Green brands & Greenwashing: A narrative journey towards legitimacy

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Abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to develop knowledge and identify legitimacy attempts for green brands to construct themselves in order to circumvent greenwashing challenges. The researcher studied the promotional content of Patagonia and the Slovenia destination brand (I Feel Slovenia) based on a pragmatic and moral legitimacy framework, supported by narrative analysis. Results showed that green brands need to develop emotional connections with consumers and environmental sustainability through narrative. It contributes to being perceived as authentic and trustworthy, which may prevent greenwashing accusations. To develop this emotional bond, findings showed green brands should monitor their actions, educate their consumers, interact with them, and involved them in green actions. For brands committed to environmental sustainability, it is highly valuable to be perceived as trustworthy and meaningful to consumers. From an organizational perspective, legitimacy is an integral part of brands' success and essential for carrying out their mission as environmental actors. There is a need for brands to take responsible action and guide consumers towards greener practices to preserve our environment. The analysis offers a new approach to looking at green brands' communication and their strategies to navigate greenwashing challenges. It also provides examples of what a green brand can communicate about, to try to come across as legitimate.

Keywords: strategic communication, environmental sustainability, green brand, legitimacy, narrative, greenwashing

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1. Introduction

"Champion of the earth" (UN Environment, 2019)

"Tree hugger heaven" (National Geographic, 2019)

These expressions are used to refer to, respectively, Patagonia and Slovenia's destination brand. These brands have committed to environmental sustainability for years, and have constructed themselves as green brands. Green brands communicate and develop products/services considering environmental sustainability and consumers' demands (Simão & Lisboa, 2017). They are well-known within their industry for their actions to preserve the environment. Last November, Patagonia published an article where they stated "Patagonia doesn't use "sustainable" anymore" (Thoren, 2021). They argue that the term sustainability is overused and distorted by brands, which ultimately lacks clarity, and misleads consumers. The consequence is that consumers may lose trust in brands, and misinterpret their messages as greenwashing. Greenwashing is a deceptive practice misleading consumers into believing the brand is green, whereas the brand's actions are unsubstantiated (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015; Seele & Gatti, 2015). It affects stakeholders' perception of the brand's trustworthiness and ultimately impacts the brand's legitimacy (Seele & Gatti, 2015). To construct legitimacy, the narrative is a key factor (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015). This thesis falls within the field of strategic communication insofar as it focuses on brands' communication and their organizational strategy - legitimacy attempts - and develops "a certain understanding and knowledge of reality" (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018, p.57).

Climate change has brought a focus on how individuals, companies, or governments, can take action to reduce our impact on the planet for several years (Allen, 2016).

Brands have committed to being responsible and sustainable when producing, selling, and communicating. It is essential for entities to be conscious and tackle today's environmental concerns. Interest in green solutions has increased tremendously, as have the consumers' expectations (Achi et al., 2021; Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). In the effort to achieve environmental sustainability, communication emerges as a crucial and valuable tool (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018). Brands play an essential role to tackle these challenges and promoting responsible and "green consumption practices" (Achi et al., 2021, p.26). Due to the environmental context and consumer demands, they have incorporated environmental sustainability into their organizational process, and communication strategies are aligning with these commitments: to be truly green.

Environmental sustainability communication has become popular. It is now also employed as a marketing strategy to make more profits and gain a positive image in consumers' eyes. Researchers and practitioners have recently acknowledged that brands not committed to environmental sustainability using green strategies for the wrong reasons seriously mislead consumers and undermine green communication's core values. Thereby progressively minimizing their impact and steering them away from their intended purpose. (Baum, 2012; Danciu, 2015; Seele & Gatti, 2015).

1.1 Greenwashing and legitimate green strategies

Greenwashing impacts the value of green strategies as a communication frame and, ultimately, the legitimacy of brands using these strategies. Green brands, despite holding an honest mission, may face these challenges regarding legitimacy and may be perceived as less trustworthy in the eyes of consumers. Greenwashing negatively influences the perception of green practices, as they are overused and distorted from their intended values. Consumers fail to identify genuine practices from false ones (Seele & Gatti, 2015). This is damaging to the brand as it can hinder actions from succeeding, goals from being achieved, and undermine the brand's meaningfulness. This is an important and current topic of study, as it can help brands learn more about

these challenges and receive information in trying to overcome them. Additionally, it is a topic that has not been studied adequately and needs further research to be addressed.

Since 2007, it has been acknowledged minimal research from a brand perspective regarding strategic communication on sustainability (Taufique, 2020). Scholars in strategic communication have focused on the "relationships" and "relationship outcomes" rather than "studying the process - communication - by which relationships are formed" (Hallahan et al. 2007, p.16). There is a lack of studies on the challenges green brands face and how they can navigate them. Researchers analyze the impact of greenwashing on brands' authenticity or measure stakeholders' perceptions. There is little research on what and how brands communicate to external stakeholders, and even less that directly relates green brands' practices and greenwashing. Falkheimer and Heide (2018) define, strategic communication as the study of "organizations' communication" and "how organizations use communication purposefully to fulfill their overall missions" (Frandsen &Johansen, 2017; Verhoeven, Zerfass, & Tench, 2011 as cited in Falkheimer & Heide, 2018, p.57). The focus of this research aligned with this definition, as it will study the construction of green brand communication in order to not be labeled as greenwashing. Furthermore, this paper focuses on how brands carry out their organizational goals, to come across as legitimate (Hallahan et al., 2007).

1.2 Aim & Research Question

This research aims to examine how green brands are constructing themselves in and through communication to circumvent being accused of greenwashing. Previous research mentioned and pointed out the role of legitimacy when facing greenwashing, saying that ultimately legitimacy gets impacted by greenwashing accusations (Seele & Gatti, 2015). Legitimacy is an integral part of the organizational process, which makes it an essential element to look at for understanding the brand's development and its maintenance (Golant & Sillince, 2007). A few more scholars

explained that legitimacy could be obtained through narrative, as it is a valuable tool for the communication process. It plays a big part in "shaping peoples' perceptions", and it enables brands to show the "relevance and effectiveness" of their activities (Golant & Sillince, 2007, p.1152; Roselle et al., 2014).

This study will investigate the legitimacy attempts of brands when communicating their narrative to consumers. This research will not show nor prove whether legitimacy attempts are successful, nor if they will, or not, be labeled as greenwashing. However, the purpose of the study is to provide insightful knowledge about green brands on how they can try to navigate more confidently greenwashing and legitimacy challenges, by offering an overview of brand practices that can be implemented in communication strategies. Analyzing the communicative construction of green brand legitimacy increases our knowledge of how green brands strategically communicate to avoid being labeled as greenwashing. The use of narrative is beneficial to identifying multiple meanings and acknowledging how brand practices contribute to constructing legitimacy (Preuss & Dawson, 2008).

Thus, the study provides a significant contribution to the field of strategic communication. Since narrative is a key factor in legitimacy acquisition, it seems valuable to focus on the construction of the stories brands are conveying (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015). As introduced earlier, "champion of the earth" & "tree hugger heaven" are expressions used by the UN Environment Programme, and National Geographic, to refer, respectively, to Patagonia and Slovenia's destination brand (National Geographic, 2019; National Geographic, 2019). These expressions show how society perceives them. These are also part of their narrative to be perceived as authentic and trustworthy. Greenwashing's phenomenon relies on stakeholders' perceptions of the brand's green communication trustworthiness, it seems valuable to look at how green brands attempt to come across as legitimate through stories (Seele & Gatti, 2015). Hence, the study poses the following research question:

How do green brands construct narrative legitimacy?

This thesis will be relevant for Strategic Communication as it will contribute directly to the field of research. Indeed, this study focuses on the green brands' communication in a greenwashing context. It will contribute to brands engaged in environmental matters, as it would provide a better understanding of how green brands are constructed and how they can try to meet the challenges of greenwashing. Greenwashing, being more present in everyday communication, is an important factor to contribute so that genuine brands can keep their role as social actors and positively influence their consumers towards sustainable and greener practices (Hallahan et al., 2007).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communicating environmental sustainability

Environmental concerns and sustainability matters are challenges that have been discussed frequently in recent years. Climate change is one of the most important and urgent issues to this day, impacting every entity; citizen, organization, government, and industry (Allen, 2016). Due to more environmental information available worldwide, and better public knowledge, these issues of climate change, environment, and sustainability have increasingly become a topic of interest for practitioners and academic researchers (Achi et al., 2021).

"Seminars, summits, conventions, and conferences" have enabled the public to get access to environmental information and be aware of environmental concerns (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018, p.7). Through these seminars and conferences, definitions and reports have been developed to create a common ground for researchers and academics in the environmental communication field. Climate change is seen by the United Nations Secretary-General as "the major, overriding environmental issue of our time" (Allen, 2016, p.3) and calls for sustainable development, also referred to as sustainability. According to Our Common Future's report, published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as Brundtland Commission), sustainable development is the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43 as cited in Allen, 2016, p.2). This definition is most used by academics researching sustainability in organizations (Allen, 2016). Sustainability is undoubtedly the challenge the most discussed in the world when it comes to environmental concerns (Allen, 2016).

Because of the importance of dealing with environmental concerns, there has been increasing attention to the study of "how the environment is communicated and understood by the public and policymakers" (Achi et al., 2021; Evans Comfort, S. & Eun Park, Y., 2018, p.861). There is, therefore, an increase in academic articles, reports on sustainability and green practices, and peer-reviewed journals focused on these specific topics such as the Journal of Cleaner Production, Environmental Communication, and Environmental Sustainability (Achi et al., 2021). To face climate change and work towards improvements, communication is the best way to fight for environmental sustainability. Brands and media have the power to raise awareness of environmental issues and get the people involved in protecting and reducing our impact (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018). Hence, why researchers have been focusing on communication in a way "to contribute to the empowerment of people to act on environmental issues" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p.348).

As the concept of sustainability within society is intended to be impactful and inspiring to consumers, its enactment "requires strong brands and comprehensive strategy" (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, p.82). With the flow and access to information about climate change and environmental sustainability, there has been a shift in consumers' and organizations' behavior as well as consumers' expectations. They are much more aware and sensible about environmental concerns (Chen, 2009). Some brands take the environmental threats very seriously and acknowledge their way of doing them is not responsible or sustainable (Allen, 2016). Consumers want to buy environmentally friendly products, and expect organizations to be more responsible and active toward environmental matters (Baum, 2012; Chen, 2009), it is what the "green consciousness" is referred to (Danciu, 2015, p.48). It is in this perspective that communication plays an important role. As Allen (2016) states in her paper, "strategic communication is needed to alert, persuade, and help people enact sustainability initiatives within and between organizations" (p.1). A few researchers like Grubor and Milovanov (2017) have argued the importance of understanding consumers' socially responsible behavior when researching and working with environmental communication. They note their decision is based on

three dynamics between the consumer and the brand: "consumer and environmental sustainability, brand and environmental sustainability, and consumer and brand" (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, p.83). Researchers show that a brand's commitment to environmental sustainability plays a crucial role in their communication, and consumers' behavior and decision process. Brands should be consistent in their vision and communication towards environmental sustainability, be trustworthy among consumers, and genuinely impact consumer behavior to influence them into greener behavior.

Strategic communication is important to convey messages, "create awareness" and "change behavior", and environmental sustainability through the brand communication is a valuable factor to reach these goals (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018, p.7). When researchers and practitioners talk about environmental sustainability, they refer to it as every aspect of our lives, with the primary goal of preserving our environment: "a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs" without overtaking the capacity of the ecosystems to continue regenerating the essential services required to meet these needs (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018, p.9). Environmental sustainability and preservation of nature have been acknowledged and embraced by academics in marketing and communication fields, they now see them as key components of their fields (Iyer & Reczek, 2017).

However, since environmental sustainability in strategic communication is a rather recent and new topic, studies are scattered in multiple fields, making the research on what has been done complex. Environmental sustainability is studied in management, economics, communication, and marketing. Scholars use different designations to research the relationship between brands and environmental sustainability (Simão & Lisboa, 2017). So studies focusing on this relationship can be found under keywords such as CSR communication, green marketing, sustainable communication, sustainable brand, green branding, environmental sustainability, etc (Simão & Lisboa, 2017). Even though these are different terms and concepts, they all

discuss, to a certain extent, brands' environmental responsibilities, actions, and their relation with consumers on environmental and sustainability challenges. As environmental sustainability in strategic communication is an increasing topic filled with gaps, some concepts and theories found in other fields will be borrowed and adapted to conduct consistent research.

The next part of this literature review will enable us to get a better view of what has been done when it comes to environmental sustainability in strategic communication, as well as get a better understanding of what is a green brand, and what has been researched.

2.2 Green brand communication

"Green brands", "sustainable brands", or "environmental brands", these terms are used interchangeably in the literature to define brands that are committed to social and environmental sustainability. In order to be consistent throughout this study, the term "green brands" will be the only term used.

Nowadays, brands play an influential role in our society. They are not solely selling and providing services to customers. Brands are known to have a powerful and strong relationship with consumers. Consumers expect them to be responsible actors acting for the good of our society (Colleoni, 2013) and demand brands to "justify their social and environmental actions" (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p.493). Consumers have an influence over brands as much as brands influence consumers' behavior (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). Grubor and Milovanov (2017) highlight that "brands are powerful instruments of change" and they are "tightly connected with consumers" (p.78). To function, brands need implicit or explicit approval from consumers. This approval refers to legitimacy and is closely related to trust and authenticity (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018). From a branding perspective, being legitimate and trustworthy is essential to be successful. Well-positioned and trusted brands are inspiring, influential, and have the ability to

drive widespread advocacy (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). Consumers have a positive impact on the brand, and subsequently, give brands the power to influence and change consumers' attitudes (Baum, 2012). Consumers are attracted to "brands they trust, brands different from others, that are innovative and appeal to their emotions" (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, p.84). Overall appealed to meaningful, smart, and interesting brands according to consumers' eyes (Danciu, 2015; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018). They are keen to identify themselves with the values, messages, and lifestyle the brand advocates (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, p.84). Researchers state green brands "can be a significant instrument for driving the change into society with respect to the environmental crisis" (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, p.85). Green branding comprises every practice and strategy seeking to encourage and empower environmentally responsible consumer attitudes and behaviors (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018). The concept of green branding is being largely embraced, due to sustainable development efforts and the benefits it brings (Danciu, 2015). It encompasses diverse green messages and practices such as the "introduction of green products into the market, the modification of existing products" while minimizing their impact on the environment, and setting up "sponsorship of or partnership with environmentally vested advocacy organizations" (Baum, 2012, p.424; Danciu, 2015; Simão & Lisboa, 2017).

Green branding refers to the communication strategies of green brands. Green brands are brands actively engaged in environmental and sustainability matters (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017; Simão & Lisboa, 2017). One that communicates and focuses its entire brand identity, vision, and goals around environmental and sustainable matters. Simão and Lisboa (2017) define a green brand as a group of attributes and benefits that are "related to minimizing the brand's environmental impact and its perception as environmentally healthy" (p.189). Communication strategies are adequately related to environmental and sustainable challenges and are addressed to environmentally conscious consumers (Danciu, 2015; Simão & Lisboa, 2017). Green brands focus on developing and communicating products and services that satisfy customer needs while considering environmental challenges (Simão & Lisboa,

2017). Danciu (2015), mentions S. Pflanz's (2014) classification of brands regarding environmental sustainability, which determines "how deep the green or ecological issues are integrated into every brand" (p.53). He suggests 3 distinct types, the ones with "green principles as their core", and the ones with "green principles integrated into their core", meaning they are progressively implementing environmental sustainability principles (Danciu, 2015, p.53). And the third category refers to the brands communicating on green benefits although it is not a predominant aspect of their brand communication (Danciu, 2015, p.53). This thesis is interested in analyzing the communication of green brands that have green principles as their core. Brands in which environmental sustainability concerns are deeply rooted in their identity and DNA.

Grubor and Milanov (2017) states brands' success relies primarily on "understanding what matters to people in their lives, how and in what direction culture is changing, how to 'walk the talk' of brand integrity" (p.84). At a time when environmental concerns and sustainability are so important, brands have both an obligation and an opportunity to improve their brand performance, increase their brand equity, and maintain their legitimacy to engage with consumers (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017; Seele & Gatti, 2015). Nevertheless, Danciu (2015) notes communication should be convincing and used to develop the green brand story. In literature, green brands are usually connoted with emotion. The story developed by the green brand is the key to creating an emotional connection with consumers (Danciu, 2015). To develop this emotional bond with the target group, brands have to communicate their "vision for social and environmental change, especially their own story and specific actions" (Danciu, 2015, p.50). Brands need to be "meaningful" to the consumers and do what they claim, if not, the emotional bond can not be developed (Danciu, 2015, p.53). Grubor and Milovanov (2017) argue that brand perception becomes more meaningful thanks to sustainability and, subsequently, strengthens emotional connections. Indeed, this emotional bond is paramount as consumers will be more positive about products, messages, and brands if it aligns with environmental sustainability and respond to their expectations and desires (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017).

Although the green brands and their communication have been of great interest for a few years, their research is still growing, and the specific study of green branding practices is still in its early stages (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). There is a lack of theoretical studies on the subject, especially "with regards to strategic communications and messages that appeal" (Chwialkowska 2018, as cited in Taufique, 2020, p.272). Most of the research found on the subject has been focused on message framing, and the perception of the "greenness" of a product or brand (Leonidou et al. 2014; Chang et al. 2015, as cited in Taufique, 2020; Iyer & Reczek, 2017). Other academics have done some more research about the impact that green products/services have on a brand's reputation, which resulted in showing that green products/services can "improve consumer attitudes toward the brand" (Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014, as cited in Iyer & Reczek, 2017, p.248). Therefore, there has been a lot of research on consumers' perception of green branding, and how green branding can positively impact the brand, and yet there's still minimal research on green brands as such, what challenges they face and how they construct their communication strategies around environmental sustainability.

Studies and practitioners have shown that green practices, that demonstrate that the organizations care about the planet, create a valuable competitive advantage (Achi et al., 2021). For instance, brands focusing on limiting the environmental impact of their activities gain a significant competitive advantage (Achi et al., 2021). Additionally, more researchers recognize that brands use environmental and social marketing strategies as a tool to gain legitimacy (Seele & Gatti, 2015). This dynamic is attractive to many organizations. Since communication on environmental sustainability concerns has a significant positive impact on the competitiveness and brand's perception, an increasing number of brands have begun to communicate their commitment to these issues, sometimes regardless of their values and positioning. Although many have used communication strategies to convey their sincere efforts to minimize their environmental impact, others have used it as a tool to amplify, or even create, false environmental claims for their products (Baum, 2012).

Being committed to environmental sustainability can benefit legitimacy and competitivity, however, it attracts a lot of brands that are using these practices for the wrong reasons. If their communication doesn't align with their values, brands can easily lose their legitimacy (Vredenburg et al, 2020). This practice called greenwashing can be harmful to the company itself, and just as much to green communication practices.

2.3 Green brands vs Greenwashing

Greenwashing is a recent phenomenon that has attracted a lot of attention in recent years from academics and practitioners. It is a growing research topic, and common grounds are still developing. As a matter of fact, depending on the field of study, greenwashing can also be referred to as "woke-washing", "blue-washing", or "pink-washing" (Vredenburg et al, 2020). Nonetheless, researchers established a common definition. They define it as a "type of deceptive" practice, misleading consumers (Baum, 2012, p.424; Danciu, 2015). Vredenburg et al. (2020) argue that greenwashing brings out the brand's inauthenticity. It shows that environmental and sociopolitical issues used in their messages do not align with the "brand's purpose, values, and corporate practice" (Vredenburg et al, 2020, p.445). As Danciu (2015) explained it, because of greenwashing, "consumers feel more unclear about the green brand, green communication and their impact on the environment and the quality of life" (Danciu, 2015, p.51). Thereupon the practice might damage the value and impact of the green communication strategies and terms.

Seele and Gatti (2015) developed this definition, arguing that how other scholars define greenwashing "does not reflect the complexity of the greenwashing phenomenon" (p.241). According to them, one factor that is mentioned but never used in greenwashing definition is "the accusation process": if there is no accusation, there is no greenwashing. This view of greenwashing gets even more interesting since as we know it, greenwashing impacts brands' legitimacy which, depends highly on what consumers think and perceive from the brands. They continue their

argument by emphasizing that even if the brand is actually aligned and committed to environmental sustainability, it does not mean that it will for sure prevent any greenwashing accusations: "greenwashing only exists when a message or company is blamed by the media, NGOs or other stakeholders" (Seele & Gatti, 2015, p.241). It then depends highly on the external stakeholders' perception and trust that they hold in the brand (Seele & Gatti, 2015). Seele and Gatti (2015) explains that to be labeled as greenwashing, the communication has to combine a false claim with a misleading accusation. From this statement, we could argue that a brand is only labeled as greenwashing if the consumers judge its communication as inconsistent, false, and misleading.

Greenwashing is an emerging concept amidst an already complex array of claims and certifications. With so many green terms lacking "accepted and universal definitions" or being questionable within the "legal and environmental activist communities", green communication practices lack clarity, making it difficult to detect and quantify greenwashing (Baum, 2012, p.426; Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). As a result, many consumers doubt the "honesty, responsibility" and green conscience of these so-called green brands (Danciu, 2015, p.49). A survey on consumers' perceptions of green brands and sustainable practices confirms the prevailing concern about greenwashing's increase (Danciu, 2015). It reveals that consumer perceptions of a "brand's greenness are often inconsistent with the actual brand's sustainable practices", leading to confusion among consumers (Danciu, 2015, p.51). Nonetheless, Baum (2015) mentions that brands are not the only entity that can act to prevent the greenwashing phenomenon. He highlights the external stakeholders' role and their need to be "more actively engaged and knowledgeable" of the brands and greenwashing practices (Baum, 2015, p.437). He acknowledges "consumers' ignorance" and lack of interest regarding brands' "green claims and unsubstantiated actions" (Baum, 2015, p.437), stating that consumers are highly valuable to brands and have the influence to bring meaningful green brands to the forefront.

As the researchers put it, greenwashing does come from misleading green practices adopted by brands that are not genuinely committed to environmental matters, but

research highlights that being involved in greenwashing do not necessarily mean that people certainly perceive the facility of the claims, and are accused of the greenwashing. The challenge that comes from greenwashing is then trickier to navigate, as it can lead genuine brands to be accused of greenwashing.

Greenwashing is a worldwide current concern that is likely to persist in the absence of adequate regulation and media coverage (Baum, 2012). An authentic green brand must be consistent in its actions, educate consumers, and have a significant enough impact to influence them to move forward with environmental sustainability (Danciu, 2015). Brands need to collectively commit to stopping this harmful phenomenon of greenwashing. Once they address greenwashing challenges, consumers can "regain trust in green claims, and genuine environmentally responsible brands" (Baum, 2012, p.437).

Environmental sustainability encompasses all aspects of environmental and sustainability practices, in which the main goal is to preserve the environment and minimize the impact on the planet. Brands engaging in environmental sustainability are referred to in this research as 'green brands'. More precisely, this study will only focus on the ones with "green principles as their core", which means brands that have integrated environmental and sustainability matters into the essence and identity of the brand itself. Therefore, every communication strategy of green brands is centered around these matters, with the hope of influencing more green lifestyles and habits. Green brands act as advocates for the protection of the natural environment, which makes them even more valuable to protect from greenwashing. Greenwashing is a phenomenon that misleads consumers and harms the trust and authenticity of communication strategies and brands. This phenomenon is growing over the years, and more research is needed as it is threatening as well genuine green brands although they did not use any greenwashing practices.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the legitimacy theory and its related concepts will be introduced. This theory will subsequently inform the methodology and analysis in the thesis. The study mainly focuses on how to gain and maintain legitimacy from a green branding perspective. The chapter will focus on Nielsen and Thomsen's (2018) model, which is notably based on Suchman's (1995) research.

Studies on green brands argue that committing to environmental sustainability brings advantages such as better competitiveness and gaining legitimacy. The challenge, however, is to navigate misinterpretations and accusations of greenwashing. Seele and Gatti (2015) explain that such a situation completely alters the outcome of green communication, and eventually leads to a reverse reaction where the brand sees a reduction in its legitimacy. Misinterpretations happen when making sense of the communication brands are conveying. Legitimacy and narrative are closely linked and important for understanding organizational and communicational processes (Golant & Sillince, 2007; Roselle et al., 2014; Seele & Gatti, 2015; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015). Hence, this study will focus on legitimacy.

While legitimacy has been acknowledged as an important topic within green branding and communication, it is considered underdeveloped. However, CSR communication research has provided useful and interesting insights into this topic (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014; Nielsen & Thomsen, p.493). As there are yet not many studies specifically focused on green branding, this research is supported by complementary research done on CSR. Exploring CSR research is relevant because it is a field in which brands' environmental contributions have been studied (Ramya et al., 2020). It is interesting to look at this similar strategy and adapt it to this research. Additionally, the theoretical framework, borrowed from the CSR concept, has been established from a sustainability perspective.

CSR stands for Corporate Social Responsibility and comprises dimensions such as social, ethical, and environmental concerns. It can be defined as a "commitment to contribute to sustainable development through improving lives" "in ways that honor ethical values and respect people, communities, and the natural environment" (Benoit‑Moreau & Parguel, 2011, p.101; Reilly & Larya, 2018, p.621). CSR communication is part of brand communication and is conveyed by the brand itself (Morsing, 2006, as cited in Benoit‑Moreau & Parguel, 2011). Green branding and CSR are similar as they both, integrate environmental sustainability matters into the brand's identity. The main difference is that green branding takes environmental sustainability concerns as a predominant aspect of its brand identity (Danciu, 2015). These concerns are deeply rooted in the brand's core and vision. Whereas with CSR strategies, green matters are not necessarily part of the core of the brand's vision (Danciu, 2015). Some brands will use CSR to communicate on these matters although they do not consider them as predominant in their brand's core. This thesis focuses solely on green brands, brands that are engaging in environmental sustainability, and their main mission is preserving the environment.

3.1 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a theory that has been studied tremendously in research. Scholars have used it from its narrowed perspective. This perspective "operates at the organizational level and is concerned with the legitimacy of individual organizations" (Gray et al. 2010, as cited in Fernando & Lawrence, 2014, p.154). Suchman (1995) views legitimacy as one organizational resource needed to reach organizational goals. Fernando and Lawrence (2014) also states that "an environmentally friendly organizational behavior" has a positive impact on organizational legitimacy (p.154). Legitimacy has an important role in brand communication, and in the dynamics between a brand and its stakeholders. To gain implicit or explicit approval (being legitimate) from the stakeholders, legitimacy theory argues that organizational social and environmental information is communicated to "key external stakeholders in

response to environmental factors" (Gray et al., 1996, as cited in Fernando & Lawrence, 2014, p.154).

Suchman defined legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." (Suchman, 1995, p.575). He also addresses the value of "social audience in legitimation dynamics" (Suchman, 1995, p.575). If the audience perceives a brand as legitimate, it makes it look more "worthy, meaningful, predictable, and trustworthy" (Suchman, 1995, p.575). Being perceived as "desirable, proper, or appropriate" for a brand is a great factor to be "persistent" (Parsons, 1960, as cited in Colleoni, p.230). The audience is a decision-maker as "organizations can only continue to exist if the society in which they are based, perceives the organization" as working according to a value system that matches the "society's own value system." (Gray et al. 2010, p. 28 as cited in, Fernando & Lawrence, 2014, p.153). Moreover, Aerts & Cormier (2009) states strategic legitimacy theory is controllable by brands. They can make strategic choices to change "their legitimacy status and cultivate the resource through corporate actions, by adapting their activities and changing perceptions" (Aerts & Cormier, 2009, p.3). The framework chosen to conduct this research established different strategies a brand can implement to manage legitimacy.

3.1.1 Pragmatic, Moral, Cognitive legitimacy

Suchman (1995) explained the legitimacy theory as three types of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. These three broad types imply a "generalized perception or assumption" that the company's actions are legitimate within "some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definition" (Suchman, 1995, p.577).

Pragmatic legitimacy lies primarily in the "outcome-oriented and company-centric approach" (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p.501). Stakeholders confer pragmatic legitimacy on an organization. Pragmatic legitimacy is granted in an effort to

optimize communication strategies in order to align with stakeholders' self-interest and expectations (Colleoni, 2013; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018; Seele & Gatti, 2015; Suchman, 1995). Moral legitimacy "reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organization and its activities" (Suchman, 1995, p.579). It is focused on the audience's judgment and perception of organizations' activities and behaviors. They evaluate on an ethical and societal level whether the activities are "the right thing to do" (Colleoni, 2013; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018; Suchman, 1995, p.579). Lastly, cognitive legitimacy is created "when an entity becomes embedded in taken-for-granted assumptions" (Zucker, 1987 as cited in Colleoni, 2013, p.231). When cognitive legitimacy is reached it means society knows the organization and perceives it as desirable and proper (Colleoni, 2013; Suchman, 1995).

Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) define three legitimation moderators that develop Suchman's legitimacy theory by translating it into communication strategies (p.495). These moderators are introduced as factors helping a brand construct its legitimacy (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Analytical Framework: Gaining Legitimacy through CSR Communication
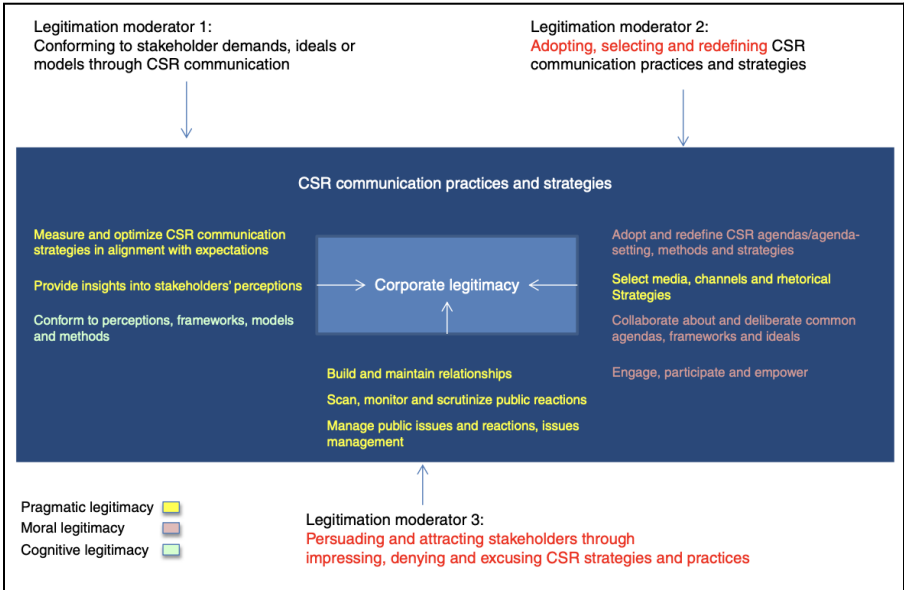
The first moderator (1) is "conforming to stakeholder demands, ideals or models; measuring and optimizing CSR communication strategies in alignment with expectations", and the second moderator (2) is "adopting and selecting specific markets, labels, advertising, agendas, methods, and strategies", and the third, and last moderator (3) is "persuading (e.g. informing, explaining, monitoring, denying and excusing) through building and maintaining relationships" (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p.495). In their framework (figure 1), we find Suchman's (1995) legitimacy types (pragmatic, moral, and cognitive) classified in each legitimation moderator. These moderators are the main factors to build brand legitimacy according to Nielsen and Thomsen. This framework has the interesting perspective of deeply and explicitly analyzing how brand legitimacy can be constructed within one society.

3.2 Legitimacy, green brands & narrative

Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) showed in their research "how can corporate social responsibility communication create legitimacy" through the framework that just has been presented. They found in their study that brand legitimacy can be positively affected by communication strategies and green messages, particularly when there is a "two-way communication" (p.502) with stakeholders, which means that the brand benefits from its stakeholders when communicating on environmental matters. Consequently, they argue that a brand that communicates its commitment to environmental sustainability only on its own, "one-way communication" (p.502), might face some challenges with legitimacy. They develop this point by noting that green communication and green messages might be easily misinterpreted as greenwashing by stakeholders if the brand tends to use one-way communication only. The researchers note that to avoid these misinterpretations, communication should "introduces and explains issues that are well supported and justified by factual information and organizational authenticity" (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p.502).

Green brands want and need to show to their stakeholders that their green branding is genuine with expressions of substantiated, well-intentioned actions. From a greenwashing context, it is even more important for green brands to show that they are genuinely engaging in environmental sustainability, so that it would not be misinterpreted in greenwashing practices, and thus, impact their legitimacy. When conducting their studies Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) showed the most salient "types of legitimizing communicative practices" identified were associated with "seeking knowledge about stakeholders", "monitoring and controlling the environment", and "creating stakeholder value, collaboration, and engagement", and "persuading stakeholders through rhetorics, organizational authenticity, concepts" (p.502). They argue that choosing the appropriate media and tone, and formulating meaningful messages that are aligned with the target group and the overall goals of the brand are decisive aspects to achieve legitimacy (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018).

Suchman (1995) addresses that scholars who study legitimacy have to clearly state which aspect they are going to use for their analysis whether it is "the full range of the phenomenon" or certain aspects "pragmatism, morality, or cognition; acquisition, maintenance, or repair" (Suchman, 1995, p.602). To conduct this specific research, pragmatic and moral legitimacy are the aspects that will be focused on. Seele and Gatti (2015) argue greenwashing occurs primarily in the context of pragmatic legitimacy since greenwashing's phenomenon relies on stakeholders' perceptions of the green brand's trustworthiness. As previous studies have shown, it is important for brands to be consistent, adapt to stakeholders' needs, and more importantly engage with them, moral legitimacy becomes then an interesting aspect to look at (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018; Danciu, 2015).

In a greenwashing context, it is pragmatic legitimacy that is closely linked to the phenomenon as it is based on stakeholders' perception of the trustworthiness of the green brand (Seele & Gatti, 2015). In the environmental sustainability context, moral legitimacy is directly related to environmental legitimacy. The latter is deeply linked to green brands as it refers to their environmental performance and actions. So when

green brands communicate, in a context where greenwashing is highly present, moral and pragmatic legitimacy are the two first main legitimacy types to study (Matejek & Gössling, 2013). Researchers have also noted that using narrative is an important factor in managing legitimacy. Indeed, how the brand constructs and presents itself to stakeholders influences the assessment of legitimacy. (Preuss & Dawson, 2008; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015). In both pragmatic and moral legitimacy, narrative plays an essential role to enables brands to "signal the relevance and effectiveness of organizational activities to internal and external organizational participants." (Golant & Sillince, 2007, p.1152)

This research aims to analyze how green brands are constructing themselves as legitimate in and through communication to circumvent being accused of greenwashing. In line with the theoretical perspective presented in this section, the research will look at the legitimacy attempts in the communication of green brand narratives. Thus, the study focuses on pragmatic and moral legitimacy. Green brands need consumers' approval to grow and influence society to be more responsible and environmentally conscious. Legitimacy is crucial to carrying out these goals and having a positive impact on the planet and people. If the stakeholders do not have a positive perception of the brand and its activities, then it becomes difficult for the brand to carry out its environmental communication and meaningful actions. The narrative is a meaningful tool to contribute to this study since we seek to examine the construction of green brand communication in an attempt to come across as legitimate.

4. Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the methods used to conduct the analysis. The research paradigm and research design will be presented.

4.1 Research paradigm

To conduct this study thoroughly, this research takes a constructivism approach. As it is qualitative research, there are only three main paradigms that can apply to describe, understand, and interpret the world (Merriam, 1998). A research paradigm helps as well to show the readers from what perspective and point of view the study has been conducted. A constructivism approach is "the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Using a constructivist approach for a study helps to understand and interpret reality. This research is in line with this approach since we look at the construction of green brand legitimacy. Legitimacy is a socially constructed concept based on peoples' perceptions (Suchman, 1995). As Merriam (1998) points out, reality can be interpreted in different ways (Yazan, 2015). People make sense in their own way of the reality they live in, their own experiences, and life. As a researcher, adopting a constructivism approach is really interesting in order to describe and interpret the meaning that people can construct (Yazan, 2015).

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 A qualitative study

This study was conducted as qualitative research, aiming to analyze how green brands are constructing themselves through communication in an attempt to

circumvent being accused of greenwashing. This thesis used an analytical approach through the content analysis of two green brands. With content analysis, the researcher can make meaning out of the data (Given, 2008; Yazan, 2015). This method enables us to analyze more in-depth data and study "how communication content relates to attitudes and behavior variables in a study." (Holman, 2017, p.249). Qualitative research using content analysis can use any type of textual content as long as it is coherent and aligns with the aim of the research. In order to answer the research question, the study focused on data found in the brands' promotional works. It allows to have an in-depth analysis of brands' narratives, an understanding of what they are explicitly and/or implicitly expressing to their stakeholders, and identify how they expressed it. The researcher acknowledged that the analysis of content is open to interpretation and diverse meanings (Given, 2008). The analysis is subjective and framed within the research paradigm previously set by the researcher (Given, 2008). The interesting aspect of conducting a qualitative content analysis is to be able to identify "conscious and unconscious messages" and narratives communicated through the content (Given, 2008, p.121). The narrative is beneficial as it enables us to recognize multiple meanings and acknowledge how the actions and values of the brands are actually contributing to construct legitimacy (Preuss & Dawson, 2008).

For consumers to build an opinion about a brand, they must first come across the brand's communication, be aware of its messages, and most likely be potential consumer so they can assess the brand's legitimacy. For this reason, external communication is essential. Promotional work that brands share with their external stakeholders, e.g. on their websites, and social media is the type of content that people based their vision and opinion on. It is from these media they develop their brand's perception. What is lacking in studies, is the focus on this first source of external communication, what brands are telling their consumers that might influence consumers' trust. The focus is then on this first source of information, digital platforms, and we look at what the brand is saying to their consumers, in what way, and if there is an interesting pattern in their external communication.

4.2.2 Case selection and sampling

The sampling strategy used for this study is purposive sampling. It is commonly used for qualitative research and is a great strategy to obtain complete and relevant data (Elo et al., 2014). The sampling is based on some criteria explained hereunder.

This study focuses on green brands and their manner of constructing their external communication, we are then looking for brands known for their active engagement in environmental sustainability. It is essential to sample brands "who have the best knowledge concerning the research topic" (Elo et al., 2014, p.4). The green brand is a concept that is not specific to one industry, a brand can be green no matter the sector it is in. What matters is that environmental concerns are part of the brand's essence, and they are perceived as green brands by consumers. As we explained throughout the research, consumers' perception of the brand is closely related to legitimacy. Consumers consider a brand legitimate depending on what they see, read and make sense from it. To conduct this research, chosen brands have achieved cognitive legitimacy, which means that the brand is already known and perceived as desirable and appropriate by society (Colleoni, 2013; Suchman, 1995). In other words, the focus is on brands that are well-known and recognized as green in society, e.g. by citizens, organizations, governments, and industries (Allen, 2016). By making sure cognitive legitimacy is achieved, the focus was on the pragmatic and moral actions of these brands' legitimacy. As stated above, pragmatic and moral legitimacy has been proven to be an essential and influential factor when it comes to external brand communication and greenwashing's perception (Matejek & Gössling, 2013; Seele & Gatti, 2015).

To be coherent and relevant, the two brands chosen have been sampled based on the criteria mentioned above. The research analyzed the brands Patagonia and I Feel Slovenia (henceforward IFS). Patagonia is an American brand that designed and sold outdoor clothing and gear (Patagonia, 2022a). The brand is well-known within the outdoor community, and for its advocacy for planet preservation. They are active in the fight against climate change and have been engaging in environmental

sustainability for years. Patagonia targets people who believe and who are fighting for the same cause" as them (Pullman, 2021), and defines its brand positioning as being "in business to save our home planet" (Patagonia, 2022a). IFS is the destination brand of Slovenia. The destination brand has been developed to attract foreign visitors to the country, as well as promote tourism in new respectful ways for the environment, the visitors, and the local population. IFS works toward more sustainable tourism in order to preserve the natural environment. IFS targets demanding and "discerning visitors seeking diverse active experiences", and defines its brand positioning as "a green boutique destination" (Country Reports, 2021).

This study focuses on green brands that may be affected by greenwashing. Any sector of activity can be affected. It is therefore interesting to study brands that are concerned with the environment and sustainability, regardless of their sector. It is the case with Patagonia and IFS, they are both engaged with their external stakeholders, and they have a common vision: developing tools to offer a better quality of life and a more responsible consumers' and brands' behavior. And they share the same missions: preserving the natural environment, protecting the planet, and ensuring a safe and healthy life. These brands matter in our society as they can make a difference, and they can influence people to act in better ways for our natural environment's well-being. Patagonia and IFS both have an important role to play to help act against climate change. So it is important to ensure they come across as legitimate when communicating to their external stakeholder, as being labeled as greenwashing may affect their goal to improve people's engagement in environmental sustainability concerns.

Patagonia and IFS have both accumulated multiple awards and certifications recognizing their sustainable and environmental engagement and actions. Patagonia is a B Corp company, which means that they meet every requirement to be a socially and environmentally responsible brand, as well as being transparent towards the public. Additionally, they received a Business Ethics Award in 2006, and they have been recognized as a "sustainability pioneer at the 2021 CFDA Awards" (Farra,

2021). Apart from certification and awards, Patagonia has been ranked at the top of the 2021 Axios Harris poll in the US for best reputation (Pullman, 2021). Trust, vision, and ethics were some of the key areas that the survey was based on. On the other hand, IFS has been granted a good amount of certifications and awards rewarding it for its green actions and strategies. To mention a few, IFS received an award at the 2020 Sustainable Top 100 Destination Awards, as the "Best of Europe 2020" (STO, 2021). In 2017, it got recognized as a leader in sustainability, with an award from National Geographic. The latter also refers to IFS as "a tree-hugger heaven" (Cross, 2018). Besides awards, IFS has enabled Slovenia to be "the first country in the world to have been, in its entirety, declared a Green Destination of the World" (STO, 2022d).

These awards and recognition by external stakeholders show us that these brands are considered green, and this for years. Environmental sustainability is deeply rooted in both Patagonia and IFS DNA. Analyzing Patagonia and IFS is highly interesting not only of the fact they are both highly appreciated in the world, and especially within their industry, but also by the share of factors they have in common. These two brands seem to share similar and deeply rooted values and visions when it comes to the environment and its preservation. Their focus is on the development of more sustainable and green practices. It is two brands that have great stories to tell, they both share love and respect for nature which is an aspect found in these brands' essence. As this thesis analyzes green brands and their communication process through legitimacy and narrative, it is important to look at brands that are without a doubt, green, and that have a good perception among consumers.

4.2.3 Data collection procedure

The content analyzed consisted of promotional materials of the brands, presented on digital platforms, such as brand platforms, https://www.slovenia.info/, and https://eu.patagonia.com/gb/en/home/, and other media in which they have published articles and conducted interviews with employees. These are comprehensive platforms, with an extensive amount of pages to access diverse content.

Examining these platforms allowed us to fully understand the goals and key messages of the brands. The brand platforms are showcases of brands and are essential in brands' perception. Brands share their values and vision, and consumers can make sense of the brand and its authenticity on these platforms (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Legitimacy is driven by consumers' perceived sense of authenticity about the brand. Hence, examining digital platforms to conduct this research. Ramya et al. (2020) argue that websites are one of "the prime means of environment-related communication between organizations and stakeholders" (p.844). As Benoit‑Moreau and Parguel (2011) point out, green brands usually communicate through "brand websites" and "relationship marketing tools" (p.101). Digital platforms are the first and main media where Patagonia and Slovenia communicate to their external stakeholders. Social media and other channels such as newsletters will not be analyzed, as the content is largely similar to what we can find on their websites.

4.2.4 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis was used to investigate the construction of brand legitimacy. This method is appropriate for understanding "the structure of the communication process" (Roselle et al., 2014, p.74). The narrative analysis as a research tool enabled us to analyze in-depth brands' legitimacy attempts through their communication process. In the literature, the role of narrative is drawn as an essential means of highlighting brands' relationships with the environment, as such, they can engage people with environmental initiatives (Preuss & Dawson, 2008). Moreover, narratives were worth analyzing as it emphasizes the pertinence and meaningfulness of brands' operations to the stakeholders (Golant & Sillince, 2007). Thurlow and Helms Mills (2015) note the use of narrative is essential to acquiring and/or maintaining legitimacy (see also Preuss & Dawson, 2018). Czarniawska (2010) defines a narrative as a combination of "three elements: chronicle, mimesis, and plot" (p.62):

> "the chronicle: what is happening, the mimesis: how does it look, a
> dimension that allows the listener to construct a virtual picture of the

events, and the emplotment: introducing logical structure which allows making sense of the events." - Czarniawska, 2010, p.62

To identify the plot, characters, and their dynamics were examined, e.g., "a hero and an opponent", assigning meaning to particular events, identifying themes that comprise the events, and tying them together in a logical sequence (Czarniawska, 2004, p.32). The themes identified were segmented into parts constituting the analysis. Each theme represented the legitimacy attempts of the brand. Once, the stories have been collected and the narrative has been prompted, an in-depth and interpretative analysis was conducted. The analysis followed the main steps as described by Czarniawska (2004): analyze the stories, interpret, and deconstruct. The analysis was combined with Preuss and Dawson's (2008) work. They established a framework for evaluating the quality and legitimacy of narratives. The second step of the model was conducted according to "the hermeneutic triad" (Hernadi, 1987 as cited in Czarniawska, 2004, p.61), and the framework elaborated by Preuss and Dawson, (2009). The analysis of the stories was supplemented by the horizontal reading, and their interpretation by the vertical reading (see figure 3).

Figure 2

A Framework for Narrative Analysis
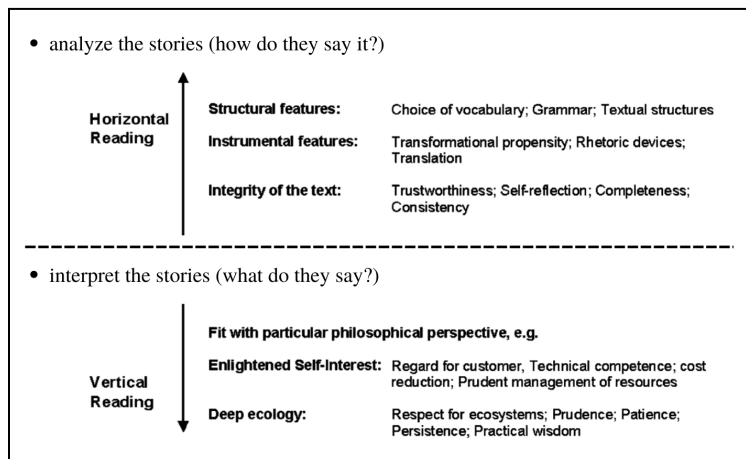
Note. The framework is adapted from *Narratives in Social Science Research,* Czarniawska, 2004, (https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849209502) and from *A framework for evaluating narrative,* Preuss & Dawson, 2088 (https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9693-4)

4.3 Methodological reflections and ethical considerations

This study was conducted with a qualitative approach, analyzing narratives. Since the research paradigm and methods are based mainly on interpretation, biases and coding errors cannot be avoided. However, as a researcher, we are aware of these limitations and we focus on minimizing them. The content was retrieved from digital platforms in which the owner can edit anything. It might happen that some data collected may have been edited since the analysis (Holman, 2017). Moreover, the analysis process can produce more limitations as our own opinions and knowledge are used to interpret and make sense of the collected data. Content analysis is subjective and open to interpretation (Given, 2008). Additionally, data may be interpreted outside of their context. These situations might distort the original meaning of the content (Holman, 2017). We worked on the validity and reliability of the research, by first being conscious and attentive to potential errors and biases in the method's process. For instance, we went back through the analysis over time. Analyzing two brands enabled us to gather more data and go through the same coding process twice, and see if it was coherent and sound throughout both analyses. We also made sure to study what we say we will study and worked on improving the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings so that the research is coherent with the research question, and the method procedure (Allen, 2016; Given, 2008).

The researcher's behavior and ethics during the research process are something to consider seriously as they can alter the whole research. As the researcher of this study, we have to acknowledge the influence and role we have over the interpretation and the process of the analysis and research. Ethics is essential and much needed to express, minimize biases, and assess whether research practices are appropriate or not (Allen, 2016). Honest conduct of the research, its truthfulness, and the accuracy of the content have been considered and taken seriously, particularly when collecting, analyzing data, and reporting the results.

5. Analysis & Findings

In this chapter, the analysis will be conducted based on narrative theory. Attention will be paid to the construction of brand legitimacy. The narrative of Patagonia and Slovenia's destination brands will be prompted and the pragmatic and moral actions of each brand will be unfolded along with the analysis.

Patagonia and Slovenia's destination brands are engaged in environmental sustainability to protect the environment. Both narratives are centered around engaging with consumers. They both believe when people explore and experience the natural environment, they become aware of the beauty of the outdoors, what the planet has to offer, and the importance of preserving it. People are willing to advocate for environmental sustainability once they have experienced it. Vincent Stanley, Director of Philosophy at Patagonia explained (Folch, 2020),

'No one would harm the environment if you know what it's like to experience it for yourself. [...] The only way to get people to care about the environment is to make it real. To be in a space where you can actually feel the connection to nature. Then you want to protect it.'

IFS continues saying that it is

'... pristine green environment encourages us to act responsibly and protectively" (STO, 2022b)

Early on, Patagonia and IFS developed their narrative around emotions and adventure. They create stories, appealing to consumers' emotions by focusing on nature, its beauty, and its benefits. When collecting their stories, some themes unfolded highlighting the pragmatic and moral practices of these brands. These legitimacy actions are disseminated through narratives, and structure the analysis. To make sense of a story's plot is to find an "interpretive theme that subsumes the events and links them in a meaningful sequence" (Czarniawska, 2010, p.62). The identified

themes refer to the legitimacy attempts (pragmatic or moral) of the brands. From a legitimacy perspective, these themes enable us to go deeper into the analysis. And see, how green brands are constructing themselves, what messages they are conveying, and how they do it. It would also, give a clear overview of the pragmatic and moral legitimacy practices they might have used.

Patagonia plays the role of anti-hero. They do not consider themselves better than others and acknowledge their mistakes. It is the first moral aspect of Patagonia. They express explicitly what they did wrong, and hold themselves accountable. They are driven by moral reasoning. Secondly, Patagonia demonstrates its commitment to responsible and sustainable practices. On a more pragmatic level, they want to mobilize their external stakeholders by educating them. For Patagonia, obtaining accurate information is valuable, both for consumers and the brand. Consumers become helpers aware of genuine green practices and able to avoid being misled. Patagonia mobilizes them as friends to join their adventure and reach their goal. Finally, one last pragmatic aspect, Patagonia develop a new model of consumption, promoting durable and quality products to its consumers.

IFS acts as a guardian, that cares for nature, and works to preserve its green environment. IFS narrative highlights a more pragmatic approach than Patagonia. The main moral aspect observed is the expression of their commitment to safer and sustainable tourism. They demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability and share relevant green branding practices. From a pragmatic approach, IFS promotes premium experiences to its consumers, "5-star experiences" (SLP, 2018). They also emphasized their rich cultural and natural heritage. Their whole narrative is centered around Slovenia's history. Lastly, IFS invites tourists and guides them on a journey for becoming responsible travelers. They provide them with tools to become environmentally conscious and encourage them to promote Slovenia's model of a green destination to other destinations and tourists.

5.1 Patagonia, the story of the great adventure

Patagonia acts as an anti-hero with one great mission, to save the planet. Consumers are partners in helping Patagonia to achieve its goal. The natural environment is reified by Patagonia. It is an object in needs to be rescued and saved. The analysis illustrates Patagonia as egalitarian. They believe they are equal with their stakeholders, and that they both have to work on themselves. Although Patagonia is an experienced environmental activist, they recognize their faults and acknowledge their mistakes. When Beth Thoren (2021), director of environmental action and initiative at Patagonia, talks about the companies feeding greenwashing, yet still having, to some extent, a positive impact, she states,

‘it is a mistake to write off the positive impact that for-profit businesses can have. Not because they’re saints (none are, Patagonia included). And not because they have all the answers (others might; we certainly don’t)’

Patagonia is transparent, and open with their actions and limits. They are part of the problem and demonstrate they are paying attention to their actions. The narrative further develops this moral aspect.

5.1.1 Patagonia is its own enemy

Although Patagonia's first battle is against climate change, they came to realize they are their own enemy. They acknowledge that as a business they are, to some extent, involved in the climate change issue, and are impacting our planet. They do not try to escape from their actions and instead choose to openly address their mistakes. They state,

‘Everything we make has an impact on people and the planet’ (Patagonia, 2020b)
‘We know that our business activity [...] is part of the problem’ (Patagonia, 2022f)

Patagonia is considerate of both people and the planet. It is not solely focused on them, as businesses that must meet their marketing objectives. On digital platforms, they use a personal and rather friendly language, which makes Patagonia seem like any other individual. The terminology and use of "we" emphasize the idea that Patagonia is more than just a business, it is an entity that cares about its environment

and the people it partners with. Their communication is straightforward. They clearly state they are part of the problem. It is highlighted by the brand itself on its platforms, as well as conveyed by its employees such as Beth Thoren (2021) stating,

'At Patagonia, we don't use the word "sustainable." Why? Because we recognize we are part of the problem'

They are holding themselves accountable for their impact. Patagonia takes its narrative a step further by recognizing its impact on the planet and that they are not doing "enough". This word is repeated a few times on several digital platforms (Patagonia, 2022b; Patagonia, 2022f; Thoren, 2021). Patagonia argues they can do more and uses negative clauses, such as: "not enough". When acknowledging they are part of the problem, they do not undermine every actions and achievement they have made. Nonetheless, they could do better, to "cause no unnecessary harm" (Patagonia, 2022f). It implies developing new ways to act and manage its business in a way that is further aligned with its values, mission, and stakeholders' expectations.

Patagonia is well-known and recognized as an influential brand activist for years (Pullman, 2021). One could argue their practices are good and have always been. They act in many situations as an experienced leader that engage with stakeholders and share their knowledge. However, Patagonia still take a step back and put its actions into question, to improve themselves and be better advocates,

'We acknowledge that no standard is perfect and continuous improvement is always our goal [...] we lead where we feel leadership is needed, readily acknowledge our shortcomings and mistakes, and try to communicate consistently, in a way that is both humble and informative.' (Henkel, 2018)

'For businesses ourselves, the first step must be taking a long hard look in the mirror [...] we must get a clear picture of our impact and use this to open honest conversations' (Thoren, 2021)

They are in a self-reflection phase. They do not take anything for granted and do not think of themselves as better than anyone. They aim for opening transparent conversations regarding their way of doing things. It is not solely about creating a good image, it's about sharing and learning. As individuals, we learn from our mistakes. We try, we fail, and we learn from it. Patagonia has tried to be a

responsible and sustainable brand but has realized its flaws and they are learning from it to be better. Opening transparent communication on this topic makes it perceived as more trustworthy, and authentic, as they openly talk about some aspects that a brand would usually try to avoid. Besides being explicit in their acknowledgment, they address what is the actual problem and to what extent they are part of it,

'If our goal was to cut emissions from our owned and operated stores, offices, and distribution centers, we'd be good. But the bulk of our emissions comes from our supply chain and materials manufacturing. We take responsibility for all of it. [...] every part of Patagonia's business is implicated' (Patagonia, 2022b)

They are facing the problem and not trying to seek a way around it. Indeed, they explicitly identify their challenges, state what the problem is, and share what they can do about it. If it is not possible to overcome the problem, they do not try to hide it, they share it as well with their consumers. Patagonia takes responsibility "for all of it", for "every part". They give details and information about the situation directly to their consumers. It's not all talk (and no action), they are explaining how they are part of the problem. Consumers can feel the authenticity because the brand is open and unveils its flaws and mistakes. It is human to make mistakes, which is not necessarily what we would think of a brand. Patagonia develops its perception as considerate, and as a brand that is personal with its consumers.

Throughout their platforms, Patagonia explains, what, why, and how. They share with the consumer their whole process of identifying a problem or situation and coming up with a solution or alternative. The use of questions is interesting, as unconsciously, the reader will ask himself the question. Moreover "we" is always the pronoun used. The reflection is not only one-sided but shared with the consumers. They do so, particularly through articles and information boxes:

"What we're doing to ensure..?", "How We're Making Change", "How We Cut Our Carbon" (Patagonia, 2022b; Patagonia, 2020a).

They do the research and then they share it (Pullman, 2021). If they identify a problem, they will act on it (Farra, 2021). They demonstrate they are no experts, but they are actively working on gaining knowledge and take action,

'We're using the resources we have—our business, our investments, our voice, and our imaginations—to do something about it' (Patagonia, 2022a)

Patagonia is paying attention to what they are doing and appreciates consumers' expectations. They are on a journey to improve their ways of doing things. They hold themselves accountable to their customers, and the planet (Patagonia, 2022e). They are indirectly giving a moral lesson to everyone in society. It is needed to "take a long hard look in the mirror", put our actions into question and see if they align with our values. This practical wisdom shows a balance from Patagonia between marketing goals, actions, and values. They acknowledge they cannot be perfect, and yet they make efforts and reflect on themselves to be more responsible. As they emphasize it on their website, Patagonia…

'...seek not only to do less harm, but more good' (Patagonia, 2022f)

5.1.2 Durable and quality products to save the planet

Along with their ideal of "less harm" and "more good", Patagonia has worked on a pragmatic approach to promote products to their consumers through narrative. Aligning to consumers' demands for sustainable practices, Patagonia has developed new ways for consumers to get outdoor clothes, by making…

'high-quality stuff that lasts for years [...] so you (consumers) don't have to buy more of it' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022b)

They use rather familiar and friendly terminology, "stuff". They address actively the consumers, "you". This new model of consumption, WornWear, is introduced by enhancing its main benefits for consumers: it "lasts for years", and they "don't have to buy more". It highlights both consumers and the environmental sustainability interest. As a clothing brand, it could be argued the main goal is to sell brand new

products. However, Patagonia emphasizes its ideology of doing less harm, by consuming only what 'you' need :

'We don't want people to buy more than they need. We want to make really great, durable products that can be fixed, encourage people to only buy what they need, and if it gets broken to repair it' (Pullman, 2021)

It appears that the brand is putting itself in the consumers' position, and emphasizing what could interest them. The value of this green initiative is underlined by expressions such as "really great". On their brand's platform, Patagonia further explains the philosophy behind the WornWear program, taking a leadership approach to influence and develop this new way of consuming. With this program, they suggest a new definition of "quality",

'Worn Wear is an exploration of quality – in the things we own and the lives we live.' (Patagonia, 2013b)

They reinvent the common definition of good quality. The slogan "Better than New" from the program, and "exploration of quality" show they are trying to give a new perspective to what are products of quality. They "want" to, which means it is their wish for people to consider high standard products, as not necessarily them being brand new. To integrate this approach, Patagonia has provided a sequencing of information highlighting every detail of the program in their narrative. On their brand's platform, consumers find comprehensive information to understand why consuming with this model is durable, what are the advantages, and benefits for them and the planet,

'What's Cool About Used? Buying used extends a garment's life by about two years, which cuts its combined carbon, waste, and water footprint by 82%.' (Patagonia, 2015)
'Buying used extends a garments life by about two years, which drastically reduces both our reliance on virgin resources and our generation of waste.' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022b)

Patagonia confidently adopts a friendly tone. An interesting choice of words is used, with a parallel between "cool" and "used". It encompasses the new definition of quality and follows its headline "Better than New". We usually tend to assume that something used is not good quality or "cool". Used products are not the first choice of consumers. New is further related to 'trendy', and higher standards. Here

Patagonia suggests a new perspective. The sentence structure is also worth mentioning. It starts with a question, followed right after by a detailed argument with facts and figures. It is a thorough explanation of what are the advantages of the product. It reflects as well the manner in which Patagonia communicates in its external communication. The friendly tone, active voice, and sentence structure make Patagonia seen as more personal and credible. They show how much they have thought about the process. These products are the best not because they say so, but they explain the process justifying why they are 'better than new':

'Our criteria for the best product rests on function, repairability, and, foremost, durability' (Patagonia, 2022f).

It falls within their approach of being accountable and developing new ways of consuming. Patagonia's action affects the consumers' interest. They answer consumers' expectations by first, offering them great products and second, by doing so in a responsible and nonharmful way for the planet. When expressing their responsibility, they talk about themselves using "we" and "our". They understood it was their responsibility to offer responsible outdoor clothing. It is their products so it is their call to do something about it and lives up to what they fight for,

'taking responsibility for our products for the whole of their lifecycle' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022a)
'Ultimately, nobody buys a raincoat from us to save the planet—they buy a raincoat to keep themselves dry. So it's our responsibility to make that raincoat in a responsible fashion.' (Farra, 2021)

Patagonia is following this anti-hero narrative, in which they have to consider that every step they take, will help carry out their mission: save the planet. They want to offer the best while having the minimum impact possible on the planet. Patagonia is loyal to its mission and marries its products to it. Their view is on the long term. The actions they take now will affect future generations. This idea of durability is implied throughout their whole communication,

'Making the best product matters for saving the planet'; 'we can limit ecological impacts with goods that last for generations or can be recycled' (Patagonia, 2022f)
'the best thing we can do for the planet'; 'keep your stuff in play as long as possible' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022a)

To appeal to the consumers, and make them more interested and included in this new model of consumption, Patagonia correlated this program to adventure and the stories we get from it. Their consumers are sensitive to great adventures and are emotionally connected to the products they own. Patagonia then chooses to develop stories with emotional effects, centered around adventure and clothing and developing the program as an...

'...invitation to celebrate the stuff you already own.' (Patagonia, 2013b)
'Worn Wear Stories'; 'Scars tell the story' (Patagonia, 2013b)
'to give it a new lease of life.' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022a)

WornWear program is an opportunity to keep the exploration going more responsibly, it's a recollection of unique memories, and an opportunity for consumers to give a new life to their clothes, offer them new experiences,

'Nothing lasts forever, so we continue to explore ways in which we can keep your gear going — in some form or another — long after its last adventure.'; 'Worn Wear is Patagonia's hub for keeping gear in play.' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022a)
'Let your gear give again.'; 'That Patagonia jacket you don't wear anymore might be on someone's wish list. Why not trade it in?'; 'This jacket was probably red once, but today it's more of a muddy pink with an overlay permanent scuff and smudge. The zipper, replaced four years ago, stands out a little brighter.' (Worn Wear Patagonia, 2022b)

Taking action and collaborating through adventures and shared experiences are some concepts often emphasized in their narrative.

In its narrative, Patagonia has been highlighting since the beginning that one action we should all take is minimizing our impact on the planet, by challenging our previous actions and buying only products we need. One further aspect that is supported by the green brand is,

'The More You Know The Less You Need' (Patagonia, 2020a)

Patagonia introduces an additional step in their journey to save the planet. By using this comparative correlative clause, they put in parallel a consequence of one thing over another. They argue that being more informed is one factor that makes you aware of what you need. In this sentence, they use the active voice again by referring directly to the consumer: The more consumers know, the less they will need. Throughout their narrative, Patagonia has always built a particularly friendly, yet quite personal open dialogue with their consumers. They play a big and important role in Patagonia's adventure. They are seen as friends and partners by Patagonia,

'We partner with our customers. In this way, a transaction is a partnership - a shared responsibility between Patagonia and the owner to keep your product in use for as long as possible.' (Henkel, 2018)

Patagonia and consumers both have to play their act. They both have responsibilities and need to work together.

5.1.3 A mobilization of informed and responsible partners

Still in a pragmatic approach, Patagonia wants to engage with their consumers, to offer them great knowledge to face nowadays challenges, and eventually, to get partners in their journey for saving the planet. To move forward in their journey, Patagonia needs people on who they can rely, people who will help Patagonia face and overcome challenges,

'It's really important to speak in coalition' (Pullman, 2021)
'We really try to treat our audience as partners in our mission' (Unboundary, 2020)
'you get some companions on the journey, but you also understand specifically the ways you can improve as an operator.' (Farra, 2021)

Patagonia opened a dialogue when recognizing its mistakes, and interacted ever since closely with its consumers to develop new ways of doing things. They all impact the planet, and they all have the same goals. Patagonia knows how strong and heard their voice can be when combined with consumers,

'we could speak to our customers as friends and that if we saw a problem and came up with a solution we could persuade others to go along.' (Folch, 2020)

Consumers have a role just as important as Patagonia in their fight against climate change and greenwashing. Hence, why they address them in an active and friendly voice. Consumers feel included and part of a movement. Nevertheless, when it comes to getting more companions for the journey, one issue that Patagonia is facing is a lack of information regarding consumers and environmental issues. Vincent Stanley, the director of Philosophy at Patagonia (Folch, 2020), mentioned that most people do not…

'…realize the dramatic damage that we are doing and are blissfully unaware of. Because most people live in cities, so they have absolutely no idea.' (Pullman, 2021)

These quotes imply as well that the lack of connection people have with nature is highly damaging. His take on this statement is rather negative and dramatic, his use of words amplifies the terrible consequences of this situation, "dramatic", "blissfully", and "absolutely no idea". When asking about government to intervene, and take responsibility for saving the planet, he continues,

'You also need to help the consumer, because they don't have any information right now' (Farra, 2021)

It is a fact, that consumers are not well-informed enough to be considered actual partners, yet. However, it is not because they are not fully prepared partners, that Patagonia cannot collaborate with them already. The strategy employs by the brand is to make their consumers feel included in this journey, show them that they are facing together the challenges and that together, they will move forward,

'The challenges we face as a society' (Patagonia, 2022f).
'we're recycling [...], we're changing [...], we grow [...], we care [...], and we keep [...];
'Together, We Can Change' (Patagonia, 2013a) 'Together we are stronger. Join a community from around the world, as we share stories about the things we care for and the ways we can take action to protect people and planet.' (Patagonia, 2022d)
'Join us' [...] 'Our voices are stronger when we speak together' (Thoren, 2021)

Patagonia introduces early on the sense of community, in an active and literal manner, 'together' is heavily used on their website, as well as 'we'. Using these

pronouns, Patagonia does not exclude anyone, everyone reading their communication can feel concerned about it. Consumers can feel included in this journey and be as much involved as Patagonia. The brand needs to establish 'deep connections' with stakeholders that share and care about the same interests and values,

'Patagonia is a brand that values deep connections with those that share our passion for outdoor sports and those with whom we align around the health and future of the planet [...] 'These are the communities we exist to serve and in trying to do so consistently, transparently, and - at times - boldly, we hope that we are developing deep and authentic relationships with our customers - and others.' (Henkel, 2018)

Their communication is tailored for this specific type of audience, the type that cares listens, and acts for the well-being of the planet. They target active consumers. Knowing this adventure for a saved planet will not succeed alone, they need the help of influential voices, and consumers hold this power when it comes to societal and environmental matters. They have a great influence on brands practices, and Patagonia is conscious of that,

'Informed buyers will force the clothing industry to drop their dirty practices.' (Patagonia, 2013a) 'you have the power to change the way clothes are made.' (Patagonia, 2019)

To get their audience conscious and act, they take a rather direct approach using 'you' and a more dramatic, yet realistic tone and discourse. They show and explain how the consumer can be influential and have as much as responsibilities as Patagonia or other organizations,

'what you buy is what the industry will become.' (Patagonia, 2013a)
'the clothing industry won't change without you. Shop Informed' (Patagonia, 2020a)

Patagonia emphasized turning its consumers into being more conscious and responsible. The choice of wording is quite negative, with to some extent, a feeling of guilt that can be felt by the reader. Consumers have responsibilities and they need to do something about them, otherwise, nothing will change. Consumers have a big and important role in this narrative, they can feel some kind of pressure and guilt from Patagonia. Patagonia is here to put them into question and challenge their practices,

'Demand better practices'; 'Know How Your Clothes Are Made." (Patagonia, 2013a)
'So tell them!, Use social media or email to contact, let them know, they care what you think' (Patagonia, 2019)

Patagonia wants its stakeholders to ask for better, and become more informed and concerned on the issues that matter to them. To compensate for the lack of information that people are facing, Patagonia takes its responsibility and acts as an educational guide providing tools so that people can get the right information to be environmentally conscious and appreciate the challenges of our social and environmental matters. It is seen as an obligation for Patagonia to use its influence, platforms, and knowledge to help consumers take action,

'We must use all the tools at our disposal' (Patagonia, 2022b)
'With so many products touting environmental benefits these days, it can be difficult to separate facts from hype and to understand a product or a brand's true impact. That's why we thought it would be helpful to assemble some tips we use to make better informed, "lighter" impact purchases. Some tips also offer insights into the challenges we face communicating accurately on our own goods.'(Patagonia, 2019)

It is consumers' responsibility to go on the journey of getting the right information and doing the work needed. Patagonia is here to guide them through all this overwhelming amount of information by providing them with clear, easy to follow content, through articles and stories,

'Here's a guide to help you do your homework' (Patagonia, 2019)
'We help guide you as you navigate your way toward shopping informed' (Patagonia, 2015)
'Learn how to be a responsible customer.' (Patagonia, 2022c)
'Ten Tips for More Responsible Shopping.' (Patagonia, 2019)

They focus on easy to read content, interesting and useful content, '10 tips', and give useful tips for consumers. Many imperative verbs are used to convey their tips and advice. It is a way for Patagonia to tell consumers what to do: 'Check', 'Consider', 'Stay Grounded', 'Beware', 'Watch', 'Keep your eye out for', 'Know Your Stuff', "Look for', etc (Patagonia, 2019; Patagonia, 2022c). Moreover, throughout their website, assertive sentences can be found, stating details and informative facts

'If a brand is making claims about its sustainability and social impact, certifications are a powerful tool to substantiate those claims.' ; 'Look for a section on the brand's website (usually called "sustainability" or "corporate social responsibility") that details how they are improving environmental and social metrics within their business' (Patagonia, 2019)

Patagonia wants to share its knowledge and make sensitive consumers more aware of environmental matters and their challenges. It is a business that educates consumers, one that pushes its audience to challenge their actions and ask themselves the right questions when consuming. Although Patagonia takes a rather realistic approach in which the audience can get a sense of guilt from not acting, they overall keep a motivational perspective on the situation, acknowledging the actions that have been taken already and the growing interest and consciousness from consumers. Patagonia is engaging with audiences through meaningful and emotionally related stories.

5.2 Slovenia, an inspirational love story

Slovenia's destination brand, IFS, acts as a guardian, in the pursuit of a safe and preserved environment. Their consumers are travelers who know how to appreciate, love, and respect nature. IFS perceives nature as a gem, a unique and unspoiled environment that needs to be taken care of. The analysis shows IFS as an inspirational and aspirational environmental and cultural protector. Maja Pak, head of research and development at the Slovenian Tourist Board, explains,

'We wanted to be green ourselves, as an organization, and to leave the minimum carbon footprint when promoting Slovenia. […] We are proud that we have become an example of good practice on a global level and that we can share our green vision, knowledge, and experience with others. We believe that by choosing sustainable tourism we are choosing to keep our planet safe, green, and clean.' (Galewska, 2017)

From the beginning, IFS expresses their hope ('wanted to') and feelings ('proud'). They explain their thinking process on why and how they come to promote Slovenia while working on its preservation. They aim to maintain "our" planet safe, green, and clean. They work at their level, as a nation, to help preserve, on a bigger scale, the planet. They share what they learned. They explain it was thanks to their…

'... pristine green environment (that) encourages [us] to act responsibly and protectively.' (STO, 2022b) 'The respect for nature shows in the way we think, live, and do.' (STO, 2022d)

In the IFS narrative, a pattern is identified early on, when referring to nature and the greenness of their country. Terminology centered around the beauty, pureness, and uniqueness of nature is greatly used, for instance, 'pristine' encompasses to some degree all these aspects. It is because they appreciate what they have in their country that they want to protect it. Along with this perspective, they argue that once you get to know, and appreciate the environment you live in, and realize how precious it is, you fell in love and want to protect it. You get emotionally attached to this natural environment. IFS shows itself as a responsible brand where every action they are taking, are aligning with its engagement to protect the environment. They develop the moral aspect in their narrative by demonstrating their commitment to appropriate responsible practices.

5.2.1 IFS as a guardian of the natural environment

Slovenia's destination brand is aware of its influence and wishes to promote good practices to travelers and others destinations. They develop this moral attempt to demonstrate their engagement to do what must be done. To convey this message, IFS employs two words: 'commitment' and 'sustainability'. On digital platforms, they choose to explicitly state their engagement,

'In Slovenia, we are committed to sustainability.' (STO, 2022f)
'A destination firmly committed to sustainability.' (SLP, 2018)
'We committed to develop sustainable tourism' (Galewska, 2017)
'Slovenia lives strictly by the principles of sustainability' (Country Reports, 2021)

One thing to highlight is the terminology employed to emphasize their commitment: 'firmly', 'strictly by'. These adjectives amplify their commitment and demonstrate the seriousness of their statement. They prove that they care, they are paying attention to what they are doing. To some extent, it is a moral lesson for everyone. Demonstrating that everyone engaging in responsible practices should always monitor their activities, and make sure they align with their values. The choice of words and their structure play a great role in their narrative. Throughout the whole communication, they are stating their mission and underlining that it is their 'choice' to take care of nature. According to IFS, it is a 'common vision', and their…

'...mission is clear: to move forward with nature (sustainable development)' (Prešeren, 2022)
'We set out on a long steep path and became active guardians of our natural heritage.' (STO, 2022d)

Nature is their source of motivation, they chose to make progress with nature and not go against it. They are finding ways to 'worked as one with nature' (STO, 2022f). It is its decision, as a destination brand, to carry out its mission, and they are fully dedicated to it.

'Slovenia is a sustainable destination [...] (and) it is essential that you are able to discover our country in a safe and responsible manner' (STO, 2022f)
'By choosing sustainability, we are choosing to keep destinations clean and green.' (Galewska, 2017) 'Determination to keep it that way by planning our development sustainably' (Prešeren, 2022).

IFS displays its dedication to sustainability practices and demonstrates its interest in 'keeping' the environment preserved. 'It is essential' and they are 'determined' to 'keep' their country green and safe thanks to responsible and sustainability practices. They take their role as guardians very seriously. Consumers are also mentioned by the brand. IFS is considering its well-being along with its mission. Maja Pak explained why the destination brand has adapted its strategies according to the changing socio-political context,

'The pandemic showed us that big and drastic changes are possible' (Country Reports, 2021) 'The values of today's consumers have changed dramatically, and responsible practices are now considered a must – especially in the eyes of modern, discerning consumers and travellers in search of healthy, sustainable lifestyles and experiences.' (Galewska, 2017)

IFS is evaluating its external environment and is aware of the challenges to overcome. Their sustainable practices is not rooted in meaningless goal and unsubstantiated actions. These are serious practices in which they address tourists' concerns regarding health and climate change. They develop new ways of exploring safely and responsibly, they are doing the right thing. Moreover, they address explicitly that their commitment to sustainability is included in their 'core' (STO, 2022a), and that it …

'...needs to be deeply rooted in the country's DNA, in people, reflected in all you do. [...] Sustainability has to be the way you work [...] It has to be something that you believe in, and it has to be a part of your story.' (SLP, 2018) 'Sustainability as such is not enough. It's a term that is sometimes quite abstract. It has to be transformed into a story and benefits that are relevant and appealing to the traveler.' (Galewska, 2017)

They talk about what sustainability means to IFS, knowing how confusing this word can be. Addressing this topic can be interpreted as a way for the IFS to open an honest discussion on a rather delicate topic. Here, sustainability is not seen as a shallow concept, but as a concept that encourages the development of new ways of

doing things. And IFS way of doing things is developing a story to encourage travelers,

'Slovenia Green is a unique story and a great lesson in sustainability for the rest of the world.' (STO, 2022d)

Aware of the misleading meaning of sustainability, IFS chose to carry out its mission by creating a unique and inspirational story that would combine sustainability practices and Slovenian experiences. This perspective is the common ground of every communication strategy of the destination brand. Their main campaign is inviting travelers to create their way of visiting the country,

'Slovenia is waiting for you to explore it. In your own way.' (STO, 2022f)
'More than 140 ways for visiting Slovenia in a more sustainable manner!' (STO, 2022b)

They develop this inspirational light-hearted romantic story with travelers, where they use vocabulary related to love, nature and sustainability. Their vision of 'sustainability' is progressively underlined by the word 'green', love and beauty words are used when referring to Slovenian nature, and their 'commitment' is referred to as…

'...a pledge to preserve the pristine nature for us and for you.' (STO, 2022d)

Through storytelling, they encompass all their vision, values, and actions taken in their environmental sustainability journey. The love for nature, the commitment to sustainability, and the respect for heritage, are all that is the essence of the destination brand, IFS. For instance, 'green' is the word the most used in their narrative, because it reflects Slovenia in every aspect, green represents this 'forest-covered nation' (Country Reports, 2021), it also represents their engagement in the preservation of the environment, …

'...in Slovenia, green is more than just a colour: the "Slovenian green" symbolises the balance between the calmness of nature and the diligence of the Slovenian people.' (STO, 2022c)

This commitment, shared throughout their communication, has allowed IFS to offer much more than a simple visit to these European countries. Working towards a more responsible lifestyle enabled them to 'create green experiences', and be 'one of the

world's greenest destinations' (STO, 2022d; STO, 2022b). IFS became a unique and green destination where people and nature live in harmony.

5.2.2 The green heart of Europe, a boutique destination for 5-star experiences

The development of Slovenia's story takes a more pragmatic approach. IFS develops actions benefiting consumers. It will offer them a unique and responsible tourism experience. By promoting their country to tourists, Slovenia's destination brand plays on their relationships with nature and their history to invite people to come to discover their land,

'Slovenia is the green heart of Europe, with a diverse and magical natural landscape and rich cultural heritage, customs, legends, and tales that merge into a single story of a charming land' (STO, 2022f)

They introduce a 'magical' story where their culture and nature are valued. They promise to tourists a one-of-a-kind experience in an authentic and 'charming' country. The narrative depicts a love story between Slovenian people and nature, and their will to share this feeling to others. IFS values and reflects its heritage, the work, and people that have taken care of and learned to live as one with nature. It portrays the close connection and the love that Slovenia, as a whole, has for its environment. Feelings and emotions are intrinsic to their narrative. The vocabulary used portrays an innocent, naive and lovely perspective of Slovenia:

'The greatest Slovenian treasures await'; 'perfect green and safe oasis'; 'green heart of Europe'; 'a magnificent symphony'; 'charming land'; 'diverse and magical natural landscape'; 'something to make your heart sing' (STO, 2022f)
'The forests have filled your lungs rivers run in your heart.'; 'the land so green and abound with unspoiled nature.' (STO, 2022d)

Metaphors, comparisons, and hyperboles are one of the many literary devices used by the brand when mentioning their country. Some references to music and adventures are employed which allows every type of tourist to get appealed depending on their interest. The beauty of their country is always elevated and emphasized with quality adjectives found throughout their narrative. The adjectives are particularly well-chosen as they are all positive and convey the idea of beauty,

authenticity, and 'pristine'. They demonstrate their love for nature and their country through their narrative. Maja Pak argues that,

'we actively protect the natural environment. Not just to add value to our products, and to be able to offer authentic experiences, but also to live up to the promise of our destination brand, whose essence is our love for nature [...] Love for nature is deeply embedded in us and the essence of our I feel Slovenia brand identity.' (SLP, 2018)

They continuously demonstrate an authentic and open dialogue, explaining each time, what they are trying to communicate and why it is important. Nature is the source of everything, life essentially, but mostly, it is the source of inspiration for IFS and Slovenia. Their destination brand's name is a way for them to prove that love is rooted in the country: I Feel s'**LOVE**'nia, (Love being encapsulated in the name, S**love**nia). The destination brand takes every action to provide a unique, handmade, and personal experience to other nature lovers,

'you will always find something to make your heart sing' (STO, 2022f)
'stunning beauty and boutique experiences tailored just for you everywhere you go' (STO, 2022f)

They address themselves directly to their consumers, 'you'. They make experiences up for all types of travelers: explorers, romantics, esthetes, etc, implying that everyone will find something to do and enjoy in Slovenia. IFS appears as a considerate brand that thinks about what is best for its consumers. They create tailor-made visits for each kind of traveler. IFS is an invitation for exploration, a discovery of the rare and unique Slovenian beauty in all its aspects, in which Slovenia is seen as a …

'Green boutique destination for 5-star experiences' (SLP, 2018)

IFS works towards this 'boutique destination' concept. As one of 'boutique' literal meaning refers to "a small company that offers highly specialized services or products" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), we can only argue that the destination brand relates to this idea of a small green country that offers highly tailor-made experiences. '5-stars' certainly refers to the quality and high standard of their offers. Slovenia is all about emotions, and through their 5-stars experiences, IFS wants to

awaken travelers' feelings and creativity. Slovenia is THE place to get 'inspired', to 'feel' something, to 'enjoy' and to live an 'unforgettable' experience, with the…

'...most unique stories and experiences that you won't find anywhere else' (STO, 2022f)

To some extent, IFS makes its consumers travel before the actual one begins. They give a foretaste of what awaits travelers. And once they come to Slovenia, they will not just passively go to explore, they will start their journey more creatively and responsibly, that will consider the well-being of nature and people. Their 'green boutique destination' is a way for IFS encompass everything that makes Slovenia what it is,

'ensures local, authentic, unique, experiential, boutique, green experiences' (Country reports, 2021)

Slovenia might be a small country in the center of Europe, but they prove it has a lot to offer. One more aspect that is highly interesting and valuable for tourists is the close connection Slovenia, the country, has with its heritage and history. IFS attaches great importance to Slovenian people and their culture. They highlight the importance for IFS to…

'...represent the green country and its people in a unique way. [...] For generations, we have lived and worked as one with nature and we hope to preserve it for generations to come.' (STO, 2022f) 'Slovenians have a tight connection with nature and attachment to the local environment.' (SLP, 2018)

IFS has always included Slovenian people as part of the brand identity. It is the inhabitants of the country and the work they have put in that made Slovenia what it is today. Every facet of local people is reflected in the brands' identity,

'most Slovenians are very active in nature – we spend afternoons after work and at weekends on trips, walks, bike rides, skiing in winter. We love to do gardening – balconies of Slovenian houses are always full of flowers. We use seasonal and local food, preserve customs and traditions, and have the biggest number of beekeepers per inhabitant. This is all reflected in I feel Slovenia. We are green, we develop Slovenia in a green manner and we proudly promote it as green.' (SLP, 2018)

IFS offers an authentic travel experience where the tourist can feel like one of the local people. Tourists values the opportunity to discover and learn about cultures and

traditions. IFS enhance their invitation through enunciating every experience the travelers can have, in the city, in the mountains, in the countryside, etc, and always do it so in a respectful and greenway for the natural environment,

'Visit the gems of Slovenian culture, gastronomy, and nature. [...] Here you will find ancient forests, crystal clear waters, unspoiled nooks and remarkable biodiversity' (STO, 2022f)
'To live hand in hand with these natural riches is a deep-rooted gratitude local feel every day.'; 'Over a decade we put together a visionary policy that nurtures everyone by the table.' (STO, 2022d)

Slovenia is the green heart of Europe that actively ensure the symbiosis with nature and people. They address actively to the consumers and highlight what makes IFS unique.

'a small region offering so much anywhere else in the world'; 'We are ready to offer you the best we have' (STO, 2022f)

IFS is 'ready' to share 'the best' of what they can offer. Throughout their whole narrative, they emphasized their wish to share what they have been taking care of for years. They are proud and passionate about their country. Nevertheless, visiting Slovenia entails a respectful, loving, and responsible exploration. IFS takes actions to guide and raise awareness of its traverlers.

5.2.3 A destination guide for discerning travelers

Still, in a pragmatic approach, IFS is engaging with tourists in every way throughout their communication, sharing with them the greenest experiences in the world. They developed a particular relationship with them. As mentioned below, they target…

'...discerning travelers who are looking for diverse and active experiences, tranquillity, and personal benefits.' (SLP, 2018)

They talk to them in an active voice, addressing them directly by 'traveler', and 'you'. Although they are communicating with travelers who are conscious of environmental and societal matters, IFS is aware as well that tourists need some inspiration and help to truly act as responsible travelers. In their story, they let people interpret that visiting Slovenia is much more than any other casual travel. They

believe that it is by exploring that you get to create unique memories but most importantly, you learn from the destination. Travelers going to Slovenia are on a journey to self-development, where knowledge and appreciation are enhanced through experiences,

'You have set the course for the land so green and abound with unspoiled nature that you will never be the same [...] On your way, you will come to understand why we included the right to clean drinking water in our constitution. [...] The inhabitants of our ancient forests can teach us all how important it is to protect our planet.' (STO, 2022d)

IFS introduces the idea of shared knowledge and emphasizes the wisdom of their people and the benefits of their lifestyle. IFS takes travelers down a one-of-a-lifetime journey, in which every step of their path is filled with discoveries and learning experiences. Along with this one of a kind adventure narrative, IFS uses imperative verbs such as: 'listen', 'take a closer look', 'learn about', to actively inspire tourists to come to visit Slovenia, convey the advantages of what they can experience along the way, and educate them on responsible practices (STO, 2022f). It is their responsibility as a green destination to provide tools to their consumers so they can change their behavior and visit in a way that aligns with the country's values,

'It was important to communicate with stakeholders, to raise awareness, and to explain them the benefits of going green.' (Galewska, 2017) 'Sustainability is also about being innovative and being able to embrace new realities in the tourism business. [...] It is not only about proving how sustainable you are presently, but to get you the tools and coaching to help you develop and improve.' (SLP, 2018)

IFS acts as a guardian of the natural environment and a guide for travelers, by suggesting 'new ways' of exploring,

'More than 140 ways for visiting Slovenia in a more sustainable manner!' (STO, 2022b)
'We encourage you to visit us by train, bike, or on foot.' (STO, 2022d)
'Slovenia is waiting for you to explore it. In your own way.' (STO, 2022f)

The IFS website is a source of unlimited inspiration, advice, and recommendations on what to do, where to go, and to enjoy an unforgettable experience sustainably and respectfully that does not impact nature and local people. They explicitly show and inform their travelers how to be responsible travelers. By suggesting different manners of discovering the country, they let people develop their travelers habits and

explore what they like when visiting countries. IFS has worked towards innovative tools to create an environment for travelers to explore freely their interests and create their 'own way' of traveling. The destination brand does not act as a teacher who knows better and gives strict instructions to follow when arriving in Slovenia. They are putting effort into being a kind and considerate guides, who give space and advice to travelers so they can have the best unforgettable time in Slovenia responsibly,

'you can enjoy truly green holidays'; 'make time for yourself and your loved ones!'; 'treat yourself to a relaxing getaway'; 'enjoy being pampered at Slovenian spas'; 'everyone can find something for themselves' (STO, 2022f)

Slovenia is friendly and welcoming and establishes an authentic and trustworthy relationship with its target audience. To consolidate this trust-based relationship, they have developed a certification program named 'Slovenia Unique Experiences' to ensure that criteria that make an experience a green and 5-stars one are met,

'we guide them in their approach to sustainability and five-star experiences so they can represent these values in their own way. It is a label awarded by SlovenianTouristBoard that ensures local, authentic, unique, experiential, boutique, green experiences.' (Country Reports, 2021) 'The criteria of the scheme itself require that there is communication with guests. After all, the purpose of the scheme is also to teach guests about a greener lifestyle." (Galewska, 2017)

IFS usually addresses tourists to the same degree as the local people. Implying travelers are as valuable as the inhabitants when it comes to responsible practices and protecting the environment. They learn from each other and share their own experiences to develop better practices that value the work of local people and respect the environment. The tourist is fully and deeply included in IFS story. It is with them that they will be able to move forward with nature and preserve it.

'Local communities and tourist providers have all come together to build a unique model of sustainability in tourism. [...] We believe in the green inspiration from one generation to another. From one traveller to another. [...] Today we stand united, together with you dear traveller, under the vision of Green Slovenia.' (STO, 2022d)

IFS consider all their stakeholders in their communication and practices, they value collaborative work and shared knowledge. The tone and voice used are always

active, and friendly, 'we', 'you', 'together', etc. Throughout the whole narrative, consumers feel and understand they also have a role to play in this journey towards sustainability and responsible practices. IFS emphasizes the idea of getting inspired and believes inspiration is a great factor to encourage more tourists and destinations to follow their green commitment. They hope that by guiding tourists with green and responsible guidelines, they will eventually become great ambassadors, attract and educate more tourists, and ultimately promote Slovenia as a unique green country.

5.3 Summary

Patagonia and IFS evolve as characters in a context where the natural environment is threatened. Each brand depicts a different genre of narrative. On one hand, Patagonia develops an action-adventure story, on the other hand, IFS a romance story. Both are on a journey to preserve the environment. Examining narrative within a legitimacy framework is valuable and insightful in recognizing legitimacy brand practices and understanding their constructions attempts. The analysis focused on pragmatic and moral legitimacy attempts that Patagonia and IFS might have used in an attempt to create their legitimacy. The analysis revealed that both brands used strategies from these two legitimacy types.

5.3.1 Pragmatic & moral legitimacy by Suchman

Moral legitimacy is focused on "what should be done", regardless of any self-interest or goals (Suchman, 1995). We then examined whether the brand is "doing the right thing" (Suchman, 1995). To identify attempts at moral legitimacy, we need to look at brands' actions and see if they are doing the right things. Patagonia appears as an anti-hero holding themselves accountable, driven by moral responsibility. The brand is transparent and open about its past mistakes, acknowledging its errors while learning from them. Here Patagonia set an example, they are "doing the right thing" as they appreciate the challenges and mistakes. They take a step back and try to find a responsible way of overcoming them. Patagonia demonstrates its engagement with green practices which ultimately strengthens moral legitimacy. IFS attempts moral

legitimacy by showing itself as a respectful guardian of the environment. Their narrative revealed its commitment to sustainability practices. They show how they adapt to the changing and challenging environment to do appropriate actions. However, we acknowledge pragmatism is still part of this commitment strategy. Indeed, they do not express their commitment to environmental sustainability in a disinterested way. They explicitly mention their commitment could be beneficial for them and the tourists

Pragmatic legitimacy considers consumers' self-interest and expectations. It focuses on brands' actions, how they contribute to achieving their goals, and how they are beneficial to consumers (Suchman, 1995). Consumers perceive brands as legitimate if they see how valuable they can be to them. Both Patagonia and IFS implement pragmatic actions throughout their narrative. They both work on educating their consumers and involving them in their journey. Patagonia is providing tools for consumers to be aware of responsible and greenwashing practices. On the other hand, IFS acts as a guide inviting consumers to explore Slovenia in a responsible and sustainable way. Consumers have an active role in the brand's narrative. They are helpers in saving the planet with Patagonia. They are nature lovers developing 'new ways' of exploring a destination along with IFS. These two green brands commit to offering the best. The best, meaning quality services aligned with consumers' expectations and environmental matters. The narratives of Patagonia and IFS may be understood as constructing legitimacy for the brands to come across as trustworthy and meaningful. The analysis showed pragmatic and moral communicative practices were combined to construct legitimacy.

5.3.2 The legitimation moderators of the narrative

The study found that Patagonia and IFS have developed a narrative in which they are protagonists on a mission. Its mission is closely linked to its engagement in environmental sustainability. Pragmatic and moral legitimacy attempts are an integral part of their story and relate to Nielsen and Thomsen's (2018) legitimacy framework. Both brands "optimize their actions conforming to expectations and ideals" (Nielsen

& Thomsen, 2018, p.495). Patagonia is an obstacle to the protection of the environment. Despite their commitment to do better, they took a look at their actions and acknowledged their mistakes. On the other hand, IFS is a guardian of the environment. They take action to protect the natural environment and people. Moreover, they both "adopt and redefine" communication practices (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p.495). They commit to offering the best and most unique products to their consumers. They create their definition of what is 'best', implying quality products are those that do not harm the environment unnecessarily. Lastly, they "inform" their consumers "through building and maintaining relationships" (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p.495). Patagonia and IFS involve consumers as important characters in their journey. Helpers or partners, brands are educating and empowering them.

The analysis revealed that each legitimation moderators, established by Nielsen and Thomsen (2018), are part of Patagonia and IFS narrative legitimacy attempts. Seele and Gatti (2015) mentions that greenwashing usually happens from a combination of false claims and misleading statements. When analyzing Patagonia and Slovenia, no misleading or potential misinterpreted messages were identified. Their legitimacy attempts are consistent and comprehensive messages that seem to be aligned with consumers' expectations (Bassey Etta & Nyong Inyang, 2018; Danciu, 2015).

6. Discussion & Conclusion

This research examined the narrative legitimacy attempts of green brands. Extensive content analysis has been conducted to determine how green brands attempt to construct legitimacy through communication. Findings revealed Patagonia and IFS both implemented pragmatic and moral strategies in their communication as an integral part of their narrative.

In strategic communication, the scope of environmental sustainability is of growing interest, yet there is still little research studying green branding in a greenwashing context. As we mentioned earlier, legitimacy is common in research, yet research usually focuses on the consumer perspective (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017; Iyer & Reczek, 2017; Taufique, 2020). These studies have shown greenwashing relies solely on stakeholder perception. Consistency in brands' communication is important. If brands do not align with their actions, they could face legitimacy issues.

Consumers tend to lose trust in green practices, as they become aware of greenwashing. It misleads them and impacts the value of green practices. In case of misinterpretations, it may impact the legitimacy of genuine green brands. If legitimacy is affected, it might weaken brands' meaningfulness, and prevent brands from reaching their goals. Greenwashing might keep growing without adequate legislation or "media attention" (Baum, 2012, p.439). If brands manage to "overcome greenwashing challenges", consumers can regain trust in green brands and practices (Baum, 2012, p.439).

6.1 Contributions of this study

The research showed the importance of developing an emotional bond with the consumers through narrative. Consistency will be enhanced thanks to the use of

narrative (Golant & Sillince, 2007). Danciu (2015) and Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) explain that meaningfulness and relevance in consumers' eyes are essential for constructing authenticity and legitimacy. Green brands need to show their audience how they benefit them. Developing an emotional connection with consumers appears to be paramount for green brands attempting to overcome legitimacy challenges.

The study revealed Patagonia and Slovenia's destination brands developed their narrative legitimacy attempts on a similar pattern. Three connections are the basis of their narrative: brands and environmental sustainability, consumers and environmental sustainability, and consumers and brands. It has first been introduced by Grubor and Milovanov (2017). According to them, these are "essential practices of successful branding strategy in the era of sustainability" (p.82). We argue to construct legitimacy, these 3 connections must be considered and integrated into brands' narratives. It will strengthen the emotional bond and the brand's meaningfulness. Each connection implies multiple strategies from which brands can learn.

To connect consumers and the brand, brands need to understand who their consumers are, to build strong and lasting relationships. Previous research has shown it is paramount to understand "what matters to people in their lives, how and in what direction culture is changing" (Danciu, 2015; Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, p.84). We argue brands must know consumers' interests, expectations, and awareness of environmental sustainability. Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) found that legitimacy is positively affected when there is a "two-way communication" (p.502). It strengthens our argument that consumers need to feel involved in the brand's mission. Patagonia and IFS, for example, interact with them and share knowledge on how they can, both brands and consumers, protect the environment. Baum (2012) points out that consumers lack interest and concern, which feeds greenwashing. Brands need to actively involve consumers in their mission. We believe it will help to be perceived as authentic and trustworthy.

To connect consumers and environmental sustainability, brands should inform and educate their consumers. As Baum (2015), Danciu (2015), Nielsen and Thomsen,

(2018) noted, to face greenwashing, awareness is required, and consumers need to gain knowledge on identifying authentic green practices. This research revealed green brands act as a guide, and interact directly with consumers. For instance, Patagonia shares comprehensive articles on how to be a responsible consumer, and IFS suggests multiple ways of visiting Slovenia responsibly. Consumers need to be well-informed. They need to be able to identify true green actions and minimize misinterpretations. We argue that it is the brand's responsibility to make sure consumers know what they should, can, and must do. This "shared responsibility" has been mentioned by Achi et al. (2021). Brands and consumers have both expectations of each other. Patagonia and IFS expect their audiences to be active and work on themselves. Patagonia motivates its consumers to demand better practices from other brands. IFS asks them to be considerate, and mindful of nature and people. We believe brands need to implement strategies to educate their consumers about green practices and what they can do as individuals.

The last connection green brands should focus on is brands and environmental sustainability. Brands must demonstrate they engage in practices that align with their actions. Developing this connection implies a one-way communication which has more risk to be misinterpreted as greenwashing. Brands must show they are actively and genuinely engaged to avoid greenwashing accusations. Danciu (2015) and Nielsen and Thomsen (2018) emphasized the need for explicit, detailed, and visible messages supporting that brands are "doing the talking" and have environmental sustainability concerns at their core (Danciu, 2015, p.59). Green brands can open a transparent discussion by expressing and justifying what they are doing. IFS is explaining thoroughly and sharing openly why they are taking action to preserve the environment. Patagonia has developed a transparent discussion in which they open up about their mistakes. They show their process of acknowledging their errors, and findings ways to do better. Brands need to persuade their consumers they are communicating substantiated, well-intentioned actions. It goes in line with Nielsen and Thomsen's (2018) legitimacy framework and the practice of "persuading stakeholders through rhetorics, organizational authenticity, concepts" (p.502).

6.2 Implications for practice

To circumvent greenwashing accusations, brands want to be perceived as authentic and trustworthy and avoid any misinterpretations. We believe that brands need to develop an emotional bond through narrative. If consumers are well informed and involved in the brand's mission, it would reduce the chances of misinterpretations and greenwashing accusations. They will feel part of an important mission and help the brand. We suggest that green brands focus on creating value between them, consumers, and environmental sustainability matters. Consumers might regain trust in green practices if they can identify them, and be involved in them. Green brands should understand their consumers, educate them, and collaborate with them. Brands should also monitor their messages and actions to ensure consistency, and alignment with their goals and mission. Patagonia and IFS narrative legitimacy attempts are practices that other green brands can learn from and adapt to their own audience and goals. Applying these strategies might be valuable to not being labeled as greenwashing. Consumers would tend to perceive the brand as valuable to them, as well as transparent, authentic, and trustworthy.

This study is conducted to support brands that are committed to environmental sustainability matters and facing greenwashing challenges. These narrative strategies are examples of what a brand can do in an attempt to navigate legitimacy and greenwashing challenges. It does not mean that they are ultimately positive for the legitimacy. Practitioners should acknowledge legitimacy is an ongoing organizational process depending on consumers' perceptions.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This research founds its limits regarding the approach taken, as it only covers theoretical and interpretive aspects of the research problem. It highlights what can be implemented to face greenwashing. However, it does not prove if these strategies truly prevent greenwashing accusations.

Moreover, the research focuses on brands from different sectors. It is an interesting approach for a first research on this subject, it provides richer data and a general

overview. Nevertheless, it might be valuable for future research to analyze additional brands within the same industry. Patterns or specific attempts might be found in one industry, but not in another one. Expanding this area of research may offer valuable insight to practitioners, and provide further in-depth results within each industry.

Furthermore, future research could focus on developing this study by obtaining insights into consumer perceptions of Patagonia's and IFS's legitimacy strategies. We believe combining this study with a consumer perspective study may provide valuable information on how legitimacy attempts, identified in this research, are received by consumers. It could lead to a greater understanding of which strategies appear to be most effective to circumvent being accused of greenwashing.

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