to rethink the way they communicate sustainability and make information more visible to the consumer. For example, communicating the facts and figures often only available in sustainability reports, materiality analysis and GRI reporting at a consumer level (Lindberg, 2021). There is also evidence to suggest that the public interest in environmental issues warrants that sustainability information be communicated beyond the limits of corporate reports (Schmeltz, 2012) by using platforms that are more readily available to the consumer (Tench et al., 2014). As new platforms for communication emerge through social media and as digitalisation offers new possibilities for dissemination through QR codes and apps, how are today’s food-product brands pushing the boundaries of communicating sustainability? How do marketing professionals have to think differently from traditional approaches to successfully communicate sustainability? Where is the line between saying too much and greenwashing and saying too little and missing the opportunity to inform consumers? These are some of the questions this study seeks to answer and thereby fill a gap in current understanding.

The literature provides several examples and interpretations of what it means to create a sustainability marketing strategy, a synthesis of which is presented in the literature review section of this paper and is used as a theoretical framework. However, there is scant up-to-date academic research on current/future trends in sustainability communication specifically in the food-product sector. There is also little empirical research focusing on how SC pioneers in the field are operating and how they are pushing the boundaries of what can and should be said about brand sustainability. This study adds to the body of research with fresh insights from leading sustainability and communication professionals on their experience of trends, barriers and opportunities for sustainability communications in the food-product sector.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to contribute to knowledge that enables practitioners in the food-product sector to successfully communicate sustainability work and performance to consumers, thereby increasing sustainable consumption. It will achieve this through the following **objectives**, 1. Identify theories, practices and trends in sustainability communication, 2. Provide tentative recommendations for how practitioners can use these findings in practice.

The research questions are, therefore:

RQ 1 - What strategies are applied and challenges faced by leaders in consumer-focused sustainability communications in the food-product sector?

RQ 2 - What can be learned from key examples of sustainability communications in the food-product sector about how brands encourage consumers to choose sustainable products?

1.3 Scope and Limitations

The focus of the empirical element of this study is food-product brands ranked in the Sustainable Brand Index (SBI) for Sweden within the B2B sector. This is described fully in the Methodology section of this paper, but their inclusion in the SBI, determined by consumer opinion, is taken in this context to be a determinant of “successful” SC. The brands selected produce and/or supply food products in stores and this does not include the restaurant sector. Apart from being a significant contributor to GHG emissions, there is also an advantage of focusing on food as it is something that a majority of people participate in, in terms of buying and consuming. It is therefore easily understandable and is a pertinent area in terms of behavioural change because there is the potential to influence a large target group. The study concentrates on B2C, consumer-level communications, meaning communications that are easily available to the consumer such as information on packaging, in stores, on social media, web content and advertisements. It excludes communications that are further away from the consumer or that need to be more actively sought out, such as sustainability reports.

The geographical scope of the empirical part of this study is Sweden and the selected companies all operate in the Swedish market (and some of them also operate internationally). Sweden was selected due to the location being accessible to the author. Sweden is also relevant as it is considered one of the most sustainable countries, ranking number one out of 65 countries based on environmental, social and governance (ESG) indicators in a recent sustainable investment report (Robeco, 2019). This indicates high levels of awareness by Swedish residents, which removes some of the barriers of communication as knowledge is already high. The temporal scope for the study is communications from the last two years, whilst also considering the company’s historical role in sustainability. This time frame is relevant to the aim of this study to contribute knowledge on current trends.

1.4 Audience

The intended audience for this study is interdisciplinary, the findings being of use in both the professional and academic fields. The findings will serve as a useful tool in developing SC strategy for practitioners in the food-product sector, as well as to other B2C sectors looking to find innovative ways to approach sustainability marketing. The study will add to academic knowledge in the field of SC, so will be of use to other researchers. Some of the findings could be of use to policy makers, for example understanding the challenges businesses face in creating behavioural change for sustainable consumption for policies that encourage or stipulate this.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

This research has not been funded or supported by any organisation; the findings are therefore not influenced in any way. The case study companies were aware that their involvement was for data collection and analysis purposes only.

The interviewees were made aware that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could stop at any time. They were not in any way coerced or pressured into participation. All respondents were given full details as to the purpose of the research and its intended outcome. The author also paid attention to ensuring that the reputation and privacy of both the companies and their employees were not damaged as a result of this research. In this regard, it was decided to leave all personal names out of the paper and refer to the respondents by their role and

company name where relevant. All the respondents were sent the quotes and insights taken from their interviews to check they were acceptable and not damaging to them or the company.

No sensitive data was collected or stored about the respondents. Interview recordings and transcripts are stored on the third-party system HappyScribe, which ensures data protection under the General Data Protection Regulation. Criteria for research needing a Lund University ethics board review was consulted and it was ascertained that this study did not require an ethical review.

1.6 Disposition

The study will be structured in the following way: Section 2, Literature Review, will outline current literature and formulate a theoretical framework. Section 3, Methodology, will describe the research design, methods and logic of this study. Section 4, Results & Analysis, will present insights from the empirical research. Section 5, Discussion, will elaborate on the bearing the findings have on this area of research and how the research questions can be answered. Finally, section 6 will seek to draw conclusions, consider limitations and make recommendations for practitioners and policy makers, as well as for future research.

2 Literature Review

The literature review first defines some of the key terms used, then presents an overview of nine frameworks for sustainability communications, which are combined and reworked to form a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is then developed with insights from a range of academic literature including communications, marketing and behaviour change. It has also been supplemented by some industry insights, which is pertinent to this study, the results of which being aimed at the industry itself. The subject range for the literature review goes beyond the food-product sector, as this was too narrow to gain enough valuable material. Therefore, insights about communications for subjects like energy and recycling are also included. It is assumed that insights about sustainability communications from other sectors can be of relevance to the food-product sector, as in turn some insights from this study will be valuable to other sectors.

2.1 Definitions & Key Terms

2.1.1 Sustainability communication

Sustainability communication sits in the domain of marketing, yet there are clear distinctions. Marketing is one of the key functions of any organisation, whether a multi-national brand, a two-person start-up or an NGO (Armstrong et al., 2015). It aims to simultaneously create value for customers, whilst profiting from value in return (Armstrong et al., 2015). In the 1960s McCarrthy formulated the 4Ps marketing matrix, comprising of product, price, place, promotion, which has been an enduring, although often criticized marketing model (Reisch & Thøgersen, 2015). In the 1970s there began to emerge a vernacular in marketing that focused not just on the selling of products for profit's sake, but on the social and environmental consequences of doing business (Belz & Peattie, 2012). Through several evolutions, including ecological marketing (focused on reactive messaging to large-scale environmental incidents and pollution), green marketing and environmental marketing (targeting a growing eco-conscious consumer willing to pay a premium for planet-conscious products) to what is known as sustainability marketing or sustainability communications today (Belz & Peattie, 2012). This paper uses the term sustainability communication (SC).

But how do these two worlds coexist, with marketing on the one hand being traditionally focused on selling and consumption, while sustainability is concerned with living within the realms of the planetary boundaries? Guyader et al., (2020) go so far as to ask if marketing and sustainability are in fact oxymorons. However, the authors turn to a contemporary definition of marketing from the American Marketing Association (AMA) to illustrate how sustainability has become a vital part of the mix. The AMA (2017), defines marketing today as “*the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.*” This definition brings together the more traditional elements of marketing with an understanding of anthropogenic impacts on the planet.

Today's marketing professionals work in a high-speed world in which the digital age has proffered new opportunities and challenges for meaningful communications with customers (Armstrong et al., 2015). But they also work in a world where we must meet climate targets if we are to see a sustainable future. Peattie & Belz, (2010) offer a new approach to McCarrthy's 4Ps, with a marketing mix that takes a less inside-out approach that focuses on the producer, and instead considers the implications for stakeholders. Their 4Cs mix offers, *customer solutions*, *customer cost*, *convenience* and *communication* as a way to reshape marketing towards sustainability. Their first C refers to not just meeting customer needs, but also addressing solutions to wider societal problems; the second C, *customer cost*, is about encompassing costs related to the entire user experience, taking into account aspects like longevity, disposal and running costs.

Substituting *place* in the original marketing mix, the third C, *convenience*, should consider more than just the positioning of products at time of purchase, but how they fit into life at home, how they can be maintained and also the reimagining of place through online markets. Finally, *communication* replaces *promotion* to encompass a two-way exchange between company and consumer and a dialogue that informs and empowers people to make sustainable choices.

According to Belz & Peattie (2012), the jumping-off point for SC is first having a general understanding of social and environmental problems and then being able to analyse the businesses impact on people and planet. Cox & Pezzullo (2018) describe environmental communication (their preferred term) as the “*role of language, visual images, protests, music, or even scientific reports as different forms of symbolic action*” (p. 12). They elaborate that environmental communication has two functions - it is *pragmatic*, meaning it conveys an instrumental purpose; and it is *constitutive*, in that it shapes, orients and negotiates meaning, values and relationships.

Sustainability communication has become an increasingly important factor in business strategy. The challenge is to use it as a means to increase sustainable consumption and not just increase consumption, as traditional marketing is inclined to do. Going forward, this paper will seek to define ways this is possible.

2.1.2 Sustainable consumption

The concept of sustainable consumption came into prominence during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and is still an often contested subject in terms of its meaning (Cohen, 2005). However, in the forming of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the concept of sustainable consumption was solidified in goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Here it is defined as “*doing more and better with less*” and “*decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, increasing resource efficiency and promoting sustainable lifestyles*” (United Nations, 2017). Concerning food, sustainable consumption has been defined by Ramos & Squeff, (2020) as, “*...the basic connection among sustainable consumption and food is that those items placed in the market to be purchased by people shall also follow the sustainable paradigm, meaning they should be socially relevant, ecologically prudent and economically viable.*” (p. 231)

A difference has been emphasized between weak and strong sustainable consumption. Weak refers to the uptake of products that are more efficient and sustainable in their production and use. On the other hand, strong sustainable consumption advocates for the absolute reduction in consumption through technology and behavioural change, ensuring that material consumption does not breach the limits of the planetary boundaries (Schroeder & Anantharaman, 2017).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Several frameworks and principles have been suggested in both academic literature and from organisations or practitioners in the field of sustainability communications. The most prominent and useful (nine) examples are described below and compiled in Table 2-1. There was a focus on frameworks proposed in the last five years to ensure recommendations are current. If any of the frameworks were originated earlier, they should have been republished or updated within five years, which was the case for the Stoknes study, originally published in 2014 and re-issued as a TED talk in 2017.

2.2.1 Nine frameworks

Psychological climate paradox (Stoknes, 2014)

Psychologist Per Espen Stoknes (2014) has discussed the major cognitive barriers or inner defences that people face when attempting to change to pro-environmental behaviour. For each barrier he offers a communications strategy (the 5S's) that will flip what he refers to as the "climate paradox". The first barrier is *Distance*, whereby people can't relate to climate issues because they are too far away geographically and temporally. This can be flipped through the notion of *Social*, which infers that you mirror the actions of peers, neighbours, friends and family. *Doom* is the second barrier, where people become desensitised due to too much information about the impacts we face, this is countered by *Supportive* where messages are framed as opportunities and positive goals. The third inner defence is *Dissonance* where what we know is not mirrored by what we do (or the *intention-action gap*). *Dissonance* can be flipped with *Simple* messages that make actions easy to undertake. *Denial*, the fourth area, is changed through *Signals*, for example giving consumers feedback or recognition for their efforts. Lastly, *Identity* relates to values overriding facts despite evidence, for which the use of *Storytelling* can be leveraged to embed facts into personal values and beliefs.

Identity	Storytelling
Denial	Signals
Dissonance	Simple
Doom	Supportive
Distance	Social

Figure 2-1. Stoknes (2014) inner defences and 5S's solutions

A blueprint for sustainability marketing (Lim, 2016)

Lim (2016) presents, *A Blueprint for Sustainability Marketing*, a holistic approach to sustainability that extends the triple-bottom-line principle – people, planet, profit. The four dimensions proposed are - *Economic*, where customer and company satisfaction are as vital as economic factors, but not at the cost of the environment. Secondly, the *Environmental* dimension calls for firms to “*facilitate the symbiotic relationship between resource use and preservation*” (p. 243) and promote a healthy connection to the environment. The *Social* aspect focuses on guiding consumers to act with respect for others, groups or society as a whole. The fourth dimension, *Ethical* proposes that sustainability marketing should adopt a moral stance in persuading consumers to act in a responsible way towards the planet. Finally, the *Technological* aspect means utilising new technology to solve complex problems and proposes that technology can be used to communicate and educate stakeholders about sustainability.

The SHIFT framework (White & Habib, 2018)

The SHIFT framework (White & Habib, 2018) was produced after a review of academic literature on marketing sustainability. It is aimed at enabling sustainability professionals to communicate to foster pro-environmental behaviour amongst consumers. It stresses the importance of scoping out the behaviour that is intended to be shifted and the target audience, since there is no single approach to behaviour change and it is context dependent (White & Habib, 2018). The five factors in the framework are: *Social influence* - normalising sustainable behaviour through the influence of peers. *Habit formation* – behaviour change can turn into long term habits. *The individual self* – emphasising the self. *Feelings and cognition* – operationalising

emotions such as fear and hope. *Tangibility* – Sustainability needs to be clear and easy to relate to.

Marketing communications for sustainable consumption (Bagdare, 2018)

Bagdare (2018) suggests a fourfold framework for SC, drawing from both literature and techniques used in traditional product marketing. The four dimensions suggested are – *Sensitize* - create awareness and educate consumers about their role and responsibilities. *Familiarize* - build credibility and knowledge about the company. *Incentivize* - provide a reward or benefit for behaviour change. *Recognize* - reward loyalty and foster customer relationship management.

Three conceptualisations of sustainability marketing (Kemper and Ballantine, 2019)

Kemper and Ballantine (2019) used discourse analysis of over 200 journal articles on sustainability marketing to synthesis three conceptualisations of sustainability marketing. Their findings offer an umbrella, or overarching perspective on marketing strategy, rather than specific actions. The three dimensions are, *Auxiliary Sustainability Marketing* – sustainability communications should include the entire value chain from productions, supply, use phase and end-of-life. *Reformative Sustainability Marketing* – promote sustainable lifestyles and behaviour by encouraging sustainable or reduced consumption. *Transformative Sustainability Marketing* – have a top-down approach by changing social and political institutions to favour sustainable consumption.

The elusive green consumer (White et al., 2019)

To understand how to close the action-intention gap, researchers, White et al., (2019) performed several experiments and consulted existing literature to draw up six actions that companies should take to encourage sustainable behaviour. *Use social influence* - use comparisons to the behaviour of peers, neighbours, etc to motivate people to change their behaviour. *Shape good habits* - first break bad habits, then form good ones through the use of default options. *Leverage the domino effect* - one sustainable action can lead to the adoption of more behaviours. *Decide whether to talk to the heart or the brain* - how you frame a sustainability campaign is crucial and can use emotional appeals or hard facts. *Favour experiences over ownership* - choose a more circular and sustainable overall business model.

The 3-Cs (Guyader et al., 2020)

In a recent publication on sustainability marketing, Guyader et al., (2020) refer to the 3-Cs principle of sustainable marketing (not to be mistaken for 3Cs in conventional marketing – customer, company, competitors). The principles are described as, *Clarity* - provide clear direct and relevant information so consumers can make a decision. *Credibility* - use verifiable, and consistent endorsement and adhere to regulations. *Comparability* - make like-for-like comparisons of environmental information to increase tangibility.

2020 vision (Stafford and Graul, 2020)

In their paper, *Our 2020 Vision*, Stafford and Graul, (2020) highlight the importance of consumers making sustainable choices in the transition to a green economy. They also mention the issue of the “green marketing myopia” whereby over-emphasis on the environmental aspects of products can be off-putting to consumers who want to know what is in it for them. To counter this, they offer six principles: *Promote the consumer value of green products*, don't focus on green aspects, but on added consumer benefits such as price, health and quality to reach a mainstream consumer. *Win hearts, not just minds*, to reach consumers who are ambivalent about sustainable products, use constructs and emotive frames that will reach them. *Make green normal*, make pro-environmental behaviours normal through defaults and peer influence. *Leverage*

mainstream social media influencers, make sustainability appear to be exciting, trendy and desirable through mainstream collaborations. *Dialogue with public policy makers*, businesses should engage with government officials and policy makers to lobby for policies that normalize sustainable behaviour.

Beyond traditional communications (Lindberg, 2021)

Lindberg (2021), has suggested that companies need to take a fresh perspective on sustainability communications, moving away from traditional motivations and tools. She suggests six aspects that should be considered when using sustainability in marketing. The first is *Materiality*, here she advocates that companies use the results of processes like life-cycle analysis (LCA) and materiality analysis in their direct-to-consumer communications. Next, she concurs with Stoknes (2014), that *Storytelling* and creativity are vital in engaging people. She cites *Definitions* as being vital, meaning make sure you use correct terms - is your product really “environmentally friendly”? Make your communications *Comparable*, by benchmarking against the company’s, or competitor’s previous achievements. Consider making *Plans over Promises*, so that you don’t make empty promises but show a roadmap of how you will achieve them. Lastly, she notes that companies need to know and follow consumer *Laws*, which stipulate what you can and can’t say regarding sustainability claims.

Table 2-1. Summary of SC frameworks with new codes in legend

Stoknes (2014, 2017)	Lim (2016)	White & Habib (2018)	Bagdare (2018)	Kemper & Ballantine (2019)	White et al. (2019)	Guyader et al. (2020)	Stafford & Graul (2020)	Lindberg (2021)
Social (3)	Economic (1)	Social Influence (3)	Sensitise (2)	Auxiliary (1)	Use social influence (3)	Clarity (6)	Promote the consumer value of green products (2)	Materiality (7)
Simple (6)	Environmental (2)	Habit forming (2)	Familiarise (1)	Reformative (2)	Shape good habits (2)	Credibility (1)	Win hearts, not just minds (4)	Storytelling (5)
Supportive (4)	Social (3)	Individual self (4)	Incentivise (4)	Transformative (1)	Leverage the domino effect (2)	Comparability (2)	Make green normal (3)	Definitions (6)
Storytelling (5)	Ethical (4)	Feelings & cognition (4)	Recognise (4)		Decide whether to talk to the heart or the brain (4)		Leverage mainstream social media influencers (3)	Comparable (6)
Signal (4)	Technological (7)	Tangibility (6)			Favour experiences over ownership (2)		Dialogue with public policy makers (1)	Plans vs promises (1)
								The law (1)

1. Reputation & Transparency	
2. Education & Awareness	
3. Social	
4. Framing	
5. Storytelling	
6. Simplification	
7. Technical	

Table 2-1 summarises all nine of the frameworks discussed above. Using a coding approach, whereby common themes and issues are determined in the material (Maxwell, 2005), several commonalities were identified in the frameworks. In light of these commonalities, seven codes were elicited into which each of the principles mentioned in the nine frameworks fall: **Reputation & Transparency, Education & Awareness, Social, Framing, Storytelling, Simplification and Technical**. Some of the commonalities are found across the frameworks, for example, *Storytelling* occurs twice, and some are found within the frameworks, for example in Stafford and Graul (2020), the principles *Leverage mainstream social media influencers* and *Make green normal*, both refer to mechanisms for normalising sustainable behaviour, thus in the proposed framework for this paper, they fall under the *Social* category.

The seven common themes will be investigated and explained further in the following section with reference to the nine frameworks as well as insights from related literature. Each theme is broken down into sub-themes as necessary and relevant.

2.2.2 Reputation and transparency

This first section looks at the value of company image as well as striking a balance between greenwashing and greenhushing.

Image

Consumers' lack of awareness about sustainability initiatives limits their ability to form opinions about firms, respond and take action, companies therefore, need to work on increasing awareness levels (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). In Bagdare (2018), the principle of *familiarisation* is proposed as key to ensuring credibility in the eyes of the consumer. Brands that are most familiar to consumers are most likely to be trusted when it comes to sustainability claims (Belz & Peattie, 2012). A transparent approach to disclosing sustainability activities is key to ensuring pro-environmental choices. Guyader et al., (2020) proffer that to be taken seriously and to gain credibility companies must avoid small print and disclaimers and rather use third-party endorsements and be consistent since consumers are more likely to trust brands that are consistently and historically sustainable.

Creating a green and sustainable image is seen as key to raising company reputation and increasing customer loyalty (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). This can be done not only in the communications about products and their use, but also by informing about the entire value chain. For example how the product was made, including emissions, materials and human rights; impacts during the use phase; and information about prolonging life, packaging materials and disposal (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). Companies should also avoid stating that they are on the way to being sustainable but give a concrete roadmap stating when, how and to what degree they will reach their sustainability goals and what they have achieved so far (Lindberg, 2021), (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021).

Another means of reputation building is taking a top-down approach by endeavouring to shift social and political institutions and policy to favour sustainable consumption through lobbying and industry collaboration (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019), (Stafford & Graul, 2020). The idea of a "catch 22" in SC, whereby the public wants information but does not want companies to be overly vocal about it, can be countered by communicating sustainability initiatives to investors, politicians, journalists and other societal messengers, who will then disseminate the information to the wider public. In this way the message is seen as more credible as it is verified and delivered by trustworthy outlets (Morsing et al., 2008). Ensuring SC aligns with policy and regulation is also a way to ensure credibility, particularly if the company can take a first-mover advantage in relation to up-coming legislation (Atkinson, 2013), (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). However,

younger consumers have been found to have less scepticism towards sustainability claims, so a direct and open approach is preferable with this consumer segment (Schmeltz, 2012).

Greenwashing or greenhushing

A key to reputation building is to avoid so-called greenwashing – making false or exaggerated sustainability claims (Guyader et al., 2020) or using environmental messages to divert attention from less desirable actions or environmental controversy (Cox & Pezzullo, 2018). Greenwashing can take several forms and guidelines developed by global safety certification company, UL (n.d.), outline the seven most common mechanisms of greenwashing: *Hidden trade-offs* refers to green claims being too narrow and focusing on just one aspect of sustainability while ignoring other related issues. *Proof* (or lack of) is seen when companies do not substantiate their messages with detailed information or third-party certification. *Vagueness* can be an issue when claims are so poorly defined that the customer could become misled or make untrue assumptions. *False labels* are problematic when companies use imagery or words that appear to be third-party endorsements but are not. *Irrelevance* of information refers to when an environmental claim is true, but it serves little purpose or is irrelevant to sustainable development. *Lesser of two evils*, is where a true claim is made about a product, but the claim is irrelevant compared to the impact the related industry has as a whole. *Fibbing*, or lying is when there is no truth in a claim (UL, n.d.).

The extent to which greenwashing is an issue was recently exposed in a recent EU-wide website greenwashing “sweep”. The audit found that in 42 per cent of cases sustainability claims were exaggerated, false or deceptive (European Commission, 2021c). The majority of cases flouted the UL’s recommendation to reduce vagueness, by using terms such as “conscious”, “eco-friendly” and “sustainable” and leading consumers to assume there is no impact from the product. Further, more than half of the cases failed to provide evidence to back up their claims (European Commission, 2021c). In the report, the EU commissioner suggested that the uptick in these unlawful claims was a result of increased demand for sustainable products and interest in sustainability from consumers.

Greenwashing represents one of the many challenges organizations face in terms of their sustainability-related communication and the fear of greenwashing accusations or backlash has caused some organisations to cease talking about, or play down sustainability (Allen, 2016), (Smith & Font, 2015). This has been referred to as green-hushing or green-muting, where companies don’t wish to be seen as morally superior, but rather customer-centric (Smith & Font, 2015) or a fear that disclosing too much will give competitors an advantage or give the public material to use against the company (Baldassarre & Campo, 2016). One study found that companies were afraid of highlighting sustainability in one area in case it attracted too much attention to areas of the business that were not so sustainable, and thus prompting greenwashing accusations (Evans, in Coburn, 2019). Font et al., (2016) found that companies (in the tourism sector) tended to downplay sustainability on their websites as a way to reduce complexity and confusion and to elevate guilt around unsustainable activities. Consumers can also make assumptions that if a product has better sustainability credentials then the quality and price are likely to be negatively affected (Evans, in Coburn, 2019).

The notion of reputation and transparency in the literature relating to SC, covers gaining consumer trust and acceptance, being open and clear and reducing the “fluff” around sustainability by communicating more than just promises. Vitaly, avoiding greenwashing to maintain the firm’s reputation but also not tipping too far the other way to “greenhushing”.

2.2.3 Education and awareness

Should SC have the role of educating the general public about the environmental issues we face as well as selling green products or services, and to what extent is this the responsibility of companies?

Bagdare (2018) suggests that education and awareness are the primary roles of SC. The author used the term “*sensitise*” to describe a process the consumer must go through to understand their role in creating a sustainable planet. The author suggests that a sense of pride be instilled in consumers regarding their choice of sustainable products and businesses. This is echoed by Kemper & Ballantine (2019) who propose that a key role of both business and government is to educate consumers about sustainability. Their notion of *Reformative Sustainability* takes the idea that unsustainable consumption is due to a lack of information and awareness and that firms have a key role in changing this. Allen (2016) goes as far as saying that awareness is the prerequisite for pro-environmental actions and that to change behaviour, we need to be aware of environmental problems. The Ecolabelling Sweden report (2021) found similar insights. Out of the companies they surveyed the main incentive for communicating about sustainability was to contribute to sustainable development, with strengthening their brand and being more competitive in second and third place.

Raising awareness through communications is considered important for encouraging greater overall engagement in sustainable activities and it has been proposed that once a consumer has adopted one sustainable habit, they are more likely to adopt another. As they make sustainable choices, consumer’s awareness grows and has a positive “spill-over” effect leading to other sustainable behaviours (White et al., 2019), (Truelove, 2014). However, there can be a propensity for a negative spillover, where because the consumer has taken one sustainable action, they feel that legitimates other non-sustainable behaviours, or there is a feeling that they do enough already, so they don’t need to do more. This is a process known as the *moral licensing effect*, where the feeling of moral achievement from one activity makes further activities seem unnecessary (Zhong et al., 2009 in Truelove, 2014). *Perceived consumer effectiveness theory* also acknowledges that behaviour in one environmental area may not apply to another area, so there needs to be an emphasis on context in SC, which can be effective in determining green consumer behaviour (Peattie, 2001).

Klößner, (2015) discusses the application of norm-activation theory when discussing SC’s role in awareness raising. The author discusses the two necessary stages of awareness, including *awareness of need*, whereby the consumer is made aware of the need to protect the environment. Here communicators should provide information about issues and the need for action via social media and education. The second stage is *awareness of consequences* where the consumer understands the impacts of their actions on the environment. This can be activated through personalised information and feedback about personal actions, such as through carbon calculators. It has also been argued that increasing people’s awareness of environmental issues alone is not enough to increase sustainable consumption, since so many other factors are part of the purchasing process (Steg and Vlek, 2009 in Klößner, 2015). People need to not only receive the information, but receive it in such a way that they can cognitively process it to effect behavioural change (Allen 2016).

The notion of educating consumers and raising awareness is predicated in the literature from a perspective of firms needing to communicate the importance of climate issues in general, as well as developing awareness around the impact of individual behaviour and making it clear how to act upon this.

2.2.4 Social

The notion of social influence occurred multiple times in the frameworks presented in table 2-1. A useful backdrop is the social network theory. Here the assertion is that social networks are made up of nodes that interact with each other and in the context of green purchasing the nodes can be seen as a way to increase acceptance (Groening et al., 2018). Therefore, communicating to a social group, rather than to the individual is beneficial, and leveraging the influence of family, friends, colleagues or neighbours can impact behaviour change or product choice (Stoknes, 2014).

Normalisation

A barrier to pro-environmental behaviour change can be that sustainable behaviour is not seen as “normal” behaviour, and conversely unsustainable behaviour is propagated because it is considered normal (Rettie et al., 2012). In a communications strategy to increase “grasscycling”, a process where people leave grass clippings on their lawn to naturally decompose instead of taking them to the landfill, White et al., (2019) took a social norms approach. This method taps into people’s beliefs about what constitutes normal or acceptable behaviour. Their strategy involved posting flyers through resident’s doors letting them know that their neighbours had started grasscycling and “you can too”.

As well as comparison to peers’ behaviour being an important influence, the idea of collective action is also important, whereby it feels that more can be done by the many, rather than just by the individual (Stoknes, 2014). In a study on environmental identity campaigns regarding climate change, Brulle, (2010) described the need for a shift from campaigns that talk to the public as individual consumers, to those that drive civic engagement and encourage people to act in the interest of a community or society. Likewise, climate psychologist, Kata Nylén, recommends shifting the focus from the individual, where the feeling of individual responsibility can lead to anxiety, and instead create a sense of a social movement where more can be achieved together (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021).

The SHIFT framework (White & Habib, 2018) suggests that people will engage in behaviour if it is considered the norm, if it is viewed positively by others and if it is linked to desirable social groups. The notion of positive image is seen in other frameworks, particularly the idea of peer-to-peer influence and the need to “fit in”, where leveraging the influence of friends and family is effective (Stafford & Graul, 2020). Similarly, social-media influencers, individuals who have a large number of followers on a platform like Twitter or Instagram, can be used as a way to create endorsement around sustainable products and as a way to show them as accepted and normal (Stafford & Graul, 2020), (Rettie et al., 2012). Rather than using people with sustainability-focused social media accounts, Stafford & Graul, (2020) recommend using mainstream accounts that will reach a wider audience and be associated with “normal” behaviour rather than niche, green behaviour. However, Ecolabelling Sweden (2021) caution in their report that when considering reduced consumption, influencers will not provide a solution, since they aim to help sell products, sustainable or not. While influencers help increase transparency and normalisation, millennials in particular have been found to have a level of scepticism towards their use. The account needs to have a good track record of believability and that the individual promoting the item isn’t just “in it for the money” (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018).

This section indicates the power of social influence to increase behavioural change as well as tapping into normative behaviour as a key approach.

2.2.5 Framing

Framing is one way to approach communications, the theory of which is attributed to sociologist Erving Goffman. He argued that frames help us make sense of the world and reduce the complexity of information to better interpret and reconstruct reality (Volkmer, 2009). Framing can take several forms and is best described as the angle, tone or point of reference/view a message takes. For the purpose of this paper, the focus is put on the most common types of frames that arose in the literature around behavioural change for sustainable consumption; loss or gain framing and point-of-reference.

Loss or gain

Promotion (gain) and prevention (loss) framing are linked to regulatory focus theory, which asserts that people either strive for pleasure/gain or aim to avoid pain/loss (Higgins & Silberman, 1998). In a study on plastic bag levies, Muralidharan & Sheehan, (2016) conducted a survey to gauge the effectiveness of a message regarding a penalty framed as a tax (loss), versus avoiding a fee (gain). They found that the tax/loss framing was more effective in motivating shoppers to bring reusable bags.

Velde et al., (2010) found that promotional framing has more success in changing behaviour in a study on energy consumption. They found that stating the seriousness of the issue and disadvantages of not taking action was not as relevant as stating the possibility to overcome. When looking at people's willingness to donate or volunteer for wildlife conservation, Jacobson et al., (2019) found that positive messaging has a greater impact on willingness to pay. One reason cited for promotion framing being effective is that it is often based on reaching an ideal or goal, so it is likely to have a more long-term effect (Boesen Mariani et al., 2010). Ecolabelling Sweden's report found that 52 per cent of Swedes felt helpless when faced with information about climate issues, and urged companies to use hopeful messaging in their communications to combat this (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021). Further, in the report, climate psychologist, Renée Lertzman (2021 in Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021), urges that companies can't simply say that they have made a slightly less impactful product and therefore they are sustainable. They need to be honest with consumers about the severity of the situation, describe what they are doing and what the customer can do, providing a sense of collaborative purpose to solve the issue. Another insight recommends a message mix of 80 per cent optimism and 20 per cent gravitas (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021).

de Vries (2019) argues that it is vital to consider cognitive bias when examining framing and she stresses that optimism bias coupled with promotion framed campaigns results in people feeling that everything will be ok so there is no urgency to act. She goes on to say that gain framing needs to be presented with action-orientated messaging so people can clearly see what can be done to reach a positive state. In this regard, motivational messages are described as more effective than depictions of abstract impacts on the environment.

Two of the frameworks in Table 2-1 talk about tapping into hearts rather than minds. or appealing to the emotional rather than the rational (Stafford & Graul, 2020), (White et al., 2019). This could be negative emotions such as fear, guilt or shame, or eliciting positive emotions of hope and joy. Fear framing is used as a powerful communication tactic and can be understood as a type of prevention framing. This strategy is more often used in health campaigns to warn against the effect of, for example, smoking (Chen, 2016). In an environmental context, this could be the rendering of an environmental disaster, a classic example in pictorial form being a turtle with a plastic bag around its neck, or a polar bear stranded on a piece of ice. In the context of their study on green consumption, Amatulli et al., (2019), hypothesise that negative message frames are more likely to lead consumers to engage in pro-environmental behaviours than positive message frames and this effect is engendered by anticipated shame. Fear-based

campaigns can, however also result in denial, defensive avoidance and desensitisation resulting in an apathetic audience (de Vries, 2019), (Brulle, 2010). The European Commission (2009) agrees that fear-based messaging is attention-grabbing and causes a reaction, but it does not create long-lasting behaviour change.

Point-of-reference

The notion of point-of-reference is also an important consideration within framing, whether a message talks to intrinsic values and an impact on the self, or if it talks to extrinsic values and the impact on society and the planet. One study found that a loss frame combined with “self-reference” as well as gain frame combined with “other-reference” (environment or society) affects attitudes towards pro-environmental behaviour (Nab et al., 2020). Another study on energy transition looked at how personality traits impact the acceptance of messages and found that promotion-focused messages were always more effective on “egoistic” individuals than prevention-focused messages (Lagomarsino et al., 2020). In a study on meat consumption, Graham & Abrahamse (2017) found that personal framing, directed at “me” was more effective than talking about wider impacts on society. The SHIFT framework uses *Individual Self*, as one of their SC principles, and suggest marketers consider the personal norms of their target group, as well as communicating barriers to pro-environmental behaviours in ways that appeal to the self. They also found that people’s existing values have an impact on whether a frame is successful, so understanding and tapping into the values of the company or product’s particular target group is vital. In this way, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to SC and an approach that suits one industry will not necessarily fit another (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). This is solidified in the attitude-behaviour-context theory that finds that context determines the effectiveness of the link between attitude and behaviour, both for individuals but also cultures (Groening et al., 2018).

There is a tension in the literature findings between the function and success of loss versus gain framing as well as the question of whether to focus on the individual or wider societal values when endeavouring to change behaviour.

2.2.6 Storytelling

Storytelling is perhaps one of the oldest forms of communication as a means of passing down knowledge, propagating ideas and as a form of entertainment. Narratives, argue Veland et al., (2018), are also vital to helping us remain within a 1.5-degree threshold. The authors maintain that there is an information deficit that needs to be filled with protagonists, timelines, and places to engage people in the transformations needed for halting climate change. The use of storytelling for delivering scientific information has been criticised in that it can’t truly relay the evaluation of evidence involved (M. F. Dahlstrom & Scheufele, 2018). However, if the storytelling is done in an ethical, truthful manner and the end goal of behavioural change is accomplished, perhaps oversimplification is justified (M. F. Dahlstrom & Scheufele, 2018).

Stories allow for expression beyond the logical brain, beyond data and quantifiable matter. They are to do with relationships, draw on the past and look into the future, they are emotional and tell of actions and consequences (Moezzi et al., 2017). Stoknes (2014) explains that we use narratives to create meaning and proffers that climate change is the grandest of narratives that can be lost in amongst more complex and technical aspects. He continues that we must find ways to tell these stories that are relatable to a non-scientific public. One way this is possible is because stories by their very nature can be persuasive, which (whilst considering ethical aspects) offers ways to persuade otherwise resistant audiences (M. Dahlstrom, 2014). In Lindberg’s principles for SC, she talks about storytelling and creativity being a fundamental way to deal with communicating her first principle, *Materiality*, which is concerned with communicating

often technical aspects of life-cycle analysis. She suggests using humour, drama and a twinkle in the eye to spark feelings and connection with consumers (PUSH Sverige, 2021).

2.2.7 Simplification

Under simplification there were several themes related to making information easier to process including nudging, making concepts tangible and tapping into other, non-environmental, values.

Nudging

The very nature of communicating sustainability information is complex. Shortcomings are rife in the form of consumers misunderstanding, being unable to form decisions and being overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information (Ölander & Thøgersen, 2014). The idea of nudging as a way to simplify complex issues was proposed by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008, in Ölander & Thøgersen, 2014). The idea is to make necessary societal behaviour change simpler to undertake through what they refer to as *choice architecture* – the importance of how choices are presented. A common nudge is the idea of default actions, whereby consumers are, for example, automatically provided renewable energy rather than having to choose it (Sunstein, 2014). Using social norms is also a form of nudging, such as the example of grasscycling in section 2.2.3, as is convenience, such as making green choices more easily accessible (Ölander & Thøgersen, 2014). Stoknes, (2017) also refers to nudging as a way to simplify complex messages and information and to counter what he describes as people’s tendency to justify continuing non-environmental behaviour because it won’t make a difference to change.

Tangibility

Tangibility is one of the principles proposed by the SHIFT framework and is related to making sustainability information both more comprehensible and easier to relate to. The framework discusses this in the context of sustainability issues often being seen as far off geographically and temporally, and that it will affect others. de Vries (2019) discusses the concept of discounting, both geographical and temporal, where a problem is perceived to be happening elsewhere, or that it will occur in the future. She argues that in both these scenarios people become ambivalent because the problem is a distant threat. The SHIFT framework suggests countering this by reminding consumers about the importance of the future, concentrating on local impacts and making communications concrete such as demonstrating the steps people need to take to accomplish something.

Words and phrases are often over or miss-used in the sustainability context and being clear about exactly what you mean by, for example, “environmentally friendly” is vital to enabling consumers to make informed decisions (Lindberg, 2021). Similarly, comparability makes choices easier for consumers, if they can compare like-for-like products or benchmark sustainability claims against each other (Guyader et al., 2020), (Lindberg, 2021).

The notion of simplification could be exemplified by the use of eco-labels. A mechanism to provide the consumer with clear information, or a signal, about the sustainability and trustworthiness of a product (Sønderskov & Daugbjerg, 2011), (Banerjee & Solomon, 2003). However, due to the burgeoning of different types of labels as a means of sustainability communication (Banerjee & Solomon, 2003), there is increased confusion amongst consumers about what the label means due to a lack of coherence, too many labels or labels that are produced internally by a brand with no third-party assurance (Reisch & Thøgersen, 2015).

Other consumer values - Avoiding the “green marketing myopia”

The so-called “green marketing myopia” concept was suggested by Ottman et al. (2006, in Lim, 2016) who found that companies were failing to gain traction on certain products because their

communications focused too heavily on green attributes instead of other consumer benefits. The concept comes out of the theory of “marketing myopia”, which proposes companies fail because they are too product orientated and look inward (we offer this) instead of being consumer-orientated and looking outward (the customer needs this) (Levitt, 2004). Lim (2016) asserts that consumers are first alert to more salient aspects of products, such as price and quality and only if these satisfy expectations will they pay attention to sustainability information. Therefore, the environment should not be at a top-level of communications. This approach can be seen as a way to counter the issues discussed in section 2.2.1, where consumers assume that sustainability means decreased quality and higher costs. Since green-interested consumers still make up a minority, environmental attributes must be linked to other benefits if a significant shift towards sustainable product choice is to be achieved (Stafford & Graul, 2020). Ecolabelling Sweden (2021) backs this up, finding that the top three factors for sustainable product choice in order of importance for Swedish consumers are 1. Price, 2. Range, 3. Information.

Keeping SC simple, to the point and easy to understand can be seen as key to removing barriers for consumers to make sustainable choices. This can include instruments to help make decisions easier, ensuring the information relatable or tapping into salient values.

2.2.8 Technical

How can digitisation help us solve challenges in communications and what is the role and purpose of technical and complex information, for example from materiality analysis, in consumer communications?

Digitalisation

To say technology and digitalization have become an integral part of the daily lives of many societies would be an understatement. On the one hand technological development has had a detrimental effect on the environment with the materiality of digital products increasing resource use and pollution (Kuntsman & Rattle, 2019), (Lim, 2016), (Belz & Peattie, 2012). In addition, the term “digital solutionism”, describes the critical standpoint where technology is seen as a fix-all solution and its rebound effects are not fully considered (Kuntsman & Rattle, 2019). The availability of information delivered via digital devices has also been noted to have the potential to increase the so-called intention-action gap, creating a culture of “slacktivism” whereby clicking and liking posts about sustainability or social issues provides enough of a feel-good factor to impede further effective action (Glenn, 2015). However, digital channels, such as the web, apps and social media are changing the way we communicate, enabling greater awareness-raising and engendering behaviour change (Cox & Pezzullo, 2018). The digitalized society is able to engage in sustainability issues from grass-roots activism and mobilisation (Cox & Pezzullo, 2018) to awareness-raising and encouraging sustainable choices. Digitalization has also created opportunities for a more collaborative approach to sustainability with the sharing economy enabled through online platforms as well as the buying and selling of second-hand goods (Kuntsman & Rattle, 2019).

Digitalization has several implications for sustainability communications. Lim (2016) describes it as having the opportunity for teaching the sustainability agenda (and can therefore also be seen in the education and awareness-raising category of the theoretical framework) but also as a way to reduce the impact of consumption. Cox & Pezzullo (2018) cite the use of gamification as a way to engage consumers in, for example, apps to calculate reduced energy consumption and give points and rewards for highest monthly reductions.

Increased use of QR codes, where a mobile device is used to scan a code to obtain more information, is another way technology is enabling greater opportunities for communication. Nestlé used QR codes on their confectionary products to give consumers access to detailed

information about not just nutrition, but also sustainable sourcing (Fox, 2014). QR codes can be activated at the point of decision making when the consumer wants more information to make a purchase decision (Atkinson, 2013). They are also a mechanism to create greater brand trust, signalling that a company is willing to be transparent and make information available. Individuals who use QR codes are also likely to be highly engaged and already aware of sustainability issues, so information must be robust and useful to be taken seriously (Atkinson, 2013). Recently Swedish supermarket chain, Coop, launched their Hållbarhetsdeklarationen (sustainability declaration), a project to provide environmental impact information about 17,000 of their private-label products. One of the first of its kind, the declaration gives information on ten parameters - biological diversity, climate, soil fertility, water use, pesticides, eutrophication, animal health, working conditions, local community, legal compliance and traceability. The information can be accessed by consumers by scanning the product's bar code, and is visualised in the form of a spider diagram (see Figure 2-2) (Björk, 2020). This greater availability of information can also be represented under the Reputation & Transparency category of this framework, since it gives consumers clear and easily accessible access to information and shows that the brand is willing to share it.

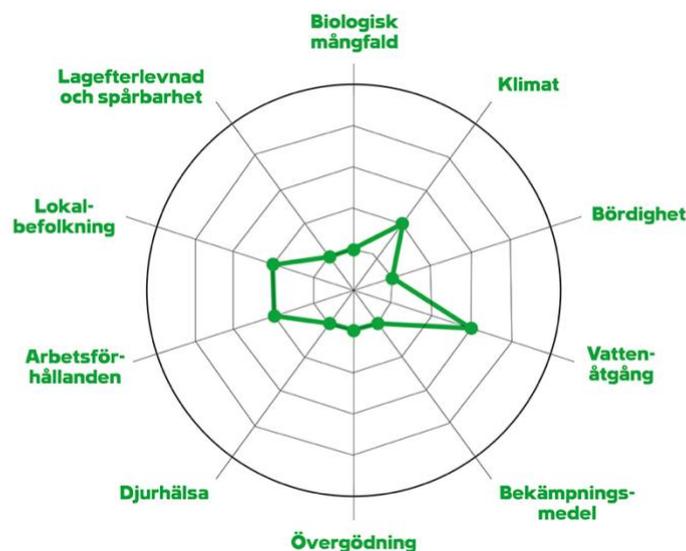


Figure 2-2. Coop product sustainability declaration spider diagram showing ten parameters of impact: biological diversity, climate, soil fertility, water use, pesticides, eutrophication, animal health, working conditions, local community, legal compliance and traceability. Image source: Coop

Facts and figures

The dissemination of complex facts and figures at a consumer level has begun to emerge in the form of CO₂ labelling or disclosure. Brands including Oatly (oat-based food products), and Quorn (meat-substitutes) have started including the carbon footprint of their products alongside ingredients and nutritional information on their packaging. A further example is seen with Swedish used-garment reseller, Sellpy, who show the water and CO₂ savings made for each garment consumers purchase (Sellpy, n.d.). Footprinting and labelling of products is a means of both decarbonising food and other production systems and achieving goals for sustainable behaviour change (Gadema & Oglethorpe, 2011). In a survey of UK supermarket shoppers, Gadema & Oglethorpe, (2011) found that while 72 per cent of participants had a preference for carbon labelling, 89 per cent were also confused by what the label meant. This confusion led to legal action in the case of meat-substitute brand, Quorn who had an advertisement banned by a UK consumer watchdog over carbon-reduction claims. The allegation was that a lack of

information could make consumers assume they would achieve carbon reduction themselves if they chose a Quorn product over another product, instead of understanding it was about carbon reduction in the company (Southey, 2020). One way of tackling this is to introduce a more coherent labelling strategy across the food industry to increase the understandability of the labels (Gadema & Oglethorpe, 2011). Rööös & Tjärnemo (2011) concur with the need for a system-wide carbon labelling strategy. They state that carbon labelling has all the issues of other labelling with an added problem of there being no conceivable personal benefit to the consumer, unlike organic labelling, which could be understood as having health benefits.

Disclosing the details of a company's materiality analysis, or product life-cycle assessment, at a level that is closer to the consumer has been advocated by Lindberg (2021). She proposes that by making this information more readily available, beyond the confines of the sustainability report, communications can be in line with the company's true impact, and thereby avoid insignificance. Schmeltz, (2012) concurs, encouraging marketers to evade the disinterest of consumers in sustainability issues by making the details of CSR initiatives available beyond the confines of the annual report. The author also advocates clearly stating figures relating to sustainability achievements, such as "we have reduced emissions by X%" as opposed to making vague promises about future goals. Further, presenting data, facts and figures is an effective way to counter the possibility of greenwashing accusations (Schmeltz, 2012). The idea of presenting facts and figures is countered, however, by the argument that this type of information can become overly complex for consumers to understand and therefore creates dissonance. In this regard, Allen (2016) recommends caution when using a technocratic approach and rather urges appealing to emotions through values-driven language.

In this section, digitalization is not seen as the means to an end of climate issues, but as a tool to help make accessing and processing information easier. Technical data is advocated as being moved closer to the consumer, but in such a way that is still understandable, which links back to the notion of storytelling.

2.3 Literature Review in Summary

Nine frameworks were identified that provided strategies for SC. On analysis of these, seven common themes were coded and a further literature review was carried out to build on these themes. The seven areas now form a theoretical framework that will be used as a guide for conducting the empirical research for this paper. The themes are:

1. Reputation & Transparency
2. Education & Awareness
3. Social
4. Framing
5. Storytelling
6. Simplification
7. Technical

Since scant up to date literature was found on what leaders in the SC sector experience and observe, the empirical research will seek to fill this gap.

3 Research Design and Methods

The objective of this study is to contribute to the knowledge around best-practice in SC. The research takes a qualitative approach with multiple case studies including interviews and content analysis.

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study was conducted using a deductive logic of enquiry, testing existing theories on the phenomena through the collection and analysis of empirical data (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). It followed the logic of first examining existing theories on best practice in SC in both academic and industry literature. From these theories, a set of common terms was developed to form the theoretical framework. To test and build on these existing theories, empirical data was then collected through case studies with interviews and content analysis of a key piece of communications from each of the case study organisations. RQ1, which focuses on strategy, was answered through the interviews. RQ2 was answered through the analysis communications material as well as the interviews.

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because an in-depth understanding of how practitioners communicate sustainability was needed to draw findings. Qualitative methods are useful for exploring social actors' meanings and interpretations of subjects (Blaikie & Priest, 2019) and are appropriate when conducting research directly with practitioners in the chosen field of study (Maxwell, 2005). Since this study aims to enable practitioners in the food-product sector to communicate successfully about sustainability, understanding the particular context they are operating in, the barriers they face, the tactics they use and so on, was vital (Maxwell, 2005). A qualitative approach, exploiting direct contact with practitioners, therefore lent itself to obtaining the findings this study sought.

3.1.1 Case studies

A collective case study approach was chosen, as it is most appropriate when studying cases that represent a similar phenomenon or condition (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Case studies are characterised by their use of multiple methods of data collection (Berg & Lune, 2012) and in this study both semi-structured interviews and content analysis of SC were used. Case studies were chosen due to their suitability when studying organisations and because they can determine attitudes and motivations that can then be generalisable for use by other organisations, (Berg & Lune, 2012) something this study aimed to achieve.

3.1.2 Case study selection process

A total of five companies were selected as the case study foci. The companies were all listed in the 2020 Sustainable Brand Index (SBI) for Sweden, under the Business-to-customer category. The SBI was used as a selection criterion because it indexes companies based on consumer perception of how sustainable the brand is. In this way, these companies can be seen as leaders in creating consumer awareness of sustainability¹. The SBI methodology carries out an initial selection of brands based on their market activity, turnover, market share and general brand awareness (*Sustainable Brand Index*, n.d.). The indexing of the brands is then based on desk-top research and quantitative surveys where 1000 respondents (consumers/general public between the ages of 16-75) assess each brand according to the perceived sustainability of the company.

¹ It is acknowledged by the author that it is not a given that because a company communicates persuasively about environmental issues, that they are therefore leaders in sustainable production.

To entrepreneurs narrow down the research, the focus was put on the food-product sector. This is a pertinent industry to examine as it is a considerable contributor to GHG emissions globally, so consumer awareness around making more sustainable food choices is vital. As stated in section 1.3 of this paper, the commonality of food purchasing adds to its relevance. Food is also an interesting area for sustainable product choice particularly, because whereas other sectors, such as fashion or electronics, should focus on what Schroeder & Anantharaman, (2017) describe as strong sustainability and driving down consumption, with food this is not the main issue. People still need to purchase food so to an extent (over purchasing and food waste is still an issue, particularly for countries in the global north, like Sweden), behavioural change towards more sustainable choices is more relevant than decreased consumption.

To select the cases, all food companies were initially extracted from the SBI top 50, giving a total of 16 companies. The final selection of five companies was based on the ability to get in contact with them and have employees agree to interviews. The five companies selected were ICA Sweden, IKEA Food Services, Kung Markatta (for which employees of the parent company Midsona were interviewed), Oatly and Saltå Kvarn. The selection enables some degree of generalizability because the companies cover a range of product types as well as business sizes and models.

3.1.3 Case study companies

The following provides details of the case study companies including company structure, market presence, employees, turnover and position in the Sustainable Brand Index. Table 3-1 provides a summary of this information.

Table 3-1. List of case study companies

Company	Product type	Position in the SBI (2019)	Annual turnover (2019)*	Number of employees (2019)*
ICA Sweden	Franchise-based supermarket chain	3	81.6 billion SEK	8500
IKEA Food Services	IKEA's own brand food product range	1 (IKEA)	193 million SEK (IKEA Food, not entire IKEA)	105
Kung Markatta (Parent company Midsona)	Range of pre-packaged organic food products	16	3.1 billion SEK (Midsona)	581 (Midsona)
Oatly	Oat-based dairy alternatives	33	1.4 billion SEK	247
Saltå Kvarn	Range of pre-packaged organic food products.	9	195 million SEK	42

**All employee and turnover figures acquired from Allbolaget.se*

ICA Sweden

ICA Sweden (ICA) is the leading grocery store in Sweden, with around 1300 stores in the country and a market share of 36 per cent. Founded in 1938, it is part of the ICA Group, which also owns pharmacies, banks and real estate. ICA is run as a franchise operation, where

entrepreneurs own and run their stores and can tailor them to local needs. Marketing and communication are part of the services offered in the franchise agreement and are therefore managed at the group level and used in a way each store feels appropriate. They have a private label as well as selling other brands. Their 2019 turnover was 81.6 billion Swedish kronor (8 billion Euro) and they have around 8500 employees. They have a broad and varied target audience, so SC has to be directed at not just the most engaged, but to the masses. ICA was ranked overall number three in the 2020 SBI, and came in first place in their industry category, Grocery Stores.

IKEA Food Services

IKEA is a global home furnishing brand founded in Sweden in 1943. It has 422 stores in over 50 markets. With its philosophy of producing products that are affordable to many, its target audience is wide, but particular collections or products may be aimed at a narrower audience. IKEA Food services employs 105 people, and its 2019 annual turnover was 193 million Swedish kronor (18 million Euro) (for IKEA Food Services only). In the IKEA organisation structure, food sits under the holding company of the IKEA Group, Inter IKEA. Inter IKEA's role is to work with franchisees, the range and supply. IKEA food consists of both the Swedish food market, a section of IKEA stores selling food to prepare and eat at home, as well as restaurants and bistros in the stores. This study focuses on food products sold in the Swedish food market as this fits with the food-product sector scope of this study and the other brands identified for the case studies. They are present in several global markets, which are each unique when it comes to communications, so the final communication strategy is determined by the markets themselves, with recourses from the global communications team. In 2020 IKEA was positioned at number one on the SBI for the second year in a row.

Kung Markatta

Kung Markatta (KM) is a Swedish brand founded in 1983 producing a range of organic food products including dry and tinned goods, oils, drinks, tea, tofu and much more. KM was bought by parent company Midsona in 2016, who own a range of brands within health and wellbeing in the Nordic region and Europe. KM has only Sweden as its market and their products can be found in many supermarkets throughout the country. The parent company, Midsona, employs 581 people (in the Nordics, Germany and Spain) and had an annual turnover of 3.1 billion Swedish kronor (304.6 million Euro) in 2019 from all its 10 brands, KM being one of its key brands in terms of turnover. Their target group has historically been an engaged and sustainability interest group. KM was ranked overall number 16 in the SBI and number 6 within their category, Food.

Oatly

Oatly was founded in 1994 by researchers at Lund University in Sweden. They now offer a range of oat-based, dairy alternative food products, including drinks, yoghurts, creams and ice creams. Still based in Sweden, the brand is available in over 20 countries worldwide. Their creative communications are done internally by their so-called "Department of mind control". They employ almost 250 people and their 2019 turnover was 1.4 billion Swedish kronor (140 million Euro). Their target group is a very engaged and knowledgeable segment but has grown from a steadfast vegan audience to a more trend-interested consumer group. Oatly was ranked number 33 overall in the 2020 SBI and number 10 in their industry category, Food.

Saltå Kvarn

Saltå Kvarn (SK) is an organic food company founded in 1964 in Sweden. They started as a single bakery that started selling their flour and milled grains. Today they produce a range of over 150 products, including flour, muesli, dried fruits and beans and pulses, some of which are

imported from outside of Sweden. Their market is solely Sweden, and their products are found in most supermarkets throughout the country. They employ 42 people and their 2019 turnover was 195 million Swedish kronor (19 million Euro). Their target audience is Swedish consumers who share the values and mission of the company and the largest group is original loyal followers. They were ranked overall number nine in the 2020 SBI, and came number three in their industry category, Food.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Interviews

Interviews were chosen as a core method to build the case study and to answer both RQ1 and 2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 1-3 practitioners in sustainability and/or communications roles from each organisation, as well as with an independent sustainability communications strategist. Using a semi-structured approach allowed for planning where questions were prewritten to capture desired subjects. However, this approach also allows for further probing during the interview should unexpected subjects arise and also for the tone and wording to be adjusted to the respondent (Berg & Lune, 2012). The interviews aimed to gain an understanding of SC in practice, ambitions, strategies, barriers and so on. The interviews enabled a deeper understanding of both *what* is communicated in terms of sustainability, and *how* it is communicated. The focus for the interviews with sustainability roles was weighted towards *what* questions and the communications roles was weighted towards *how* questions to align with how they operate in their respective roles. The interviews were also used as a way to pinpoint particular sustainability communications to use in the content analysis part of this research that, in the opinion of the practitioners, were most successful in terms of the strategy applied and results achieved.

As well as questions based on the theoretical framework, the interviewees were probed to identify other particular variables that had a bearing on the type of SC used such as the brand's market presence, target audience and historical sustainability reputation. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix I.

Interviews were held online using video conferencing software, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. This was due to unavoidable constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the online-interview environment using video conferencing has similar benefits as the traditional face-to-face interview, such as rapport building, probing and spontaneous discussion (Berg & Lune, 2012).

3.2.2 Interviewees

In total 9 interviews were conducted with current employees in the case study organisations in both sustainability and communications roles, or a role that combined both areas. In the case where the role covered both areas, just one interviewee was selected. In addition to employees, one independent sustainability strategist was selected to provide an outside-in perspective of the industry and not only brand-centric insights. Interviewees at the case study organisations were selected on a basis of their in-depth knowledge of the company's sustainability and/or communications work, because they have some level of influence over SC in the company and because they currently work at the company. The Interviewees were contacted through both the author's and the thesis supervisor's personal contacts as well as through LinkedIn and via company websites. The respondents are presented below from information gathered during the interviews and from their respective LinkedIn profiles, a summary of which can be found in Appendix II. For simplicity, interviewees are referred to as Respondent 1-9 (R1-R9).

ICA Sweden (1 interviewee)

An interview was held with one respondent (R1) from ICA since this person covered both communication and sustainability roles as Senior Sustainability Manager. Placed within the corporate responsibility department, this senior strategy role has a particular focus on communications. Having worked for the organisation for almost a year, the respondent is tasked with coordinating between corporate communications, external customer marketing, internal communications and investor relations. Previous to this position, she had worked for around 10 years as a Sustainability Communications Consultant, a role she describes as being a bridge between the sustainability and communication departments.

IKEA Food (3 interviewees)

Interviews were held with three people from IKEA Food. Initially, just two respondents were to be interviewed, one from communication and one from sustainability, but the first communications respondent suggested it would be useful to get insights from her colleague who was both communications and sustainability, so all three were included. The first (R2) is Global Marketing and Communication Manager at IKEA Food Services. She has worked for IKEA Food for almost five years and current responsibilities include creating messages and communication material for products and innovation, including sustainability aspects at a global level. The second interviewee (R3) is Communication Business Partner Sustainability at INGKA (one of the main franchisees of IKEA) and she previously worked as a Communication Specialist at IKEA Food. The third interview (R4) is Global Health & Sustainability Manager, Food at Inter IKEA Group. Her role is to focus on how the food business section of IKEA impacts health and sustainability and to connect with the three IKEA pillars for healthy and sustainable living; circular, positive and fair and equal. Having worked at IKEA food for nearly two years, the respondent had previously worked within sustainability for Nestlé's confectionery segment.

Kung Markatta (2 interviewees)

Two respondents were selected from KM, covering both the sustainability and communications/marketing departments. Both respondents are Midsona employees, and work across various brands within the organisation and have KM as one of their responsible brands. The first respondent (R5) has the title, Nordic Sustainability Coordinator, and has been working for Midsona for two years on tasks including carbon accounting and writing the sustainability reports, but also working with the brands on what they communicate about sustainability. One of her roles is to provide the marketing department with science-based information that they can then use in communications. The second respondent (R6) is Nordic Brand Manager, Organic Foods at Midsona, and works closely with KM on new product launches and communications strategy.

Oatly (1 interviewee)

One respondent (R7) was interviewed from Oatly, who due to her multifunctional role could provide both a sustainability and communications perspective. With the title of Sustainability Engagement Manager, her role is predominantly to keep sustainability on the agenda within the company and externally, empowering co-workers to make sustainability a core value in the organisation. She leads and coordinates sustainability training and engagement, works with HR to make it a key part of the company and is a sustainability spokesperson. Within this, one of her roles is to coordinate with the creative department, ensuring external communications are science and fact-based, whilst also being engaging. She has worked for the organisation for four years and was previously Sustainability Coordinator at one of Sweden's largest supermarket chains.

Saltå Kvarn (1 interviewee)

One respondent (R8) was selected from SK, who covered both the areas of sustainability and communications (although the role is mainly within sustainability, there was also integration with communications). She had the title of Environment, Sustainability and Business Development with responsibility for SK's overall environmental management strategy and had been working in this role for one and a half years. Previously she had worked in the sustainability department at Lantmännen, the Swedish cooperative of farmers. She mentioned that her role has always intersected with communications departments and she has acted as a go-between, providing them with information.

Independent (1 interviewee)

As well as the five case study companies, it was useful to seek insights from someone working in SC but without an attachment to a brand. In this way, this study could benefit from an impartial perspective of the industry. Respondent R9 was selected because of her knowledge of the subject and recent contributions to the industry perspective. She has worked as both an independent Sustainability Communications Strategist and in the same role for commercial communications agencies for several years. She recently wrote an article in Sweden's leading journal for the marketing and communications industry, Resumé, about how brands should approach SC (the findings of which are presented in the theoretical framework) and was a partner for the production of the 2021 Ecolabelling Sweden report on communication.

3.2.3 Communications material

To answer RQ2, it was also pertinent to examine existing SC from each of the case-study companies. This helped to put the insights from the practitioners gleaned during the interviews into an in-practice context, making it more tangible. It also offered the opportunity to either corroborate what the practitioners said or to identify other aspects evident in the SC.

The unit of sampling, unit of data collection and unit of analysis were identified, as necessary in content analytic research (Neuendorf, 2017). The unit of sampling was defined as communication campaigns, the unit of data collection was web content, apps, advertisements, social media and packaging content from the defined case study companies released in the last two years, and the unit of analysis was type of SC used as defined in the theoretical framework. Since consumer-level communications from companies can be numerous, using different platforms – websites, billboard, tv, social media, in-store and on packaging to name a few, a narrowing-down process helped obtain appropriate material. A non-probability purposive sampling approach (Neuendorf, 2017) allowed the interviewees from each of the case study companies to suggest an example of communications that in their view was “best-practice”. The interviewees were prompted by asking which campaigns exemplify their strategy towards SC, and/or which campaigns were most successful from a consumer perspective, in as much as they had high consumer acceptance or uptake. This could be based on existing data on consumer reaction or purchase if available.

Below follows a description of each of the communications materials collected, each of which were suggested by the interviewees as pertinent and successful (in their opinion) examples of their sustainability communications. Images of the communications examples (excluding web pages) can be found in Appendix III.

ICA Sweden – Mitt Klimatmål (My Climate Goal) app

In 2018 ICA launched an online app and service, Mitt Klimatmål (My Climate Goal). Customers who are ICA members can sign up for an additional online service where their food purchases are included in a total monthly calculation of CO₂ emissions. This figure is presented alongside the Swedish average monthly emissions from food purchases and the UNs recommendation.

Users of the service are then offered tips on how to reduce their climate footprint by swapping or reducing certain products. For the analysis, the app itself was used as well as the sign-up page for the app on the ICA website², which gives information about the app.

IKEA Food Services – Plant ball online campaign

In 2020 IKEA launched their plant ball, a meat-free alternative to their popular meatball. This product aims to actually reduce or convert sales of the meatball as a means to contribute to reduced climate emissions. For the analysis, the Swedish webpages relating to the launch of the product were used, as well as the online store page³.

Kung Markatta – Instagram posts

In the last year, KM has made a conscious decision to put more emphasis on sustainability, particularly in their social media channels. According to the interviewee (R6), they aim to make one or two of their 5 weekly posts about a sustainability issue. For the study, four months (16 weeks) of Instagram posts were analysed, extracting the posts that explicitly mention sustainability. Many of the posts mention “organic”, as this is one of the brand’s unique selling points, so this was excluded as a selection criterion as it would have produced too many results. From 72 posts over 16 weeks, 12 were deemed to be about sustainability specifically and were used in the analysis.

Oatly – Climate footprint declaration on packaging

In 2019 Oatly started to label some of their product range with a climate footprint declaration. It is printed on the packaging, either small text-based information on the back, or as a more prominent graphic element on the front. Further information is available on their website. They use a third-party organisation, CarbonCloud, to calculate for them. The declaration on the back of their iKaffe/Barista product, for example, reads:

“Climate footprint: 0.30 kg CO₂ per kg. Source: CarbonCloud”. (Oatly, 2021)

For this study, the carbon declaration itself, on the packaging, as well as the Oatly website page⁴ explaining the carbon footprint declaration are included in the analysis.

Saltå Kvarn – New packaging design

SK relaunched the packaging design of some of its products in 2021. For this a greater focus was put on health, taste and sustainability via text descriptions and graphic elements. For the analysis in this study the new packaging for their muesli was used.

3.3 Data Processing and Analysis

3.3.1 Interviews

The interview times ranged between 30 minutes and one hour, depending on the time made available by the interviewee. Where two people were interviewed from the same organisation the timing tended to be shorter per interview. A total of 9 interviews resulted in approximately 7 hours of recordings. The interviews were recorded using the conferencing platform function, prior consent having been obtained. Notes were taken during the interviews of keywords and

² <https://www.ica.se/appar-och-tjanster/klimatmal/> (accessed on 16 April 2021)

³ <https://www.ikea.com/se/sv/new/vaextbaserade-bullar-foer-dig-som-aelskar-koett-pub803db710> (accessed 16 April 2021), <https://www.ikea.com/se/sv/p/huvudroll-vaextbaserade-bullar-fryst-20483592/> (accessed 16 April 2021)

⁴ <https://www.oatly.com/int/climate-footprint> (accessed on 16 April 2021)

quotes to make searching and coding the transcripts easier at the next stage. The interview recordings were then uploaded to the online software, HappyScribe, and transcribed using the automatic transcribing function. The recordings and scripts were stored on this platform, which is protected by General Data Protection Regulation. The resulting scripts were then read through whilst listening to the audio and any errors generated during the automatic translation were corrected. Coding was performed using a *directed content analysis* approach whereby codes and categories that are derived from existing theory are used to analyse the material (Berg & Lune, 2012). In the case of this study, the transcripts were scanned for evidence or direct reference to the seven categories identified in the theoretical framework: *Reputation & Transparency, Education & Awareness, Social, Framing, Storytelling, Simplification* and *Technical*. The material was also read in such a way as to identify any other areas not identified in the theoretical framework, thus allowing for unintended results to emerge. The coding was performed using the highlighter and note-taking tools in the HappyScribe software. Once the codes were identified in the text, quotes were pulled out and filled into a spreadsheet under the relevant company/theoretical framework subject.

3.3.2 Communications material

The selected communications material was analysed using content analysis and coding. Content analysis involves the analysis and systematic examination and interpretation of materials to identify patterns and themes and derive meanings (Berg & Lune, 2012). The *directed content analysis* approach was also used for the material, using the theoretical framework categories as a guiding principle. Since the communications material is unlikely to use direct references to the categories in the framework, it was necessary to apply a *latent content analysis* approach. This way of examining content allows for a more interpretive rather than explicit, reading of the symbols and messages underlying the content and allows for a deeper structural meaning to become apparent (Berg & Lune, 2012). For example, it was unlikely that the communications material would make a direct reference to company reputation (one of the seven theoretical framework categories), but it could build on the company's historical sustainability work, which from the literature review is a way companies can bolster reputation. It can therefore be understood as symbolic elucidation of the reputation category. The communications examples selected were examined in their original form, for example online content, information on packaging, etc.

A coding scheme (Neuendorf, 2017) was developed using the same categories identified in the theoretical framework. These were further broken down into subcategories based on findings in the literature, to allow for a more detailed analysis. During the assessment of the communication material, the occurrence of each of the categories and subcategories were plotted in a table and notes were made about how they occurred. This is summarised in the Results & Analysis section of this paper.

During the analysis, results from the interviews and communication materials were also correlated with other fixed variables, such as company age or size, that were identified by the interviewees as pertinent to how they use communications.

4 Results and Analysis

The main aim of this study is to add to existing literature about SC that will enable practitioners in the food-product and related sectors, to successfully communicate their sustainability work and performance and in turn increase sustainable consumption. It aims to achieve this by filling the identified gap in the knowledge about the most up-to-date practices, techniques and trends for SC used by some of the leading practitioners in Sweden. This chapter outlines the findings from the five case studies conducted to achieve the aim and answer the research questions. Findings are drawn from interview data and content analysis of a piece of key communication material from each of the organisations. The findings are presented within the same theoretical framework structure identified in the Literature Review section of this paper, with findings that were found to be outside of the framework presented at the end.

4.1 Key Findings

4.1.1 Reputation & transparency

This part of the theoretical framework refers to how brands gain consumer trust and acceptance through SC. Interviewees were prompted with questions about the overall aims of their SC strategy and how they ensure credibility.

Image

For the ICA respondent, it was important to always return to the question of why you are communicating sustainability. Describing ICA's reasons, R1 explained it as being two-fold. One is to strengthen the brand; they need to be attractive to the consumer and SC helps this. She said that SC is a significant tool for engaging people in the brand and that her colleagues in the marketing department actively ask for sustainability material because, "*they know it engages people*" (R1). This she said, is more of a traditional communications approach. The second aspect is about meeting climate goals; ICA has a target of cutting the climate impact from the food they sell in half by 2030 and a key strategy is encouraging customers to buy more sustainable, lower-impact products:

"It's something we do to achieve our sustainability targets. We know that we cannot reach our target of lowering our climate impact if we don't get our consumers on board, so we're really dependent on communications to meet our sustainability targets." (R1)

However, it is difficult to achieve a balance between publishing sustainability material that ICA knows will engage consumers versus material about issues that are of most importance in addressing climate change but that might not engage consumers as much. Plastic was an example she gave of an issue that appeals to people; social media posts featuring this subject achieving massive engagement (R1). Other respondents mentioned this issue and talked about the practice many brands use of looking at trend reports to ascertain the areas consumers are most concerned with and tailoring their communications accordingly. However, this can often lead to communication about low-hanging-fruit topics that may not have the most impact, for example focusing on the impact of packaging and not of the production of the product itself, which may have a greater climate impact (R9, R7).

Describing Oatly's approach to communications in general, the respondent (R7) was keen to establish that they don't use a traditional marketing approach; they don't use KPIs or survey their customers to determine what they want. Rather they want to engage people in more "*disruptive*" ways that don't necessarily meet people's expectations. This is also their approach when it comes to SC; it's about challenging norms, starting conversations and taking a chance with strategies that others might avoid (R7). For example, she suggested the idea of

communicating that locally produced does not correspondingly mean better for the environment and lower emissions. This is something they've considered, but they know it will cause critique because it is so emotive; people have a more emotional connection to local food, so assume it is better sustainably (R7).

It is not just consumer trends that shape the approach brands take in their sustainability communications, events including extreme weather, or a scandal can influence what is relayed. For KM, who was at the time gearing their communications away from sustainability somewhat, the dry summer in Sweden in 2018 prompted a new strategy. Seeing that Swedish consumers were re-engaged with climate change after an extreme-weather event, they realised they needed to put sustainability higher on their communications agenda again (R5). For IKEA, a scandal over ingredients in their meatballs initiated a more concerted approach to both sustainability and health communications (R3).

Trustworthiness and transparency were cited by the IKEA interviewees as well as KM (R6) as strong drivers when it comes to SC in terms of creating change and protecting the brand:

“All IKEA communication is about transparency, being open and honest, not having all the answers yet, but also this layer of wanting to inspire others to take action, leading by example.” (R3)

“We are a huge, super-important and big brand when it comes to this (sustainability). So, of course, we want to be sure that what we say is true because otherwise if there was a gap it could damage our brand.” (R2)

The ICA interviewee cited the company's long-standing reputation and historical track record in sustainability as important. But not just their sustainability track record, also being a familiar, dependable and constant brand in the Swedish supermarket landscape helps:

“Being one of the largest actors in our sector and having worked with sustainability in a structured way for a very long time, it's not really an issue for us. People know who we are, they know that we are probably credible.” (R1).

Being a recognised brand is an advantage for achieving credibility within sustainability, she suggested, because consumers tend to think that the brands they know and like are more sustainable and this is particularly the case for local brands:

“Consumers looking at the Sustainable Brand Index, for example, Swedish brands are seen as more sustainable because they're closer to home and we like them more and we know them better, even if that's not necessarily true at all.” (R1)

Both the SK respondent (R8) and KM (R6) talked about how sustainability has been part of the company ethos from the beginning. This has afforded both brands a reputation of trustworthiness when it comes to sustainability and has meant that they are regarded as sustainable even if they do not communicate it as much as the other brands (R6). They also have a dedicated target group who have been there since the beginning and are there because they offer sustainable products (R8) (R6).

In terms of companies creating a strong brand image and standing out with their SC, and therefore securing their reputation, respondent R9 said companies need to be bold and daring. She said brands need to take *“big leaps in order to gain attention because now everyone is saying the same thing”* (R9). She identified both Oatly and SK as having achieved this brand image with their communications but in very different ways, Oatly taking a bold, humorous approach and SK a more grassroots, earnest approach that has a historical advantage. Most other brands, she

suggested are homogenous and don't stand out because they all say similar things. The KM interviewee (R6) mentioned that they need to be more daring in their SC to attract a younger audience, but she said, not quite as daring as Oatly for example.

Greenwashing or greenhushing

Many of the interviewees raised the issue of getting a balance between saying too much too soon about sustainability initiatives and not publishing information on consumer platforms. One of the IKEA respondents described this:

“Consumers only see a super small part of what's actually behind a whole topic.” (R2)

The respondents explained that IKEA is often careful in their communications because they don't want to over promise, and they aim to only publish information when there is enough substance in claiming the idea for it to be credible and not open to scrutiny (R2, R3). This was described as a problem because it can appear that the company is doing less than they are and competitors can appear more engaged if they are more vocal (R2). This is in contrast to what was said about the brand's ethos being rooted in transparency and leading the way even if they don't have all the answers.

Both SK and KM respondents said that only relatively recently have their brands actively engaged in communicating about sustainability, even though it has always been the backbone of the company. For SK, R8 said this wasn't out of fear but just because that wasn't how they did things; it wasn't part of the company culture, but there was a lot more going on behind the scenes than they talked about. She described this as *“the opposite of greenwashing”* (R8). For example, they were one of the first companies in Sweden to climate compensate, but this was not communicated at the time (R8).

The ICA interviewee also attributed their tendency to take their time communicating sustainability information to avoid a negative response, but said their size and market position also influence this:

“We tend to be quite conservative in not talking about things before we have something to show for it. So, there's a lot going on behind the scenes that we don't talk about because we're not quite there yet... Being very large and established you do become a little bit more conservative compared to if you're a challenger in the market or a smaller brand.” (R1)

One of the KM respondents (R5) suggested that they are also careful to avoid negative responses and often have to weigh the risk between transparency and disclosing information that could damage the brand:

“They (Kung Markatta) know that they do a lot of good things, but they don't know how to put it out there without greenwashing.” (R5)

Taking a different stance on this issue of keeping sustainability quiet, the Oatly respondent (R7) said they try to do the opposite and talk about initiatives even if they are not fully developed. She said that in general other brands are too afraid of being critiqued so they avoid talking about any sustainability solutions that are not infallible. She felt that this has the effect of slowing down progress and prevents important discussions from happening. She describes Oatly's take on this:

“You have to be open and vulnerable about what's not great... we have to have those conversations.” (R7)

Communications material

The fact that each of the brands are ranked in the SBI gives grounds to conclude that their communications have had a sustainability-image raising effect and their communications material can therefore be classified under reputation within the framework. For some this is more overt than others. Although low down in the webpage structure, IKEA talk about - *Working hard to fulfil our ambition to be climate positive by 2030* - voicing their commitment to sustainability. Oatly's decision to declare their climate footprint on their products is also a signal of their transparency and has the potential to elevate their reputation within sustainability. Both SK and KM use their historical brand image and commitment to organic farming to engage. For example, one KM Instagram post reads:

For us sustainability is more than just a trend. Considering the environment has been at the heart of everything we do and we've done that since we started in 1983 (Kung Markatta, 2021)

KM also use third-party endorsement to increase reputation, with three out of the 12 posts examined focusing on them being ranked number one in Differ's "Sweden's Most Green Brand" (another consumer-based sustainability index⁵).

4.1.2 Education & awareness

In the theoretical framework, the notion of educating consumers and raising awareness refers to communication of climate issues and the importance of our actions. Questions posed to the interviewees included whether awareness and education about climate change and biodiversity, issues were seen as important and the extent of their responsibility to inform consumers.

The responsibility of larger brands, when it comes to raising awareness and encouraging consumers to make more sustainable choices, was raised. According to one respondent, R9, this is because they have the capacity to reach the most people and this is particularly the case for Sweden, where the market is dominated by a few large brands. This was stressed by the IKEA respondents, who conveyed that as a large global brand, IKEA has the opportunity to make a significant impact when it comes to changing people's behaviour and that they can do more than perhaps a smaller local brand can (R2, R3).

It was also stated that companies should educate around sustainability, but that they have to do it in a way that doesn't condescend or sound "*preachy*" (R4). The ICA respondent concurred, explaining that they raise awareness about specific subjects, like the use of plastics, through Q&As on social media and short films with experts answering questions, but that they need to be careful not to tell customers what to do:

"Telling our customers what they should and should not eat, that's not something that's a viable option for what we want to do, and most consumers don't respond well to that." (R1)

However, most customers do know that they should make more sustainable choices, but not how:

"I think most consumers out there have this awareness...They know they should be trying to live a more sustainable life, but what they really struggle with is how when you're still constantly being presented with all of these choices that will take you in the opposite direction" (R4).

⁵ <https://www.differ.se/sveriges-gronaste-varumärke/> (accessed 23 April 2021)

Education and awareness were also related, by the ICA respondent, to the fact that they need to reach their climate goals so making consumers aware of their purchasing habits and the impact they have is important. This is predominately done through the Mitt Klimatmål app.

Within the topic of using SC to raise awareness about climate issues as well as increasing sales, the Oatly respondent said that is about 95% of the reason why they do it:

“It's about creating impact in society... when we do our packaging or social media, we don't think - OK, how can we make people think that we are good at sustainability. We are thinking - how can we engage people in this subject that we are very passionate about?” (R7)

Apart from engaging and creating awareness amongst consumers, one of the main target groups for Oatly's communications is the food industry itself. Since they are a relatively small company, they can't make a big impact on their own, but their ambition is to galvanize the industry to reduce impacts more widely (R7):

“We're interested in engaging people in the food industry, which we think is massively important if we're going to face some of our biggest challenges... In order to create positive impact, it's not about what we do, Oatly is a super small company, we need to create a movement.” (R7)

In this regard, Oatly recently launched a campaign where they specifically asked on billboard posters and other media “Hey food industry, show us your numbers”. This was a direct call to the food industry to also show their climate footprint data so that consumers have something to compare Oatly's numbers against.

Communications material

From the communications material examined, aspects of each of the brand's material can be classified as raising awareness and educating consumers about sustainability issues. One of the KM Instagram posts, for example, describes the impact of organic farming on biodiversity and insect populations. ICA's Mitt Klimatmål app is another example, where consumers are given feedback on the impact of their purchases and ideas of how to reduce their emissions. The accompanying web pages also mention how food has an impact on the climate:

Many of us are worried about climate change and know that food has a huge impact (ICA.se, n.d.)

IKEA put other values such as taste and price above the sustainability message (this will be explored further in section 4.1.6), but on the product webpage for the plant ball there is a section about the energy and resource use for the product that reads:

We want to inspire more people to eat more plant-based food. Why? Because it usually requires less water, less land and less energy to produce it – and is, therefore a more sustainable alternative (IKEA.se, n.d.)

While the small CO₂ declaration on Oatly's packaging might not give much information, for those customers who take a step further and read about it on the company's website there are details about why we need to think about emissions and how they calculate them, usually in a humorous, light-hearted tone. For example:

“Food consumption accounts for a quarter of the planet's greenhouse gas emissions. So, as you've heard a bajillion times, any changes we humans can generate in this area will absolutely make a huge difference” (Oatly.com, n.d.)

SK also use their packaging as a way to educate consumers about the importance of organic farming for soil health, part of the text on the muesli packaging states:

When you choose Saltå Kvarn's organic muesli, you help to support our Swedish organic farmers – and contribute to agriculture that is more environmentally friendly (Saltå Kvarn, 2021)

On this recent decision to communicate more about sustainability directly on the consumer packaging, the SK respondent said:

“We wanted to communicate something that would give the consumer a feeling of what they are contributing to when they buy this product.” (R8)

4.1.3 Social

In the framework, this section refers to how communications can be relayed in the context of a social group, rather than to the individual and leveraging the influence of family, friends, colleagues or neighbours. Use of norms is also discussed. Respondents were prompted with questions about strategies in this area and the importance of normalising sustainable behaviour and whether social influence is used.

Normalisation

Norm messaging was mentioned in relation to the promotion of plant-based food products. For IKEA, they know the majority of their consumers are meat-eaters, so the challenge was to get some of this large consumer group to switch to non-meat options. They tested the use of norms as a way to encourage people to choose more plant-based foods and found that using the word “vegan”, or even “vegetarian” was a deterrent for some people because of its associations with a specific group and “unconventional” behaviour. By using the term plant-based or “flexitarian” they could convert more people away from choosing meat (R3). This is particularly the case in markets where movements such as veganism are still small. According to one respondent this can be done in a really simple way, for example you can say:

“More and more people try plant-based alternatives - and then you feel like, OK, I'm more and more people.” (R2)

Respondent R9 argued a similar case, saying that the trouble with the term vegan, and even vegetarian, is that people view that segment in a certain way that they don't necessarily associate themselves with, so using a more relatable term makes people more open to the product.

Communications material

In the content analysis, norms messaging was evident in the IKEA plant-ball web pages with the absence of the term “vegan”. In the ICA Mitt Klimatmål app, users are shown their emissions from ICA purchases alongside both the UN target for 2030 for individuals (44kg) and the Swedish average (158kg). This is a way to inspire people to be more like the UN target and actually less like the norm.

4.1.4 Framing

Framing is discussed in the theory as the angle communications take, and whether they frame messages in a particular way such as loss or gain and intrinsic or extrinsic values. Interviewees were asked if they consider these strategies in their communications, which is the most common and which is not used.

Loss or gain

The emotional connection people have to food was raised (R7, R2), and the fact that people make their food purchase decisions based on emotions, which are not necessarily based on facts or science or what is better for the environment. IKEA, R2, mentioned that this emotional connection differentiates how you communicate about food compared to furniture, for example.

The SK interviewee said that they wanted to use uplifting and positive messages because people want to feel good and that they are buying items that have a positive impact. They also take a more emotional approach in their tone and one that is inclusive and understandable to many people and therefore not overly intellectual or technical (R8).

Point-of-reference

One framing approach is to connect sustainability to a more intrinsic value in order to make it more accepted. For example, both the ICA and IKEA interviewees (R1, R4) explained that it is important to connect sustainability with health, a relatable and valued attribute when it comes to food:

“They're (consumers) looking first at their own health and then secondarily at the health of the planet.” (R4)

According to another respondent, health makes consumers more prone to act because climate messages can cause indifference and a feeling that it is too hard to make a difference as an individual. Further, the feeling of “doom” associated with climate-related messages can make people feel helpless (R9). She also felt that focusing on the health aspect can help reach wider audiences, as the climate or animal rights concerned consumers are already choosing the vegetarian options, for example, so health can be a way to capture other, wider target groups. She referred to one advertising campaign that took just this approach to move people towards choosing more organic products using the health frame. The campaign, from 2016, was from the Swedish supermarket chain, Coop, and featured an “*experiment*” where a family switched exclusively to organic foods and the claim was that chemicals in their bodies decreased as a result⁶.

For SK the approach is not to deflect from sustainability with intrinsic values but to focus on extrinsic values and what you contribute to environmentally and socially by purchasing their products. The interviewee described this as sharing their core values and creating a connection with the consumer:

“If you (the consumer) share our values and beliefs, this is how you can contribute to a change.” (R8)

Communication material

The ICA Mitt Klimatmål app can be seen as taking a promotion/gain frame with headlines such as *Together we can make a difference* on the associated webpage. It combines this with an extrinsic point-of-reference where the consumer is encouraged to think about their contribution to the planet - *By changing the food you buy you lower your impact on the climate* (ICA.se, n.d.).

⁶ The Swedish Patent- och marknadsdomstolens (Patent and Market Court) ruled that this campaign and its associated claims violated the Marketing Act because they were inflated and did not use a large enough sample group, so they were forced to withdraw all material (Svenska Dagbladet, 2017).

KM's social media posts use a mostly promotional frame with phrases like, *Thanks for choosing a sustainable alternative, together we can make a difference* (Kung Markatta, 2021). This is coupled with mostly an extrinsic point of reference with relation to biodiversity and a more sustainable world.

Oatly takes an extrinsic point of reference, with their use of the climate footprint, however, if taken in the context of the rest of the information on their packaging the declaration is very small while other factors, such as taste, and the use of humour are much more prominent.

The IKEA plant-ball communications focus more on intrinsic values, such as taste and price rather than the climate impact and although the climate reduction of choosing the plant version over the meat version is mentioned, it doesn't explicitly say what this will lead to.

SK also combine an extrinsic point of reference with a promotional frame in their packaging text, with a reference to contributing to a secure future for generations as well as a positive impact on soil, pollinators, farmers, biodiversity and so on.

4.1.5 Storytelling

Using creativity as a way to engage more consumers in sustainability and communicate complex issues was something the ICA respondent pointed to as an area needing improvement and that could take inspiration from traditional marketing techniques:

"If you want people to like your brand based on sustainability, you need to do the same thing that you do in other types of communications. You need to be engaging." (R1)

She suggested that one approach to this is storytelling and creating a connection between consumer and producer by communicating where the product has come from and the individuals who have produced it. This not only guarantees traceability, she said, but also creates an emotional connection to the people who produced the product. However, she also noted that an issue with this kind of communication, particularly on packaging, is that most consumers don't have the time to digest so much information:

"Do I have time when I go for my weekly shop to look at everything that I buy to see who grew it? Or do I just want to buy coffee?" (R1).

Communication material

The packaging for some of SK's best-selling products, including muesli, has recently been redesigned to include a section of text that covers circa one-third of the space on the back of the package that is devoted to sustainability. There has been a conscious decision in the re-branding of their packaging to take a storytelling approach and in doing so they believe, unlike ICA, that people do want this added information when making purchase decisions. This, the respondent explained is a way to avoid the tendency for sustainability information to become overly complex and technical and hard for the consumer to understand (R8). Their approach is to tell a story about the producers and in turn what you as a consumer are contributing to by buying the product. None of the other communications examined used this technique. The information delivered is in parts quite advanced, they mention on the packaging text for example that, *nitrogen-fixing plants are grown, which naturally add nutrients to the soil* (Saltå Kvarn, 2021).

4.1.6 Simplification

The framework refers to the importance of keeping SC simple by making choices easier, making information more relatable or tapping into salient values. Questions posed to the respondents included how they make complex sustainability issues understandable to consumers.

Nudging

Nudging approaches were raised as an effective form of SC. For ICA, nudging is a way to subtly indicate that something is sustainable, for example, they use a green-leaf symbol on recipes available on their website to indicate the sustainability of the ingredients. On this, the interviewee commented that the information is just there, it's not overtly about sustainability and isn't in a special sustainability section that users have to deliberately seek out.

Respondent R9 also stressed that it is vital not to separate sustainable products from other products in speciality sections, as that means consumers have to make a conscious effort to choose them and they are made less "normal". Instead, they should be part of the general product offering, with vegetarian options placed together with meat options, for example, so they are seen in the same way as other products.

Tangibility

For the ICA interviewee, to engage consumers and increase sustainable consumption, the respondent was confident that simplification is key:

"...we need to dare to simplify things and to not always tell the whole story." (R1)

She said that this can be a challenge for environmental specialists as they want to be informative about the whole picture. She said it's ok to know the whole story and be confident that behind the scenes there is a solid sustainability framework, but that this information is not suitable for everyone and won't help to get people to make a purchase decision:

"...not everyone will be interested in the full story or understand it, so it's fine to be a bit more brief in communications." (R1)

She also said she sees things needing to go a similar way of the Coop spider diagram (see Literature review chapter), where a balance is found between communicating complex information in a way that is easy to digest.

One IKEA respondent had a similar take, and discussed the need to simplify SC in the context of information provided at the point of purchase:

"I think when it comes to direct communication towards customers in direct commercial communication, you can't go too deep into the complex issues because people are not in the mindset or don't have the prerequisites to understand them." (R2)

She also said that more detailed or technical information might not be right for consumers, but can be communicated to other stakeholders:

"We know there are groups that need more (information) like the NGOs and the media" (R2) and *"We know that the media are more interested in the materials that we use and the innovation and the collaborations."* (R2)

Eco-labelling and certifications were cited as a way to reduce complexity in communications on product packaging:

"Through certifications we can create certainty, or we can make people feel that we have checked it for you." (R2)

Eco-labelling was further flagged as important, particularly for the food industry, as a way to encourage sustainable choices, because labelling is well established, recognised and trusted in this sector, so people make purchase decisions according to them (R1). However, for SK,

ecolabels were not enough to communicate the added value the consumer can contribute to when they buy a product (R8). Although labelling has a role to play, the respondent felt they needed to go beyond just using an eco-label and opt for a more informative approach. The customers, she said, want to know what the value is for them when buying a product and what values they are contributing to. The communication of these added values is also a way to differentiate and to persuade consumers to choose the product over others on the shelf, even if it might come at a higher price (R8). KM had a similar take on not relying on labels, but rather than adding more information their approach was to simplify and make their packaging cleaner and easier to understand. They took this approach after performing a consumer survey where they found that they could tap into a younger target group interested in products that are more aesthetic and stylish. They made the decision then to put the eco-labels on the back of the packaging as they realised this information was secondary to a target group interested in aesthetics. However, the shift in interests caused by the hot Swedish summer in 2018, as discussed earlier, reversed this decision.

Other consumer values – avoiding the green-marketing myopia

The need to engage a non-sustainability focused target group came up. Communicating sustainability to a dedicated group that are already interested in sustainability is “*easy*” because they are willing to dedicate time to understanding the complexity of the issues but finding ways to reach a wider audience is crucial for real change (R1). This was described as going from “*from niche to mainstream*” (R7).

The importance of understanding the target group and their particular context was cited as key to tapping into larger audiences and persuading them to change their behaviour:

“The bigger value is to target the bigger audience, but then you also have to adapt your message to that group and understand the triggers of that group.” (R2)

Further, the need to highlight values closer to and of greater direct benefit to the consumer, like price, as well as or instead of sustainability, was mentioned as a way to capture different audiences:

“There will always be other things than sustainability that will be important for the consumer and they will almost always choose price before sustainability.” (R9)

This approach came up in all three of the IKEA interviews. In the example of communication around the plant ball, the sustainability message is there at a secondary level to other messages:

“We had a layer of, what's the number one message? That's the taste and that it looks and feels like the meatball. And then it (sustainability) was like second or third - OK, and by the way, it only has four per cent of the climate footprint of the regular meatball.” (R3)

This was concurred by R2 who said:

“When I started (at IKEA) four or five years ago, we were talking about needing to categorise it as vegetarian/vegan, but we've moved away from that now. The best way to change behaviour is to not do that, it's the taste that makes it appealing.” (R2)

One of the interviewees suggested that marketing and communication need to stop being so “*overt*” with sustainability messages and even consider avoiding talking about sustainability claims altogether:

“It might just be not talking at all about sustainability or health claims and just talk about how luxurious and indulgent and decadent it is, rather than trying to focus on one particular attribute, which is not what consumers make their choice based on.” (R4)

One respondent also pointed to the fact that many consumers will assume that a product is not as high quality if it is marketed as environmentally sound, so sustainability should be made less prominent (R9).

For SK, there have been consequences of their current focus on the environment in their communications strategy. According to the respondent, they rate high with consumers on environmental issues, but not as high on other values like taste and health, and those were values they felt they needed to lift because when it comes to food those are the core determinants for choice (R8). However, since their products are in a higher-price range, it was felt that sustainability was a way to differentiate and show what values you get if you buy the product. KM (R6) mentioned that they never talk about price in their communications.

Communications material

As well as IKEA putting taste and price higher in their communications hierarchy for the plant ball, SK made taste and health values a similar priority on their packaging. While Oatly includes the climate footprint, it is at a more discreet level than the rest of the communications on their packaging that are not sustainability related.

Since only 12 out of 72 of KM’s Instagram posts in the last four months were sustainability related, it can also be concluded that they put a higher importance on things like taste, quality and inspiration, which is covered in the other posts. In the 12 posts analysed, sustainability is married with other values. For example, one post (from 19th April 2021) lists many of the sustainability initiatives they work with, from transport to packaging and then says that none of this matters if the products don't taste good and that KM makes a difference by creating high-quality products.

4.1.7 Technical

From the framework digitisation and technology are seen as having an increasingly important role in communications, while the role of technical and complex information is disputed. The interviewees were asked about their approach to complex information from LCAs and materiality analysis and if and how it should be communicated to consumers, as well as their thoughts on trends in the digital realm.

Digitalisation

In terms of digitalisation becoming a bigger part of SC, ICA’s R1 mentioned that she anticipated a greater use of consumer data collected on purchase behaviour to encourage people to choose green products:

“We obviously have a lot of customer data, we know what people buy, how often they buy it. We have a really good insight into their consumption patterns. How can we use that data to nudge people in a more sustainable direction?” (R1)

She also suggested that the e-commerce sector had a significant potential to increase sustainable consumption. She pointed to research that suggests people make more sustainable choices when they buy online compared to in a physical store. They are, for example, more likely to opt for eco-labelled products when buying online, which has a huge potential for behaviour change as the e-commerce sector will only get bigger (R1).

Facts & figures

R1 mentioned that there has been a trend in the last few years for brands to talk about carbon neutrality, but her concern was that consumers don't really understand what it means and have no way of comparing such claims against each other. In terms of communicating aspects of materiality analysis and LCA data at a consumer level, she was encouraging and had high hopes for the example set by the Coop spider diagram. However, she stressed the importance of alignment in the industry on what is meant by different terms and calculations so that it is easier for consumers to make sense of the data and compare against other products. This need for a global framework for communicating the climate impact of products was echoed by the IKEA respondent:

“It's hard if you don't have a comparison that's true for the globe, it's almost impossible to communicate a specific climate footprint and also to bring it down to consumer language level...we are very much struggling in that.”
(R2)

One IKEA respondent suggested that communicating aspects of materiality analysis or LCA data was not useful and that it could potentially alienate consumers (R4). Further, R4 said that such technical or data-based information is not understandable to the consumer so can lead to “*decision fatigue*” (R4) whereby the consumer stops being able to follow or comprehend the information presented to them due to quantity and complexity. She felt that the expectation for that sort of information to create behavioural change was too high. There was also a suggestion that using carbon footprinting as a communication strategy has a high potential for greenwashing since it is easily misunderstood (R5). Another take on this was given concerning providing a calculation of how much lower the climate impact of one product is compared to another. For IKEA this direct comparison is done for their plant-ball product where it is stated that it has 4 per cent of the climate impact of the meatball. In this way, the information is easier to understand because of the comparison (R2)⁷. It was also said that it perhaps doesn't matter if the consumer understands the numbers, but the fact that they are there indicates a level of transparency and that the brand is aware and active in this area, thus leading to greater trust (R2).

The KM interviewee (R5) explained that although they perform carbon footprint analysis on many of their products, they are not ready to communicate it to consumers. Again, she said that once there is a global, or EU aligned framework to calculate emissions they would be more likely to use this in consumer communications, because then it would be a “*fair competition*” (R5). She also pointed to complications or sudden changes in the supply chain that can influence and invalidate the data and if it is already printed on labels, they would then be giving false information. She also expressed that it could be damaging to the brand if, for example, their published emissions turned out to be higher than the cheaper supermarket private-label brands.

Oatly is one of the few brands that has chosen to print the climate footprint of some of their products on the packaging for selected markets. The interviewee explained that calculating the climate footprint started as an internal exercise to test and understand the climate impact of their products and to educate the internal team. The creative department then saw this as an opportunity and suggested it would also be interesting for consumers (R7). The reaction to the climate footprint declaration has been one of provocation, mostly because it is a complex subject that Oatly is tackling without necessarily having all the answers. They therefore receive criticism for it not being a complete solution (R7). The interviewee concurred with what other

⁷ It is noted that under upcoming EU legislation, (Amendment 171) this type of comparison may only be able to be used to compare products within the same company, since comparison of plant-based products with meat or dairy may not be permitted (Oatly.com, n.d.).

respondents suggested, that it is vital going forward that there is a universal approach or framework to climate footprint declarations. However, she was clear that not having the perfect solution yet should not be a reason to refrain from communicating these aspects. To this point she said:

“If not us, who? If not now, when?” (R7)

She continued:

“I think that's why perhaps people find this very provocative, because we talk about something that is very complicated and we don't have all the solutions. We just want to create conversations.” (R7)

Respondent R9 felt that a lot of SC focuses on “*symbolic*” acts to signal that a company is doing sustainability work, but if marketing departments could find ways to communicate the information from their sustainability reports at a consumer level, they would be delivering more relevant and impactful information. Companies need to start communicating information that is relevant to their strategy and business approach (R9). Giving as an example the strategy used by Swedish fast-food chain, MAX, to disclose the CO₂ emissions on their menus, the respondent suggested that this was a good brand-building exercise as it signalled their concern with environmental issues. She was, however, doubtful about the extent to which consumers understood the numbers. One way to address this, she said, is to put the numbers in context, for example using science-based targets and comparing them to the Paris Agreement targets. This is something that is done in the ICA Mitt Klimatmål app, where a personal climate footprint is compared with the UN 2030 target. She also said that showing the numbers is one thing, but what’s more significant is to show how you are going to reduce them.

For SK communicating technical data to their consumers was not in their scope. The interviewee discussed the process of creating the new packaging texts, saying an early version was much more technical, but they felt that no one would understand it so went with a softer tone (R8).

Communications material

From the communications material examined the use of materiality analysis is clearly seen in the ICA Mitt Klimatmål app as well as Oatly’s climate declaration. IKEA use a percentage to show the reduced climate footprint of choosing one product over another, but it is not a part of the headline communications. ICA had one of the only communications materials that uses digitalization techniques to disseminate sustainability information, through the use of an app.

4.1.8 Additional findings

During the interviews, some findings related to the research questions, but that didn’t necessarily fit within the theoretical framework. There are presented here.

Some findings came out of a discussion with the interviewees about their roles. There was a description by a number of them (R1, R7, R8 and R9) about their function being a “bridge” that connects the business areas of sustainability and communications.

Several of the participants talked about the need to tailor sustainability messages to the platform it is being published on, and that the platform influences the strategy (R1, R2, R9). This was described as the need to think about not just what you communicate but where you communicate it. For example, the ICA interviewee said that they tend to talk a lot more about sustainability in their social media channels, where they can break the information down and

explain it, compared to advertising (billboards, tv, etc), which is positioned further away from the brand (R1).

The role government and policy makers have in shaping sustainability communications was mentioned (R4). This has both positive and negative impacts on the ability of brands to effect behavioural change. For example, having clearer regulations and penalties around greenwashing can help prevent misinformation. Whereas legislation such as the EU Amendment 171, which could prohibit the use of words like “milk” and “cheese” for non-dairy alternatives, could hinder an increase in plant-based consumption.

The question of which stakeholders drive sustainability communications was mentioned. While consumers are a key driver, the company’s investors are perhaps even more important (R1, R5). They are the ones who are pushing for a target-based sustainability strategy and transparency (R5). This stakeholder group asks the “*difficult questions*”, which means communications have to be correct and ensures they conform to environmental rules and regulations (R1). This then can be seen as having the potential to trickle down to what is communicated at a consumer level.

4.2 Results and analysis in Summary

The interviews produced a rich set of findings within all of the theoretical framework categories. Some of the categories were more prolific in results and provided greater traction with the interviewees - Reputation & Transparency, Education & Awareness, Simplification and the facts and figures part of the Technical section. Others, Social and Storytelling, had less content. Framing had considerable input, but a lot of the insights were related to intrinsic values that could be considered under Simplification and tapping into other values. The communications material, provided a useful complement to the interview data, giving both new findings and providing evidence for some of the interview findings. Table 4-1 provides an overview of the communications material findings, where each campaign is assessed according to the theoretical framework themes. This shows similar findings to the interviews, where the emphasis is on Reputation & Transparency, Education & Awareness and Simplification. Framing is evident in the material, with each of the campaigns being able to be put into a framing category, though this was not very relevant during the interviews.

Table 4-2 provides a summarised version of the sustainability communications approach taken by each of the five case study organisations gleaned during the interviews and from the communications materials. This is presented alongside other variables that could have a bearing on the nature of the communications strategy, which were alluded to by the interviewees.

Table 4-1. Communications material content analysis results

	ICA - Mitt Klimatmål app	IKEA Food - Plant ball online campaign	KM – Instagram posts	Oatly - Climate footprint declaration	SK - New packaging design
Reputation & Transparency					
Image	X	X	X	X	X
Greenwash/greenhush					
Education & Awareness					
Environmental issue raised	X		X	X	X
Social					
Normalisation	X	X			
Framing					
Gain/promotion frame	X		X		X
Loss/prevention frame					
Extrinsic point of reference	X		X	X	X
Intrinsic point of reference		X			
Storytelling					X
Simplification					
Nudging					
Tangibility					X
Other consumer values		X	X	X	X
Technical					
Digitization					
Facts & figures	X			X	

Table 4-2. Summary of case study sustainability communications strategy from communications material and interviews, shown with other variables.

	ICA	IKEA Food	Kung Markatta	Oatly	Saltå Kvarn
Target group	General	General	Eco conscious	Vegan / trend aware	Eco conscious
SME / Large	Large	Large (IKEA entire)	Large	Medium	Small
Date founded	1938	1943	1983	1994	1964
Product	Various foods	Various Swedish foods	Various organic plant-based foods	Plant-based dairy alternatives	Divers organic plant-based foods
Summary from interviews	Audience too wide /generalist for them to be provocateurs so they use nudging and signals to coax people towards sustainable choices. More happens behind the scenes than is communicated and that is necessary for the target group.	More going on behind the scenes than communicated. The target audience is interested in sustainability, but for the majority other values are more important and talking about these is a way to increase sustainable consumption.	They have a well-established customer following who know they stand for sustainability. Slight fear of saying too much and losing this reputation. Organic is the key driver; other values are important though not price. Sustainability is on the way up in their strategy hierarchy due to new audiences.	Don't approach their communications in a traditional way, interested in being change makers and provocateurs. They are focused on shifting the industry as much as they are consumer choices.	Core following of customers who are there because of their reputation, they were there from the beginning. More focus on sustainability is needed in their communications now due to new audiences, Important to talk about values and what the customer is contributing to environmentally when they buy a product.
Summary from content analysis	The app gives information about environmental issues and gives actions about how to reduce personal impact. This is sustainability focused but not assumed that it will be taken up by the majority of customers.	Environmental implications are stated (reduced emissions compared to the meatball) but other values are highlighted, specifically taste and price.	Just 16% of the posts in the last 4 months are about sustainability, pointing to other values (mostly taste and quality, product range, etc) being more important. However, the sustainability posts discuss issues like what organic farming contributes to, biodiversity, etc. Educational in tone.	Very fact based and minimal sustainability info on the packaging in the form of the climate footprint. Sometimes this is combined with other info on the packaging but mostly non-sustainability related info. Much more detailed information on the website about how the footprint is calculated, what it means, why it is important, etc.	Large part of the packaging text taken up with the sustainability story, focus on the farmers, biodiversity, organic principles, etc. Quite complex information told in a storytelling format. Focus on the positive impacts on the planet when you buy the product.

5 Discussion

5.1 Reflection on the Findings

This section will examine the findings presented in the previous chapter within the context of the existing research and literature and as a way to answer the research questions. RQ1 was answered through the interviews, which provided direct dialogue with practitioners and enabled insight into the process behind their communications. The findings gave a view of the bigger picture; what the companies are trying to achieve, their strategies, what they would like to do better and what challenges they face. RQ2 was focused on key examples of the case study companies' communications, giving an insight into how ambition matches implementation. It also allows for additional understanding of what is achieved in the communications that might not have emerged during the interviews.

RQ 1 - What strategies are applied and challenges faced by leaders in consumer-focused sustainability communications in the food-product sector?

Two differing approaches emerged from the findings about the reasons SC is needed; boosting company reputation and creating actual change to meet climate targets. These could be seen as drivers that can and should work in symbiosis – the company becomes more attractive by communicating their sustainability initiatives, more consumers choose their products and a greater shift to sustainable consumption is achieved. The fact that most of the case study companies use consumer trends and interests (which may not be the most crucial issues at hand) as indicators of what they should communicate, could help to attract consumers. However, it could have the potential to lead consumers to focus on areas that have less impact on mitigating climate change and environmental degradation. One insight was that to remain on course in your sustainability communications you need to keep reminding yourself why you are doing it. For the case study companies, the aim was consistently to reach climate goals and decrease their environmental impact, as was the finding for most companies from Ecolabeling Sweden (2021). However, just talking about that may not be the most effective way to steer behavioural change.

Another tension point was between saying too much about sustainability and saying too little. Four out of the five brands mentioned holding back information about sustainability for various reasons; one was because they are fearful that saying too much might highlight bad sustainability in the company, a notion that was raised in the literature by Evans, (in Coburn, 2019). Further, a determining factor was that brands don't want to over promise on sustainability development and because company size and reputation can lead to conservatism. The downplaying of sustainability is in some cases an intentional strategy to increase sustainable consumption. In this way, greater visibility is given to values considered more important to the consumer in the purchase decision process. This idea is echoed in the literature by the avoidance of the “green-marketing myopia” (Ottman et al. 2006, in Lim, 2016). However, this is counter to calls from policy makers, such as in the EU *Farm to Fork* strategy and the *Green Consumption Pledge Initiative*, both of which highlight the need for clearer information about sustainability so consumers can make greener choices. It is also counter to the issue raised by both SK and KM, that to attract new, younger consumers they need to raise sustainability in their communications hierarchy. From these differing findings, it is clear a balance should be met between defining what and if other salient values are of interest to the brand's consumer group and complementing these values with sustainability information.

The literature pointed to giving third parties, like politicians and journalists specific information and not channelling it directly to the consumer (Morsing et al., 2008). This was not highlighted as a strategy in the interviews, only from IKEA who said they provide the media with quite

different information to consumers. Here the media can be seen as a filter for information, which they then relay to consumers. For Oatly, there is a hierarchy to creating change, with a focus on changing the industry first, which in turn gives the consumer a greater ability to make green choices. This is similar to what in the literature, Kemper & Ballantine (2019) called *Transformative Sustainability Marketing*, where actors aim to shift social and political institutions to increase sustainable consumption. Oatly has, as well as campaigning other food companies to disclose their climate footprint, lobbied the European parliament regarding Amendment 171, which would pose restrictions on what plant-based products can claim.

The notion of “social” as raised in the framework, was not a prominent factor in the interviews. There was no mention of using peer influence (White & Habib, 2018), (Stafford and Graul, 2020) (Stoknes, 2014) and the idea of galvanising consumers through collective rather than individual action (Brulle, 2010) was not prominent. There was also no mention of using social media influencers during the interviews. However, the idea of normalisation was raised by one of the case study companies and the independent interviewee in regard to specific terms, such as plant-based versus vegan used to name or label products. The suggestion is that sustainability needs to be normalised and associated with accepted behaviours to be taken up by a larger audience. This strategy is also in line with the idea of the green-marketing myopia and could be applied more generally within the food and other sectors when considering the naming of products and moving away from terms that have particular connotations with “other” behaviour as opposed to the norm.

The interviews revealed a push and pull between making information technical and keeping it simple. While on the one hand Oatly is trailblazing in their footprinting approach, the other brands are cautious and sceptical of this both in terms of its potential to confuse the consumer and for the possibility for it to be misconstrued. The approach of making complex information easy to understand and more digestible through storytelling, was suggested in the literature (Lindberg, 2021) (Stoknes, 2014), but is only seen in the SK packaging text. There was a consensus, however, that there needs to be an integrated and global framework for calculating the climate impact of food products before brands can fully consider using it, something found in the literature from Gadema & Oglethorpe (2011) and Rööös & Tjärnemo (2011). Perhaps, though, this will only become possible and available through ground-breaking brands paving the way, testing it and pushing the industry to change.

One area in which the reviewed literature did not elucidate was the role of the sustainability communications professional and how this is currently placed in organizations. The interviews shed light on this through the first, warm-up question asked of all the respondents – *can you tell me about your role?* It was clear that a need has been identified for a direct line of dialogue and collaboration between those responsible for sustainability and communications. Certainly, the communications responsible needs input from the sustainability professionals about *what* to communicate, and vice versa, sustainability needs the expertise of the communications department on *how* to communicate it. However, it was also clear that when there is a role that combines the two functions in one, a bridge is formed that connects the two sections. This was seen with R1, whose role as Senior Sustainability Manager had a focus on SC, which she also had background experience in. Respondent R7 also had an integrated role of advocating and mediating sustainability information across the organization and its stakeholders. This cohesive role of the sustainability communicator is something that will perhaps become a greater necessity within organisations as the need to establish brand approach to SC becomes ever more pressing.

The answer to RQ1 then, can be summarised as the following. Key to SC strategy is finding the right balance in SC between subjects and values that cater to consumer interests and what will

cause the greatest sustainable consumption and most impact for climate change mitigation. To establish this, communications professionals return to the question of why they need to use SC; what is the goal? It is also determined by what type of brand they are - size, target group, history and so on. The challenges lie in knowing what will work for a particular brand, being able to hold back information where necessary, or conversely, knowing when it will be beneficial to be a challenger.

RQ 2 - What can be learned from key examples of sustainability communications in the food-product sector about how brands encourage consumers to choose sustainable products?

All of the brands' communication material qualified, according to the framework, under the scope of *reputation*. Although several of the interviewees mentioned catering to consumer interests, particularly around subjects like packaging and plastics, this was not overtly evident in the material itself. In fact, issues like biodiversity and climate change were more evident in most cases. However, these issues were not raised in isolation, but with an action-orientated message to encourage people to change their behaviour. This is in line with Klöckner's (2015) thoughts on norm-activation theory, whereby first an issue is raised and then a course of action is suggested. SK makes this explicit on their packaging, by stating the link between a positive impact on the planet and buying their products. This technique is seen most clearly in the ICA app, where customers are first made aware of their climate impact and then ways to reduce it are suggested. This is also an example of using goal setting as a means to encourage consumers to change behaviour, or what Cox & Pezzullo (2018) describe as the use of gamification.

A majority of the communications material subscribed to the role of decreasing the climate impact of the company and product and not just being about boosting company reputation, in line with the findings from Ecolabelling Sweden (2021) and Belz & Peattie (2012). For example, the interviewees explained that IKEA's plant-balls are pointedly aimed at reducing, or replacing, sales of their higher-impact counterpart, the original meatball. The communications aim to achieve this by relaying both the comparable taste of the plant-ball and the reduced climate impact. For ICA, the app was explained to be a concrete strategy to meet their climate goals. However, because users need to actively sign-up to use it, it could potentially only be used by a sustainability-interested/active group who are already achieving a reduced climate footprint.

Intrinsic values such as health, taste and price were discussed in the interviews as key attributes to communicate over and above sustainability. This was the case for IKEA's campaign material. In the case of the other's, it is useful to consider what the material is presented alongside, for example, Oatly's climate footprint is often the only item relating to sustainability on their packaging, while only 12 out of 72 of KM Instagram posts over four months were sustainability focused. This suggests that sustainability is not a primary value communicated. However, where intrinsic values are highlighted, a majority of the campaigns examined also include an extrinsic point of reference, noting the impact on the environment and a better future for all, for example.

Context was also raised in the interviews in terms of tailoring the communications material to the platform it is published on, something that was not raised in the literature reviewed, but it is assumed that this is covered by general marketing literature not included in the review. Of particular relevance was the proposal of avoiding too much information at the point of purchase where consumers do not have the time to process it. In this regard the idea of signalling sustainability at the point of purchase could be useful, to show consumers it is part of the company ethos and pointing to where they can discover more information. Eco-labelling, although criticized by some of the interviewees for not being understandable, a similar sentiment seen in the literature (Reisch & Thøgersen, 2015), is one such way of signalling sustainability. It is seen in Oatly's climate footprint declaration on their packaging and is often the only

sustainability-related information on the packaging (though this seems to vary from product to product). This gives the consumer a “signal” that the company is doing the right thing, much like the purpose of other eco-labels. They then have a webpage detailing how they perform the footprint, its limitations, purpose and so on. So, in this way other values are given president (in Oatly’s case often fun and humour), sustainability is signalled and more information and transparency are available. The opportunities that e-commerce scenarios offer in terms of being able to provide more detailed sustainability information where consumers are in a mindset to digest it should also be considered. This is in line with Allen (2016) who suggested that people not only need to receive information but receive it in such a way that they can cognitively process it.

Two of the communication material examples were in line with the literature about inspiring a notion of communal/group action, rather than putting a focus on individual responsibility (Stoknes, 2014) (Brulle, 2010) (Ecolabelling Sweden, 2021), using phrases such as “together we can make a difference.” There was no evidence of so-called “prevention” framing or using negative or fear-inducing messages about the environment, rather most of the brands presented a promotional framing with messaging about the positive environmental impact you can have by choosing the product. This was in line with findings from Nab et al., (2020). This was not something that came up explicitly in the interviews; when asked directly about framing many of the brands hadn’t thought about their communications in this way. This indicates that more focused attention on the research highlighted in the framing section of the literature review about what approaches have a greater impact, could be of benefit. Then a framing approach is not applied “by accident” but is fully considered.

The communications material demonstrated some use of materiality data and not just from the company, Oatly, who advocated for it in the interviews. The ICA app finds a way to communicate complex figures, but in a way that is both comparable, making it more understandable, and actionable. IKEA also demonstrate how to communicate a reduced carbon figure in their marketing, again using a comparison against the meatball to make it meaningful. Despite many of the interviewees expressing caution and concern about the use of data and figures, there is evidence of this being done in the material, so perhaps they are further ahead in this than they realise.

In summary, RQ 2, which sought examples in practice of how SC is executed, can be answered as follows. Climate impacts and challenges are in the majority of cases made apparent, to varying degrees, but not in isolation to other values. Several of the cases use a combination of salient values in focus, plus a signal about sustainability, plus more sustainability information available elsewhere (such as online) where it is more easily digested. Factual and science-based data is used but is made understandable through either comparison to other metrics, or relatable through techniques such as storytelling. In many examples consumers are also empowered with action orientated messages that are easy and attainable. Extrinsic and intrinsic values are more often combined, revealing both what’s in it for the consumer plus what can they contribute to beyond themselves. However, this is not something that communications professionals tend to consider overtly.

5.1.1 A suggested approach for SC depending on company type

Brands must decide what SC approach will be most successful for them and the answer is evidently not the same for every company. From the interviews, it was clear that aspects like market size and position, target group, product type, history/age of the company all have a bearing on strategy. This is in line with the literature, which suggests that there is no single approach to behaviour change, that it is context-specific (White & Habib, 2018) and that context can help make the link between attitude and behaviour more effective (Groening et al., 2018).

There were noted similarities in the findings about SC strategy from companies that share company type attributes. This leads to a suggested grouping of company types. This suggestion is not derived directly from the analytical approach, since it was not from the beginning a direct part of the analysis logic. It is, however, a reflection based on the overall results; where findings from the theoretical framework appear not to reflect bounded and singular approaches to SC, but rather they are dependent on the type of company in question. For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, three company types are suggested: *Challengers*, *Reliable Constants* and *Eternal Ecos*. Table 5-1 provides a summary of the main similarities and characteristics that have been attributed to these types, compiled from data gathered on the case study companies and during the interviews. Each of the five case study companies is assigned to a company type. Other food brands and non-food brands outside of this paper have also been included under the company types. This is based on a brief understanding of these other companies and not in-depth research, but the purpose is to provide greater weight and context to the company types and to see how this suggestion can be generalised outside of this paper. A SC approach is then provided for each of the three company types and under each of the theoretical framework categories. This provides a suggestion to how different SC approaches could suit different company types. This is something that has not been done to a significant extent in the literature and other SC frameworks consulted (with the exception of the SHIFT framework, which suggests company scoping as a starting point). Many of the existing frameworks suggest doing A but not B, where instead the thinking needs to be, do A if you are a type X company, or consider B if you are a type Y company.

IKEA and ICA fall under the category of *Reliable Constants*. Through their sheer scale, consumer acceptance and familiarity they have the capacity to create widespread change. This is in line with what Belz & Peattie, (2012) pointed to - familiar brands are more likely to be trusted. However, due to their large and heterogeneous target group this type of brand is not positioned well to be provocateurs, so they tend to keep sustainability in the back rather than the foreground and use subtle nudges, simplified information and other values to engage. Their ambition to reach climate targets and make actual progress is, however, a key driver in their sustainability activities, even if it is not apparent to the consumer.

In the category of *Eternal Eco*, SK and KM talked about their well-established brand values in environmentalism having earned them a dedicated customer group and has meant that they haven't had to work as hard at pushing sustainability through marketing. Although with a similar ethos, these two brands are quite different in company size and structure (since KM was acquired by Midsona five years ago, which makes them a much larger player now). This is perhaps why KM is the slightly more hesitant brand out of the two when it comes to being overt with consumers about sustainability, taking on some attributes of the *Reliable Constant*. Their target group is comfortable with environmental terminology, but heavy climate data is avoided. Their message is about making a difference by buying their products.

Oatly, the outlier in this study, sits within the *Challenger* category and is happy to expose their climate data, even if it means provocation, as long as it is creating a change. They are usually the innovators and disruptors, not focused on consumer expectations but rather on shaking things up. The *Reliable Constants* can be seen as followers of the *Challenger* approaches, but only when the initiatives are ready to be accepted as the norm.

Table 5-1. Company types compared to SC approach

Type	Challenger	Reliable Constant	Eternal Eco
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Focused on a specific range of products >Innovative, market changer >Daring and cheeky >Specialised target group >Medium/large enterprise >Younger company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >A staple in people's everyday >Trustworthy and reliable >Where you go and know your needs will be met >Generalised target group >Large enterprise >Older company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Historically based on organic, sustainable, ecological principles Trusted in this area >Potentially need to evolve to reach new, younger target groups >A loyal and long-term specialist target group >Small/medium enterprise >Older company
Case study company	Oatly	ICA, IKEA	Kung Markatta, Saltå Kvarn
Food brands outside study	Quorn, Oomph, Ben & Jerries, Beyond Meat	Coop, System Bolaget, Arla, Ånglamark, Zoégas	Renée Voltaire, Bio foods
Non-food brands outside study	Tesla, Spotify	Electrolux, H&M, SJ, BAUHAUS, Handelsbanken, Volvo	Fjällräven, Patagonia, Naturkompaniet
Reputation & transparency	Transparent to create a reputation, push boundaries of how they can communicate transparency and use it to start conversations.	Transparent to other stakeholders (investors, etc) but hold back with consumers as not effective with their generalist target group.	Transparency comes naturally as it is embedded in the ethos and sustainability (or ecological) is what their key target group is there for.
Education & Awareness	Education about impacts and environmental problems is a large part of why they do what they do.	Too much "educational" content might become patronising. You can't tell people what to do.	Education about impacts and environmental problems is a natural part of their brand and offering.
Social	Normative behaviour is not something they are interested in perpetuating.	A generalist audience needs to be nudged to change by making sustainable options seem normal.	A “together we can make a difference” message is important, but there remains a focus on sustainability.
Framing	Extrinsic (environment, society) values are important to communicate, but with a strong brand tone that taps into other values (humour for example).	Intrinsic values (what's in it for me) should be placed higher than what is contributed to the planet.	Sustainability should be communicated at the same level as other values; they should complement each other.
Storytelling	Humour and a twinkle in the eye are important.	Consumers do not have time for a lot of information, needs to be fast and digestible, so storytelling techniques are only appropriate in certain platforms (online).	The story of the producers and the impact on the world around us is part of their offering and their customers are interested in this information.
Simplification	Make hard facts and data easy to understand.	Keeping things simple and easy to comprehend is key and other consumer values should be lifted.	Simple is about making impacts more tangible to the consumers by relating to the real people in the supply chain or local impacts in the target market.
Technical	Make factual and technical information available but make it easy to digest and comparable.	Technical information is hard to understand and can be alienating. If it is used it should be communicated at a secondary level. Digitalization should be used when it helps to make complicated information more accessible.	Technical data is confusing to the consumer, information should be focused on impacts (biodiversity, soil health, etc) but not on figures.

5.2 Reflection on the Methodology

The methodological framework enabled a deeper understanding of what firms at the forefront of sustainability communications practice and in turn, provides insight for others wishing to accelerate this area. The overarching method was case studies. By selecting cases that are somewhat “typical” and by using multiple cases, as opposed to a single case study, the extent to which the results can be made generalisable was increased. The choice of five companies of varying sizes, market share, revenue, operational duration, product offering, and target groups offered the opportunity to gain generalisable insights for the food-product sector. Some of the findings are food-specific (using taste as a communications value, for example) but many are more general (such as using normative wording) and therefore relevant to other sectors, though within the parameters of B2C communications.

The use of interviews proved valuable as it was possible to gain an in-depth understanding of how the firms operate in terms of sustainable communications. It is acknowledged that the interviewees could be answering the question based on personal opinion and had other representatives from the organisation been interviewed there could have been different answers. However, where more than one respondent was interviewed from a single company, the answers from each of them were aligned and no significant discrepancies were noted.

The research starts to point to some useful findings about how communications should be deployed depending on company type. This could have been solidified with the inclusion of additional case studies, which would have made it possible to quantify how communication styles measure against variables such as company size, target audience or company age. It may also have introduced other business types and approaches not alluded to in this research. The finding that company type has a bearing on SC approach was not something that was anticipated at the beginning of this research and emerged as a result of the interviews, which is why it was not built into the methodological approach. If this had been anticipated, then it could have been useful to review current literature around company types in general marketing and business literature.

A limitation of the content analysis of the communications material is that each of the examples were examined in isolation from other communications material. This is the case for the direct context, meaning the other information communicated on the packaging alongside, for example, the Oatly climate footprint declaration. Also, the wider context of what the entire communications offering of each company comprises. This would of course have given a more balanced view of how much emphasis is put on sustainability and what other SC approaches are evident. However, this was not feasible in the time and scope of this study. For example, the information and design of Oatly’s packaging vary not only for each different product, but it also varies within the same product, so the range of content would have been too large. It would also have been too burdensome in this study to look at the context of the entire communications offering of each brand.

5.3 Critical Reflections on the Results

When considering communications and marketing, it will always be necessary to consider what the traditional purpose of marketing is; to increase the sales and profitability of a company. Good communications alone will not solve today’s climate issues and being a good talker is not evidence of being a good walker. The results of this study cannot be taken as a reflection of the best examples of sustainability practice, although the companies selected all cite being sustainable as a core reason for their SC. The insights in this study can also not be taken as a guide of how to make a company look good. What is happening in terms of sustainability in the

background, out of sight, will always be more important. And then comes talking about it to engage people in the right way.

6 Conclusion

In this research, the problem of businesses needing to advance and deliver on sustainability communications to close the intention-action gap for sustainable consumption was identified. It is understood that the pressure on businesses to deliver in this area will only increase as policy and consumers call for it. By reviewing the literature around this subject, several valuable recourses and frameworks were identified and synthesised into seven key areas that formed the theoretical backdrop for the empirical part of this study. However, a gap in the current literature was identified as being a lack of research on the brands and individuals who are currently leading the way in this area. It was deemed a significant gap since how practitioners operate in practice can give valuable insights into not just how SC is optimally performed, but also what challenges are faced.

The results from a cross-section of case study companies, demonstrate a push from brands to use communications not just in the traditional profit-boosting sense, but to actively lower emissions and impact. That it comes from a position of meeting climate targets, and is not just lip service, also means that the SC strategy applied is not a simple tick-box exercise. It is not as straightforward as “*the promotion of sustainable practices or causes to the general public*” as the EU Green Consumption Pledge (European Commission, 2021a) puts it. Providing information is vital, but as seen in this study, this can mean several things, from unapologetic facts and figures to a story about farmers in the supply chain or actively minimizing the environmental message.

The results show that there are differing approaches to SC strategies depending on the brand type. And there needs to be. There is no single consumer type, so different approaches are needed to engage as many target groups as possible. Not every brand can and should be challengers as there is a risk many consumers will switch off, but these brands are needed to push innovation and engage early adopters. Then there is a place for the brands who take a subtler approach to SC and who are more likely to engage a wider public audience through their scale. These brands though, need to use their power to collaborate on challenger initiatives and make them more likely to be accepted and then incorporate them in their strategies when they are. The proliferation of sustainable consumption is dependent on there being different types of SC that appeal to different types of consumers.

While companies need to identify the optimal way for them to do the talking, their actions and *actual* sustainability profiles must match up. Where rankings such as the Sustainable Brand Index show how successful companies have been in convincing consumers of their sustainability credentials, the question remains of how sustainable they are beyond the consumer eye level. There is a need for brands to help close the consumer intention-action gap, but also the possibility of a communication-action gap for themselves.

6.1 Recommendations for Practitioners

6.1.1 Recommendations for communications professionals

The key audience for this study is intended to be practitioners working in the field of sustainability communications in the food-product sector, as well as other related B2C sectors.

Since there tended to be greater unanimity in the findings from companies of a similar ilk or size (IKEA and ICA, Saltå Kvarn and Kung Markatta), a conclusion can be reached that there are dependencies that can help identify the SC strategies most appropriate for a particular brand. Defining these dependencies is one of the first things to consider when deciding on a SC strategy. This is not unusual in communication strategies in general, but it can be considered in

a different way to a brand's overall marketing strategy. The following suggests several recommendations to consider when planning a sustainability strategy:

1. Consider how your brand is positioned to define your sustainability strategy. Aspects including company size, market position, geographic location, product type, target group, brand image, company age, history and reputation all have a bearing. Consider if you are a *Challenger*, a *Reliable Constant* or an *Eternal Eco* or perhaps a combination of types.
2. Continuously return to the question of why you are communicating sustainability and if your actions meet your communications. Have this as a guide but not necessarily as a strategy – you might be communicating because you want to reduce your CO₂ emissions but talking about CO₂ emissions to your particular target group may not be successful in terms of increased sustainable consumption.

Considering both of the above, you can begin to define how the following aspects can be integrated into a strategy:

Reputation & Transparency:

Challenger - Use transparency as a way to start conversations. Reputation is built on pushing boundaries.

Reliable Constant – Much of your sustainability information is more suited to investors, NGOs, media and other stakeholders. Consumers don't need as much information and they trust you because of your position in the market.

Eternal Eco - Being transparent is a natural part of your ethos, but don't rely on the good memory of older customers; make your sustainability ethos clear for new, younger target groups too.

Education & Awareness:

Challenger – Use your platform to educate an audience that is hungry for information.

Reliable Constant – Don't try to tell people what to do or feel, use subtle nudges and easy actions.

Eternal Eco – Use your reputation and interested target group to communicate the issues that they can contribute to through engaging with your brand and beyond.

Social

Challenger – You are not the norm, but you can capture a growing audience who are interested in the change that is needed to combat climate issues and influence the industry as a whole.

Reliable Constant – Make sustainability feel more normal, avoid the use of terms related to non-normative behaviour.

Eternal Eco – Create a sense that there is a way to make a difference together.

Framing

Challenger – You have a strong brand tone so extend this to your SC. Don't be afraid of communicating the environmental issues being faced and what you are doing to solve them

Reliable Constant – Your consumer group are more likely to be interested in what your product offers them personally, so increase the focus on other values and bring sustainability in at a secondary level.

Eternal Eco – Focus on sustainability but not at the expense of other important values to your target group. Focus on the positive impact on the planet that your products have.

Storytelling

Challenger – Use creativity, uniqueness and humour as a way to engage.

Reliable Constant – There needs to be creativity but also brevity, your consumers do not have the time or interest to digest a lot of information. Place extended sustainability information further away from the point of purchase decision.

Eternal Eco – Use the story of your product and your supply chain to engage customers as this is where you shine and what your target group is interested in.

Simplification

Challenger – Make things simple by using labelling and signals to indicate sustainability. But don't water down the information too much.

Reliable Constant – Simple is what the majority of your consumers want, tell them the facts but make them digestible and comparable.

Eternal Eco – Simple is about making impacts more tangible to the consumers by relating to the real people in the supply chain or local impacts to your target market.

Technical

Challenger – Don't shy away from communicating the hard data, push the boundaries of what you can do with LCAs and materiality analysis in consumer communications.

Reliable Constant – Only use facts and figures if they are easy to understand and comparable, make use of digital platforms to make this information more accessible to those in your audience who want it.

Eternal Eco – Technical data isn't necessary or correct for your target group, talk about the issues rather than presenting numbers.

6.1.2 Recommendations for policy makers

Policy plays a role in encouraging communications from companies, but it can be useful to understand the challenges and limitations that companies face. For example, it is clear from this research that simply being transparent and providing consumers with “information” about sustainability practices is not always the right course of action for every brand. Therefore, when making policy around communications it is recommended that this is accompanied with access to advice and guidance on SC strategy.

Policy makers also have a role to play in supporting how brands can increase sustainable consumption and removing barriers for this process. Policies that take into consideration what could potentially hinder companies using communication to increase the acceptance of a more sustainable product over a less sustainable one, are vital.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This research has started to draw some insights about the variables that can help brands establish what their communications strategy should be. This could be developed by conducting wider scale research including a much larger group of case studies which would enable clearer indications of patterns and correlations and a more solid indication of company types.

In addition to including the brand perspective, a better understanding on the consumer perspective could also be beneficial to further research about the impact of certain SC strategies. This could be done, for example on existing campaigns and focus on how consumers react to them. It could alternatively use fictitious campaign examples using different SC strategies to gauge willingness to purchase as a result. However, a research approach of this nature may not be able to address the intention-action gap phenomena as the opinions of respondents could still be based on intention.

It could also be beneficial to conduct research with brands from a policy perspective and focus specifically on the barriers they face in communications. This could shed light on what would help the shift to greater sustainable consumption whilst remaining within the boundaries of market integrity.

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Appendix

Appendix I - Interview Protocol/discussion prompts

Warm up question:

- What is your role in the company?

Sustainability – *What is communicated?*

1. What is the overall sustainability coms strategy for COMPANY X?
2. What does the consumer want to know regarding sustainability?
 - a. How do you measure this?
3. Reporting vs consumer communications – how do you decide what gets communicated at a consumer level?
4. What should the food industry think about in terms of sustainability communications that might be different to other industries?
5. To what extent is communication about sustainability to do with educating the public to make sustainable choices, vs awareness about your company's work?
6. What trends do you see in sustainability communications?

Communications – *How do you communicate it?*

1. How do you ensure believability and credibility in sustainability claims?
2. How do you differentiate in a sea of sustainability claims?
3. How do you normalise sustainable behaviour, so it's a natural choice?
4. In what ways do you create a tone in your sustainability communications? How do you use for example emotions, feelings, moral stance, benefit to the individual vs the planet, tailored to your target audience, etc.
5. How do you make complex issues in sustainability understandable to consumers?
6. Do you use peer-to-peer communications, social influence, etc?
7. Traditional marketing vs sustainability marketing, is it different, how?

Final Q – an example of a “best practice” in your company communications around sustainability – in terms of your strategy, but also consumer acceptance and reaction (was this measured?)

Appendix II – List of interviewees, roles and interview codes

Table 0-1. List of interviewees, roles and interview codes

Organisation	Role	Respondent code
ICA Sweden	Senior Sustainability Manager	R1
IKEA Food	Global Marketing & Communication Manager	R2
IKEA Food	Communication Business Partner Sustainability at INGKA	R3
IKEA Food	Global Health & Sustainability Manager, Food at Inter IKEA Group	R4
Kung Markatta	Nordic Sustainability Coordinator	R5
Kung Markatta	Nordic Brand Manager, Organic Foods	R6
Oatly	Sustainability Engagement Manager	R7
Saltå Kvarn	Environment, Sustainability and Business Development	R8
NA/Independent	Sustainability Communications Strategist	R9

Appendix III – Communications material, visual examples

Oatly



Figure 0-1. Example of the backside of Oatly's iKaffe packaging featuring the climate footprint declaration. Image, authors own

Saltå Kvarn

English translation of the middle section of text is as follows

FOR HEALTHIER SOIL THAT LASTS FOR GENERATIONS

On this organic farm, manure comes directly from the farm itself and nitrogen-fixing plants are grown, which naturally add nutrients to the soil. Saltå Kvarn's grains come from organic farms that through perennial crop rotation build up rich soil that lasts for generations to come.

When you choose Saltå Kvarn's organic muesli you are helping to support our Swedish organic farmers – and contributing to agriculture that is more environmentally friendly. Naturally, the more our farmers do for the environment, the more we pay them for the grains.

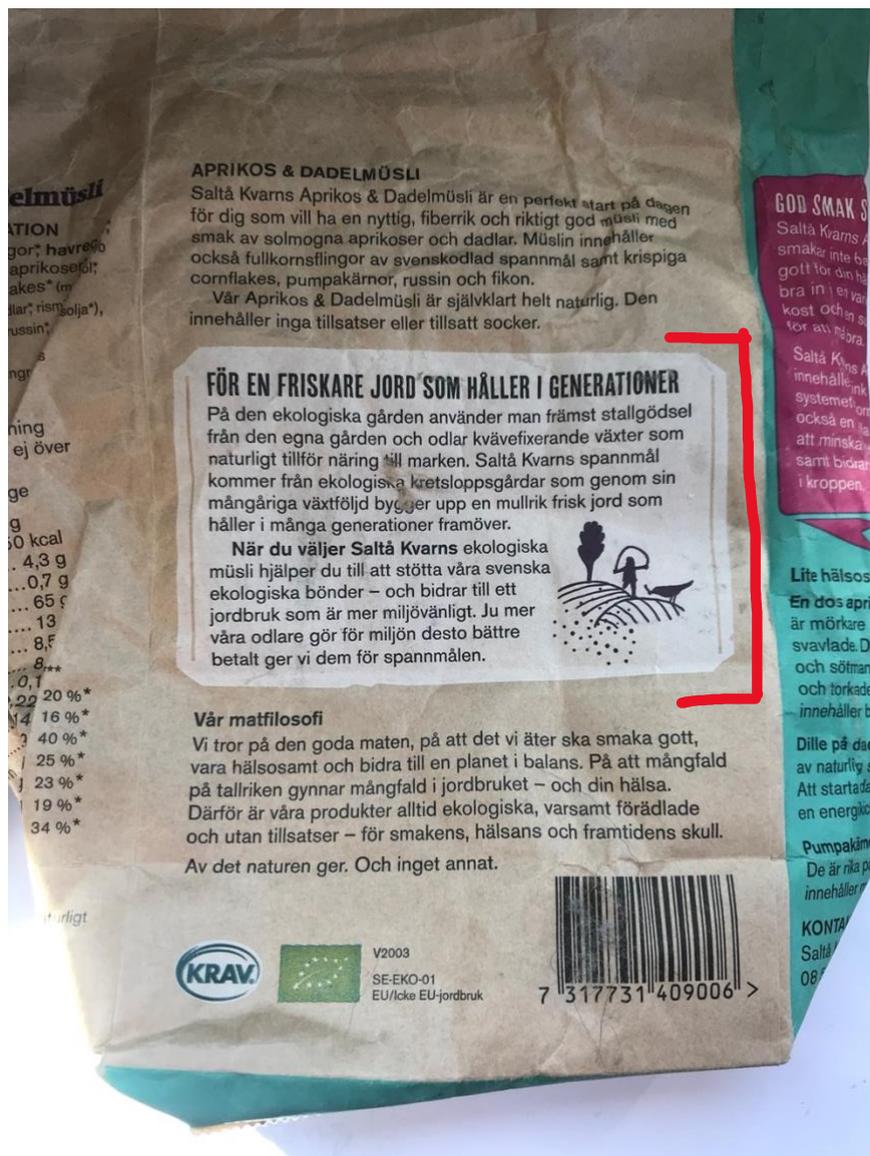


Figure 0-2. Example of the backside of Saltå Kvarn's packaging for Muesli. Image, authors own

ICA Sverige

Example of the information provided in ICA's Mitt Klimatmål (My Climate Goal) app/online service. The total climate impact of personal purchases would be shown where the question mark is and is shown next to the average in Sweden (in red) and the UN's climate goal for 2030 (in green).



Figure 0-3. Screenshot from the ICA Mitt Klimatmål app, published here with permission

Kung Markatta

12 out of 72 Kung Markatta Instagram posts from the last four months that focus on sustainability, with translation of the main text.



Translation:
There are many reasons to eat more plant-based and organic in everyday life. Plant based is not only healthy and tasty but also the most climate-smart choice. Good, right!



Translation:
Did you know that Kung Markatta's Virgin Coconut Oil is cold pressed immediately after the harvesting of the KRAV organic and Fairtrade certified coconuts? This means that those who produce it have decent working conditions. We think that feels good.

Our coconut oil has a mild aroma & taste of coconut and is perfect for cooking, baking, on a sandwich or in a smoothie.



Translation:
HURRAY! Our sustainable, organic & healthy products have been green since 1983. Now Sweden's consumers have had their say and named Kung Markatta Sweden's greenest brand in food production companies. It doesn't get greener than this and we are so happy! Thank you everyone who voted!



Translation:
THANK YOU. Sweden's greenest consumers have had their say. Kung Markatta has been named Sweden's greenest brand through Differ's annual consumer survey! We are so happy and proud - now we continue with even more exciting plant-based, organic innovations!

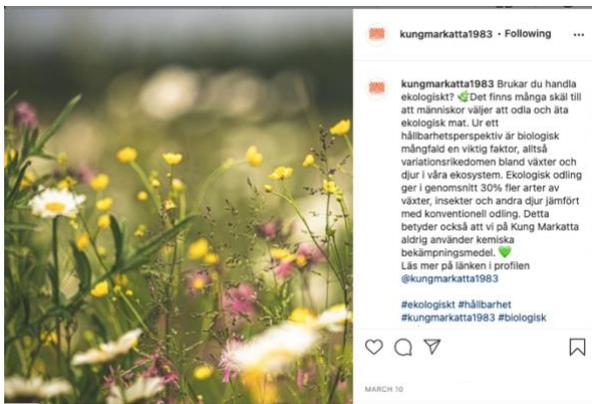
See the link in our profile to find out more.



Translation:
 Creamy + tasty = coconut cream. Kung Markatta's organic coconut cream is produced by squeezing the coconut pulp from organically grown coconuts and then mixing it with water to achieve the right creaminess. And the crops are Fairtrade-certified to contribute to a more sustainable world. How do you use coconut cream?



Translation:
 HURRAY! Kung Markatta has been named Sweden's greenest brand within food-producing companies. Discover our plant-based, organic products too. Now blue is the greenest colour!



Translation:
 Do you usually buy organic? There are many reasons why people choose to grow and eat organic food. From a sustainability perspective, biodiversity is an important factor, i.e. variation among plants and animals in our ecosystems. Organic farming produces on average 30% more species of plants, insects and other animals compared to conventional farming. This also means that we at Kung Markatta never use chemical pesticides. Read more on the link in the profile @ kungmarkatta1983

If you want to know more about our coconut cream, click on the link in the profile @ kungmarkatta1983



Translation:
 We LOVE that organic has become increasingly popular over the years. But for us, ecology and sustainability are more than a trend. Caring for the environment is at the heart of everything we do and it has been since we started in 1983. We are proud that all our products are organic and always grown / cooked / roasted / ground / pressed / harvested with love. We think you feel it taste too

So thank you for choosing a sustainable alternative in everyday life. Together we make a difference. Read more about how we think about sustainability on our link in the profile @ kungmarkatta1983



Translation:
 Sometimes you may think that you do not have much influence on major issues like climate and sustainability. But every little choice makes a difference. For example, choosing an oat-based steak instead of a normal steak is an easy step and yet one of the most important we can do, as plant-based foods have a significantly lower impact on the climate than meat.
 In addition, our oat steaks are of course super tasty, prepared from real ingredients and can be used both as a veggie burger and, as here, in classic Swedish home cooking, so it will be a double win. Keep an eye out for our oat steaks in the freezer counter in Ica! Do you want to know more about how we work with sustainability? Click on the link in the profile



Translation:
 Sustainability, ecology and high quality have permeated our philosophy ever since we started 38 years ago. For us, it is a matter of course that all our raw materials are organic, but we are also constantly working to improve our transport and packaging. Another way to contribute to a more sustainable world is to cook more plant-based foods at home. That is why we are constantly developing new plant-based products that can make everyday life easier. Like these seitan burgers for example. They get a broad umami taste from mushrooms and have a really nice and chewy texture.



Translation:
 We could spend several days talking about why climate and sustainability issues are important to us at Kung Markatta. How all our transport is climate-compensated, that we work towards 100% recyclable packaging and that in our production stages we follow the UN's global goals for sustainable development. We have even won an award as Sweden's greenest brand this year.
 But none of that matters if we did not also want to create food magic. It is by also making really tasty and good products that we can actually make a difference. So that's where you find us. With one hand in the garden and the other in the production kitchen where we work to develop sustainable and really tasty, green food.



Translation:
 Did you know that Kung Markatta suppliers must sign our code of conduct?
 It is based on the UN's guiding principles and contains rules on everything from human rights to anti-corruption, labor law and environmental impact. We have close relationships with our suppliers and constantly want to help them get better. Many of our products are labelled with CRAV or Fairtrade. This means that the crop in the product is grown with care for both the environment and the person who grows it.

Figure 0-4 Screenshots from Kung Markatta's Instagram account @kungmarkatta1983, reproduced here with permission