



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

Integrating and Communicating Sustainability

Case Study: A global brand's integration of sustainability in its corporate brand identity
& external brand communication; a globalized & standardized vs. localized approach

by:

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May 2022

MSc in International Marketing & Brand Management



Abstract

Title	Integrating and Communicating Sustainability
Date of Seminar	2nd of June, 2022
Course	BUSN39 Degree Project in Global Marketing
Authors	Louise Andersson and Louise Hägg
Supervisor	Veronika V. Tarnovskaya
Key Words	global brand, IKEA, corporate brand identity, sustainability, external brand communication; standardized vs. localized.
Inter IKEA Groups	Sweden and Canada
Thesis Purpose	Researching how a global brand integrates sustainability as part of its corporate brand identity and how the brand communicates sustainability to the local market, using a standardized or localized communication approach.
Theoretical Perspective	Incorporating the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix & Integration for sustainability — implementation model to analyze a global brand's approach to integrate and communicate sustainability to the local market.
Methodology:	A qualitative case study focusing on IKEA's integration and communication of sustainable initiatives through an abductive approach, viewing the data through a research philosophy of relativistic and social constructivism.
Empirical Data	Gathered from semi-structured interviews with various managers at IKEA internationally to analyze their integration of sustainability in their corporate brand identity and external brand communication in the global and local markets. Additional data was collected from IKEA's Sustainability report;- strategy & their global and local websites.
Conclusion	IKEA demonstrates an aligned and standardized brand identity in the four paths, where the essence mainstreams the rest of the elements. However, the approach to communicating sustainability varies depending on the market due to current sustainability challenges and priorities for the local consumers; therefore, adopting a localized communication approach.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our most tremendous gratitude toward our supervisor, Veronika V. Tarnovskaya, for her guidance, feedback, and encouragement throughout our thesis duration. These suggestions and further knowledge within academic writing have been very appreciated and helped us advance our master's thesis to the next level.

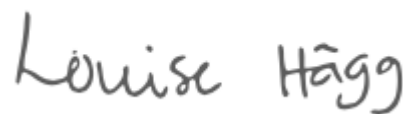
We would like to express an additional and extra sincere gratitude to our respondents and collaboration partners at Inter IKEA Group around the world; Åsa Nordin, Identity and IKEA Trademark Manager in Sweden; Nina Bogstedt, Brand Identity Manager in the Netherlands; Johanna Andrén; Marketing Manager in Canada and Heléne Davidsson, Global Sustainability Manager in the Netherlands. These extraordinary managers generously sacrificed their time to participate in our interviews and provide us with great insight, profound knowledge, and experiences of the global- and local IKEA Brand.

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May 2022



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Table of content

Introduction	1
1.1 Foundation of the Case	1
1.1.1 IKEA as a Global Brand	2
1.2 Problematization	5
1.3 Research Purpose	7
1.4 Research Questions	8
1.5 Delimitations	8
1.6 Outline of the Thesis	9
Literature Review & Theoretical Frameworks	11
2.1 Global Brand	11
2.2 Corporate Brand Identity	12
2.2.1 Corporate Brand Identity Matrix	13
2.3 Brand Communication	15
2.3.1 Standardized versus Localized Communication Approach	16
2.4 Sustainability	17
2.4.1 Integrating and Communicating Sustainability	19
Methodology	23
3.1 Research Philosophy	23
3.1.1 Ontological Position	23
3.1.2 Epistemology Position	24
3.2 Research Approach	25
3.3 Research Design and Method	27
3.3.1 Case Study	27
3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews	28
3.3.3 Secondary Data	29
3.4 Data Collection and Sampling	30
3.4.1 Sampling Theory	30
3.4.2 Facts about the Managers at IKEA	32
3.4.3 Interview Guide	32
3.4.4 Recording and Transcribing	34
3.5 Data Analysis	34
3.6 Research Quality	36
Empirical Findings and Analysis	38
4.1 Global IKEA Brand,	38
4.1.1 IKEA Global Brand; Integration of Sustainability to Brand Identity	39
4.1.2 IKEA Global Brand; Communicating Sustainability Initiatives	46
4.2 Local IKEA Groups	49

4.2.1 IKEA Sweden; Integration of Sustainability to Brand Identity	50
4.2.2 IKEA Sweden; Communicating Sustainability Initiatives	56
4.2.3 IKEA Canada; Integration of Sustainability to Brand Identity	59
4.2.4 IKEA Canada; Communicating Sustainability Initiatives	66
Discussion	69
Conclusion and Contributions	73
6.1 IKEA's Integration & Communication of Sustainability	73
6.2 Theoretical Contribution	74
6.3 Managerial Contribution	75
6.4 Limitations and Future Research	76
Bibliography	78
Appendix	85
Appendix One, Interview Guide	85
Appendix Two, Interview Guide 2.0	86
Appendix Three, Consent Form for Interview Participants	88
Appendix Four, Swedish Sustainable Website	89
Appendix Five, Canadian Sustainable Website	90
Appendix Six, Swedish Sustainable Website Products	91
Appendix Seven, Canadian Sustainable Website Products	91

List of Figures

Figure 1. Positioning of Research

Figure 2. Positioning of the Global Brand; IKEA

Figure 3. The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

Figure 4. The four paths, CBIM

Figure 5. Integration for sustainability — implementation

Figure 6. Positioning of the Integration for sustainability– implementation

Figure 7. CBIM implementation for Inter IKEA Group, Global

Figure 8. CBIM implementation for Inter IKEA Group, Sweden

Figure 9. CBIM implementation for Inter IKEA Group, Canada

Figure 10. First Outer Layer, CBIM, communicating Sustainability through the four paths

List of Tables

Table 1. Information about Respondents

Table 2. Sustainable initiatives communicated in the four paths of the CBIM

List of Pictures

Picture 1. IKEA's various corporation's distributions

Picture 2. Map of the thesis' structure

List of Abbreviations

CBIM — Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

IKEA — Ingvard - Kamprad - Elmtaryd – Agunnaryd

MNFC — Multinational Franchise Corporation

1. Introduction

Welcome to the first chapter of this thesis; we will start by introducing the reader to the global brand we have chosen to focus on, IKEA, and other relevant theoretical backgrounds. Later to demonstrate the problematization that has arisen in the last few years leading to our conducted research question. Further, we will display the research delimitations and the map the readers will walk through for the thesis structure. Let's begin!

“To create a better everyday life for the many people.”

-Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA, n.d.b)

1.1 Foundation of the Case

In the world we live in today, every country has its own culture and local brands, with their own traditions and brand heritage. At the same time, the world is influenced by globalization and digitalization, which has brought everyone closer and has opened up endless opportunities for countries, and companies to expand worldwide. Today, a small company has the opportunity to reach consumers globally and acquire market shares based on unique competitive advantages in the forms of price, function, design, etc. (Roper & Fill, 2012). However, an issue has now arisen with the latest trend where consumers purchase more sustainable and local products (Marketing Manager, interview, 22 February 2022). This challenge could threaten these multinational franchise corporations, *MNFC*, as their primary business idea is to offer more standardized mass production of products. Therefore, incorporating the consumer's needs and providing more sustainable products can lead to competitive advantages while the competition in the market increases internationally.

According to Smith (2003), The World Business Council for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of sustainability, claiming that it is on the global policy agenda. Today, in 2022, sustainability has become an even more important topic in society and has a significant influence on the global brands due to the global sustainability goals the UN has

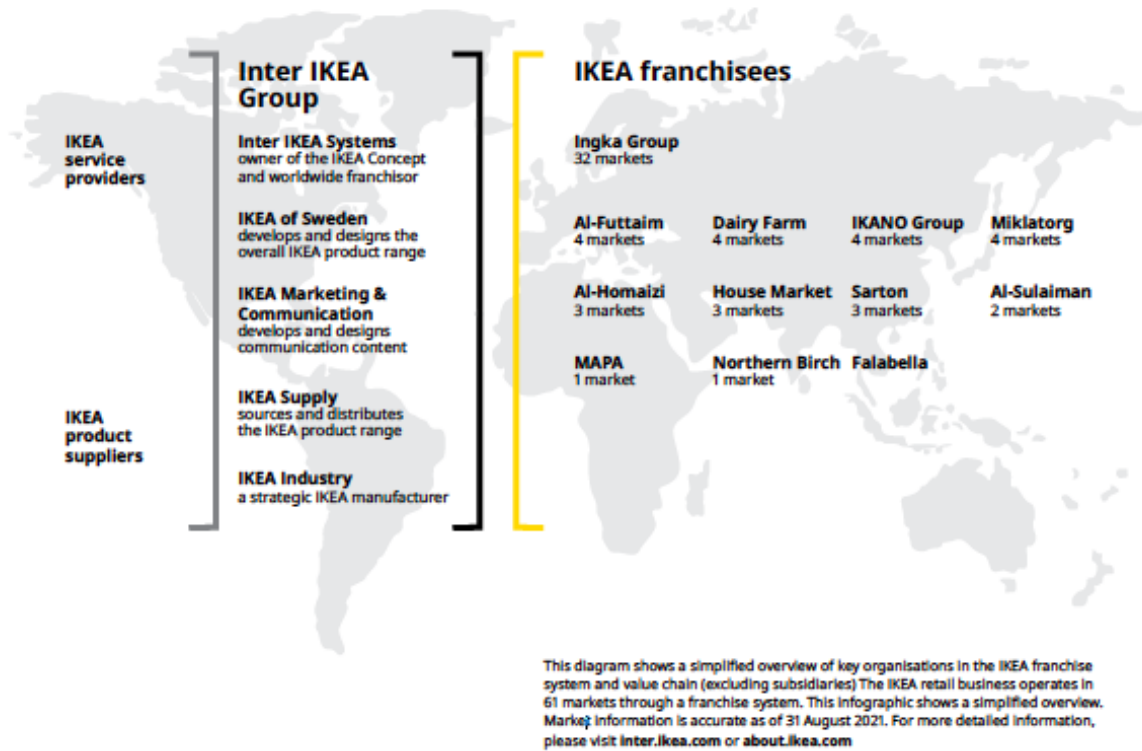
implemented for 2030 (FN, n.d). Historically, corporations have had heightened interest in sustainability, especially during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Smith 2003). The difference today is due to climate change because of the effect of the fast-fashion industry and other carbon dioxide emissions, which have had a severe negative impact on the entire world (Smith, 2003). Smith (2003) continues to argue that this has led to the active debate regarding sustainability among companies now has shifted; it is no longer a question of whether corporations should commit to sustainability and create more sustainable actions, but instead how.

Being an MNFC emphasizes that there are also extensive responsibilities that come along. Sustainability is, as mentioned, a highly current topic, and many global brands express themselves to have implemented sustainability into their daily operations and as a part of their corporate brand identity. The rise of sustainable companies internationally is a strong indicator that it is something that many consumers seek and that it generates high value. Furthermore, this trend opens up the question of how global companies should communicate their sustainable operations to their local consumers, stakeholders, etc., to keep the brand identity intact.

1.1.1 IKEA as a Global Brand

In 1943, in the small village in Älmhult, province of Småland, Sweden, the great Ingvard Kamprad founded his company IKEA, acronym; Ingvard - Kamprad - Elmtaryd – Agunnaryd. The founding business idea of IKEA was to sell pens, wallets, and other household goods that its consumers purchased through a mail catalog in the local area. The company was highly influenced by the Småland mantra, which later turned into the IKEA mantra: simplicity, affordability, and, foremost, innovation (IKEA, n.d.a). It was not until a few years later, in 1951, that Kamprad developed the new business model of selling home furniture for a low price, which later in 1956 turned into an innovative idea at that time. Thus, to sell furniture in flat boxes that the consumer assembles all by themselves, which to this day still is part of the product description and part of the IKEA business model (IKEA, n.d.a). IKEA has since then expanded to the entire Sweden, Scandinavia, and Europe and grown into a multinational franchise corporation known worldwide. One of IKEA's biggest franchisees is Ingka Group, the retail department store, and it is currently established in over 458 traditional

stores around the globe (Statista, 2021) and 61 different markets (IKEA, 2021b). The total IKEA corporation is divided into separate companies, all owned by IKEA AB and then later dividend in the specific country and function; for example, IKEA supply, INGKA group Canada, IKEA of Sweden AB, etc. (2021a). The various corporations' IKEA distribution is illustrated below:



Picture 1. IKEA's various corporations distributions (IKEA, 2021b)

Today, in 2022, IKEA's business idea is "to offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them." (IKEA, n.d.b). The values of the Smålands mantra and now the IKEA mantra is still strongly connected to the IKEA business and implemented in the entire IKEA franchise corporation worldwide. The brand heritage and the "IKEA-way of business" strongly manifest in the organization's culture and values (IKEA, n.d.b; Tarnovskaya & de Chernatony, 2011). As a global brand, IKEA can easily be recognized by its blue and yellow logo and matching large warehouses, which have the same design and similar layout globally (IKEA, n.d.b; Steenkamp, 2017). IKEA also demonstrates several communication channels where they communicate their corporate brand as well as their range of products. For example, on social media, IKEA possesses both a global and several local accounts for each market or country (Instagram n.d.a; n.d.b; Facebook, n.d) as well as they have their own

corporate owned websites, on a global and local level (IKEA, n.d.b.; n.d.d.; n.d.e.). According to Steenkamp (2017), a globalized strategy is implemented that aligns the various corporations to be viewed in a similar image, and in this case demonstrate the alignment between IKEA's corporate brand identity and their communication to the local market. Steenkamp explains that the local IKEA group's managers have the opportunity to differentiate their offers, communication, and campaigns depending on the demand in the specific country and market (Steenkamp, 2017). However, the success of IKEA's global corporation is due to, citing Kamprad:

IKEA is not the work of one person alone. It is the result of many minds and many souls working together through many years of joy and hard work. (IKEA, n.d.b).

IKEA has come a long way since its starting point in 1943. IKEA is nowadays a leading global brand in the retail market and was ranked 27th in 2021 among the Best Global Brands (Ranking the Brands, 2021). In 2017, IKEA ranked 32nd globally in the Change the World criteria; however, they have not been placed there since (Ranking the Brands, 2017). Furthermore, IKEA was ranked number five in the Sustainable Brand Index in the Netherlands year 2020 (Ranking the Brands, 2020). Several years back, IKEA added a new value to their brand identity and a word that strongly influences corporate procedures and communication, namely sustainability.

In recent years, IKEA as a brand has emerged sustainability into its core values, and they are currently working hard to reach its goals regarding sustainability. According to Urde (2022), IKEA has placed its focus on developing its corporate brand. However, they are also expanding and emerging into new product categories and repositioning themselves in the market. IKEA themselves are stating that they want to act as inspirers towards people while making it easy and cheap for as many people as possible to live a more sustainable life (IKEA, 2021a). IKEA's strategy can be divided into focus areas; fair and equal, healthy and sustainable lifestyle, and circular and climate positive. As they are working daily to reach their goals, IKEA has great ambitions that they want to achieve until 2030 (IKEA, 2021a; IKEA, 2020). These goals include using renewable and recycled material to make their products more sustainable, implementing new services such as the Circular Store, actively working towards being a more waste-free company, etc. (IKEA, 2020).

For the next chapter, we will present a holistic overview of our case studies' focus on relevant challenges that have emerged in today's society, the new sustainability trend, and a gap within the research area, which we aim to fulfill with this master's thesis.

1.2 Problematization

In today's society, a global company needs to take on the responsibility of being a company that implements sustainability into its practices to contribute to a positive outcome of its operations (Smith, 2003). Furthermore, the company needs to communicate these values to inspire and affect its consumers to become a more sustainable society (IKEA, n.d.b). Lastly, it is just as crucial for the global companies and brands to both integrate sustainability as a part of its identity to develop sustainability in the entire corporation fully and at the same time, keep their identity intact throughout the world (Roper & Fill, 2012). Academic research on sustainability is a topic that has grown in popularity during recent years and is today more of a question as to how companies can work with sustainability rather than if they should implement sustainability in their practices (Smith, 2003; Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010; Maon, Lindgreen & Swaen, 2008). Existing studies in the area of sustainability are often focusing on the strategies that companies can or should implement to become more sustainable (Albino, Balice & Dangelico, 2009; Krajnc & Glavic 2005; Gupta & Kumar, 2013), whereas we have identified a gap on further research does not connect sustainability and strategy. Therefore, since sustainability is no longer a choice for companies but rather a demand, it is also a reason why this subject and research field has caught our interest. Albeit, the question that arises regarding how global brands and MNFC are communicating their sustainability action and operations to their consumers.

In the development of sustainability strategies, the importance of communication is being highlighted (Genç, 2017; Godemann & Michelsen, 2011), where it has been argued that communication is crucial to gain broad support from the general public for sustainable development to become realized (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). Further, the connection between sustainability and external communication has also been researched before, for example, how global companies can communicate sustainability on social media (Dovleac, 2015; Reilly & Hynan, 2014), in addition to how communication about sustainability can increase consumer value (Line, Hanks & Zhang, 2016), or studies that compare local and global companies communication (Tewari & Dave, 2012). With the knowledge of the existing

research on sustainability, global brands, and communication, the interest in the combination of these objects has occurred, further leading to the inquiry of how a global company can communicate sustainability to the broad public when approaching the people in different local areas around the world.

As previously mentioned, for a company to become fully sustainable in its operations, it is crucial to integrate sustainability into the company's core (Roper & Fill, 2012). Thus, sustainability has to become a part of a global brand's identity to permeate both the global and the local parts of the company. Previous research conducted by Tarnovskaya and Chernatony (2011) in the field of brand identity and the potential challenges with global brands and identity highlights the importance of brand identity transfer in different countries and markets. Thus, when a global company is operating in local markets around the world, it can be hard to keep a standardized or globalized approach to communication since culture, languages, history, etc., differs in countries all over the world. Therefore, to research global companies and how they are approaching the local markets with their communication regarding sustainability, it is also of our interest to investigate how sustainability integrates into the corporate brand identity. Connecting identity to sustainability, it is essential for the global company to fully integrate sustainability into the core identity. This, ensures that the global company's core and the identity transfer are aligned internationally, even if the communication approach to the local markets differs.

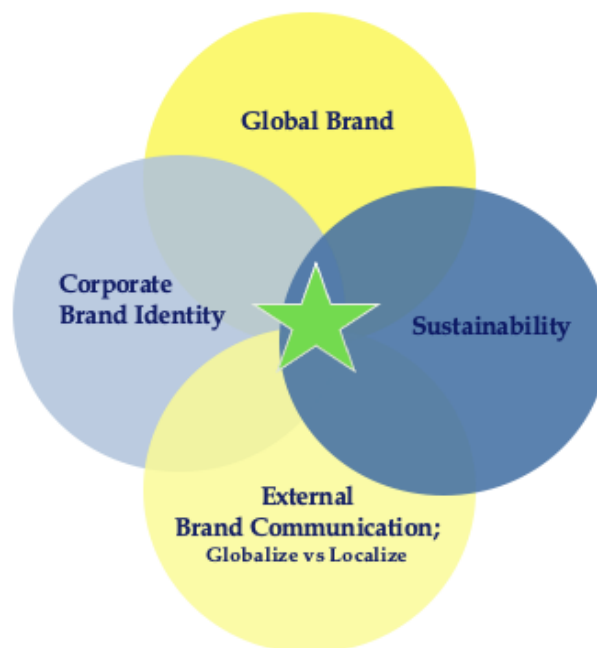


Figure 1: Positioning of Research

Even though all of these areas have been researched independently and some have been connected with each other, the combination between global companies, sustainability, corporate brand identity, and external communication is a research area where we have identified a more significant gap. We see a lack of academic research in the area of global companies, how they are integrating sustainability into their core identity, and how they are communicating sustainability externally to their consumers. Further, a smaller gap has also been identified in how global brands adapt their communication approach to sustainability, whether from the global, standardized, or localized point of view. Thus, this thesis aims to fill this gap with knowledge on how a global brand approaches its local consumers while communicating sustainability challenges, strategies and initiatives.

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this master thesis is to investigate how a global brand is implementing sustainability into its corporate brand identity. Furthermore, we are also interested in how the current brand communication on sustainability towards the local market is implemented. Additionally, whether the brand adjusts its communication approach depending on the country, therefore using a localized method, or pursuing a globalized and standardized communication when discussing subjects such as sustainability goals, challenges, and strategies.



Figure 2: Positioning of the Global Brand; IKEA

For this particular case study, IKEA will be the company of interest to exemplify how a global company approaches the local markets with their communication on sustainability and how they integrate sustainability as part of their corporate brand identity. IKEA is the market leader in the home furniture industry, and when it comes to corporate brand identity transfer across borders (Tarnovskaya and Chernatony, 2011). Furthermore, the authors argue that IKEA has created associations and an organizational culture similar internationally. Therefore, where we are interested in applying our research purpose to the case study object of IKEA and their integration and communication of sustainability.

1.4 Research Questions

- How does a global brand integrate sustainability into its corporate brand identity?
- How does a global brand communicate sustainability on a global and local level?

1.5 Delimitations

Our master thesis topics are limited to international marketing and brand management research, thus excluding other areas that could provide a fascinating insight into this case study. Due to the time limit and resources, our intentions are narrowed down to only exploring one global brand, in our case IKEA. However, we are conducting an individual case study in the form of researching the following countries or Inter IKEA Groups: Sweden and Canada. Thus delimiting other countries or IKEA Groups and their local operations. An additional excluding factor is the consumer-centric perspective; hence, the approach we, as the authors, are aiming for is solely the managerial point of view. Sustainability and brand communication are broad aspects; therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, we have chosen to focus on IKEA's existing, one-way communication, implemented in each selected country, their websites as well as IKEA's global sustainability report and Sustainability Strategy conducted by IKEA Headquarters as well their global website. Hence, social media, the catalog, and other existing two-way communication material available will not be of interest for this case study to keep the material concise and within the frame of research limitation.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Here is the following guideline or map for the structure of this thesis:



Picture 2. Map of the thesis' structure

Walking into our thesis, you will first be greeted with an introduction, providing the background of this specific case where we introduce IKEA as a global brand. After that, the reader will enter the section of our problematization, displaying previous research and our researching positioning of the thesis with our chosen relevant topics that will be brought to the surface leading to our conducted research purpose and questions. After that, a delimitation and outline of the thesis will be displayed to the visitor of this case study.

In the next room, we will present historical literature reviews and our theoretical frameworks to provide the reader with relevant knowledge and tools that can be retrieved for the empirical analysis. This includes: The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix by Urde (2013) and Integration for sustainability — implementation (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou 2014). These frameworks are supported by the background information about global brands, corporate brand identity, and further information about sustainability concepts. Additional theoretical knowledge regarding various tools that can be implemented in brand communication will give the readers insights about globalized and standardized versus localized communication.

The room that follows will provide the chosen research philosophy, design, and methodology for how we are collecting the data and the analysis plan. Then, continuing to the empirical and analytic chapter, we will present interesting findings from the collected data from our primary and secondary sources that later will be studied and discussed by the authors of this thesis divided after the themes from the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix and IKEA implementation model of Sustainability. Thereafter led to the discussion regarding potential alignment and differences between the Global and Local IKEA Groups and within the brand identity and communication approaches.

Finally, walking to the self-serve area, the authors will make a well-conducted conclusion from the gathered data and discussed findings, hoping that it could benefit and provide vital information for future theoretical contributions and limitations of the thesis. Additionally, we will offer strategies and insights for other IKEA Groups, MNFC, or other global brands for future practices when integrating sustainability into their identity and communication along with managerial contributions. The bibliography and appendix will provide a long *receipt* at the checkout from which all of the *items* (sources) are gathered.

Do not forget to buy a hotdog or a Swedish Cinnabon on your way out!

2. Literature Review & Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter will present the readers with theoretical concepts, literature, and previous research central to this thesis purpose, where global brands, corporate brand identity, brand communication, and sustainability will be presented. After that, the theoretical frameworks and implementation model by Urde (2013); & Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) will be reviewed.

2.1 Global Brand

For this thesis, global brands will be the point of departure. The definition of a global brand will be presented, in addition to previous research relating to global brands. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of a global brand is: *the name of a product or service that is known and sold in all parts of the world by a company* (n.d.a). To expand the definition, Steenkamp (2017) defines global brands as:

[...] a brand that uses the same name and logo, is recognized, available, and accepted in multiple regions of the world, shares the same principles, values, strategic positioning, and marketing throughout the world, and its management is internationally coordinated [...](p.3).

The goal for these companies is to create and maintain an identity that is aligned to the consumer's image of the corporation and that is consistent across various markets (Roper & Fill, 2012). Roper and Fill (2012) further display that the major factor for a company to show brand value or strength is to impact the decision-making choice among consumers. Steenkamp (2017) argues that the average person living in western society is exposed to five thousands of brands daily, an aspect that companies must keep in mind when forming strategies to stand out in the crowd of brands. According to Steenkamp (2017), the human brain stores knowledge of products in the form of a network, which can be easily reached in the case of brand recognition. A global brand with a well-known logo and name can provide a sense of reduction of risk and instead offer trust and quality to the consumer's mind (Roper & Fill, 2012). Schwartz (2004) argues that as more brand choices become available for the consumer, the decision process becomes much more challenging. Therefore, brand recognition serves as a cognitive shortcut, which will assist this decision.

The emotional and recognition factor plays a big part in the decision-making process and thus creates a form of trust or a sense of familiarity (Schwartz, 2004). Therefore, when entering the supermarket humans spend approximately four to five seconds purchasing low-engagement products, such as soap, chips, etc. Albeit, this knowledge and brand recognition will be retrieved from your brain network and affect your product purchase decisions (Steenkamp, 2017). Steenkamp (2017) continues to argue that the easiest way and the essential function to become top of mind for the consumers is to fulfill their emotional needs and to be associated with positive feelings and reputation. This is a standard tool that marketers use to add emotional meaning to the products and the brand identity. With mass production and price reduction in today's global market, Roper and Fill (2012) argue the competition is intense. Therefore, the brands need to find a way to differentiate themselves from their competitors. The emotional benefit is one of the many tools which could be implemented in that case to compete for the hearts and minds of the consumers and not compete for the top venues or flashiest stores or marketing (Steenkamp, 2017).

The goal for global companies is to create and maintain an identity that is aligned to the consumer's image of the corporation and that is consistent across various markets (Roper & Fill, 2012). The authors further argue that global brands that wish to be perceived as a sustainable need to integrate and align sustainability into the core identity of the company. Thus, to ensure that sustainability will permeate the company across local markets and to keep the identity aligned. Further on, the concept of corporate brand identity will be presented next, together with the framework Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser, 2015; Urde, 2022), to further see the importance of alignment of the brand identity across the nine elements.

2.2 Corporate Brand Identity

In order to investigate how global brands are incorporating sustainability into their corporate brand identity, we will use a theoretical framework relating to corporate brand identity. According to Urde (2022), all corporate brands have their own unique core identity, which reflects on all parts of the company and how they operate and communicate their brand to their target group. It is a way to internalize a brand's most fundamental values, personality, etc. and what it intends to represent. It also enables a brand to communicate and position

themselves on the market, in addition to building their reputation and making a name for themselves on the global market (Urde, 2022). A way to pinpoint these specifics that creates the entire business can be provided with the use of The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser, 2015; 2019; Urde, 2022). The Matrix structures the corporate brand identity into various categories to uncover its true self but also to create a stronger brand identity and its activities on the market (Urde, 2022).

2.2.1 Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser 2015; 2019; Urde 2022), CBIM, consists of nine elements that define the totality of a brand's identity. These elements are; *value proposition, relationship, position, expression, brand core, personality, mission and vision, culture, and competencies*. These nine elements are divided into internal, external components, and the inner path is a combination of both. In Figure 2, the CBIM conducted by Urde (2013; 2022) displays these characteristics and questions to ask yourself as a brand while identifying its different characteristics and approaches.

External	<p>VALUE PROPOSITION</p> <p>What are our key offerings and how do we want them to appeal to customers and non-customer stakeholders?</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>What should be the nature of our relationships with key customers and non-customer stakeholders?</p>	<p>POSITION</p> <p>What is our intended position in the market, and in the heart and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders?</p>
External & Internal	<p>EXPRESSION</p> <p>What is distinctive about the way we communicate and express ourselves and makes it possible to recognize us at a distance?</p>	<p>BRAND CORE</p> <p>What do we promise, and what are the core values that sum up the essence of what our brand stand for?</p>	<p>PERSONALITY</p> <p>What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?</p>
Internal	<p>MISSION AND VISION</p> <p>What engages us (mission) and what is our direction and inspiration? (vision)</p>	<p>CULTURE</p> <p>What are our attitudes and how do we work and behave?</p>	<p>COMPETENCES</p> <p>What are we particularly good at, and what makes us better than the competition?</p>

Figure 3. Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013)

The CBIM, in this thesis, will be implemented to analyze the corporate brand identity of a global brand to see how the brand has incorporated sustainability into the business through the nine elements. This way, it can be examined whether sustainability is included in all parts of the brand identity and how sustainability is incorporated. We will further explain the implementation in the data analysis. Furthermore, below are the paths of the CBIM that will be used for analyzing a global brand's integration of sustainability in their corporate brand identity and communication. The nine elements have been integrated into the framework, where the brand core integrates with the entire brand identity and creates categories or paths of the elements.

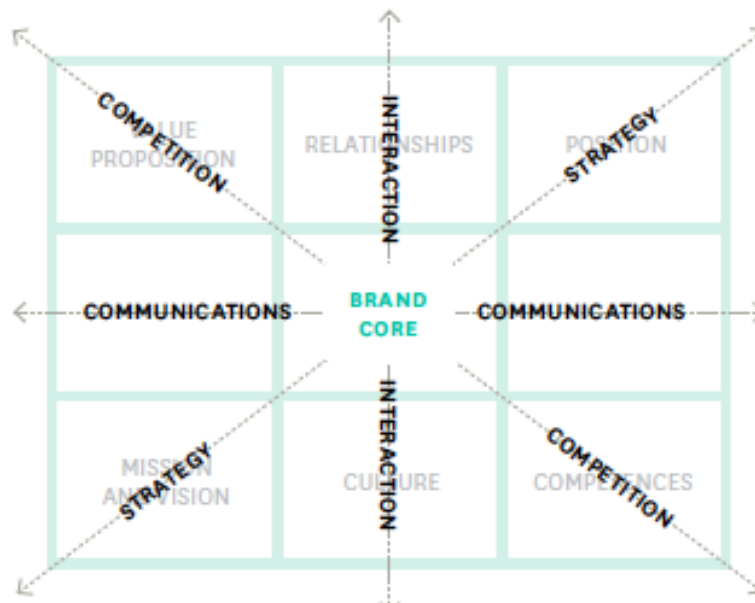


Figure 4. The four paths, CBIM (Urde & Greyser, 2019; Urde, 2022)

The role of the brand core is both in an internal and external manner to guide the organization for a complete integration. The paths that are being made up of different elements consist of the following; *strategy*, *competition*, *interaction* and *communication* (Urde, 2022). These will be the outline of our empirical study. Therefore, the implementation of these elements can contribute to further understanding of how sustainability is communicated in the local and the global IKEA corporation and how sustainability is incorporated into the brand's core value and brand identity.

Moving on, an additional layer called *The communication and positioning layer* (Urde, 2022) covers the corporate brand's identity-expression, when externalizing the brand identity in the form of e.g. a story or when marking its position to the public. Urde (2022) further argues

that while expressing a brand identity to the public, it is critical to include the rhetorical tools of ethos, pathos, and logos while telling a story about a brand. By using these tools, it will help with the development of the brand's activation and persuasion to the local market (Urde, 2022). This guides the outer layer of the Matrix, which will be further interpreted by the authors while constructing their own outer layer focusing on the communication aspect. For the purpose and aim of this thesis, we want to incorporate the global and local brand's communication of sustainable integrations and initiatives.

In the next section, we will provide further research within the field of brand communication and display two different communication approaches global brands can forego while communicating sustainability to their target groups; through a standardized and localized approach. This, to investigate how global brands can approach the local markets regarding communication on sustainability.

2.3 Brand Communication

The different forms of brand communication and how they manifest will be presented, to gain a more profound understanding of how brands communicate externally. Communication can be explained as *symbolically mediated actions* (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011), where humans form their sense of reality based on experiences and perceptions. According to Roper & Fill (2012), brand communication can manifest in several different ways, where it can take form verbally, through written materials, through figurative communication, etc. However, the alignment of all the various forms of brand communication externalizes the essence of the brand identity to the market (Roper & Fill, 2012). When it comes to communication, every strong global brand possesses three qualities that are essential for the brand; clarity, consistency, and constancy (Arruda, 2009). These three C's show the public who you are, your brand signature, and your brand's visibility. Thus, these qualities are the key components for companies to consider when forming their communication strategy.

Previous marketing literature in the field of communication highlights that communication is seen as a vital part when developing sustainability strategies (Prothero, Peattie & McDonagh, 1997). Accordingly, it is important for companies to take advantage of how they are communicating sustainability to the public, not least having the three C's in mind to develop

a style of communication that affects the public the most. Furthermore, for stakeholders to be able to express their preferences and for the company to make progress on sustainable development, it is crucial for companies to communicate their sustainability achievements (Falchi, Grolleau & Mzoughi, 2022; Mathis, 2007). This means that it is not enough for the company just to communicate sustainability to the audience to improve their position on the sustainability ladder, but for the company to communicate what they have achieved when working with sustainability. For global brands, it is important to adjust what achievements are being externally communicated in the local areas, for stakeholders to relate to what is being communicated and for the communication to stay relevant in different local areas around the world (Roper & Fill, 2012). In the next chapter, the authors of this thesis will display two different approaches to communication toward sustainability; standardized communication and localized communication.

2.3.1 Standardized versus Localized Communication Approach

Corporate brand communication can further take both a standardized perspective, aiming to be present and similar internationally, or a localized view where the business adapts the communication regarding what is happening in the local area (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). What strategy to use is not set in stone; it is instead something that depends on the company, what consumers they want to target, what the purpose of the communication is etc. The field of standardization and localization is an area that is well researched; however, the discussion regarding standardized advertising and whether to advertise the same product the same way over markets has created a controversy and has been on the agenda for over fifty years (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Based on empirical findings from a study made in the United States of America, the majority of companies tend to follow a localized approach rather than a standardized one (Kanso & Kitchen, 2004). The same study also showed that consumers feel that companies with more localized approaches have a more severe approach to cultural variables than companies with more standardized approaches. The results from this study enhances the importance for global brands to approach their local consumers with a localized communication, to stay aligned with the cultural variables and what is currently happening in the local areas. Keeping a standardized communication can result in a misalignment between the company and its local consumers, making the company less relatable for the consumers.

Although the majority of companies tend to follow a localized approach (Kanso & Kitchen, 2004), Schuiling & Kapferer (2004) argues that there are multiple advantages of standardizing a corporation, and that there are benefits of standardizing the production and communication. The authors give examples of cost reduction, internal operative business systems, external marketing, and sales communication. Regarding the economic aspect, a standardized production and supply chain will reduce costs because of quantitative mass-production. In addition, applying a global brand name enables the visual communication and packaging of products to substantial savings and leads to higher recognition among their consumers (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1986; Buzzell, 1968; Craig & Douglas, 2000; Levitt, 1983; Porter, 1986, cited in Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). These will, in return, increase the corporate revenue and enhance the financial performance. However, Steenkamp (2017) argues that a corporation with a standardized approach might face several risks; for example, managers cannot predict that the market will perceive the communication in a similar manner. Instead, it is a competitive industry where every market can vary, and companies should therefore adapt their approach and position after it. Steenkamp (2017) further suggested adjusting the marketing mix to meet the local need and adapt to the country's culture and customs. This can once again be connected to global brands, and the question as to how they are approaching the local markets with their communication when typically being standardized and globalized in their operations.

Moving on from the concept of communication and the various ways for implementing a global and standardized versus local approach, sustainability will be further defined and elaborated. By combining communication and sustainability, the hopes are to gain further knowledge of how global brands can communicate sustainability to the local target groups. Therefore we will first display previous research within the field of sustainability to further explain its importance, and later display how companies can implement sustainability in their practices.

2.4 Sustainability

To get an understanding of sustainability and how a global brand can integrate and communicate sustainability, the concept of sustainability and previous research within the area will be presented. Sustainability and sustainable development can be described as the

development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 1987 p. 43, cited in Thomsen, 2018), a definition that implies that we together must look out for the future of our planet. Previous research regarding marketing and sustainability identifies that companies should adapt their marketing practices and marketing strategies in an effort to respond to current environmental and social issues (Kotler, 2011). Companies should also address the environmental problems that have occurred due to the firm's operation, and should therefore embrace sustainability (Shrivastava & Hart, 1995). The results from these studies imply that it is important for companies to integrate and communicate sustainability, and because of this it is interesting to research how global companies are addressing this. In order to respond to current environmental and social issues, the global company has to adapt to their local markets since this differs all over the world (Roper & Fill, 2012). At the same time, for a company to address the environmental problems that have occurred due to the firm's operations, it is also crucial that this is communicated on a local level for the company to be relatable to the habitants in the local area.

Sustainable development is said to be ethically motivated and refers to a form of lifestyle and economics that will not put our future in danger (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). Ethically, it can be argued that all companies should be sustainable and work actively with it, but in a world with market-based economies a company also needs to be successful economically to survive (Baumgartner, 2014). Global companies tend to standardize their operations in order to maximize their revenue and minimize the costs for the company (Schuiling & Kapferer 2004), an aspect that is contrary to sustainability and often results in a negative impact on the environment. This contradicting aspect is of interest to investigate, how global companies are tackling these issues by integrating sustainability into their identity and how they further are communicating sustainability achievements to the local markets.

Being a company actively working with sustainability has advantages compared to companies that are not focusing on it. These companies can be called irresponsible companies and include those who have for example illegal businesses, unethical businesses, or businesses that are severely unsustainable. A study has shown that 75% of consumers are likely to act in a negative manner toward a company that is irresponsible, all ranging from posting about the company on social media to boycotting the company (Holmes, 2016). Further, the study shows that one in four will communicate negatively to friends and family

about the brand, resulting in a loss of 39% of the company's consumer base. Lastly, the study also shows that 83% of investors prefer to invest in companies that are known for their sustainability, since they often are more transparent and hence result in lower risk for the stakeholders. These statistics are not only showing the importance for companies to integrate sustainability into their operations, but also the importance for companies to communicate how they are working with sustainability to ensure that they are not being viewed as an irresponsible company by consumers.

To demonstrate how a global brand has integrated sustainability and how they are communicating sustainability, we have chosen the Integrating Sustainability and Branding - implementation model by Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014). This model will later be implemented based on our case study and objects in order to construct our analysis.

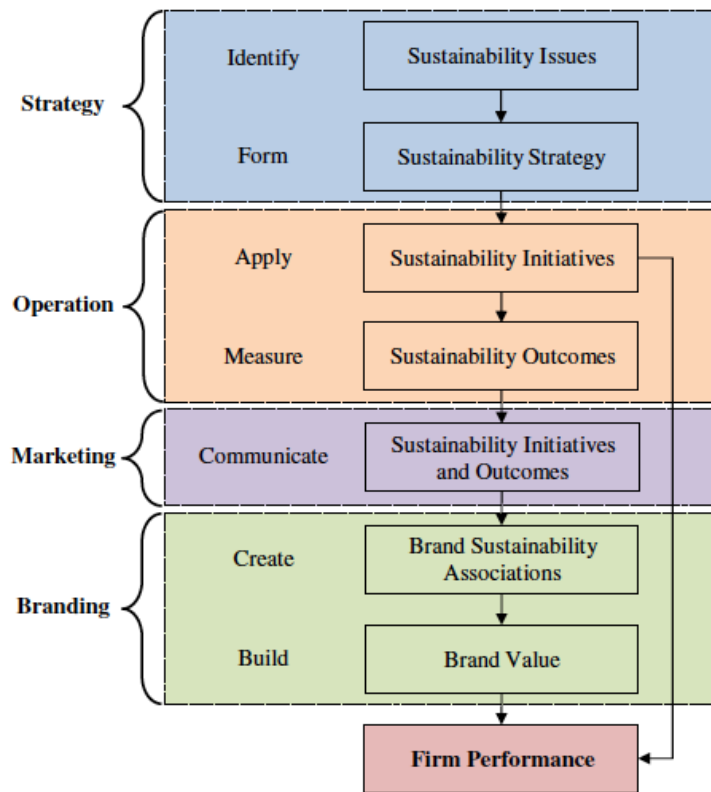
2.4.1 Integrating and Communicating Sustainability

Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) have developed a framework in the field of sustainability, communication, and branding, with an integrative perspective. The authors suggest that firms can take advantage of using their brands through branding activities to promote their value of sustainability. Furthermore, by using the brand through branding activities, the firm can emphasize the sustainability practices that have been implemented, and the impact these practices have on stakeholders. Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) also state that sustainability is a matter of strategic importance and that the implementation of sustainability practices should take form through a comprehensive plan of sustainability strategies.

Furthermore, Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) suggest that when integrating sustainability into a firm's branding, the firm can grant a competitive advantage by appealing to consumers concerned about sustainability. The authors explain several different marketing techniques that can be applied, to ensure that sustainability becomes an essential part of the brand. One of these techniques is communication, where the firm can communicate sustainability efforts and what will result, such as in advertisements, packages for products, and other promotional material. Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) are simultaneously

stressing the importance for companies to respect and preserve the communities, cultures, and environments where they are operating.

In order to implement the framework that Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014) have developed, the implementation should follow the components strategy, operation, marketing, and branding. Furthermore, the strategy procedure involves the steps to *identify sustainability issues* and *form a sustainability strategy*, the operation involves the steps to *apply sustainability initiatives* and *measure sustainability outcomes*, marketing involves the steps to *communicate sustainability initiatives and outcomes* and branding involves the steps to *create brand sustainability associations* and *build brand value*. When applying and following these steps, the firm will eventually reach the final step, *firm performance* (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014).



*Figur 5. Integration for sustainability — implementation
(Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014)*

As a first step, the firm is simply assessing the issues they are planning to address and should after that form a sustainability strategy based on what challenges need to be solved. In this step, it is also essential for the company to take into consideration both the environmental and social concerns regarding all stakeholders that might be affected, as well as the industry in

which the firm is operating when defining the issues. In the second step, firms need to create a plan for, then implement, and lastly measure the result of the sustainability actions. Here, it is crucial for firms to firstly employ specific social and environmental initiatives and align the sustainability efforts with the firm's activities. This way, the firm can strengthen the current and desirable associations of the corporation (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

In the final two steps, the focus is on connecting the firm's sustainability strategy to an outstanding performance by communication and managing the brand. It is vital for the firm to consistently communicate the sustainability practices and outcomes in company reports, advertisements, sustainability reports, etc. Thus, consumers and stakeholders can create brand associations of consideration, sustainability, and responsibility by being informed about the company's sustainability outcomes. These associations can potentially enhance the brand's image and create value for the company (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

For this study, the steps of communicating sustainability initiatives and outcomes will be the main focus to see how a global brand communicates sustainability externally to its local market. Since the framework's purpose is to explore communication strategies, engage current sustainability challenges, and apply solutions to them, the researchers of this thesis find Kumar and Christodouloupoulou of much relevance that will provide further insights on communication approaches. Although, for this thesis, we believe that this framework cannot stand alone. However, combined with the Matrix (Urde, 2013), it will contribute to fulfilling the research gap to reach the thesis' true potential. The relevance and further detail of the framework and its implementation model will be further explained in the data analysis category.

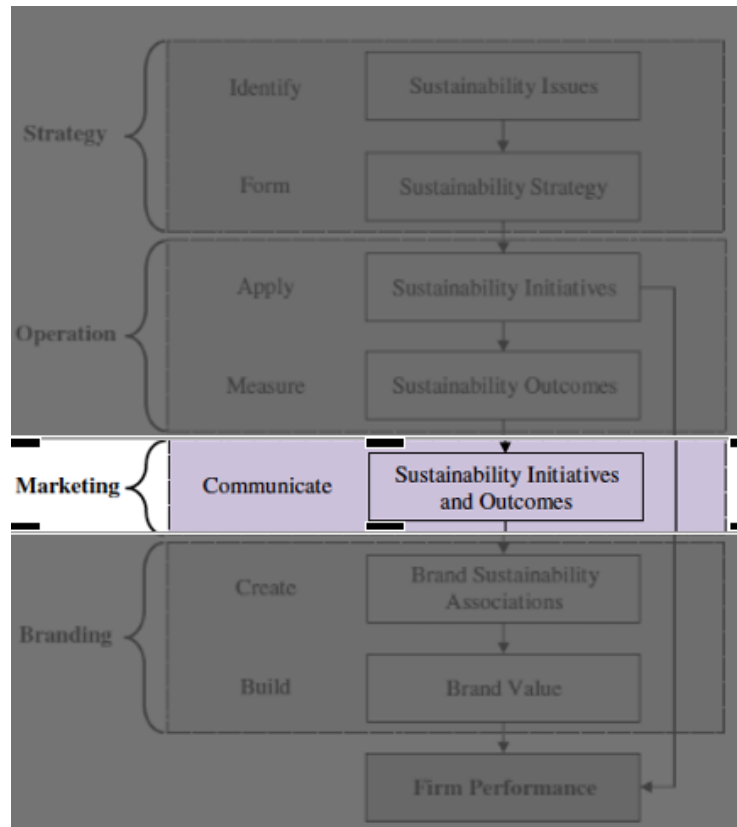


Figure 6. Positioning of the Integration for sustainability– implementation

The choice of implementing both the Matrix and the Implementation model is that the Implementation model covers both the focus of the sustainability challenge and initiatives, as well as the focus of how they communicate it internationally. Therefore the Matrix nor the Implementation model cannot stand alone, but together they complement and enhance each other to answer our research questions. For the discussion these frameworks will be interlocked and create an extended version of the Matrix, more details are displayed in the data analysis section. Up next, we will demonstrate and argue for our method approach to collect and analyze the gathered empirical data.

3. Methodology

This upcoming section focuses on our approach to collecting data through a qualitative procedure, where we have divided it into seven subcategories: (1) Research Philosophy, (2) Qualitative Research Method (3) Research Design (4) Data Collection Method (5) Data Analysis (6) Research Quality.

3.1 Research Philosophy

To start our plan for the data collection, we will display the core of our research interest. Therefore, the best way to explain the philosophical position and design is to describe the philosophical position and design. These facts will display the researcher's perspective of collecting the data and how they interpret it (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021).

3.1.1 Ontological Position

Starting from the core, in Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2021), the ontological position is manifested as the philosophical assumption or perceptions about the researcher's view on the nature of reality based on truths and facts surrounding them. Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe demonstrate four different aspects: realism, internal realism, relativism, and nominalism. From a realistic point of view, the world of nature is independent of the human's perception to interpret it. In contrast, nominalism argues that there is no single truth but that every particle or object around us is a human interpretation and observation of the nature of the world. Inside these extremes, internal realism agrees that there is a truth but too understandable for a human to generalize. The second one is relativism, which displays the truth of people's perspectives through the lens of their eyes (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021).

For our thesis, we have decided to place our focus on relativists' way of constructing the world. This choice is based on the assumption that we are conducting a qualitative data collection method. Additionally, all of the responses from the managers will generate different answers, assumptions, and perspectives for us to analyze and further discuss. Hence, there will be several individual truths about their perceptions of IKEA as a global company

and its operations. Pursuing the relativist ontology, the role of researchers may impact the interpretation of the collected data and thus affect the results of this study. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), the grounding theory of relativism is the language constructed from various knowledge. Therefore, when the researchers are phrasing the interview questions or conducting any contact with the respondents, this might implicate or influence them. By using relativist ontology, we hope to achieve higher data quality. Furthermore, the respondents enable them to reflect on their own experience and interpretation of IKEA branding communication for their specific market and how sustainability could affect this choice.

3.1.2 Epistemology Position

Moving on from ontology, it takes the reader to the outer layer called epistemology, which is about the theory of knowledge and facts (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). An important aspect to keep in mind is that many philosophers disagree with the assumptions mentioned below or have their interpretation of the concept of social constructivism and positivism. However, we interpret the concepts according to the displayed facts and knowledge distributed from the literature book written by Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2015; 2021).

Continuing from our position of a relativistic design, leading to the choice of the epistemological approach. According to Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2021), there are two ways or practices to take on during this thesis; positivism and social construction. However, since the purpose of this study is to gain further knowledge of IKEA's integration towards sustainability as part of their brand identity, we hope to gain a richer understanding of how IKEA should lay their focus on their upcoming approach to brand communication within the sustainability field. Therefore, we have decided to conduct this thesis through a social construction manner. Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2015) think that knowledge or "reality" is co-created and socially constructed from relativist ontology. There are multiple assumptions from people worldwide and their perceived experiences and perceptions.

3.2 Research Approach

Accounting from the chosen research philosophy and due to the purpose of this thesis, our data collection will be gathered through a qualitative approach to an in-depth investigation of a global brand's integration of sustainability in their brand identity and their external brand communication. In Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2015), qualitative data is defined by the non-numerical form in which the information has been gathered and is most commonly data that accounts for what a research participant has said or done. Furthermore, Easterby-Smith, Jackson and Thorpe (2015) explain that qualitative data can be collected through interviews, written observations, company reports, etc., and has developed through a process that is both interactive and that serves to explain different phenomena. Therefore, we will conduct qualitative research that, in its nature, achieves an explorative, in-depth approach to the research method. We will include open-ended questions for the research participant to respond more freely than data collected quantitatively for the semi-structured interviews.

We find that a qualitative approach is the most suitable for our research purpose. Since we are interested to understand a global brand's integration of sustainability in their brand identity and which approach they are implementing in its external brand communication in the message of sustainable topics. To gain this understanding of these phenomena and whether IKEA is implementing a communication approach that is more localized or standardized, we need to gain a deeper understanding of IKEA's current way of operation. Further, we also need to examine if there are any changes depending on the different IKEA Groups and local markets.

Conducting research within the field of business, there are two main approaches that can relate the theory and the research, namely inductive and deductive research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021; Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). The inductive starting point comes from observing phenomena, which then leads to a grounded theory. Deductive aim starts from existing theoretical material, which leads to hypotheses and is then observed to either accept or reject them (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). Recently, an additional research method of reasoning has become popular in the research field, namely abductive reasoning, which implements both the different approaches, deductive and inductive (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). According to Bell, Bryman, and

Harley (2019):, *abduction is proposed to overcome the limitations associated with deductive and inductive positions* (p.24). Kennedy and Thornberg (2018) describe abduction as a particular form of a creative process when researching how phenomena or data support existing literature, theoretical material, or hypotheses. Abduction can also be used to modify published data and even shift its understanding. The limitation of this approach is far beyond the other two because of its ability to combine, elaborate, further explain, modify, reject or emerge an old theory with a new one, etc. In addition, this approach provides the option to move back and forth between various theories and data collection to make comparisons or interpret from a new angle to create an even more nuanced finding or conclusion, which could contribute to the whole research community as well as the managerial or theoretical contributions (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018).

The abductive method of process also enables us to *overcome the limitations associated with deductive and inductive positions'* (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019, p.24). Since the purpose of this research is to explain and elaborate on the current issue of sustainable global communication, which is quite a new phenomena in the researching field, an abductive method speaks strongly to our choice. Our abductive approach is also influenced by interpretation, as we conduct interviews with managers and analyze their personal and professional opinion regarding IKEA's way of communicating sustainability as part of their brand identity. Interpretive research explains: *involving a dialogical process between theory and the empirical phenomenon; this results in the production of 'reflexive narratives, not explanatory models or theoretical propositions* (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019, p.24).

To demonstrate the chosen method for our thesis, existing literature and theories regarding sustainability and brand identity are applied with a global perspective on the brand and an externalization approach for expanding the theoretical lenses. As explained above, the process of moving back and forth occurs during our research process, which the abductive approach enables us to do. Albeit, our purpose of the thesis is not to generate a new theory but rather to enable us to conduct a nuanced conclusion to our research question. Also, to further demonstrate an example of a global brand integration of sustainability in its brand identity and align it to its external brand communication in its local market. In line with the abductive approach, implementation of the framework from Urde (2013) and Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) was purposely chosen to understand further and interpret the data collected from our respondents rather than conducting a statistical comparison or other tests.

3.3 Research Design and Method

Due to the chosen research philosophy, our way of reasoning, and the construct of our data through a qualitative method and abductive approach, we will further explain in detail the design of this thesis. Research design provides a further reflection of our principle and displays the research style of our case study, and we plan to gather our primary and secondary data. Thus, to ensure the reader a holistic and comprehensive understanding of our plan and how it will be utilized further in our analysis (Bell, Bryman & Harely, 2019).

3.3.1 Case Study

For our thesis, we are conducting a single case study researching how a global brand can integrate sustainability into its corporate brand identity and how to communicate sustainability to the local market using a globalized or localized approach. The choice for this single case study style is due to our focus on one global brand, IKEA, to gain further and more profound knowledge within this research position. First, we will compare IKEA's international and local corporate brand identity and observe their communication expression in the chosen Inter IKEA Groups, Sweden and Canada. This enables us to gain a detailed exploration of which communication strategy is being implemented in the various markets around the world and have the ability to compare the different approaches to communication and identify their Corporate Brand Identity Matrix. Further on, to analyze and discuss the alignment between the global and a local point of personality, core value, and expression. Finally, the motivation for choosing Sweden and Canada as markets to research will be explained further in the sampling theory.

This form of research design has increased in the business and marketing field in the last few years (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The single case study will provide a holistic understanding of a global brand's external communication approach and IKEA's integration of sustainability in its brand identity. We want to provide the reader with a more practical and grasping, in-real-life context case. This case study's research design aims to gain more profound knowledge within a phenomenon or an area of research, which leads to further practical and theoretical knowledge for the reader (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

To gather the empirical data, we are conducting semi-structured interviews that allow the researcher to interact with the managers directly to gain an in-depth perspective and insights about IKEA's corporate brand identity and external brand communication and their approach toward sustainability. The respondents were not offered the interview guide (Appendix One and Two) prior to the first meeting to encourage a free discussion, thus eliciting accurate responses to the questions (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews is to gain the advantages of engaging the respondents in an exploratory discussion, flexibility regarding the set-up of the interview guide, and room to add additional information or questions during the duration of the interview, which the authors did not consider before it (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015).

Prior to the conducted interviews, the respondents were offered the choice of the scenario for the interview. Still, due to the geographical differences as well as the presence of Covid-19, the respondents chose the virtual-meeting platform, Teams. The IKEA manager's preferences concerning data and individual safety issues motivated their choice of Teams. Although all of the respondents received a personal meeting invitation with a date and time based on the manager's location, adjustments were made to accommodate the time difference for both parties for the interview. Before the interview, the respondents had received a general description of the purpose of the study and details about their participation in the interview. A consent form (Appendix Three) was sent to the respondents. It clearly outlined their voluntary participation in the study and their ability to withdraw from any stage during the interview, and their rights to remain anonymous for this study. The duration of each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The researchers divided the quest of asking questions while the other researcher acted as secretary and took notes to compare with the audio recordings. Prior to the start of the interview, the respondent had to give consent for us to an audiotape for transcription; if denied, the respondent has the opportunity to withdraw from the interview. Audiotaping the interview enabled the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' answers to the conducted interview guide and simultaneously provide the respondent the ability and safety to speak freely during the entire interview process (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). We conducted our first interview at the beginning of February, retrieving information about IKEA as a brand, their identity, and their local communication techniques. At the beginning of May, follow-up interviews were

conducted with the same managers and additional managers within the field of sustainability where the interview guide, Appendix Two, was applied.

3.3.3 Secondary Data

Further on, when gathering additional qualitative data, it can be collected primarily by the researcher and through secondary sources that were not constructed with a purpose for this specific study but are still relevant for another research purpose (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Using the hermeneutic approach, we can use existing reports or other articles but interpret them in our context and purpose (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). The authors continue to argue that when collecting secondary data, there is the possibility to explore new relationships and patterns within data that is already existing. For example, secondary data in the form of textual data is information and findings gathered with a different purpose than the research currently being conducted (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). Secondary sources can range from company reports, advertisements, books, news articles, etc., and enable specific data about, for example, companies or markets (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, it is essential always to be critical of secondary data to assess the credibility of the information. Additionally, secondary data is also opening up a historical perspective, an aspect that might not be feasible through primary data collection. However, the main disadvantage of secondary sources is that it does not ensure that the data will be helpful to or fit the purpose of the new research (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015).

For our study, we aim to complement the primary data we will gather from interviews with secondary data collected from sustainability reports (IKEA, 2021a; IKEA, 2020), other relevant reports (IKEA, n.d.c), and IKEA's local and global websites (IKEA, n.d.b; n.d.d; n.d.e). Since all of these sources are published by IKEA themselves, it is safe to consider these sources reliable and trustworthy. However, it is still essential to keep in mind that the information might be biased toward the company since the reports have the aim to show the positive aspects of IKEA.

3.4 Data Collection and Sampling

The method of collecting the data will be described and divided into several segments: sampling theory, information regarding the respondents, interview guide, and recording & transcribing. Due to the limitation of resources, findings, and time has led to the number of interviews with IKEA managers and the limitation of countries to observe. However, this case study focuses on collecting the highest quality, in-depth research data from the respondents of our distribution rather than aiming for the highest number of interviews with managers from every country and market. Within these constraints, we aim to gather enough intel within our limitations to have the ability to answer our research question.

As Kvale and Brinkmann explain: *the aim of qualitative interviews should be to collect information that captures the meaning and interpretation of phenomena in relation to the interviewees' worldviews* (2009, cited in Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015, p.141). Next up, we will display our aim for sampling our respondents and the motivation for our chosen countries.

3.4.1 Sampling Theory

Before collecting data for a study, the authors of this thesis need to decide on a sampling strategy. Including the sampling unit, how many of it needs to be selected, and on what basis the sampling can be conducted (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). Therefore, the choice of a global brand was conducted after thorough research and landed on IKEA, due to them being one of the most valuable retailer companies in the world. In addition, the most valuable furniture retail company in the world (Statista, 2021) has actively implemented sustainability in all activities in the company, with clear goals they want to achieve by the year 2030.

Researchers collect data from a sample to make more generalized statements about a larger population. Therefore, claims legitimately can be made from sampling data depending on the relationship between the selection and the larger group it aims to make claims regarding. When deciding on sampling design, two fundamental principles underlying the choice; representativeness and precision (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). As the authors further explain, accuracy in sampling is about the credibility of the sample, while

representativeness in sampling is whether the sample and the collected data are representative of the more significant population. However, the accuracy of a conclusion is drawn from the chosen sample and it depends on the characteristics of the rest of the population (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021). For this thesis, IKEA will demonstrate a case study object and be implemented as an example of how they have integrated and communicated sustainability to their local market. Therefore, the results of this case study will not be representative of the global brand nor generalizable. However, the precision of the chosen sample is conducted through careful consideration and from the position at the company that creates credibility to their responses and ability to develop this empirical data. This leads to the conclusion that they can provide correct and accurate knowledge about the brand.

For this study, a purposive sampling method (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) was applied, where we had a clear idea of what sample units were needed in order to answer our research questions. Hence, the members of the population, in our case, are the managers that meet these criteria. The main factors that were included when considering initial contact were: their position within the company, the duration they had been at that position, and their geographic establishment at IKEA. After the initial contact and discussion regarding the purpose of this project, it has shown that they do not fit these criteria or maintain interest in our conditions. In addition to the purpose of this study, they obtain the ability to be out-ruled or rejected participants. During the interview process, the authors of this thesis will ask the respondents afterward about potential managers interested in participating in this study to extend the sample and lead to the snowball effect of the selection (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019).

The reason for choosing different countries, Sweden and Canada, is to get a broader perspective from different countries and analyze if there is any difference between the local countries and how IKEA operates their communication approach towards sustainability. The Swedish market was chosen due to its acceptability to the authors of this thesis and our inside contact in the identity department at IKEA Group Sweden. However, the authors also have a great interest in the North American market, which displays different cultures and customs regarding sustainability and the way they communicate. This was acknowledged after conducting previous studies while researching various platforms and social media channels to observe different communication strategies and focus of the product placement. Thus, it

landed us to reach out to multiple managers and gain contact with the Marketing Manager in Canada. Furthermore, having a sample of respondents with different positions at the MNFC also broadens our perspective and allows for findings that might not have been found if all managers possessed the same position at IKEA in the same country. This enables the analysis to gain broader but still in-depth insights from different departments and different IKEA Groups and markets. The respondent's experience and perception of the integration of sustainability in the IKEA brand identity and communication can be discussed and analyzed. The following section will introduce the readers to some basic information regarding the respondent in the different IKEA Groups.

3.4.2 Facts about the Managers at IKEA

Table 1. Information about Respondents

Respondent's name	Country of Placement	Inter IKEA Group Position	Duration at IKEA, approx	Date of the Interviews
Åsa Nordin	Sweden	Identity & Trademark Manager	17 years	9 Feb 2022 6 May 2022a
Johanna Andrén	Canada	Marketing Manager	5 years	22 Feb 2022 3 May 2022
Nina Bogstedt	Netherlands	Global Brand Identity Manager	3 years	10 March 2022 4 May 2022
Heléne Davidsson	Netherlands	Global Sustainability Manager	19 years	6 May 2022b

3.4.3 Interview Guide

During the establishment of our data collection from our respondents, the researchers of this thesis conducted two interview guides, Appendix One and Appendix Two, which assisted us during the semi-structured interviews. This ensured that specific questions and topics were being covered but still enabled the responses the freedom and time to reply and expand the answers to the questions that are open for interpretation (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Appendix Two displays the chosen frameworks from Urde (2013; 2022) and Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) to further understand IKEA's implementation in these areas. The interview guides (Appendix One & Two) acted as support or guideline during the interviews; however, the guide didn't need to be followed in exact order. Therefore, the interviews were not standardized, although with context that the managers possessed different positions would already lead to different answers. However, the general intention for each interview was that the outline was similar. Therefore, the interviewer promoted it to stay objective during the interview and not lead the interview in a particular direction (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

The gathering of our sample was initiated; after a guest lecture during the Brand Management and Reputation class with Mikael Ydholm, a previous employee at IKEA. Ydholm provided us with the contact information of the identity and trademark Manager. The other respondents were connected through the social media platform LinkedIn, where advanced scanning of IKEA's employees based on their position and duration at the company and their geographic location was of our interest. After initial contact through the social media platform, further information and discussion was conducted via email, where the first interviews were scheduled. Due to the fact of the pandemic presence as well as the geographical distance between the respondents and us, our greatest option was to conduct the interviews through the virtual meeting program, Teams.

The interviews started with a description of the aim of this thesis and our great interest in IKEA to use as an example MFNC to implement in this research. Thereafter, the respondents were asked regarding confidential information to give heads or tell us so that they would feel comfortable during the course of the interview. After, fundamental information regarding their current employment and their everyday tasks were discussed. As displayed in the interview guide, questions regarding their past perception and recent experience of IKEA as a global brand, brand identity, sustainability- approach, and communication strategy. The interview duration was approximately one hour, and no financial compensation was received from any respondent for participating in this study. However, they are to be distributed the thesis results afterward and provided with the final draft of the Master's thesis.

3.4.4 Recording and Transcribing

The interviews were recorded for the interviewers to gain all the crucial details that could be used for the analysis. In addition, of course, the respondents were asked to record their session at the beginning of their approval and whether they wanted their identity to remain unknown. Throughout this whole process of interviews, the ethics of conducting research was essential and our top priority. This is so that no misconduct would arise and no violation of the respondent or the integrity of the research community would be conducted (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021).

The recordings and the answers will remain confidential and only be used for the sole purpose of this study. If one of the respondents has confidential or personal information that wishes not to be submitted to the paper, the authors will understand and respect that decision. Further on, when transcribing the interviews, the respondents' quotes will be transcribed word for word so there won't be any miscommunication in the analysis for the readers or the fellow author. Some of the interviews were conducted in Swedish; therefore, a translation will be needed where some minor adjustments of the sentences might need a small change so the message will become as evident in English. Afterward, the information will be categorized into different sections to compare the manager's experience and perception of brand identity and communication, combined with additional aspects of the sustainable strategies implemented at IKEA internationally. When referencing the interviews in our empirical data collection, the respondents will be referred to by their actual name and position since they did not wish to remain anonymous. A consent form (Appendix Three) has been distributed and signed by all managers. Finally, in the following category, we will walk the reader through how the data analysis will be constructed, sorted, reduced, and argued for (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

3.5 Data Analysis

Prior to the analytic section of the thesis, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) argue that the authors should sort the material into different categories or elements mentioned on repeated occasions by the managers or seen while observing the websites and reports during the data collection. For the purpose of our thesis, this inclines that the managers elaborate on their

own and IKEA's interaction with sustainability, both as integration in their corporate brand identity as well in their external brand communication. There are also two important principles according to the authors (2018), the *what* and *how*, also known as the undertone of the constructed interviews. Furthermore, this refers to what was actually said and later formatting of different themes that are in focus, which then became the extended foundation for our sorting, and later connected to our chosen frameworks and theoretical perspectives.

After this is constructed, there are three main steps that are central, according to Kvale (1997, cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018): *distilling, categorizing and interpreting* (p.75). The distilling process is constructed when the transcription of the interviews is reduced, meaning limiting the interesting findings to those who are relevant and contributing to our purpose, for example, creating shorter sentences or themes (Kvale 1983; 1997, cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Thereafter, we will sort this into the chosen categories, which, as mentioned previously in the positioning of the research with a focus on IKEA (figure 2), corporate brand identity, global brand, external brand communication, and sustainability, where we later will interpret and discuss the findings. The themes will be demonstrated based on the interviews and will be further elaborated in the analysis, discussion, and conclusion. Kvale continues to argue that interpretation tries to: *reach beyond what is directly said to work out structures and relations of meanings not immediately apparent in text* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p.235, cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p.31). This is demonstrated in our empirical data and analysis section and limited to this section. It is presented in quotes and references to the managers and provides further elaboration of the topic due to our previous knowledge within the research field and more profound knowledge of the global brand.

For the empirical data, our retrieval of interesting findings are conducted from the interviews with IKEA's local and global managers and insights from the various websites, to be implemented and construct our interpretation of the global brand into the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013). When we are implementing our findings into the CBIM, all of the nine elements of the Matrix will be demonstrated. The empirical findings and the analytic section are thematized based on the extended version of Urde (2022), where the four paths emerge; *interaction, competition, strategy and communication*. For our thesis, further focus in the discussion and conclusion will be based on the outer layer of our interpretation of the First outer layer of the CBIM, and creating a table of the completion for how IKEA

communicates sustainability to the global and local market. These elements are chosen to detect potential alignment, standardization, or differences between each market and the global guidelines, in order to see IKEA's integration and external brand communication approach towards sustainability.

Thereafter will the Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014) framework be based on the primary and secondary data sources. More specifically, in this study the model of Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014) will be used to investigate sustainability issues that a global company has identified, how the global brand has implemented activities into their business to work on the issues. Lastly, how the company communicates this process to consumers and stakeholders on a global and local level (Kumar and Christodoulopoulou, 2014). The model can thus work to see how such a valuable company can be successful in its sustainability work and communication towards consumers and stakeholders. If there are any differences, these issues are being tackled and communicated globally and locally. This can later be applied to other companies, using IKEA as an example of a global company operating in different local markets.

3.6 Research Quality

When conducting qualitative research, it is crucial for the authors of this thesis to evaluate different criteria to secure the good quality of the study. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Therefore, besides the interviews that will be conducted for this study, secondary data will be included through sustainability reports, previously conducted studies, reports, and other information retrieved at the IKEA website.

For this thesis, transferability is one of the criteria that need to be considered when conducting the interviews (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The information available in the sustainability reports and on the IKEA website is arguably trustworthy. Still, when conducting interviews, it is essential to be critical of the said information. It is important to stay objective and not steer the conversation in a particular direction to affect the respondents and, thus, avoid the risk of bias. The employees might have a biased view of the company and only want to bring forward information that will be favorable for the company. However,

there is always a risk that the responses will be affected by the interviewer's tone of voice, how the questions were asked, etc. (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2021).

Furthermore, Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2021) mean that to pursue a high level of quality regarding the gathered findings from external and secondary data, dependability is critical to have in mind. This means that when collecting the data, a critical approach has been conducted and the published information has been carefully and critically scanned to guarantee the empirical findings' trustworthiness. It is also essential to remember that the discoveries that will be brought to the surface in this thesis, both from interviews and secondary material, are not generalizable to all global companies. However, it is an indicator of what can be the most suitable strategy for global brands.

4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

The upcoming section will present and analyze the findings gathered from the collected data categorized after the key topics; interaction, competition, strategy, and communication.

We will first display the Global Brand of IKEA, to later niche down to the local market, Sweden and Canada, where implementation and compilation to the frameworks; Corporate Brand Identity Matrix & Integration for sustainability — implementation will be constructed based on our findings.

4.1 Global IKEA Brand,

The first part of empirical data that will be presented is IKEA's global approach; their collective and united sustainability approach, and way of communication. A crucial part of the analysis will be conducted with a compilation of our perceptions from the primary and secondary data and later implemented into the nine elements of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013; 2022; Urde & Greyser, 2015; 2019). Thereafter, the analysis will be thematized after the four paths; *interaction, competition, strategy, and communication* (Urde, 2022). These themes have been chosen because they represent all nine elements of identity in the CBIM. By analyzing these themes, we can see *if and how* IKEA is currently integrating sustainability into all the different elements of the corporate brand identity. Further, these themes and the CBIM can also help global brands ensure that sustainability is fully incorporated and permeate all parts of the identity, in order for their further communication on sustainability to be aligned with the brand identity on both a global and a local level. Afterward, the Integration of Sustainability – Implementation framework (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014) will be implemented to analyze how IKEA's communication towards sustainability on a global and a local level is displayed. Later for the discussion, these findings will be connected to the themes to investigate the corporate brand identities and the potential alignments or differences in how the communication on sustainability is shown in the various markets.

Downbelow, our interpretation of the global IKEA's identity based on the nine elements of the CBIM will be presented. As mentioned, the following part of the thesis will discuss and analyze the findings to see how sustainability is incorporated into the corporate brand identity based on the four themes that have been chosen.

4.1.1 IKEA Global Brand; Integration of Sustainability to Brand Identity

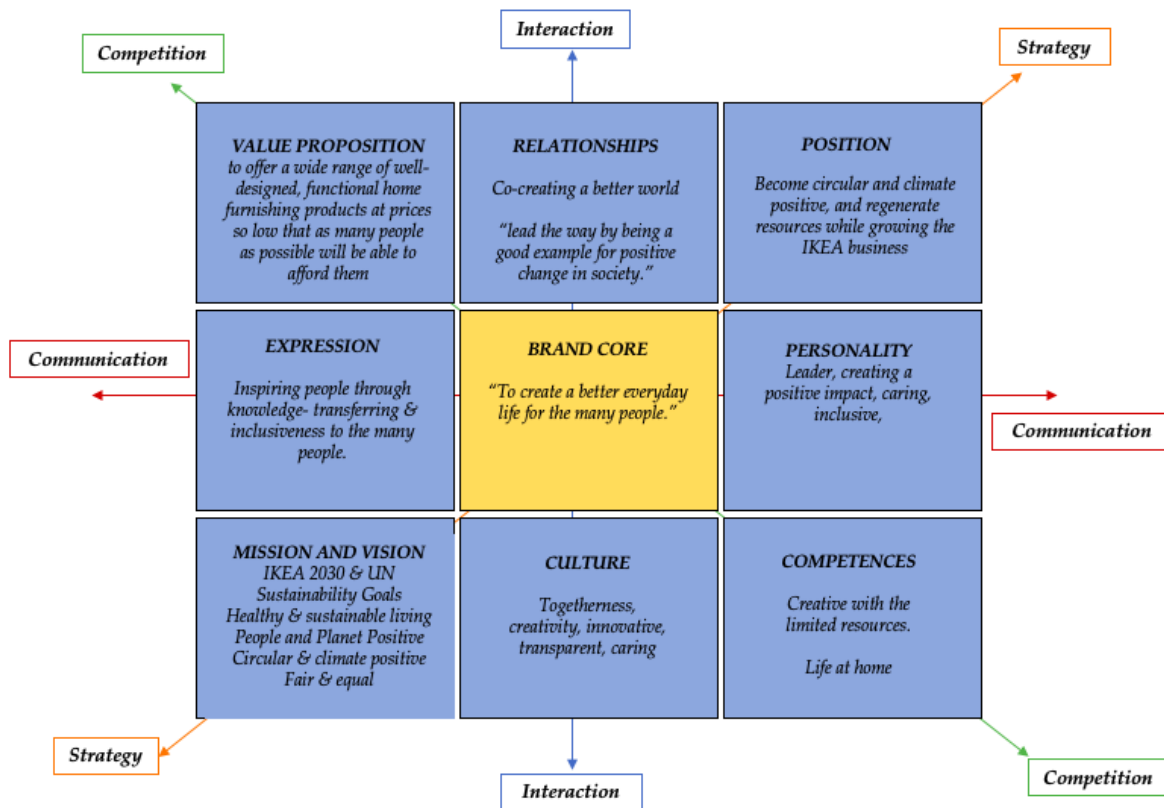


Figure 7. CBIM implementation for Inter IKEA Group, Global

Interaction

In order to investigate how sustainability is incorporated into the interaction section of the CBIM, the elements of relationships, brand core, and culture will be included. The questions that are being asked in the interaction section of the framework are what kind of relationships the company is striving for, what the company's promise is, what the company's core values are, and what culture the company has. Implemented on IKEA by the findings from the conducted interviews and by analyzing the global IKEA website, the element of relationships is being defined as *co-creating a better world and to lead the way by being a good example for positive change in society*, the element of brand core is defined as *to create a better everyday life for the many people*, and the element of culture is defined as *togetherness, respect, creativity, innovative, transparent and caring*. Since the element brand core stays the same throughout all of the paths, the definition of brand core will not be repeated in further sections.

Throughout IKEA's sustainability strategy report (2020), great focus and emphasis lie on the sustainability core, wording, *caring for the people and planet*. This demonstrates the leading words and the view from all of IKEA's operations and actions. Further on, according to IKEA (2020), sustainability carries a great deal of value and their own meaning and definition of the concept:

We want to have a positive impact on people, society, and the planet. For us, it's about balancing economic growth and positive social impact with environmental protection and regeneration (IKEA, 2020, p.3).

With the hopes of impacting the people and the planet through their operations, IKEA is emphasizing themselves as leaders of this change. Being a leader for sustainable change can be seen as a part of the IKEA culture, where they are inspiring every consumer to make small sustainable changes that together will result in a great change for society. IKEA is one of the top leading MNFC in the market and therefore has the ability to act as role models and inspire others to implement sustainable actions through creative and innovative products and ways of living life. IKEA themselves are saying that they want to *lead the way by being a good example for positive change in society* (IKEA, 2020, p.16). Since the best method for displaying sustainability is giving examples of how they execute it, Kamprad (IKEA, 2020) states *no method is more effective than a good example* (p.10).

When it comes to the relationships that IKEA is striving for, it is clear that they want to achieve positive changes for the future together with their consumers. Besides being a leader and inspiration of positive change, the aspect of togetherness was discovered during the interview with IKEA's Global Brand Identity Manager Nina Bogstedt. She emphasizes that through the co-creation between the consumers, stakeholders, suppliers etc., *we together can create a better world* (interview, 4 May 2022). Along with the togetherness, IKEA wants to involve their consumers in their decision-making, since it is the consumers' needs and wants that are important for the company. This can be seen by the fact that IKEA is developing a new position in the market but are engaging the consumers in different panels to have an in-depth understanding of global consumers around the world (Global Brand Identity Manager, interview, 4 May 2022). By including their consumers in the development of its position, IKEA can establish that their operations are aligned with the consumers' perspective

of IKEA and sustainability, possibly leading to IKEA having an even greater impact on their consumers in the future.

Hence, IKEA wants to integrate sustainability into the relationship, core, and culture part of their identity by acting as leaders and inspirers of sustainable changes through creative and innovative methods and attributes. Sustainability is also displayed as the togetherness, where IKEA, together with their consumers, can make a great positive impact if all people just make one small sustainable change in their everyday lives. IKEA also wants to be transparent with their consumers during processes and changes, and they are aiming to create a positive impact on the people and planet through their company. The usage of the IKEA products will further implement sustainability among their consumers and through the IKEA way of living. IKEA is integrating sustainability by putting great emphasis on the care IKEA has for the people and planet, making that statement the core of sustainability that runs through all company operations.

Competition

The first diagonal path covers the competition, which focuses on the connection between the brand's unique competencies and its attractive and competitive value proposition to align with the brand promise and the essence of the MNFC. IKEA's core value of *creating a better everyday life for the many people* (IKEA, 2021a; 2020) can be strongly aligned with their various competencies. This is demonstrated in IKEA's sustainability report when emphasizing the global challenges IKEA is facing with the limited resources accessible on this planet. The increased environmental challenges and limited resources have led to severe pressure on the wildlife, forests, ocean pollution, agriculture, etc., and additional negative effects on all livelihoods and the billions of people around the globe (IKEA, 2020). Therefore, IKEA displays their initiatives and their competence by being *creative with the limited resources* (IKEA 2020, p.4). They have additionally implemented tools and strategies to decrease the negative effects on the environment, for example, how recycling of the consumer's disposal and trash can create smarter solutions and even create new products out of it. Thus, it highlights the attributes of the Småland- and the IKEA mantra, where creativity and innovation can be displayed in their sustainable manufacturing techniques and the competencies IKEA possesses (IKEA, n.d.g). Other regulations concerning sustainable production are IKEA's control of the entire supply-chain in addition to the IWAY- regulation, thereby deciding and having an impact on the operations and the systems from the start of the

product's life to its placement in the consumer's blue-shopping bag. The respondent (interview, 4 May 2022) takes great pride in this control and states that it helps them to continually fully integrate sustainability in every product stage. Therefore IKEA can fully support and communicate this to the many people around the world.

We believe that everything we do comes with the responsibility to create a positive impact on people, society, and the planet. But we can only achieve this if our business partners share our vision and commitment to sustainability. That's why we have IWAY, the IKEA code of conduct for suppliers (IKEA, n.d.c).

As well as that the products are being produced sustainably, an additional factor for IKEA is influencing their consumers to live a more sustainable life and to create positive changes by using IKEA's products. The Global Sustainability Manager (interview, 6 May 2022b) argues that the image IKEA wants their brand to be perceived as is trustworthy. Consumers should be able to trust the brand when IKEA is displaying the mark of sustainability, ranging from the production-process to the products placed on the shelves. In the long run, the products will benefit both the people and the planet due to IKEA's brand competence and sustainable product design. Therefore it is a responsibility of the brand to ensure that the entire production process is made in a sustainable manner since the consumers should not have to take on the responsibility themselves to know or research whether the products are sustainable or not. This responsibility should be carried out by the entire MNFC, making people all over the world feel trust towards IKEA and their displayed products.

Strategy

For the next theme, the second diagonal attribute displays how IKEA integrates sustainability into the strategy section of their identity. The strategy section includes the mission and vision, the company's brand core, and lastly, their position in the market. Furthermore, these themes will investigate and highlight the alignment of sustainability through these elements and its connection to the promise IKEA strives for. It will also explore how the company positions itself in the market compared to their competitors. For IKEA, the mission and vision have been defined as *all the UN sustainable development goals are connected and IKEA will use them a compass to mobilize change in its work* (IKEA, 2020, p.9), and the position has been defined as *to become circular and climate positive, and regenerate resources while growing the IKEA business* (IKEA, 2020, p.14).

Aligned with the mission and vision of IKEA, they are actively working together with the UN Sustainable Development goals to reach an extensive amount of sustainability goals in the company by the year 2030. These goals act as guidelines or as an ethical compass for how IKEA should adjust their daily operations and align them with its sustainability goals and vision for the corporation (Global Sustainability Manager, 6 May 2022b). IKEA has further added an extended version of the core value and the guidelines for the sustainability goals, for IKEA to become *people and planet positive* (IKEA, n.d.g), the three P's of the global IKEA brand. People and planet positive communicate the agenda for IKEA's sustainability strategy and come with great ambitions for IKEA to achieve until 2030. This ranges from the start of the product manufacturing and throughout the entire value chain, including all of their various systems, working with long-term goals for creating a better everyday (IKEA, 2020, p.4). The final goal is to align the IKEA corporations around the world and their primary associations of IKEA as a brand.

The purpose of this strategy is to inspire, activate and lead us in our decision-making and goal setting so that we together can achieve the big positive changes we want to see in the world, and for the entire IKEA ecosystem (IKEA, 2020, p.2).

The current attributes can be divided based on three different categories, *Healthy & sustainable living, Circular & climate positive, and Fair & equal* (2020, p.11), and act as different missions that IKEA actively works for. These are global goals that are set to align the global IKEA, and in addition to influence the local corporations. However, it is up to each local franchise group to set their plan for implementation in this area and set their own strategic goals (Global Brand Identity Manager, interview, 4 May 2022; Global Sustainability Manager, interview, 6 May 2022b), for how to put this common strategy to practice to *create a better everyday life for the many people* (IKEA, 2021a). These goals also connect to the position IKEA strives to maintain in the furniture industry in the global market: *Becoming circular and climate positive, and regenerate resources while growing the IKEA business* (2020, p.19).

Furthermore, an example of IKEA's current plan and strategy to maintain this position in the market and mindset when evaluating the brand: *Being a leader means looking critically at all*

aspects of our business, but also engaging in the debate and enabling consumers, coworkers, and partners to take action and contribute (IKEA, 2020, p.10). The success of a business is not a one-person job; it is through the traits and actions of togetherness that they can reach their sustainability goals by 2030. Albeit, challenging its standardized procedures in its everyday tasks and engaging all parts of the corporation to act in a more sustainable manner is a good start for corporations to engage in this manner. This process results in the employees of IKEA engaging in and implementing small changes in their everyday life. If everyone at the corporation executes these small changes or actions towards a more sustainable attribute or initiative, it might result in a big change (Global Brand Identity Manager, interview, 4 May 2022).

Having a positive impact means that we always aim to generate more than we use ourselves, working to make a positive difference beyond our own business (IKEA, 2020, p.10).

Additionally, IKEA uses a large amount of their resources on insight research. As previously mentioned, IKEA wants to reposition themselves, and they are also currently undergoing a research project regarding where in the different markets IKEA is positioned today. Based on the findings that will surface after these projects, IKEA will decide if they need to do something different in their operations and what to strengthen and focus on to gain a future stronger position in the different markets. Global Brand Identity Manager (interview, 4 May 2022) implies that IKEA does not aim to change who they are but rather to strengthen identity parts of what they are already doing. To capture their new market position by integrating sustainability, IKEA can therefore create competitive advantages in the market. This approach and position they are directing to take is connected to their brand promise and their inspiration, which is to remain market leaders in the furniture market, but now with a sustainable approach.

How IKEA integrates sustainability into the strategy section of their identity is displayed through their mission and vision, brand core, and position. They are working together with the UN sustainable development goals and are therefore integrating sustainability goals themselves in the company. Further, these goals will also contribute to creating a better everyday life for many people, hence aligning the brand core of IKEA. Lastly, the integration

of sustainability is also visible in the positioning of IKEA, where they are currently undergoing research to strengthen their position in the sustainability market.

Communication

Furtheron, the main focus of this empirical data analysis for the communication approach, also known as the alignment between the brand personality and their expression of the brand core, is to analyze how well IKEA's personality penetrates all of the internal and external communication. For IKEA, as a corporate brand, there are several core values that reflect the essence and personality of its core identity. IKEA calls them their *forever parts*. These values unite and are mainstreamed across the entire franchise corporation. These forever parts keep the core of IKEA and the Smålands mantra intact, which is one of the goals Kamprad envisioned for his company many years ago (IKEA, n.d.a). The respondents further display that these core values shall not change since that would change the entire corporation and the core identity of IKEA (Global Brand Identity Manager, interview, 10 March 2022). The forever parts, values, are; *Togetherness, Caring for people and planet, Cost-consciousness, Simplicity, Renew and improve, Different with a meaning, Give and take responsibility; and Lead by example* (IKEA, n.d.b). These various parts function as guidelines for the employees and each market they operate in. It also affects the employees' and managers' everyday decisions and behaviors at work and how they want their reputation to be perceived by their target group, also known as the many people (IKEA, n.d.g). As displayed in the Matrix (Figure 7), these forever parts are implemented across the different elements, one way or another. Therefore, it becomes obvious to us that there is a strong alignment between the conducted interviews, the website, and these *forever* values.

Throughout the observation of the Global IKEA website, the distinctive way that they are communicating with their consumers is by knowledge transfer, by conveying a sense of togetherness, and by displaying how IKEA is contributing towards a more sustainable future. On the website, the most important issues that IKEA is currently facing regarding sustainability are displayed, together with how IKEA is currently working to solve these issues to reach their sustainability goals. One of the focuses is how IKEA is being a "good citizen" by communicating how they are actively working towards a more sustainable future with clear goals to reach by 2030. Another example is their strategy, where they are engaging their consumers to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle by applying one of their main personality traits *togetherness* in the communication. This style also influences the local

corporations through their own challenges to encourage everyone to join them in this trend. This can be traced back to the 60/40 strategy, where it can be discussed that the global website is communicating the long-term focus work and brand building activities (IKEA, n.d.g). The websites are aligned and reflect the Småland's- and IKEA's mantra; simple, functional, but at the same time creative, innovative, and foremost, inspirational. Through IKEA's communication, the personality traits of caring, inclusive, creating a positive impact, and their leadership skills inspire other MNFC, consumers, and non-stakeholder to join this trend of sustainability. Further information regarding the global brand's communication is displayed in the following section, where the implementation model of the global IKEA brand will be formatted and central for analysis. This, to gain a more profound insight into the Global IKEA communication approach to the local IKEA groups, their consumers, and other stakeholders.

4.1.2 IKEA Global Brand; Communicating Sustainability Initiatives

Using the framework implementation of integration for sustainability, we as authors have the ability to analyze how IKEA has worked with sustainability globally through the framework, from identified issues and how they further have communicated the operations externally. This will be done by a content analysis of the IKEA global website under the category *Sustainability* (IKEA, n.d.g), the IKEA sustainability report FY21 (IKEA, 2021a), and by information from interviews with Global Brand Identity Manager (interview, 4 May 2022) and Global Sustainability Manager (interview, 6 May 2022b). This way, we can see how IKEA is working towards becoming a more sustainable company and how they are communicating their work externally on a global level. Downbelow, how IKEA Global has identified sustainability issues and challenges will be presented, as well as the strategies that have been applied and further how they have communicated this externally to stakeholders.

Identifying challenges, Applying strategies and Communicate Sustainability Initiatives

When identifying sustainability challenges, the main focus of the issues and challenges are aligned with the UN Sustainability Goals, which can be demonstrated in the general sustainable goals for the entire IKEA organization. These challenges and goals influence the general guidelines that every local market is following, but how these challenges are being communicated, what goals are being worked towards, and what strategies to implement will

depend on the local markets. What is influencing this is the current state of the country, what is considered important in the local markets at the time, and what issues they are currently facing. Every country thus has the freedom to decide themselves how they are working towards becoming more sustainable and what will be communicated to the public, as long as it follows the global goals and guidelines.

Regarding how IKEA globally is applying sustainability initiatives to solve the identified issues, the sustainability report communicates that IKEA is actively trying to reduce their climate footprint and accommodate sustainable practices throughout their entire supply chain. IKEA's brand has implemented clear guidelines and commitments that they are actively working towards, both globally and locally, intending to become *People & Planet Positive*, *Healthy & Sustainable Living* and *Circular & Climate Positive* by 2030 (IKEA Sustainability Report, 2021). How this is done at a national level depends on the local challenge, but they are all striving towards the same goals (Global Sustainability Manager, interview, 6 May 2022b). Externally, as mentioned before, they communicate or share information and knowledge for how other people can participate in this manner. When analyzing the FY21 IKEA Sustainability Report (IKEA, 2021), IKEA is communicating the intentions IKEA has regarding the implementation of sustainability operations to reach their sustainability goals, what IKEA has achieved this far regarding sustainability, and how they are planning to continue their operations in order to achieve future goals of the company.

The respondent also highlights that IKEA globally has a certain tone-of-voice when communicating sustainability towards the local markets. This sets the agenda for how IKEA wants to talk about sustainability. Still, every local IKEA has their own choice of what they further communicate towards their consumers through campaigns, etc. At the same time, IKEA is working to inspire and enable more than one billion people to achieve a better everyday life of living within what our planet can handle, also with the goal to achieve this by the year 2030 (IKEA Sustainability Report, 2021; Global Sustainability Manager, interview, 6 May 2022b). IKEA says:

We will work to make healthy and sustainable living the norm by inspiring and enabling more sustainable behaviors in society. This includes, for example, how we use marketing and communication to shape demand. By advocating for policies and

regulations that support a healthier, more sustainable society, we strive to use our influence for the benefit of the many (IKEA Sustainability Report, 2021, p.6).

Further ways for IKEA to communicate sustainability to their consumers, the Global Sustainability Manager (interview, 6 May 2022b) argues that the products are to be the carriers of the sustainable message. The products enable the consumers to change their everyday life into a more sustainable life through creative and innovative sustainability solutions. By communicating sustainability as a natural part of the business, consumers will not have to question whether the products are sustainable or not. The raw material is what has the biggest climate impact in the supply chain, and the sustainability report (IKEA, 2021a) communicates that IKEA has an ongoing development by actively working on the commitment to have all products made of only renewable and recycled materials.

Moreover, the Global Sustainability Manager also talks about the importance of working together to become more sustainable, both for IKEA internally, and together with consumers and stakeholders. This aligns with their personality trait and the relationship IKEA strives for by the adjective togetherness. In the sustainability report, togetherness is also an aspect that is communicated to the reader:

We don't have all the answers and can't achieve our goals alone. Therefore, we're committed to working together with others in a collaborative way and being transparent about what we learn. We rely on our culture of entrepreneurship – always moving forward and not waiting for perfection (IKEA Sustainability Report 2021, p.6).

IKEA's primary communication channel to distribute their sustainability initiatives is in their annual sustainability report. The report highlights current sustainability challenges and different initiatives and strategies that have been implemented to reach the goal during the year, and the positive impact these initiatives have had on the people and the planet. For example, IKEA has identified that their climate footprint and their supply-chain is directly connected and that it stands for about two-thirds of their total climate footprint. This also includes suppliers' production, an aspect that IKEA is communicating that they are actively working on to reduce the climate footprint. To achieve this, IKEA has launched a program in order to help with the acceleration of the transition for the suppliers' to have a hundred

percent renewable electricity in their operations (IKEA Sustainability Report, 2021). Thus, IKEA is firstly presenting the issue, what has to be done, and later what they are doing right now to contribute to a more sustainable future.

Further initiatives that IKEA is communicating is that great impact can be achieved through small changes. The sustainability report communicates that IKEA is replacing their light bulbs with more energy-efficient ones, with the goal of having a hundred percent renewable energy for the IKEA operations (IKEA Sustainability Report, 2021). This change might not seem so big, but that will contribute to a more sustainable future. This might also be an aspect that can motivate and inspire their consumers to change to more energy-efficient light bulbs as well, further contributing to a more sustainable future. IKEA is also communicating that they are working towards the goal of having fifty percent of the main meals being plant-based by 2025 by increasing the plant-based food offered in their warehouses (IKEA, 2021a). By implementing a more plant-based menu, consumers can also become inspired to do this change themselves. By going to the IKEA warehouse, purchasing sustainable products, and later eating a plant-based meal in the restaurant, consumers might decide to follow IKEA and purchase some of the plant-based food items. Hence, the small changes that IKEA is making inside their warehouses and operations can have a greater impact by communicating to the consumers that it must not be hard to become more sustainable in everyday life.

In the following section, we will introduce the reader to the local operations of IKEA in the following countries and markets, Sweden and Canada. Thereby identifying and analyzing their sustainability integration and their approach to communicating sustainability to their local markets and consumers.

4.2 Local IKEA Groups

For the second area of interest, additional knowledge of IKEA's local operations and identities will be presented. This information will lead to further insights into the local procedures and enable us to observe the influence that the global regulations and guidelines have on the local markets. The data has been gathered from semi-structured interviews with managers from Sweden and Canada, as well as additional data that has been gathered from the local IKEA's websites. The information and findings will help with the understanding of

the local communication approach to sustainability and will later be implemented into the framework by Kumar & Christodouloupoulou (2014). After the presented findings, the thesis authors will compile their own interpretation of the local IKEA's corporate identity based on Urde's (2013; 2022) framework CBIM, thematized based on the four paths interaction, competition, strategy, and communication (Urde, 2022; Urde & Greyser, 2019).

4.2.1 IKEA Sweden; Integration of Sustainability to Brand Identity

To collect information about IKEA Sweden and how they work with sustainability, interviews have been conducted with Åsa Nordin, Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager at Inter IKEA Group Sweden (9 February 2022; 6 May 2022a). Additional information will also be collected from the Swedish IKEA website (n.d.d) from the category: *En mer hållbar vardag* (English: A more sustainable everyday). These findings will be implemented into the CBIM, and thereafter be thematized after the sections of *interaction*, *competition*, *strategy*, and *communication*, to investigate how Inter IKEA Group Sweden is implementing sustainability into their corporate brand identity.

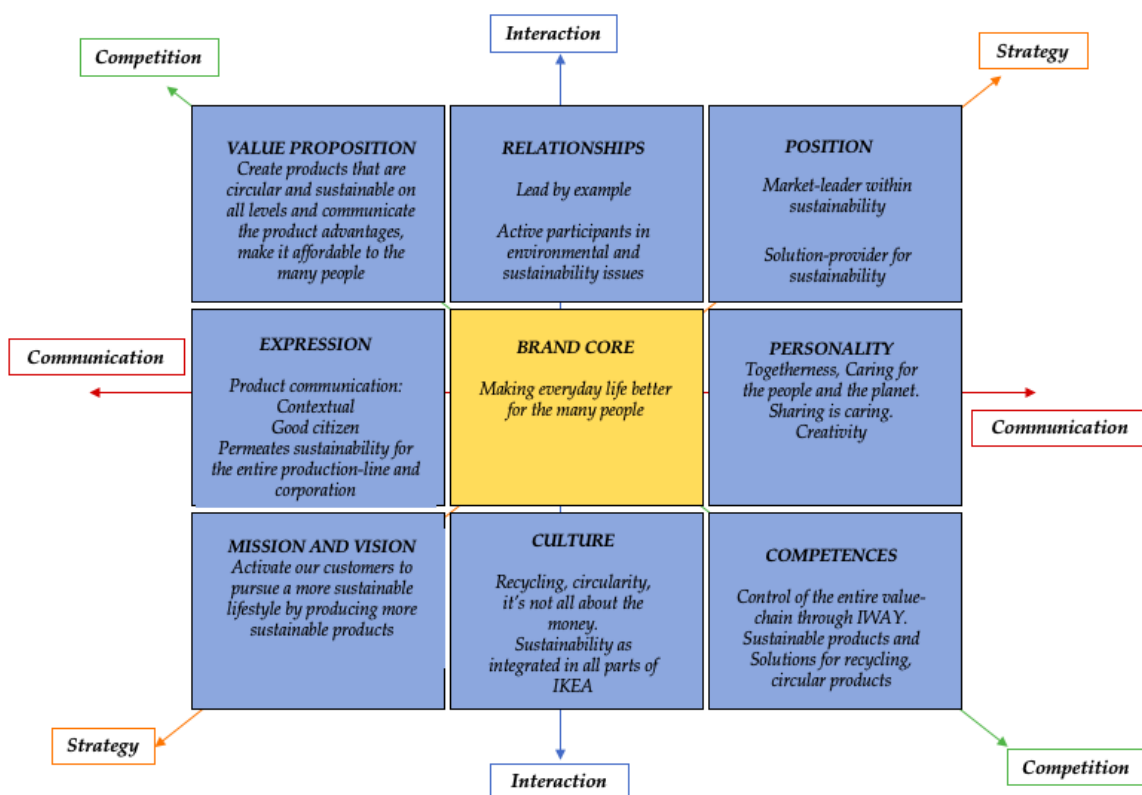


Figure 8. CBIM implementation for Inter IKEA Group, Sweden

Interaction

The interaction section of the CBIM includes the elements of relationships, brand core, and culture. For Inter IKEA Group Sweden, relationships have been defined as *lead by example*, and *active participants in environmental and sustainability issues*, their brand core has been defined as *making everyday life better for the many people*, and their culture has been defined as *recycling, circularity, it's not all about the money*, and *sustainability as integrated in all parts of IKEA*. Since the brand core is integrated into all paths of the CBIM and hence is the same throughout all of the paths, the definition of the brand core will not be included in the rest of the sections, to reduce repetitions.

Regarding IKEA and their relationship with stakeholders and sustainability, IKEA is offering smaller companies knowledge and competence, for example on sustainable product design and how IKEA currently is working towards becoming a more sustainable company (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). The respondent argues that smaller companies often do not have the resources to develop these sustainable processes themselves, but with the help of IKEA's techniques and knowledge, they can integrate and develop sustainability into their own businesses. Thus, IKEA offers knowledge transfer without any expectation of a financial gain from sharing these insights. However, it can be argued that this knowledge transfer will result in a greater accomplishment for companies in the market and an enhanced reputation for IKEA. This, by assisting other MNFC or global brands with the development of sustainability through the knowledge of IKEA. In accordance and alignment with the brand core, this can eventually result in making a better everyday life for the many people, if additional companies also implement these procedures and are integrating sustainability into their corporate brand core.

Aligned with knowledge transfer to other companies, IKEA Sweden also offers this procedure to their customers and non-stakeholders. This time, it is shown in the way that IKEA is displaying the usage of IKEA's products and how it can result in an increase of people who live a more sustainable lifestyle. Further, this can result in a more positive impact on the planet (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 9 February 2022). This process is something that IKEA has actively been working with and demonstrated in the CBIM (Urde, 2022). IKEA is positioned as a role model and leading by example. By acting as role models and ensuring that other companies, consumers, stakeholders, and non-stakeholders will take part in the IKEA knowledge, they can ensure that their

competencies and the knowledge they possess will not get lost or stay inside of the walls of IKEA. Instead, it will run through all of the operations, reaching the consumers, stakeholders, non-stakeholders, and the outside world. Since the aim is that together, IKEA can contribute to a more sustainable everyday life for the many people by sharing and caring for the people and the planet.

Regarding the culture at IKEA Sweden, finding similarities through consistency and coherency and the history of the company has a lot of impact on it, to ensure that IKEA Sweden is aligned with the Global IKEA (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 9 February 2022). From the beginning of IKEA there was not a lot of focus on IKEA as a company. Instead, it was the people that stood in the light. However, after a couple of years, the talk about IKEA as a company increased, which further put emphasis on IKEA as a brand. The IKEA values started to become more expressed, which has had an impact on how the culture of IKEA is today.

[...] our history and our origins as a company in Älmhult etc. have created and shaped a value base that is very much based on the time when IKEA came into being (interview, 9 February 2022).

The values that IKEA strives for and that affect the culture of IKEA and the overall operations are helping IKEA to keep the culture aligned throughout the globe.

The importance of these core values and their demonstration and influence of the entire operations, the IKEA values, a.k.a a number of values that are also specific and that it is clear that they help us to work with them constantly and evenly [...] (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 9 February 2022).

For how sustainability is integrated into the culture of IKEA Sweden, the respondent emphasizes the importance that it permeates all parts of the company and is not seen as a bi-product (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). Not least by making products that are circular and sustainable, but also by making and inspiring the consumers to live a more sustainable life (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). The respondent also claims that adapting sustainability used to be seen as a competitive advantage, but is today a *hygiene factor*, and it is supposed to be a part of the

business. Sustainability is thus no longer seen as something that can be integrated in order to stand out from the crowd or to attract consumers, but that sustainability is fundamental for business and is today so natural that it is not giving extra motivation or satisfactory feelings among consumers.

For the connection of the elements integrated into the interaction path, culture, as well as relationships, are connected to the brand core of making everyday life better for the many people, by integrating sustainability into the culture of IKEA Sweden. This way IKEA is ensuring that sustainability runs through all employees, operations, and the production of products, lessening the negative impact on the environment through their operations as well as making it possible for their consumers to live a more environmentally friendly life by the use of their products.

Competition

The competition section of the CBIM includes the elements competences, brand core, and value proposition. The value proposition at IKEA Sweden has been defined as to *create products that are circular and sustainable on all levels and communicate the product advantages, make it affordable to the many people*, and IKEA Sweden's competence has been defined as *control of the entire value-chain through IWAY. Sustainable products and solutions for recycling and circular products*.

What competencies IKEA has is first and foremost that IKEA is a leading company in the furniture market with great knowledge about product design, sustainable solutions, and innovative product development, and that they have had the ability to mature their business throughout the last 75 years. The IKEA strategy, to create and offer well-designed products that are affordable to the many people, is also a competence that makes IKEA stand out from the crowd of companies while making everyday life better for the many people. Now that IKEA has implemented sustainability as an aspect that should run through all of the organization, IKEA can also offer circular and sustainable products in the range of their well-designed and affordable assortment (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). When asked about IKEA and competitive advantages, the Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager (interview, 6 May 2022a) says the fact that IKEA owns and thereby controls the entire supply and value chain and that because of this, they both have the ability to choose whom to work and cooperate with, as well as to control suppliers and

subcontractors. This enables IKEA to control sustainability throughout the whole process, from raw material to finished product in their consumers' homes. Since IKEA has the ability to choose who they are cooperating with, they have the ability to choose employees who share the competencies that IKEA values.

IKEA Sweden's defined value proposition, to create products that are circular and sustainable on all levels, is something that is of great importance for IKEA Sweden. They want to maintain the high level of circular and recycled products in their assortment and are working to create the whole process from raw material to finished product in a sustainable manner (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). Hence, sustainability displays its integration into the value proposition by telling the consumers that there are advantages to purchasing IKEA's products. By purchasing the products, it means contributing to a more sustainable everyday life and a more sustainable future. Due to IKEA's environmentally friendly products, the goal to become circular, and by their active work towards an entirely sustainable production-process, positive outcomes to the people and the planet will come as a snowball effect.

Strategy

The strategy section of the CBIM includes the elements mission and vision, brand core, and position. For IKEA Sweden, the mission and vision have been defined as *activating our customers to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle by producing more sustainable products*, and IKEA Sweden's position has been defined as *market leader within sustainability and solution-provider for sustainability*.

The mission and vision clearly run through the organization, as one of the focuses for IKEA Sweden are to inspire and motivate their consumers to become more sustainable, both in their everyday life and by the usage of IKEA's products (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). Here, it is also important for IKEA to motivate their consumers to *actually* take the step to become more sustainable. It is not enough to just talk about sustainability and hope for the consumers to apply this trend to their personal lives but to engage them to participate in more sustainable actions such as recycling, lessening the water waste, using more energy-efficient products, etc. It is noticeable that the mission and vision are integrated into the IKEA organization, and it is through the employees that the mission and vision can be realized to the outside world. Further, by activating the consumers to live a

more sustainable lifestyle, the brand core of making everyday life better for the many people will go hand in hand with the activation of a more sustainable lifestyle. Hence, sustainability is integrated into the mission and vision by permeating the organization and the employees, who will further inspire and motivate the consumers to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle.

Tracing back to the relationships that IKEA are striving for and their knowledge transfer to stakeholders and customers, it can be argued that IKEA is positioned as a leader in the field of sustainability in the furniture market. That IKEA is at the forefront in the area of sustainability can be seen with their implementation and creation of sustainability reports, IWAY (regulations for the entire supply chain), and People & Planet Positive (initiative and guidelines for the Inter and INGKA corporations), which together with their 2030 sustainability goals are implying the IKEA is actively working towards being a more sustainable company. To be a good citizen, IKEA is contributing to a better and more sustainable future by giving to charity, by driving questions regarding sustainability forward, and together with other companies also driving politics forward to ensure that sustainability will become an integrated part of the society (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). This is what will contribute to a more sustainable future and is something that companies with great influence and solutions to sustainability issues have the responsibility to do.

Communication

The communication path of the CBIM is completed by the elements' expression, brand core, and personality. For IKEA, expression has been interpreted as *product communication: contextual and good citizen. Permeate sustainability for the entire production-line and corporation*, and the personality has been defined as *togetherness, caring for the people and the planet, sharing is caring and creativity*.

The personality of IKEA Sweden is something that runs through all operations at the company. Togetherness is shown in multiple parts of the company, not least by the fact that IKEA values the work together with their consumers and stakeholders (Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager, interview, 6 May 2022a). Throughout the IKEA website and findings from the interviews, a lot of emphasis is on how the biggest changes and impacts will be made together. When it comes to the distinctive and recognizable way that IKEA communicates sustainability to their consumers, what first comes to mind is the

communication about how the IKEA products will help the consumers contribute to a more sustainable future. This way of communication can lead to the connection between seeing the IKEA products and thinking about sustainability, and vice versa. Hence, it is a technique for being top of mind among consumers and stakeholders that wants to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle.

The Identity and IKEA Trademark Manager say that regarding how sustainability should be communicated is something that there might be different opinions about inside the company. On a product level, one opinion is that a little green dot can communicate to the consumer that the product is sustainable. However, on the other hand, what does that say about the other products that do not have a little green dot on them? Since sustainability is a relatively new concept at IKEA, the Identity and IKEA Trademark Manager (interview, 6 May 2022a) says that it is hard to find a strategically good way to communicate sustainability without having to compare products to each other. However, what part of sustainability that is communicated externally differs from country to country, based on what the current issues and priorities are in the countries. The respondent argues that every local IKEA has more freedom to develop and customize their communication towards sustainability, and that their strategies of implementation can be demonstrated differently (interview, 6 May 2022a). This can be displayed in their campaign *Life at home*, where hundreds of employees have conducted home visits in local homes around the world. Here the employees are striving to gain further insights into the cultural and societal effects on the consumers, and the needs at the local market in terms of products (IKEA, n.d.f). This can range from whether to implement a new product design or function, or if new products need to be provided to that market (IKEA, n.d.f; the Identity and IKEA Trademark Manager, interview, 9 February 2022).

In the following model by Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014), the focus will lay on the communication approach concerning sustainable initiatives arranged by the local operations in Sweden.

4.2.2 IKEA Sweden; Communicating Sustainability Initiatives

In order to analyze how IKEA Sweden is working towards sustainability and how they are communicating sustainability to the local market, the step *Apply and Communicate Sustainability Initiatives* from the framework of integration for sustainability - implementation model will be used for analysis. The information that will be implemented into the framework is conducted both from the interview with the Identity and IKEA Trademark Manager, in addition to information that has been gathered from the IKEA Sweden website.

Identifying challenges, Applying strategies and Communicate Sustainability Initiatives

What can be clearly seen on IKEA Sweden's website is that there is more emphasis on the products and on how the products will help the consumer pursue a more sustainable lifestyle than on the global website. Further, the website puts a lot of context to the products, inspiring and communicating to the consumers how the products can be integrated into the home (see appendix 7). Moreover, the website also communicates to consumers and stakeholders about IKEA's role in the journey towards a more sustainable future. The first section that the visitors get exposed to on the Swedish IKEA webpage under the category a more sustainable everyday is the following:

How sustainable is IKEA? More sustainable day by day. With solar panels for the home, vegetarian hot dogs, and energy-saving solutions, we pave the way for more sustainable homes for the many people. We want you to feel that it is possible to live more sustainably. Therefore, we focus on inspiring change by developing products that are affordable, energy-efficient, and made with recycled or renewable materials. As Ingvar Kamprad used to say: *No method is more effective than the good example* (IKEA, n.d.d).

The webpage communicates that IKEA as a brand integrates sustainability into its practices and that their development inside of the company becomes more sustainable everyday. IKEA Sweden is also communicating that IKEA is engaging in knowledge-transfer to engage and motivate their consumers to become more sustainable. This will be made possible by purchasing IKEA products and gaining further inspiration and insight for how to live a more sustainable life, creating a more sustainable future through *the IKEA way of living* (IKEA,

n.d.d). The Identity and IKEA Trademarks Manager (interview, 6 May 2022) emphasizes that through the product assortment, IKEA has the responsibility to design and develop circular products with different aspects of sustainability.

The IKEA website (IKEA, n.d.d) communicates sustainability through the products by relating them to environmental problems that the products can help to reduce. This is for example water faucets for a decreased use of water, more environmentally friendly LED bulbs, products made with recycled materials, etc. The webpage has also included a guide for consumers to live a more sustainable life and is a combination of information about sustainability and environmental issues, what the consumer should think about regarding these issues and what products can help the consumer live more sustainably within these areas. That IKEA Sweden is focusing more on the importance of the products might be an indicator that the sales aspect is of more importance for the local IKEA's, since they do drive consumers to the warehouses.

Further, how IKEA connects their sustainability initiatives to current environmental problems is shown by that IKEA is working towards becoming more sustainable throughout the whole process from raw material to delivered product. This has been done by implementing more sustainable transportation fuels to reduce the environmental impact along with the increased online-purchases and home deliveries that have been seen since the pandemic. The website also communicates that IKEA has clear goals to reach in this area by 2025 for all home deliveries. The information from the website is very much aligned with how the Identity and IKEA Trademarks managers (interview, 6 May 2022a) explain how IKEA is working with sustainability and their active work towards becoming more sustainable in all of the operations. How the website is communicating their sustainability initiatives thus seems to correlate with how the employees perceive the work towards a more sustainable future.

The rest of the webpage is divided into categories, which are *Our materials*, *Positive impact on humans and our planet*, and *With a view to a more sustainable future*. The first two sections show pictures with short information underneath them that communicates different parts of sustainability that IKEA is working with (see Appendix Four & Five). The last section, with a view to a more sustainable future, is a link to the IKEA sustainability strategy, communicating for example the sustainability goals that IKEA has set for 2030. By having this type of communication, keeping the information in sections that further expand to more extensive information might be a way for IKEA to let the consumers decide what kind of

information and communication they are interested in. This way, the visitors on the websites can choose more freely what parts they want to gain more knowledge about, perhaps depending on what problems they are currently facing in their lives. Hence, a consumer interested in lessening their water use might click on the information about water-efficiency, hopefully resulting in a purchased product or that the consumer will pursue more positive actions for the planet.

After analyzing the Swedish IKEA website and relating it to the findings from the conducted interviews, we can see that IKEA is communicating sustainability mainly through the use of their products and by relating IKEA and the products to current environmental issues. Additionally, the following market of interest is IKEA Canada for observation and analysis of IKEA's integration and communication of sustainable initiatives and implementations.

4.2.3 IKEA Canada; Integration of Sustainability to Brand Identity

To gather further information about the local market of Canada, we conducted interviews with Johanna Andrén, a Marketing Manager at Inter IKEA Canada Group (22 February 2022; 3 May 2022) and from the local website (IKEA, n.d.e). Thereafter, conducting an interpretation of IKEA's local corporate brand identity by using the Matrix as the framework. The data findings will be thematized after the extended version, *four paths* (Urde, 2022); *interaction, competition, strategy, and communication*, to investigate and analyze how Inter IKEA Group Canada is implementing sustainability into their corporate brand identity.

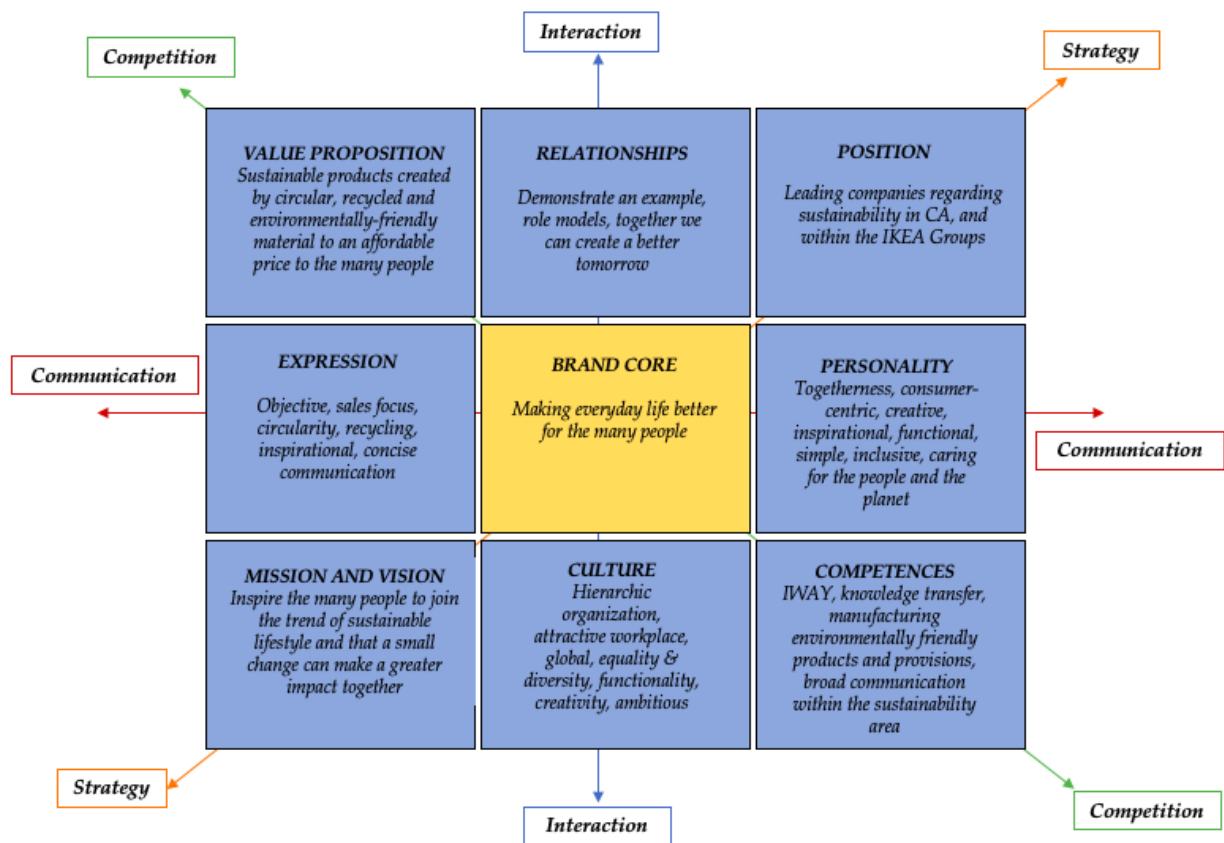


Figure 9. CBIM implementation for Inter IKEA Group, Canada

Interaction

The interaction section of the CBIM is completed by the elements' relationship, brand core, and culture. For IKEA, relationship has been interpreted as *demonstrate an example, role models, together we can create a better tomorrow*, the brand core is as explained *making everyday life better for the many people*, and the culture has been defined as *hierarchical organization, attractive workplace, global, equality & diversity, functionality, creativity and ambitious*. As with IKEA Sweden, the brand core will stay intact through all of the paths and will therefore not be repeated in the following sections.

IKEA's essence and brand core, have been aligned with the global's *to create a better everyday for the many people* but with a slight difference, *making everyday life better for the many people* (Marketing Manager, interview, 3 May 2022). This implies that IKEA Sweden is a part of the positive impact on their consumers' lives, and by purchasing IKEA products or following their guides for how to live a more sustainable life, the consumers can achieve a better everyday life. When asked about the core at IKEA, Marketing Manager (interview, 3 May 2022) says that the essence permeates all markets around the world. What is unique

about IKEA, according to the Marketing Manager, is that IKEA is living according to their values and that they have a very strong equality and diversity, a bigger purpose with an inspiring agenda when discussing sustainability. *It is not just about the consumers, but to put all people first and specifically those that might be in need* (Marketing Manager, interview, 22 February 2022). The Marketing Manager continues that without people, there would not be any business and that it is only together we can create a better tomorrow (interview, 3 May 2022).

According to the respondent (interview, 3 May 2022), the local operation places greater focus on implementing and making an active difference at the local level, working directly with the local market and its consumers as well as non-stakeholders. One of the relationship attributes IKEA places in the Canadian market is demonstrated by providing a good example and by providing various strategies for other corporations to implement sustainable techniques and systems. The Marketing Manager highlights the importance of appearing as role models in the industry due to IKEA's size and power in the market. She argues that by possessing this knowledge, as IKEA does, it is a societal favor to share this knowledge with the market and smaller companies who do not have the resources to develop this themselves. Additionally, this knowledge-transfer can also persuade other MNFC to join this trend of sustainable actions and integration in its corporate brand identity (Marketing Manager, interview, 3 May 2022). This knowledge-transfer and togetherness demonstrate the relationship and the culture alignment that the local operation in IKEA Canada has integrated and applied in their actions.

Furthermore, the respondent (interview, 3 May 2022) argues that IKEA Group Canada is seen as an attractive place of work, with its influence by the Swedish heritage and organizational culture. This is being demonstrated by the prioritization and benefits for all of the employees in the corporation, as well as that IKEA actively works towards inclusiveness, equality and diversity in its staff and employment culture. However, the respondent explained that the organizational culture is somewhat different from the Swedish IKEA. In Canada it is a more hierarchical culture, and in addition to that, all of the employees are showing further gratitude for their employment due to benefits (interview, 3 May 2022). IKEA as a company offers great focus on its employees and its wellbeing, which is somewhat different from other Canadian organizations. However, the Marketing Manager mentions that she can feel the presence of the global organization, both in the way they are working but also in the way that they are exchanging work and knowledge between markets. Another cultural aspect that the

Marketing Manager brings up is the differences in the sustainability challenges; *North America is much further back in the development of sustainable actions. Therefore, challenges that Sweden and other European countries experienced years ago, are today relevant in Canada and the States* (interview, 22 February 2022). This challenge of different prioritization of the active goals leads to different strategies to implement in the Canadian market and what is current for its local consumers. It is therefore critical for the Canadian managers to communicate knowledge regarding topics that are current for that specific market.

Competition

Moving on to the diagonal path, competition, majoring in value proposition, brand core, and competence. The value proposition at IKEA Canada has been defined as to *Sustainable products created by circular, recycled and environmentally-friendly material to an affordable price to the many people* and IKEA Canada's competences has been demonstrated in the area; *IWAY, knowledge transfer, manufacturing environmentally friendly products and provisions, broad communication within the sustainability area.*

The Canadian market is actively working with the regulation of IWAY, where the presence of a sustainable mindset and actions influence the entire value-chain. Therefore, many of the products produced are created with circular, recycled, and environmentally-friendly materials. Another way that IKEA communicates sustainability externally is by sharing knowledge and initiatives that they themselves have found to be successful in their own business. The respondent (interview, 3 May 2022b) highlights the importance of sharing knowledge and says that IKEA is sharing their product designs for other companies to be able to become more circular. This is especially applicable to smaller companies that do not have the resources to develop these initiatives themselves but gain these insights through knowledge-transfer from the MNFC, like IKEA.

The Marketing Manager argues that the standardized value proposition has a great impact on the Canadian offer and is a way to have an impact on their consumers and non-stakeholders. Thereby providing more sustainable products but still at an affordable price with good quality and functional products to the many people in the Canadian market (interview, 3 May 2022). Further on, the respondent discusses that IKEA's ability and knowledge of producing sustainable products also leads to the ability to offer educational and broad communication to

the many people in the Canadian market (interview, 3 May 2022). Examples of these are mentioned further in the analysis of IKEA's communication in the implementation-model.

Further, how IKEA Canada themselves think that they can act in order to inspire their consumers to live a more sustainable life, Marketing Manager states that *historically, I think that it is important to not just talk, but to really live the way we learn* (interview, 3 May 2022). To communicate how consumers can make a change, the respondent argues that IKEA Canada's approach is to communicate how every small change matters and that a lot of small changes eventually will result in a big change.

Strategy

For the next diagonal path, strategy, the position, brand promise, and mission and vision is highlighted. For IKEA Canada, the mission and vision have been defined as *Inspiring the many people to join the trend of sustainable lifestyle and that a small change can make a greater impact together*, and IKEA Canada's position in the market as *Leading companies regarding sustainability in CA, and within the IKEA Groups*.

Sustainability has been a current topic within the blue walls of IKEA for the last few years, however, Marketing Manager takes great pride in IKEA both being one of the leading companies regarding sustainability in the Canadian market but also that they already were one of the first corporations within IKEA that implemented sustainable strategies. According to Marketing Manager, IKEA Canada implemented sustainability into their practices three years prior to the other Inter markets around the globe (interview, 22 February 2022; 3 May 2022).

The important part for IKEA regarding how they are strategically working, Marketing Manager highlights the long term focus to keep being top of mind among the consumers. IKEA is currently working with the 60/40 principle, where 60 percent of how IKEA is working should be long term-focus and brand building, while the other 40 percent is what IKEA calls activate. She continues to discuss the importance of brand building, with a season-based strategy to communicate what is relevant in the specific moment to claim their position in the market (interview, 3 May 2022). When it comes to local competitors, Marketing Manager argues that IKEA are market leader when it comes to sustainability, which can be seen by the quote:

[...] looking at surveys and how we are doing compared to competitors, we have a huge gap in all areas of sustainability, how we develop products, how we communicate about it etc., and we are winning on all accounts from how many products we have and what we can offer [...] (interview, 3 may 2022).

Thereby, using their leverage of a great amount of intel on the sustainable action and procedure excels and strengthens their position in the Canadian market. Albeit, the Marketing Manager motivates that IKEA is one of the leading companies in the industry with their focus on sustainability, but also among the other MNFC and the IKEA franchise, IKEA Canada Group are pretty advanced compared to the other franchises (interview, 3 May 2022).

Communication

Finally for the fourth path, aligning the communication, thereby the elements expression, brand core, and personality, the distinctive way that IKEA Canada is communicating will be elaborated. For IKEA, expression has been interpreted as *Objective, sales focus, circularity, recycling, inspirational, concise communication*, and the personality has been defined as *Togetherness, consumer-centric, creative, inspirational, functional, simple, inclusive, caring for the people and the planet*.

How IKEA is currently communicating sustainability and their sustainability initiatives, Marketing Manager highlights that they are using broad, creative, and inclusive communication strategies towards consumers when advocating sustainability. An interesting aspect regarding the way that IKEA communicates with their consumers is through a great amount of focus on the traditional marketing channels and communication techniques. This is an aspect that might not be as usual around the world, but for the Canadian market, the traditional flyers that are put in the mailbox is a way of communication that is very effective. This can be connected back to the aspect that North America is a bit behind Europe in their development in different areas, which Marketing Manager means is a pervading theme. Thus, what was considered an efficient channel for communication years ago in other parts of the world is highly current today in North America. What is interesting though is that the flyers can be argued to be contradictory to the sustainability work since lots of papers are being produced to something that in fact can be communicated through other channels instead. Even though the paper is partially sustainably made (Marketing Manager, interview, 6 May

2022), the impact that it has on the environment could be reduced if choosing another way of communicating with the consumers.

The strategy on the local websites are communicated through product- and emotional settings, displaying their product range to communicate how to create a better everyday life for the consumers (IKEA, n.d.b; n.d.e; n.d.g). The products themselves have a lot of focus on them and compared to the Swedish website the products are not being put in a context but are displayed on their own. Additionally, there is a lot of focus on the price of the products, implying that the products are displayed together with the sustainability issues to increase sales. By relating the products to sustainability issues, IKEA is also putting emotional settings into the context, communicating that the consumers can contribute to preventing the issues by purchasing IKEA's products and by following the IKEA way of life towards a more sustainable future.

Throughout the analysis of the IKEA Canada website, as well as the information that has been retrieved through the interviews, it can be argued that IKEA Canada's personality focuses on the attributes togetherness, creative, inspirational, functional, simple, inclusive, consumer-centric, and caring for the people and the planet. The respondent (interview, 3 May 2022) states that the main part of her role is to ensure that sustainability is a natural part of the IKEA business and a priority, and not just a side activity. The manager continues to describe how sustainability should be an integrated part of IKEA's identity and personality, and therefore influenced its decisions and operations at IKEA in Canada. Therefore, sustainability should be integrated into all the attributes that have arisen throughout the analysis of IKEA Canada's personality. Moreover, togetherness is visible through the weight that IKEA puts on achieving sustainable results together, which also links to the care for the people and the planet. The solution to the problems they are facing is to introduce consumers, stakeholders, and non-stakeholders to creative and functional products and guidelines for achieving a more sustainable lifestyle which should be communicated in an inspirational and simple manner. Further, IKEA Canada is putting a lot of emphasis on being inclusive and caring for all people on the planet.

4.2.4 IKEA Canada; Communicating Sustainability Initiatives

In order to analyze how IKEA Canada has worked with and are communicating sustainability, the framework of integration for sustainability - implementation will be used. The empirical data is collected from the local IKEA Canada website and primary data from the conducted interview will be used in order to investigate how IKEA Canada are communicating sustainability externally to their consumers and non- stakeholders.

Identifying challenges, Applying strategies and Communicate Sustainability Initiatives

Directly when accessing the website and the category *A sustainable everyday*, IKEA Canada communicates their intended implementation to affect their consumers into becoming more sustainable and living a more sustainable lifestyle. Similar to the IKEA Sweden's website, the first section on the website says:

How sustainable is IKEA? Well, with veggie hot dogs, chairs made of recycled plastic bottles, and furniture made from sustainable materials, we want to effect and inspire change. We want to empower you to make more eco-friendly choices. Because, as our founder Ingvar Kamprad said: No method is more effective than a good example (IKEA, n.d.e).

Further, the website communicates the local actions and strategies towards circularity, and their initiatives to give IKEA's furniture a second life. As they are communicating, *From pre-loved to re-loved*, where consumers are able to sell back their used IKEA furniture with the goal of being a 100% circular business by the year 2030 (IKEA, n.d.e). The website also includes different sections with guides to sustainable living, communicating how consumers can achieve a more sustainable everyday life by the use of IKEA's products, water- and energy-saving activities, guides to lessen food waste, etc. The website also communicates regarding sustainable furniture materials, where they are saying:

Does IKEA sell green furniture? Yes, and in more ways than one! We are committed to making our products with more renewable and sustainable furniture materials like responsibly-sourced cotton and better plastics. We also use sustainable wood sources, like bamboo, to make more eco-friendly furniture. You can learn more about our

efforts to work with better materials and reduce waste through the articles below (IKEA, n.d.e).

Various marketing channels demonstrate very traditional market and communication techniques. They are, for example, using paper-flyers for advertising and product offers, however the catalog did not have the same effect on the Canadian population as expected. Until this day, the response to flyers generates a positive effect and drives sales for the INGKA warehouses, but contradicts from a sustainability point of view. Besides flyers, IKEA Canada is also using a lot of resources on more traditional channels like TV to communicate sustainability to their consumers (interview, 22 February 2022). The campaigns that IKEA Canada launches are according to the Marketing Manager something that differentiates them from many of the European IKEA with their approach when communicating sustainability in campaigns. The Marketing Manager emphasizes: *I think that it is important that we do [campaigns] in an innovative way and a bit more inspiring. If I look at one of the campaign-movies from the Swedish market regarding recycling, it is a lot more rational, more everyday-style over it, and very predictable [...]* (interview, 3 May 2022).

The Marketing Manager continues on the differences between markets and the campaign-approach with that North America and Europe generally has a different tone of voice, a.k.a style, when it comes to the communication and the campaigns. She states: *there are really big differences in the tone of voice from market to market, and I think that Canada has a more inspirational, emotional and visually strong communication, whereas Sweden and Europe has more of a humor twist to it* (interview, 3 May 2022).

The respondent (interview, 3 May 2022) continues that there is also a lot of communication outside broad channels, where IKEA wants to connect sustainability and the communication more to the products. She says:

If we take our family club, for example, we have had a focus on what is important to you [as a consumer]. Do you want to make a difference when it comes to food, or more recycling, and try to personalize the communication. It must not be overwhelming, you have to start somewhere. I may still travel and go by airplanes, I may drive a little too much, but then I can at least switch out a meal to veggie balls

and try to decrease a little on meat consumption, and make sure to recycle and try to use less plastic (Marketing Manager, interview, 3 May 2022).

An initiative that IKEA Canada has come up with regarding sustainability was a cookbook called *ScrapsBook*; *a cookbook dedicated to cooking with the little things we usually throw away. Featuring 50 recipes created in collaboration with chefs across North America and waste-saving tips, all designed to help you live a little more sustainably in your kitchen.* (Marketing Manager, interview, 3 May 2022; IKEA, n.d.e). Creating this cookbook is a way to communicate to consumers that instead of throwing away food there are plenty of ways to use it for cooking, and once again it is the little things that matter in the long run. This is something that later further expanded and was implemented in other markets around the world.

Further on, she mentions that people might be reluctant toward sustainability since the lifestyle can be expensive. Hence, why they are highlighting the small changes.

In the broad and traditional communication channels, such as television commercials, etc., the respondent highlights how every consumer and non-stakeholder can make a difference. However, the respondent displays the challenges that the stigmatization; *sustainability is a bit difficult and that it costs too much* (interview, 3 May 2022). However, it has therefore become IKEA's goal to inspire and also simplify the sustainable initiatives a consumer and local people can implement in their everyday life, by making small changes in a more sustainable direction.

[...] e.g., eat meat one day less a week, replace your light bulbs, recycle, and keep in mind that when you brush your teeth, do not leave the water running. “One little thing”, which was one of our big campaigns in 2020, then we continued with a campaign called “Our little world” (Marketing Manager, interview, 3 May 2022).

By introducing simple ways to engage in the goal is for the trend to spread, where all of the consumers' act in a small sustainable action will together create a big change in society. Something that aligned with the core of IKEA's identity, to make everyday better for the many people.

5. Discussion

This chapter will reflect, discuss, and further elaborate on the key findings of potential alignments between the global and the local brand identity and their brand communication towards sustainability based on the CBIM framework & 4 paths. This lays the foundation of the new framework, 1st outer layer of the Matrix, focusing on how the global brand communicates sustainability. Further on, the main findings and frameworks will be related to the previous theoretical literature.

The thesis aims to answer how a global brand integrates sustainability into their corporate brand identity and further how they communicate sustainability to the local consumers, therefore an extended version of the CBIM has been constructed. With inspiration from Urde's (2022) *1st outer layer*, communicated and positioned, we have added a layer in order to demonstrate how and by which the four different paths communicate sustainability. Instead of telling a story and highlighting the position on the market, the authors will demonstrate how IKEA communicates its integration of sustainability into its corporate brand identity and the potential alignment with the global brand.

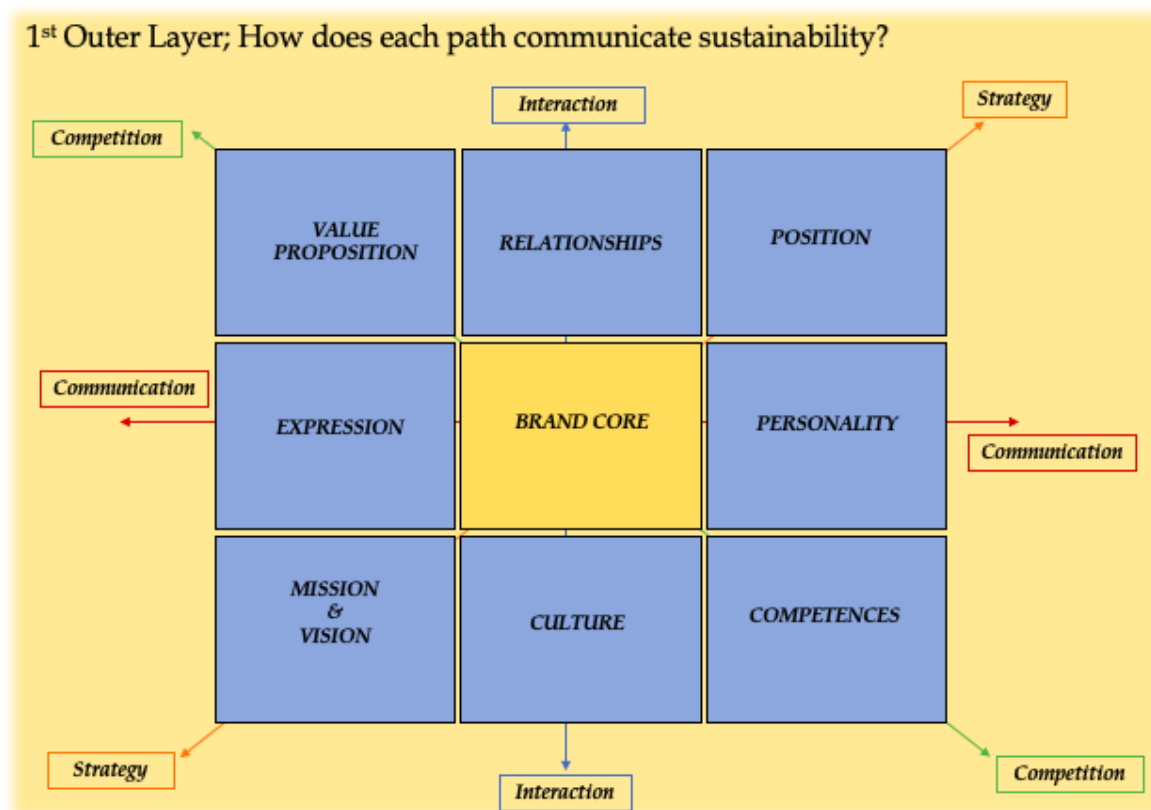


Figure 10. First Outer Layer, CBIM, Communicating sustainability through the four paths.

Table 2. Sustainable initiatives communicated in the four paths of the CBIM.

Theme	Findings		
	Global Brand	Sweden	Canada
I N T E R A C T I O N	<p>Communicating sustainability by taking on the position as leaders for inspiration, knowledge-transfer, and co-creation.</p> <p>Motivating consumers and stakeholders to pursue sustainability through the IKEA culture of togetherness, creativity, and an innovative mindset with a care for the people and the planet, while being transparent towards consumers.</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability through leading by example.</p> <p>Actively work to ensure that sustainability permeates all parts of the company, and to offer knowledge-transfer for how other global brands and consumers can become more sustainable.</p> <p>Staying consistent and coherent to align the identity, and communicate the importance of circularity and recycling.</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability through close encounters with consumers to make a difference at the local market.</p> <p>Act as role models for sustainable solutions and to offer knowledge transfer on sustainability.</p> <p>Inclusive, diverse, and grateful working culture, however experiencing a bit of different prioritizations.</p>
C O M P E T I T I O N	<p>Communicating the initiatives made towards a more sustainable future with limited resources, leading to creative and innovative solutions for the sustainability challenges IKEA is facing.</p> <p>At the forefront of sustainability due to IWAY, leading to the control of all procedures to establish and communicate sustainable processes.</p> <p>Aiming to provide trustworthiness, and take on the responsibility to ensure for the consumers that their products are sustainable.</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability through their knowledge of sustainable product development, innovative and sustainable solutions, and through the control of their value-chain.</p> <p>Communicates the importance of sustainability through the production of circular and recycled products, and the advantages that consumers will experience when using their products.</p>	<p>Communicates sustainability through the products, made of circular, recycled and environmentally-friendly material.</p> <p>Sharing knowledge and initiatives that they themselves have found to be successful in their own business.</p> <p>Communicating sustainability by living the way they are learning.</p>
S T R A T E G Y	<p>Communicating sustainability through the creation of goals that are aligned with the UN sustainable development goals.</p> <p>Emphasizing the importance of togetherness while making changes towards becoming circular and climate positive.</p> <p>Communicating the value of sustainability through the intention of their new wanted</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability by inspiring and activating consumers to become more sustainable by using IKEA's products-range.</p> <p>Engage consumers, stakeholders, and non-stakeholders to participate in more sustainable actions through knowledge-transfer.</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability by being leaders in the area of sustainability, integrating sustainability into the corporation years prior to other IKEA's.</p> <p>Communicating sustainability through the 60/40 principle, both highlighting the long-term and short-term work and initiatives to keep being top of</p>

	position on the market by strengthening certain identity parts.		mind among consumers regarding sustainability.
C O M M U N I C A T I O N	<p>Communicating by knowledge-transfer, by conveying a sense of togetherness, and by displaying how IKEA is contributing towards a more sustainable future.</p> <p>Acting as inspirers by being a good citizen.</p> <p>Communicating their personality traits of caring, inclusive, creating a positive impact, and their leadership skills, to inspire other MNFC, consumers, and non-stakeholders to join the trend of sustainability.</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability by emphasizing how consumers and stakeholders can make the biggest changes and impacts together with IKEA.</p> <p>Communicates sustainability by knowledge-transformation on how IKEA's products can help the consumers become more sustainable in their everyday lives.</p>	<p>Communicating sustainability through broad, creative, and inclusive communication, with a lot of focus on the traditional channels.</p> <p>The strategy on the local websites is communicating through product- and emotional settings, displaying IKEA's product range to communicate how to create a better everyday life.</p>

The global brand of IKEA and its local operations demonstrate a pursuit of a localized communication approach: the expression of the sustainable actions presents itself in various forms due to differences in the tone-of-voice, prioritization of the local sustainable challenges, and strategies implemented by the local market and its management. However, the global brand approach demonstrates IKEA as a good citizen and how they, as a company, are contributing to a more sustainable future. This can be further elaborated through their sustainable products, and through their control and regulation of the entire value chain regulated by IWAY. The global strategy, and additional goal for IKEA, is to demonstrate by examples how other corporations, stakeholders, and consumers can join the trend of sustainability initiatives by providing knowledge-transfer for various procedures in regulation and manufacturing. This clearly aligned with the personaIKEA's personality and culture, the people and planet, inclusiveness, co-creation, and finally, togetherness. IKEA's active work and value proposition to transfer knowledge to the public set an added value for the global IKEA brand. It strengthens their position in the market and is gaining them further competitive advantages, an alignment to their personality and the brand competencies. However, the local IKEA's are emphasizing more focus on how the local consumers can contribute to a more sustainable everyday by purchasing and using their products. Furthermore, there is a strong alignment of the shared sustainability goals, which the global IKEA brand has implemented in each of the franchises. These are used as a strategy for

aligning the corporations to work towards shared goals. However, the strategy to get there or what to communicate is as mentioned, localized. These goals, therefore, integrate and influence all of the additional elements in the matrix which displays a strong alignment with the IKEA's brand promise, the essence and the golden rule Kamprad implemented, creating a better everyday for the many people.

The personality traits of the IKEA groups in Sweden and Canada demonstrate their strong alignment to the brand's foreverparts, which are strongly integrated into the IKEA brand organization. This displays the effect on the way IKEA constructs its business and all of its operating systems, including the entire value-chain and supply-process. However, the sustainability integration to Inter IKEA departments are seen as important and a custom, and as aligned with the managers' arguments that sustainability is not a bi-product or an add-on but instead an integration into all systems and operations within the corporation. Here further focus lay on more consumer-centric, sales focus and local challenges on their communication channels, whereas the global brand focuses on the sustainability goals and initiatives the global IKEA aims to reach.

As seen, there are some standardized procedures of a global company that operates in local areas. The standardized approach is noticeable in guidelines, overall goals for the company, important parts of the corporate brand identity, etc., and parts of the company that are needed in order to stay intact throughout the world. However, how the global company operates and approaches the local consumers in the way they are communicating is less standardized, and every market has more freedom to decide what is the most suitable approach for their own market. When communicating sustainability to the local markets, more emphasis is put on the important and current issues that the local markets are facing today. The local markets decide the tone of voice, what sustainability strategies to implement, and what sustainability goals to reach are as long as the global way of constructing business and integrating its corporate brand identity still permeates all parts of the local brand and communication.

6. Conclusion and Contributions

In the final chapter we will summarize the empirical findings and circle back to the research purpose and thus in a successful manner be able to conduct a conclusion and answer our research questions. Additional contributions both in terms of theoretical and managerial will be provided to the reader. Lastly, limitations and recommendations for further research will be brought to the readers' attention.

6.1 IKEA's Integration & Communication of Sustainability

As previously mentioned in the introduction chapter, the research purpose was to demonstrate how an MNFC has integrated sustainability into their local operations and if the global guidelines, sustainability goals, and strategies are aligned with the chosen countries of interest. The result and findings we hope to demonstrate are if the global brand is implementing a globalized and standardized approach or a more localized approach while communicating sustainability to the local market. This led to our conducted research questions and answers:

➤ ***How does a global brand integrate sustainability into its corporate brand identity?***

From the findings in the analysis and our interpretation of the Matrix, a global brand is integrating sustainability into its corporate brand by ensuring that it permeates all parts of the corporate brand identity, and is not seen as an add-on-function. The most effective part is to incorporate sustainability into the brand core, thus ensuring that it is noticeable and communicated in all parts in addition to implementing the same identity to local operations within the brand. Thus, incorporating sustainability into all operations, all procedures, plus the other elements of the matrix, can then lead to achieving the company's goal of fully integrating sustainability into each part of the matrix. Additionally, sustainability has to be visible, and tangible but also encouraged to all parts of the MNFC and throughout the entire value-chain.

➤ ***How does a global brand communicate sustainability on a local and global level?***

For how global brands communicate sustainability on a global level, a lot of emphasis is put on how the global brand is acting as a good citizen and the global brand's role in the making

of a more sustainable everyday, but also a more sustainable future. For how a global brand communicates sustainability to the local markets, they are applying a localized approach that depends on the current and prioritized issues and challenges in the local countries and markets. The tone of voice and which sustainability issues the global brand communicates to the local markets therefore differs, but the presence of the global brand is noticeable. It is present in their corporate brand identity, their shared guidelines, and aligned sustainability goals for the entire corporation, that will provide the true effect of the communication. Through communication, the global brand has the ability to gain further competitive advantages in the market and to be perceived as a sustainable global brand, or a sustainable multinational franchise corporation.

The following chapter will present our theoretical and managerial contributions within the four theoretical frameworks and interests that our thesis has touched upon; corporate brand identity, globalized & standardized- and localized external communication, and integration of sustainability in a global brand.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

The findings that have arisen throughout this research process will contribute to existing research by connecting global brands, brand identity, corporate brand communication, and sustainability. Distinguishing our research by looking at the external communication from a global brand in local markets, we add research and findings to the understanding of global brands and sustainability, a topic that is both very important and extremely current today. Combined with the knowledge of existing research in the fields of global brands, brand identity, corporate brand communication, and sustainability, we believe that this study will contribute valuable research through the combination of these fields. By conducting interviews with several IKEA managers, and analyzing both the global and local websites, we are providing an in-depth picture of how a leading retailing company in the furniture sector is actively working with sustainability. The contributing knowledge of this case study; how IKEA as a global company is approaching the local markets with their communication on sustainability, we hope to contribute to the knowledge transfer to other global brands who wish to implement sustainability in their corporate brand identity and how they can communicate it to their local markets.

We also consider our research to contribute with knowledge and the development of the Integration of Sustainability — implementation model, where the international aspect was added for how local operation within an MNFC can communicate sustainability to its local market while still staying aligned to the global brand's identity. Further, how to align the various corporations in relation to the way they are communicating sustainability issues and initiatives, to ensure that miscommunication and misalignments between the different franchises and consumers will be prevented. Moreover, in this thesis, we hope to contribute insights and knowledge to the CBIM and our extended layer of communication. These findings on how a global company with franchise corporations has the ability to keep its brand core intact with an aligned global identity regarding how their sustainable identity and initiatives have been presented. These findings contribute to knowledge about how global companies that operate in local areas can stay aligned across markets, even though the expression and communication style are more freely adapted and expressed to the local markets. This insightful research concerning global companies operating in local areas, to gain further and more profound knowledge while communicating to the local consumers, in order to stay aligned to their brand identity but also relevant in the various sustainability areas and implementations.

6.3 Managerial Contribution

With the conclusion and the answers to the research questions of this case study, we hope to provide insights for other global brands. Hereby, to demonstrate an example of how a global brand has integrated sustainability in their corporate brand identity, and provide examples of communication approaches for the companies to reach their consumers in the different markets. This can be demonstrated both through a standardized communication approach and a localized communication approach.

For integrating sustainability into a global brand's corporate identity, IKEA displays the insight to implement sustainability in every procedure, operation, strategy, and mindset, from start to sold product. Therefore, sustainability will become a natural part of the corporation and not an add-on, which has the potential risk of being overlooked or not fully integrated, which leads to differences between the different franchises internationally. An additional insight is to implement common goals and a brand essence or promise that influences all of

the other elements. This creates an alignment between the different paths and allows the communication towards sustainability to reach its full potential in the various markets.

A competence that IKEA withholds and actively shares with the public is different regulation and environmentally-friendly procedures and tools for conducting products that has a positive impact on both the people and the planet. Also, having control of the entire supply-chain gives the corporation the ability to regulate and implement operational systems and materials that maintain the standards they aspire for and act as a tool for creating a better everyday for the many people.

However, applying differentiating communication or expression to the local market, provides the freedom and ability to localize the communication and connect with the local consumers. Through IKEA's various strategies to gain further insights regarding the local consumers, it can gain them the competence and the ability to enhance their position in the market, and to provide them with the advantage while expressing and communicating. We therefore, place great emphasis on global brands to align and ask themselves the questions displayed in the Matrix, in order to align their corporate brand identity so the communication to the public leads to a stronger brand and position in the market.

We also advise other MNFC to implement different strategies, like the IKEA home visits, for the company to gain further knowledge about their consumers' wants and needs, their prioritizations on sustainability issues, and the requirements while purchasing sustainable products. By implementing strategies like these, the company can create competitive advantages, stay relevant in the different markets, and stand out from the competition of brands throughout the world.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

The positioning of our research led to the phenomenon; global brands and how they integrate sustainability in their corporate brand identity and external brand communication. This research field is limited to prior research, however the last few years many MNFC has experienced challenges. Due to the present pressure for global brands to join the trend of sustainability, it is no longer a question of if but rather how they should implement sustainability in their operation and how to communicate it to the global and local market.

This leads to great relevance for research and a gap that we have intended to fill. With this thesis, we can transfer an example of how a global market-leading brand is currently integrating sustainability in their entire corporation and how they are communicating sustainability to all of their markets. When gathering the qualitative data, our case study has been limited to only choosing one MNFC, IKEA. However, if provided with greater resources and a longer duration to conduct our thesis, our goal would be to involve more IKEA Groups and managers or employees worldwide. Also, to extend the research to include more platforms for observing their communication approach, add the branding aspect from the current framework of use by Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014). Furthermore, our case study is limited to the representativeness and ability to generalize IKEA's communication and integrations due to the limited number of local markets. However, great focus was put on transparency with our empirical findings from the conducted interviews to reflect on their answers.

For future research, it would be interesting to include employees in other positions, for example employees that are working in the supply-chain or in the department stores, to gain their perception of the IKEA corporate brand identity and their way to integrate sustainability in their operations and communication. Furthermore, after the interview with the Global Brand Identity Manager (interview, 6 May 2022b) she expressed a current challenge for IKEA; to find their new position, in regards to the sustainability position they strive for, in the market. Therefore, it would be interesting to research how IKEA should position itself in a specific market to align its sustainable identity and operations in the market.

Since our purpose for this thesis was based on the managerial and qualitative approach, an additional interesting field of research would be to conduct research from the consumer-perspective and a quantitative approach. Here the research focuses on the different challenges regarding sustainability in the various countries and markets, displaying how the different nationalities prioritize these issues while consuming sustainable products. Therefore, mapping out different sustainability challenges and demonstrating them across the globe to see which of the issues, and in what order, has the greatest impact on the consumers.

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Appendix

Appendix One, Interview Guide

Questions to Identity and Trademark Manager:

Who are you and what do you do at IKEA?

How would you describe the core identity at IKEA?

Does it demonstrate the same beyond all markets?

Which core value would you say is the most important for IKEA's identity?

Does IKEA's work similarly around the world to ensure that the brand identity looks the same or is the local approach more adapted to different markets from a communication point of view?

What brand communication do you use at IKEA today?

What has the development of your communication looked like over the last few years?

What are your biggest obstacles / problems when it comes to branding?

After being around for so many years, how do you adapt your techniques to remain market leading and relevant to many people?

How do you work to ensure that the brand identity and brand image are aligned?

Question to Global Brand Identity Manager:

What do you work with at IKEA? What does a normal working day look like for you?

What kind of branding do you mainly work with?

How would you describe The core identity at IKEA?

Does it demonstrate the same beyond all markets?

What is the difference between the organization at IKEA in the Netherlands and in Sweden?

Does IKEA work similarly around the world to ensure that the brand identity looks the same or is the local approach more adapted to different markets from a communication point of view?

What marketing strategies do you primarily use?

What are your biggest obstacles / problems when it comes to branding?

What opportunities do you see regarding the development of this? Is there any special part that you, above all, develop within your brand?

After being around for so many years, how do you adapt your techniques to remain market leading and relevant to many people?

Questions to Marketing Manager:

- What do you work with at IKEA? What does a normal working day look like for you?
- What is the difference within the organization at IKEA in Canada and in Sweden?
- How does the Småland mantra shape your work culture in Canada?
- How would you describe The core identity at IKEA?
- Does it demonstrate the same beyond all markets?
- What brand communication do you use at IKEA today?
- What has the development of your communication looked like over the years?
- Which primary platforms do you invest in and which do you want to work on more?
- Do these differ depending on the country? (Canada / Sweden)?
- Do you direct your communication to the entire Canada / world market or is it adapted to the local city / regional market?
- After being around for so many years, how do you adapt your techniques to remain market leading and relevant to many people?
- What are your biggest obstacles / problems when it comes to marketing?
- How do you work to ensure that the brand identity and brand image are radiated together.
-

Appendix Two, Interview Guide 2.0

Follow-up with all of the Managers

For the purpose of this interview we want to focus on IKEA's communication towards sustainability.

Hey! Thank you very much for taking the time to have this follow-up meeting with us! We have started our thesis-work and together with our supervisor we have decided to focus on IKEA, sustainability and brand-communication. We are interested to see how IKEA communicates sustainability and how you implement your sustainability strategy globally. Also observing the individual markets and see if we find any differences, considering the communication. We think that this interview will take approximately thirty minutes.

Before we start, we confirm your status of anonymity in the thesis, about the information you have shared and how you want the information about your name, position, etc. to appear in the thesis.

If it's okay for us to include your name, we would like you to write on a piece of paper (Appendix Three) or in an email, where you consent that your name, other personal information may be included in this case study.

Questions to all of the managers:

Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2012; Urde & Greyser 2019; Urde, 2022)


- What are our key offerings and how do we want them to appeal to customers and non-customer stakeholders? (Value Proposition)
- What should be the nature of our relationships with key customers and non-customer stakeholders? (Relationship)
- What is our intended position in the market, and in the heart and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders? (Position)
- What is distinctive about the way we communicate and express ourselves and makes it possible to recognize us at a distance? (Expression)
- What engages us (mission) and what is our direction and inspiration? (vision)
- What are our attitudes and how do we work and behave? (Culture)
- What are we particularly good at, and what makes us better than the competition?
 - What makes IKEA better than other companies in Sustainability? (Competence)
- What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character? (Personality)
- What do we promise, and what are the core values that sum up the essence of what our brand stands for? (Core)
- Do you find that IKEA's values and approaches are aligned with the core value? In what ways have you integrated sustainability to all of these elements?

Integrating Sustainability Framework

- Has IKEA encountered any problems related to sustainability?
- How did you plan to solve this problem, what strategy did you use?
- How did you communicate the plan and the results to your consumers and other stakeholders?

Thank you for participating in this study. We sincerely appreciate your contribution to our Master Thesis in International Marketing and Brand Management 2022.

Appendix Three, Consent Form for Interview Participants

	<p>SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT</p> <p>SAMPLE CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH INTERVIEW Consent for participation in research interview, purpose of a Master's Thesis</p> <p>I agree to participate in a research project conducted by; Louise Andersson & Louise Hägg from MSc in International Marketing & Brand Management, Lund University, Sweden</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I have received sufficient information about this research project and understand my role in it. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project and the future processing of my personal data has been explained to me and are clear.2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is completely voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.3. Participation involves being interviewed by Andersson and Hägg from Lund University. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I allow the researchers to take notes during the interview. I also allow the recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue by audio/video tape. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview and dialogue to be taped I am fully entitled to withdraw from participation.4. I have the right not to answer questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview and ask that the data collected prior to the withdrawal will be deleted.5. I have been provided the option to be cited either by my full name and position within the company or to remain anonymous. If chosen to remain anonymous I have been given the explicit guarantee that the researcher will not identify me by name or function in any reports using information obtained from this interview, that my confidentiality as a participant in this study remains secure.6. I have carefully read and fully understood the points and statements of this form. All my questions were answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.7. I obtained a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer. <p>For the purpose of this thesis, I the respondent choose that my name and position will remain:</p> <p>Available [] or Anonymous []</p> <p>_____ Participant's Signature Date</p> <p>_____ Researcher's Signature Researcher's Signature Date</p> <p><i>For further information, please contact: Louise Andersson, lo8373am-s@student.lu.se or Louise Hägg lo4666ha-s@student.lu.se</i></p>
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Appendix Four, Swedish Sustainable Website

En mer hållbar vardag

Hur hållbart är IKEA? Mer hållbart dag för dag. Med solpaneler för hemmet, vegetariska varmkorvar och energibesparande lösningar banar vi väg för mer hållbara hem för de många människorna. Vi vill att du ska känna att det är möjligt att leva mer hållbart. Därför fokuserar vi på att inspirera till förändring genom att utveckla produkter som är prisvärda, energieffektiva och tillverkade med återvunna eller förnybara material. Som Ingvar Kamprad brukade säga: "Ingen metod är effektivare än det goda exemplet".

Våra material



Trä - ett material med många egenskaper

→



100% satsning på mer hållbar bomull

→



Bambu har många hållbarhetsfördelar

→



Endast återvunnen eller förnybar plast i IKEA-produkter år 2030

→

Appendix Five, Canadian Sustainable Website

A sustainable everyday

How sustainable is IKEA? Well, with [sewage hot dogs](#) (bars made of recycled plastic bottles) and furniture made from sustainable materials, we want to effect and inspire change. We want to empower you to make more eco-friendly choices. Because, as our founder, Ingvar Kamprad said: "No method is more effective than the good example."



From pre-loved to re-loved: we're giving IKEA furniture a second life

With our sell-back service (it's never been easier to re-use, recycle and reduce), you can receive in-store credit and give your used IKEA furniture a second life.

[Learn more](#)

Guides to sustainable living



Guides to sustainable living



Tapping into ways to save water



Bright ideas for saving energy



Think twice before throwing it away



Create a healthier home



Love your furniture for longer



Appendix Six, Swedish Sustainable Website Products



VALLAMOSSE Stång med handdusch 269,-



VOXNAN Takduschset med termostatblandare 1 995,-



BROGRUND Takduschset med termostatblandare 1 995,-

Appendix Seven, Canadian Sustainable Website Products

Water-saving shower heads

[Shop shower heads](#)

Best Seller



VALLAMOSSE
Riser rail with hand shower/outlet
\$59.99

Best Seller



VOXNAN
Showerhead with thermostatic faucet
\$129.00



VOXNAN
Bath/shower set thermostatic faucet
\$149.00
★★★★★ (2)

Best Seller



BROGRUND
Showerhead with thermostatic faucet
\$129.00
★★★★ (5)