SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

Circularity in Outdoor Textile Brands

Examining the Integration of Brand Identity, Management Actions, and Communication Strategies for Sustainability

by

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to investigate how outdoor textile brands align their brand bdentity with their management actions and communication to become more circular. It was as a consequence explored how communication strategies of outdoor brands align with their management decision and how management actions push the transition of a brand towards more circularity.

Methodology: This paper takes a qualitative approach. Seven online semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to collect primary data. Moreover, secondary data was collected through the analyses of websites and sustainability reports of the interviewed brands.

Findings: The study, among all the findings, explore how outdoor textile brands reduce the environmental impact through conscious choices and embrace sustainability as a core principle. Outdoor brands focus circular economy practices with the concept of durability and extending the life of products. This study also explores why outdoor brand communicate less of what they are actually doing in regard of circular economy practices. Challenges and chances of CE practices are moreover explored.

Theoretical contribution: This study contributes to research in the field of circular economy as well as brand identity and communication practices. It contributes with insights in regard of outdoor textile brands aligning their brand bdentity with their management actions and communication to become more circular.

Practical contribution: This research contributes to support managers of outdoor textile brands, since they can use the findings for a better management of brand identity, communication, and circular practices. Overall the thesis provides an understanding of the transformation from a linear to a circular economy.

Keywords: Circular economy, outdoor textile brands, brand identity, communication strategy

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1. Introduction

Climate change is one of the most significant issues the world is facing today (UNFCCC, 2022). In response to this challenge, the Paris Agreement was concluded between 196 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference 2015 to limit global warming to a 1.5% temperature rise (Van Beek et al. 2022). This is because climate change and the associated global warming are causing environmental problems in the form of natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and heat waves that impact people's everyday lives. Water distribution is also affected by climate change. More frequent and extreme weather events contribute to some regions experiencing little to no rainfall while others experience heavy rain. In addition, a lot of water is used for industry and production. Water quality is also increasingly declining due to pollution. Poor water quality can lead to people not having enough clean drinking water if any at all. Environmental impacts also result from using improperly disposed of chemicals in industrial processes. When chemicals and pollutants enter water systems, they damage ecosystems and pose health risks to humans and animals (Ingulfsvann, 2019). Biodiversity loss is also being driven by climate change, among other factors, which also affect ecosystems and cause species to have difficulty adapting to a changing environment. Even though the Paris Agreement is a landmark in multilateral processes as it is the first agreement binding many nations together, it is still questionable whether the 1.5-degree target can be met. Exceeding the 1.5-degree target involves "large risks for natural and human systems, especially if the temperature at peak warming is high, because some risks may be long-lasting and irreversible, such as the loss of some ecosystems" (IPCC, 2019, p.36).

The textile industry is one of the most polluting industries, contributing significantly to climate change and environmental degradation. The European Parliament (2022) reported that 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by clothing and footwear production. The production of textile, accessories, and equipment contribute to a negative impact on the environment. The textile industry also contributes to the abovementioned issues, like drinking water, ocean pollution, and biodiversity loss. In addition, the textile industry is responsible for a significant amount of CO2 emissions caused, among other things, by transportation through shipping and aviation (Filho et al. 2022). Manufacturing textiles, especially cotton and other natural fibers, is also energy-intensive because of garment care through washing (Maiti, 2022 & Filho et al. 2022). Therefore, vast amounts of water are also needed (Maiti, 2022). Another adverse effect in production is the dyeing and finishing of the textile because this is causing 20% of the global industrial wastewater pollution (Kant, 2012). The

usage of synthetic fibers in comparison to cotton and natural fibers is even more problematic. Nowadays, polyester is the most used material to produce clothes (Niinimäki et al. 2020). This results in two negative influences on the environment. On the one hand, polyester is made from fossil fuels, which, in contrast to cotton, releases more than twice as much carbon emissions (Niinimäki et al. 2020 & Cherrett, 2005). On the other hand, microplastic is released into the environment when washing clothes made of synthetic fibers (Maiti, 2022). Moreover, the industry's seasonal nature means that large amounts of clothing are produced, but many items are only worn a few times before being discarded. This overproduction creates significant waste and leads to further environmental damage (Maiti, 2022).

Outdoor textile companies contribute significantly to environmental pollution since they use many synthetic materials because of their performance benefits of drying fast, lasting long, being waterproof, breathable, and has good temperature regulation (Cernansky, 2021). Every year 0.5 million tonnes of microfibers are released into the ocean because of washing clothes, which accounts for 35 percent of the primary microplastics released into the environment (European Parliament, 2022).

Acting on climate change is fundamental for outdoor brands for various reasons. One of them is that some of the founders of outdoor textile brands are outdoors enthusiasts and enjoy nature, so it's close to their hearts to protect it (Wang, 2010). Many outdoor brands were also founded in natural regions and are often still based there, meaning there is a deep connection to this place (Oberalp Group, 2023). In addition, the brands appeal to people who pursue outdoor activities such as hiking or climbing and enjoy their time in nature, which should be preserved. So both the brand, with all its employees, and the customers identify with protecting the environment. Adopting sustainable practices also improves brand reputation and sets outdoor businesses apart from their rivals (Gossen, 2022). The UN calls on all nations to introduce stricter rules for climate protection. Otherwise, the 1.5% target will be exceeded. Protecting nature is also essential for outdoor textile brands because when it is destroyed, there is no longer a working field for them. One solution for outdoor textile brands to reduce or even eliminate harm to the environment and therefore counteract climate change is the circular economy, as products are used again and again, which reduces the use of raw materials and cuts CO2 emissions (UN Climate Change, 2021). It is a regenerative system that reduces waste resources and energy by slowing down, reducing, and closing energy and material cycles (Kirchherr et al. 2017). First, however, it must be analyzed how outdoor textile brands integrate this approach and what opportunities and barriers can result from it.

Communication is essential in transforming outdoor textile brands towards the circular economy. On the one hand internally so that managers can drive circularity and externally inform consumers about current proceedings (Van Ruler, 2018). Outdoor textile brands communicate powerfully about sustainability in texts on their website, and photos and videos often depict nature (Arc'teryx, n.d.-d). This closeness to nature is also reflected in the section on the brands' website where they introduce themselves. Protection of the environment and a focus on sustainability, as characteristics of the brands, are integral parts of the identity of these brands. Brand identity is crucial for the transformation, gives direction and purpose, and sets the reputation. Furthermore, identity plays a vital role for the management as it enables to build of a strategy. However, communication around sustainable behavior and the circularity of a brand should not be a method to give the company a positive image in the public eye. If outdoor textile brands fail to be open and honest about their effects on society and the environment, it could harm the brand's reputation and lead to consumer outrage (Gossen, 2022).

As outdoor textile brands present themselves close to nature, communicating that they want to protect the environment and that sustainability is deeply rooted in their brand identity, this master thesis intends to analyze what steps are being taken towards more sustainable action and whether they positively affect environmental protection. This work focuses exclusively on circular economy practices because it offers an excellent opportunity to meet the 1.5% target of the Paris Agreement and thus counteract climate change. In addition, more research on the circular economy in outdoor clothing brands (Fuchs et al. 2022). The master thesis wants to investigate how far they have already developed and implemented within outdoor textile brands. Furthermore, enablers and barriers to transition towards a circular economy within outdoor textile brands will be identified. Brand identity is the first step in understanding how outdoor textile brands position themselves and their communication strategy. A comparison is made regarding whether the brand identity and communication match and how this can support the transformation to a circular economy. This thesis enables knowledge transfer and dissemination of best practices within the industry. It can inspire and inform other outdoor textile brands and stakeholders by highlighting successful examples of sustainable and circular practices and showing a way for the future. For this reason, the following research question and two sub-research questions were developed to help answer the main research question.

RQ: How do Outdoor Brands align their Brand Identity with their management actions and communication to become more circular and thus more sustainable?

SQ: How do the communication strategies of outdoor brands align with their management decisions (in promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible practices)?

SQ: How do management actions push the transition of a brand towards more circularity?

2 Literature Review

The literature review lays the foundation of this Master thesis and presents what is already known about the already presented topic.

2.1 Linear Economy

Industrial economies have used a linear model for resources since they first started to grow. The linear economy (LE) relates to the industrial revolution, and the driver was to make a profit. LE's are still the dominant, preferred, and most adopted model: "Today, industrial activity involves a linear production consumption system with inbuilt environmental deterioration at both ends" (Stahel, 1982, p. 73). The components of this linear model are described as 'take-make-use-dispose', 'make-use-dispose', or 'cradle-to-grave', which always follows this order. This process entails the extraction of raw materials, transformation into a product using manufacturing techniques that require labor and energy and delivering the finished product to the end user for eventual disposal (Boulding, 1966). In addition, economic growth can be attributable to LE (Maddison, 2001) because "linear productions tend to favor profit and are easier to organize when the cost of inputs is low {...}" (Morseletto, 2023, p. 3).

In the linear economic model, value creation is given by the product. Therefore, the difference between market price and production cost gives the actual profit margins, and to maximize the profit, it is necessary to sell as many products as possible and minimize production costs. In addition, ever-increasing technological innovation seeks to quickly make products obsolete and incentivize consumers to buy new products (European Commission, 2022).

2.1.1 Limits to Growth

However, there is a reason why companies should no longer economize in a linear process. In 1972, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) presented the 'Limits to Growth study'. This scientific study aimed to investigate the problem of development, its scarcity, and its limits. This research demonstrated the existence of a significant limitation of economic development caused by non-renewable resources, which are present in nature in a fixed quantity, such as oil, coal, gas, et cetera. The report was based on a simulation that calculated the effects on natural reserves and the ecosystem caused by the world's population growth. This study shows how the world's ever-

increasing population comes up against the limit of exhaustible resources available in nature in limited numbers and cannot be increased if businesses continue as usual. Once the threshold is crossed, production stops growing or decreases drastically, and the increase in population growth slows down as exhaustible natural resources become insufficient to satisfy everyone's needs. In this scenario, the world population decreases until to a stationary point where everyone lives in poverty at the limits of subsistence (Meadows et al. 1972 & The Conversation, 2022).

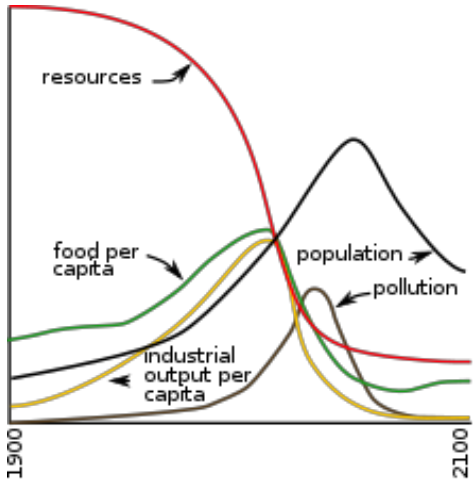

Figure 1: The Limits to Growth from MIT (1972)

The Global Footprint Network, the international organization that first started the Ecological Footprint measure to calculate resource consumption identified the 28 of July in 2022 as the day on which the population used the total available budget of natural resources for an entire year. Earth Overshoot Day happens earlier every year, suffice it to say that every twenty years, it has gone from late December in 1971 to mid of October in 1991 to the beginning of August in 2011 (Earth Overshoot Day, n.d.).

2.1.2 Impact on Climate Change

Linear business raises negative associations because it uses non-renewable raw materials at the beginning of the process, and products become waste (Morseletto, 2023). Due to a low product price and a vast variety and quantity of products (Witt, 2001), LE encourages increased consumption, and consumers can easily and quickly replace their old products (Mugge et al. 2010). Strasser pointed out in 1999 that single-use products returned durable and reusable products with a shorter life. Overproduction gives rise to overconsumption (Brouillat, 2015). Although LE harms the environment as described, it is the dominant model, which also has to do with the fact that negative impacts on the

environment are not included in the price of materials (Nußholz, 2017). Another aspect is that since raw material prices were low compared to labor costs, it is a wasteful resource utilization method. The linear production model incurs resource losses in several ways, such as waste in the production chain, end-of-life waste, energy use, erosion of ecosystem services, and others (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013).

According to the United Nations, "The extraction and processing of natural resources causes half of global emissions and over 90% of biodiversity loss" (United Nations Climate Change, 2021). Furthermore, the NDC Synthesis Report published by the UN Climate Change shows that nations are far from meeting the 1.5°C climate target and that stricter mitigation plans and actions must be enforced (United Nations, 2021). The MIT report (1972) that was already introduced indicates the limits of the use of resources, but this is necessary for the functioning of a LE. Instead, the report encourages using renewable or alternative energies and materials or alternatives to fossil fuels (1972).

2.2 Circular Economy

As outlined in the previous paragraph, the growing ecological imbalance is becoming increasingly evident, resulting in the need to change the economic model. The opposite of the LE is the circular economy (CE) (Morseletto, 2023), which enables distancing from the traditional model with the 'end-of-life' concept (Kirchherr et al. 2017).

Switching from the current linear model of the economy to a circular one would save the EU hundreds of billions of money and substantially positively influence the environment (Lewandowski et al. 2015).

There are many definitions and theories in the field of CE, and the concept does not have a specific creator but several contributors.

Kircherr et al. (2017) claim that the term CE means many different things to different people.

According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the CE is a generic term to describe an economy designed to regenerate itself:

> "Circular economy is looking beyond the current "take, make and dispose" extractive industrial model. Instead, the circular economy is restorative and regenerative by design. Relying on system-wide innovation, it aims to redefine products and services to design waste while minimizing negative impacts. Underpinned by a transition to renewable energy sources, the circular model builds economic, natural, and social capital". (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013).

Moreover, the European Parliament in 2016 described the CE as "an economic model based, among other things, on sharing, leasing, reuse, repair, refurbishment, and recycling, in an (almost) closed loop, which aims to retain the highest utility and value of products, components, and materials at all times". These practices will be explained later.

The definition of CE given by Kirchherr (2018), which uses a recent meta-definition based on an analysis of 114 definitions of the term, reads:

> "We defined CE within our iteratively developed coding framework as an economic system that replaces the 'end-of-life' concept with reducing, alternatively reusing, recycling, and recovering materials in production/distribution and consumption processes. It operates at the micro level (products, companies, consumers), meso level (eco-industrial parks), and macro level (city, region, nation, and beyond) to accomplish sustainable development, thus simultaneously creating environmental quality, economic prosperity, and social equity, to the benefit of current and future generations. " (Kirchherr et al. 2017, pp.229).

Furthermore, in the circular model, products are part of an integrated business centered on providing a service. Therefore, it is not only the value of selling a product that creates competition but also the formation of an added value of the associated service. Among a company's assets are also products, and product lifespan, reusability, reparability, and recyclability are guided by extended producer responsibility (European Environment Agency, 2017).

In addition to various definitions for the CE, many different frameworks have been applied.
Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013) reproposed different schools of thought that made up the "circular economy" concept, specifically Regenerative Design, Performance economy, Cradle-to-Cradle, Industrial ecology, and Biomimicry.

- Regenerative Design: In the 1970s, John T. Lyle asked his students to develop ideas for a sustainable society living sustainably without harming the environment. The term 'regenerative design' emerged from this challenge, which involves designing systems, including agriculture, that can renew or regenerate the resources they consume.

- Performance economy: In 1976, Walter Stahel and Genevieve Reday presented the idea of a CE in their research report to the European Commission. This idea involves creating an

economy in loops that promote job creation, economic competitiveness, resource savings, and waste prevention. Stahel's Product-Life Institute focuses on four primary goals: product-life extension, long-life goods, reconditioning activities, and waste prevention. They also advocate for the 'performance economy', which means selling services instead of products. The CE is seen as a framework and a coherent model to address the end of the era of low-cost oil and materials.

- Cradle-to-Cradle: Michael Braungart, a German chemist, and Bill McDonough, an American architect, developed the Cradle-to-Cradle concept and certification process. This design philosophy considers all materials involved in industrial and commercial processes as nutrients, which are either biological or technical. The Cradle-to-Cradle framework focuses on designing products with a positive impact rather than simply reducing negative effects. It uses nature's biological metabolism as a model for developing a technical metabolism flow of industrial materials. The model emphasizes defining materials' molecular composition to facilitate recycling quality-based materials. The design also focuses on making products easy to disassemble and recover their components for the next generation. The Cradle-to-Cradle framework addresses materials, energy, and water inputs and is based on three principles: 'Waste equals food', 'Use current solar income', and 'Celebrate diversity'.

- Industrial ecology: is the study of the material and energy flows within industrial systems, aiming to create closed-loop processes by designing production processes following local ecological constraints. This approach seeks to eliminate waste by making it an input for production. It takes a systemic view, attempting to make production processes function as close to living systems as possible. Industrial Ecology is interdisciplinary and can also be applied in the services sector. Its principles focus on natural capital restoration and social wellbeing.

- Biomimicry is a discipline that involves studying nature's designs and processes to solve human problems. Janine Benyus, the author of ‘Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature’, describes this approach as ‘innovation inspired by nature’. Biomimicry relies on three principles: studying nature's models to solve human problems, using an ecological standard to assess the sustainability of our innovations, and valuing nature as a mentor rather than merely as a resource to be exploited.

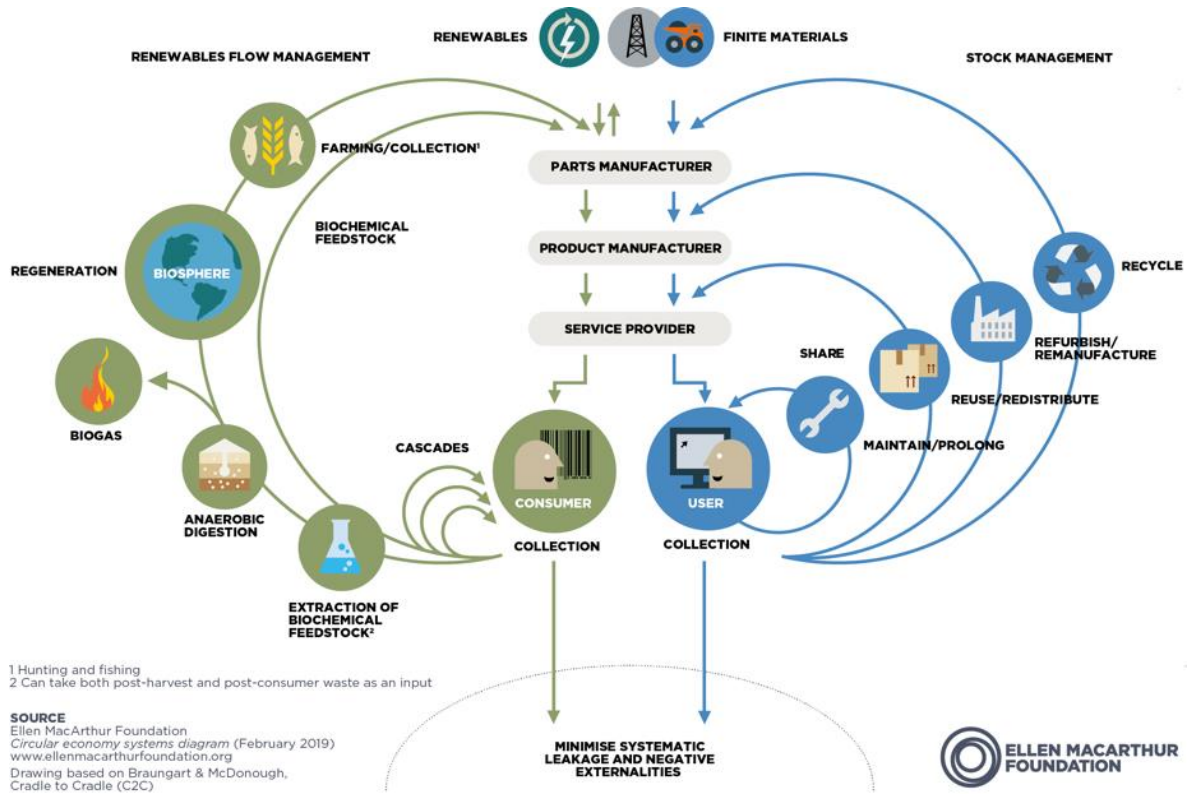

Figure 2: The Butterfly Model (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013)

The butterfly model proposed by Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013) shows how technological and biological nutrient-based products and materials cycle through the economic system, thus illustrating the key role of manufacturers and recycling companies. The technological cycle and the biological cycle are the two main cycles. The butterfly diagram, which depicts the CE system, demonstrates the constant flow of materials in a CE. In the technological cycle, materials and products are retained in use through procedures like recycling, reusing, repairing, and remanufacturing. The nutrients from biodegradable materials are returned to the Earth via the biological cycle to renew nature.

Considering the illustration proposed, it is possible to delineate three fundamental principles:

1) Preserve and enhance natural capital by controlling finite stocks and balancing renewable resource flows; 2) Optimize resource yields by circulating products, components, and materials at the highest utility at all times in both technical and biological cycles; 3) Foster system effectiveness by revealing and designing out negative effectiveness.

Kirchherr et al. 2017 also show in their research that the CE is typically portrayed as a collection of actions that combine reduce, reuse, and recycle and requires a fundamental shift instead of incremental twisting of the current system. The framework from Garcia-Saravia Ortiz-de-Montellano (2022) goes hand in hand with this assumption. The author identifies two main dimensions of circularity: circular processes and circular impacts. Circular processes refer to designing and

managing material flows, including waste prevention, reuse, and recycling. In contrast, circular impacts refer to circular practices' environmental, economic, and social benefits. The author describes the circular processes, referring to the different ways in which the maximum value of any product, component and material can be kept within a system. These are called Value retention stages (VRS). The latter can constitute blocks of the circular system.

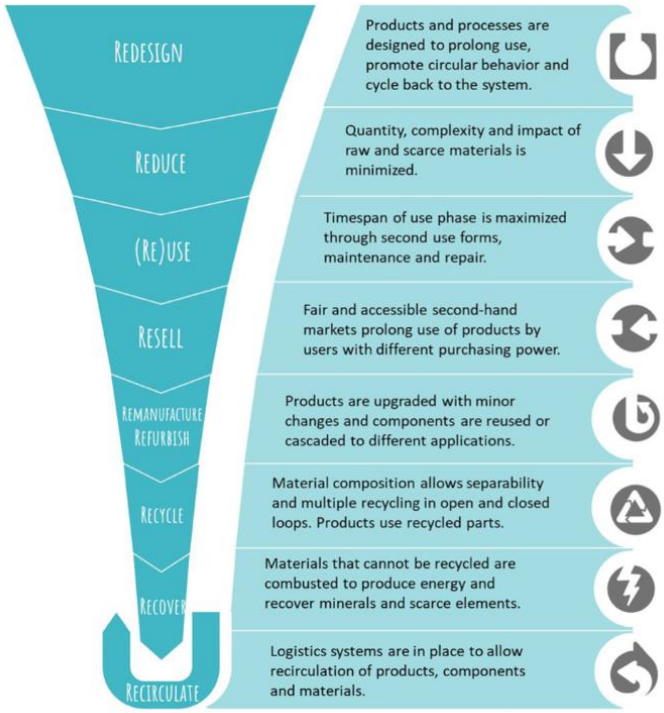

Figure 3: Value retention stages and their aim within the CE (Garcia-Saravia Ortiz-de-Montellano, 2022)

As shown in Figure 3, the author differentiates eight different value retention stages, specifically redesign, (re)use, resell, remanufacture/ refurbish, recycle, recover, and recirculate. In addition, the authors discuss the various methods that can be used to maintain value at four separate levels: 1) the product itself, 2) the product's components, or the parts from which a product is formed, 3) the materials that make up these components, and 4) the logistics needed to move these elements.

Redesign: This is the process of changing material and product uses to address specific concerns or achieve desired attributes. It is a key tool for circular transitions and is necessary to meet new circular expectations. There are seven main categories of redesign indicators in the current CE landscape.

Reducing: The goal of reducing the CE is to increase production efficiency, decrease reliance on critical and scarce resources, simplify products and systems and reduce environmental pollution.

Use and Reuse: The CE approach considers a product's use and reuse phases without requiring any changes or disassembly. To achieve this, strategies are needed to match the product's actual and desired use time.

Resell: The difference between Reuse and Resell in the CE lies in the economic transaction and energy transferring a product to a second user. Product reselling can occur between consumers or with a company as an intermediary.

Refurbishment and remanufacturing: Both processes occur at the component level in the CE. Refurbished products are of satisfactory quality but may not meet the original performance standards. At the same time, remanufacturing is a more rigorous process that restores products to the same quality level as the new counterpart product.

Recycling: The most commonly used as a VRS stage. The framework implemented by the authors distinguishes recycling into three categories: recycling of products (also known as reuse and resell), recycling components (refurbish/remanufacture), and recycling of materials.

Recover: Recovery procedures can be used to extract minerals, energy, or rare elements from materials when recycling cycles have finished and no more value can be derived from them in their present state or if the product composition makes recycling all but impossible.

Recirculate: In the circular economy, the ability of goods, parts, and materials to be recycled is equally as significant as their capacity to retain value. To physically transport them throughout the loops, which enables the other Value Retention Strategies (VRS), takes a concerted effort from the whole supply chain.

On the other hand, circular impacts are the main aim of CE, defined by Garcia-Saravia Ortiz-de-Montellano (2022) as "the sustainable and fair improvement of quality of life for nature and society". As Lewandowski et al. (2015) stated, these impacts can be broken down into three main components: contribute to social development, improve environmental performance, and ensure a socially fair and market-relevant economic contribution.

Environmental performance includes the development of regenerative flows that encourage waste recovery, efficient and renewable energy production, water and wastewater management, and preventing air pollution, GHG emissions, land-use change, toxicity, and other environmental problems. Social development includes a system in which the employee is continually educated, engaged, and satisfied. Products that encourage circular consumer behavior and organizations that work with locals to improve policies and social wellbeing. Finally, the economic contribution includes business models that support circular initiatives, which are motivated by value retention rather than development and aid in the equitable distribution of income Lewandowski et al. (2015).

2.2.1 Product Design and Business Model Strategies

The definitions and frameworks provided so far serve as a basis for understanding companies' actions to include circularity in their strategy. However, the transition of an economy from a linear to a circular one depends on policymaker decisions and business entities' introduction of circularity into their business model. Moreover, converting to a CE model requires four fundamental building blocks: material and product design, new business models, global reverse networks, and enabling conditions (Lewandowski et al. 2015).

Bocken et al. (2016) discuss product design and business model strategies, stating that it is crucial to incorporate CE concerns early in the product design process since only minor changes are usually possible once product specifications are set. Furthermore, changing a product design is challenging once resources, infrastructures, and activities have been committed. This session will discuss product design and business model strategies.

2.2.1.1 Product Design

Lewandowski et al. (2015) assert that there are various approaches to generating circular value, including short cycles where products and services are maintained, repaired, and adjusted, as well as long cycles that extend the useful lives of current products and processes based on buying recycled waste streams and creating new combinations of resources and material components, and pure circles where resources and material are entirely reused.

Bocken et al. (2016) discuss the methods through which resources move across a system, which are used to classify design and business model techniques. The authors introduce the concepts of 'slowing', 'closing', and 'narrowing' resource loops to describe the different strategies for resource cycling. Regarding slowing resource cycles, it refers to designing durable items and prolonging product life through service loops like repair and reconditioning, which extend and intensify product use. As a result, the movement of resources from manufacturing to recycling slows down. This tactic has been called the 'slow replacement system' since it implies a different connection with time than the reuse of items and product-life extension.

On the other hand, closing resource loops refers to recycling, which is the process of closing the loop between post-use waste and production. In contrast to linear models, which have a 'cradle-to-grave' flow of materials, this results in a circular flow of resources, resulting in a cradle-to-cradle flow. The author also emphasizes that recycling does not impact how quickly resources or things move through the system. Figure 4 illustrates the two different approaches.

Bocken et al. (2016) propose different circular design strategies as well as circular business model strategies for both slowing and closing the resource loop (figure 4).

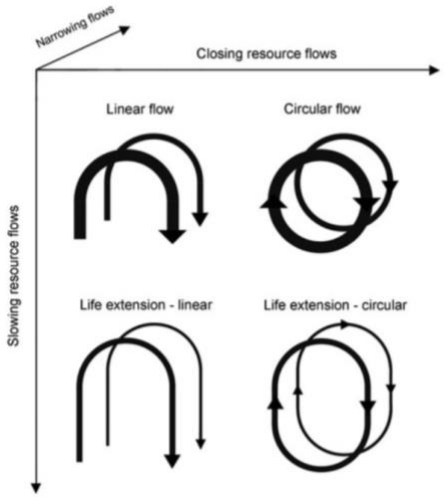

Figure 4: Categorization of linear and circular approaches for reducing resource use from Bocken (2016)

Design strategies for slowing resource loops involve extending the life of products and reducing the use of new natural resources. Designing for extended product life and designing for long life are the two key design concepts proposed by the authors.

Designing long-life products: Making products that can be utilized for a long time is a component of long-life product design. Design for attachment and trust, which refers to making things that customers will love, enjoy, or trust over extended periods, can help achieve this. A component of this technique, which entails developing products capable of forging empathetic alliances with users, is emotional durability. Designing for physical durability entails creating things that can withstand use and abuse without degrading. The choice of materials is crucial when designing for physical durability.

Design for product-life extension: By incorporating service loops, the design for product-life extension aims to create goods that can be used for a longer time. Reusing the product itself, performing maintenance, fixing problems, updating technology, or a mix of these are all examples of service loops. Creating items that can be readily maintained in good shape and repaired is known as design for maintenance and repair. After deterioration or damage, repair includes bringing the product back to its original state. By enhancing a product's value, efficacy, and upgradeability, designers may make it usable even as the environment changes. Creating products with components or interfaces that fit other products also makes it simpler to repair and update items, known as design for standardization and compatibility. Finally, developing goods and parts that can be readily detached and reassembled is known as design for dis- and reassembly.

The Cradle-to-Cradle design philosophy, which encourages a circular approach to product design, is one of the design solutions for closing resource loops.

Design strategies for closing resource loops involve design for a technological cycle, design for a biological cycle, and design for dis- and reassembly.

Design for a technological cycle is for 'products of service' or things that supply a service (as opposed to objects of consumption). When creating products with a technological cycle in mind, designers ensure that the materials can be continuously and safely recycled into new materials or products. The waste resources must be recycled into new material with qualities identical to those of the original material in order to maintain a constant flow of resources throughout the technological cycle.

Design for a biological cycle is for 'products of consumption' or items that are consumed or worn during use. Using this approach, food products are created with safe and healthy components that feed natural systems throughout their life cycles. Materials in a biological cycle are biodegraded to initiate a new cycle.

Finally, 'design for disassembly' is a technique that supports *design for a technological and biological cycle* and overlaps with it. It involves making sure that components and products can be readily disassembled and rebuilt. Separating elements that will go through distinct cycles, such as biological and technological, is also essential.

2.2.1.2 Business Model

Current knowledge provides several frameworks for building business actions and models regarding circularity. For example, Bocken et al. (2016) developed business model innovations to slow and close resource loops. Finally, a table summarizing the most relevant aspect discussed by the author is reproposed.

Business Model Strategies	Definition
Business model strategies for slowing loops	

Access and performance model	Providing the capability or services to satisfy user needs without needing to own physical products
Extending product value	Exploiting the residual value of products – from manufacture to consumers, and then back to manufacturing – or collection of products between distinct business entities
Classic long-life model	For instance, business models focused on delivering long-product life, supported by design for durability and repair.
Encourage sufficiency	Solutions that actively seek to reduce end-user consumption through principles such as durability, upgradability, service, warranties, and reparability and a non-consumerist approach to marketing and sales (e.g., no sales commissions)
Business model strategies for closing loops	
Extending resource value	Exploiting the residual value of resources: collection and sourcing of otherwise "wasted" materials or resources to turn these into new forms of value

Industrial Symbiosis	A process-oriented solution, concerned with using residual outputs from one process as feedstock for another process, which benefits from the geographical proximity of businesses

Table 1: Business model innovations to slow and close resource loops (Bocken et al. 2016)

Lewandowski et al. (2015) provided the foundation for the main principles of this new approach of doing CE, specifically:

(1) Design out waste/ Design for reuse
(2) Build resilience through diversity
(3) Rely on energy from renewable sources
(4) Think in systems
(5) Waste is food/ Think in cascades/ Share values (symbiosis)

The author also outlines that there is a need to change the business model components to develop a circular one. For example, reversed supply-chain logistics is one of the most crucial elements of circular business models.

One of the frameworks discussed by Lewandowski et al. (2015) is broken down into nine building blocks. From this framework, it has been implemented as a Business Model Canva of 11 elements. According to the author, the latter can be used to design circular business models since every business model is both linear and circular to some extent. This is because every business improves its operations, virtualizes products or processes, and/ or leverages some resources from material loops, introducing some CE principles, perhaps not consciously. In other words, a 100% circular business model does not exist yet, for both practical and physical reasons. These building components enable the establishment of a company model that adheres to the CE's tenets and include:

1. Value proposition: Identifying the unique value of the circular product or service.
2. Customer segments: Identifying the target customers for the circular product or service.
3. Channels: Utilizing effective distribution channels for the circular product or service.
4. Customer relationships: Building and maintaining relationships with customers who value circularity.
5. Revenue streams: Generating revenue from circular products or services.

6. Key resources: Utilizing suppliers and resources that support a CE.
7. Key activities: Improving performance and eco-friendliness through good housekeeping, process control, product design, and partnerships.
8. Key partnerships: Collaborating with partners who support circularity.
9. Cost structure: Reflecting financial changes made in other components of CBM.
10. Take-back system: Designing and implementing a system for materials recovery and reuse.
11. Adoption factors: Considering organizational capabilities and external factors that support the transition to a circular business model.

A particular aspect discussed by the author regarding the Business Model Canva is the reference to the employee role. For example, additional organizational changes may be necessary due to the cost structure, such as those related to materials use, energy consumption, and employee conduct. Moreover, regarding the adoption factor, the latter encompasses internal and external forces. Internal competencies involve intangible resources, such as corporate culture, expertise, transitional processes, and team motivation. These elements are based on fostering teamwork and human resources, using change management tools, tools, and methodologies for designing business models and using assessment models.

Another interesting framework discussed by the author and introduced by Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) comprises two categories of attributes: structural and cultural. Economic, environmental, social, and holistic traits, including triple-bottom-line performance, closed-loop systems, and stakeholder networks, are examples of structural qualities. On the other hand, economic, environmental, social, and holistic traits such as recognizing nature as a stakeholder, balancing stakeholder expectations, and limiting consumption are examples of cultural features. The framework is relevant and reproposed in this thesis since it strongly emphasizes the necessity of an all-encompassing strategy and stakeholder collaboration to realize sustainability objectives. Circularity is challenging to achieve without cooperation.

2.2.2 Enablers and Drivers

The United Nations (UN) published an article in 2021 entitled 'Shifting to a CE Essential to Achieving Paris Agreement Goals' regarding climate change. At the World Circular Economy Forum (WCEF) on the 15 of April 2021 the UN concluded that the transition towards a CE is essential to achieve the climate goals (United Nations Climate Change, 2021). CE is gaining traction (Garcia-Saravia Ortiz-de-Montellano, 2022) and is a trending concept (Kirchherr et al., 2017).

The CE offers many opportunities that counteract environmental degradation and depletion and ensure a sustainable future. According to Neves and Marques (2022), who, among other things, have examined the drivers of CE at the level of social, economic, and environmental factors, **education** is a key driver. People with higher education are more aware of environmental issues, so they are more likely to buy circular products, such as recycled ones, or recycle (Cerqueira et al. 2021). As the resistance from older individuals was founded towards new practices in the CE, who may be less motivated to adopt or adapt their ways of doing things, a change is seen in the **younger generation** as some are more conscious of the need for recirculation. A driver on an environmental level is aware and the regulation. The **awareness** is created by communicating environmental challenges, showing people the importance of their actions, and motivating people to change to more sustainable behavior. Kirchherr et al. (2018) pointed out that "highly visible actions and media campaigns can increase consumer interest and awareness of environmental action" (Neves & Marques, 2022. p.9), which is fundamental to moving towards a CE. The driver **regulation** should support the transition from the LE to the CE. In 2020 the European Commission adopted the so-called 'Circular Economy Action Plan' to reduce consumption within the EU. It aims to increase the manufacturing of sustainable products and empower consumers (European Commission, 2020).

2.2.3 Barriers and Obstacles

Despite the numerous benefits the CE possesses, and the many concepts being discussed, only a little progress and implementation have been achieved (Kirchherr et al. 2018). In a research study conducted by Kirchherr et al. (2018), it was possible to distinguish four barriers that the CE presents, specifically, cultural, regulatory, market, and technological barriers.

Cultural barriers, particularly those related to consumers and company culture, have been mentioned in previous research as significant hurdles to the widespread adoption of CE. However, Kirchherr et al. (2018) find that cultural barriers are the least mentioned category of CE barriers in the relevant literature. The research conducted reveals that cultural barriers are, in fact, one of the most pressing barriers to the implementation of the CE, with "Lacking consumer interest and awareness," "Hesitant company culture," and "Operating within a linear business model" being the top three cultural barriers identified.

Various authors have identified market barriers such as low virgin material prices and high upfront investment costs as obstacles to adopting CE business models. However, Kirchherr et al. (2018) show that market barriers are the second most pressing category of barriers, with low virgin material prices and high upfront investment costs being two of the five most pressing barriers.

Furthermore, low virgin material prices are the root cause of cultural barriers to adopting CE, as higher prices would make circular products more affordable and increase consumer and company interest.

While previous literature has highlighted **regulatory barriers** as a significant obstacle, Kirchherr et al. (2018) found that businesses and policymakers do not consider regulatory barriers as a primary challenge to achieving a CE. However, the interviewees raised relevant examples of regulatory barriers, such as restrictions on transporting waste across borders. Two market barriers identified in the study, namely low virgin material prices and high upfront investment costs for circular business models, are partly induced by governmental intervention. The authors propose targeted interventions, such as incorporating externalities into the price of resources and energy and providing financial support for circular business models, to accelerate the transition towards a CE.

While much-existing literature suggests that having the relevant technology in place is a prerequisite for the CE transition, Kirchherr et al. (2018) find that **technological barriers** do not emerge as core barriers in their survey of businesses and policymakers. While lacking circular design appears as a core CE barrier among the technological barriers, it doesn't rank high in the survey's most pressing barrier. This finding may be encouraging for those keen on a CE transition as it suggests that significant time may not be needed to accomplish a CE transition due to slow technological development.

Another barrier not to underestimate is discussed by Baxter et al. (2017), who argue that **contaminated interactions** in which materials or products that should be reused are polluted by undesired contaminants are one of the main obstacles to attaining a CE.
In closed-loop systems, secondary processing makes the problem worse by adding more contaminants. Such impurities present an implementation problem in a CE solution where the cycling of material flows delivers recurrent value and might increase the cost or complexity of the cycle or even invalidate it.
The author identifies three types of contaminated interaction, specifically: technical, systemic, and interaction. **Technical contamination** describes impurities in materials that are already present or that are introduced from a contaminating source and render the substance unusable. Technical contamination during processing can have an impact on how useful raw materials and finished goods are, as well as present threats to human health and the environment. They can be measured and evaluated objectively in comparison to a material's pure state, which is established by desired attributes specified by businesses and regulatory agencies. As materials lose value and are

downcycled to useful applications in a circular system, assessments of technical contamination become more crucial at each stage of use. **Systemic contamination** refers to impurities in the material flow inside a system. When materials are hard to separate near the end of their useful lives, systemic contamination can happen, resulting in impure material mixtures that are expensive and time-consuming to reprocess. The efficiency with which materials move inside a system is a concern with systemic contamination, a problem that gets worse as we progress toward a CE. Systemic contamination is a problem affecting material streams rather than specific goods, and supply-chain stakeholders are the ones most concerned about this type of contamination. Design for disassembly, which can reduce the dangers of systemic contamination, is a crucial component of the CE mindset.
Contaminated interaction is concerned with imperfections in the perceived value of an object as a result of prior use. A user-object interaction that differs from what was planned, whether a desired or normal engagement, is referred to as contaminated interaction. The behavioral issue with contaminated interaction is how user-object interaction and decision-making alter as different people use items and pass them between users. The contamination of the interaction can result from the transit of an object between many persons or environmental elements like ultraviolet deterioration. It can also result from a genuine or perceived alteration in the status of the thing. By adversely affecting individual decision-making, such as the aversion to remanufactured products that disqualifies such things from further circulation, contaminated interaction can operate as a barrier to the CE.
The analysis made by the author showed how contaminated interaction could lead to hindered circulation of material, downcycling, and disposal.
With downcycling, the author refers to when manufacturers and service providers may downcycle products to secondary applications and markets because of contamination interaction problems that cause products or substances to lose value. Because of this, manufacturers may downcycle their products to secondary markets and uses depending on consumer perception instead of an actual decrease in value. Sending goods to secondary marketplaces, which only pay a small portion of the original value, is another downcycling strategy.
According to the author, disposal can take place in two ways. First, people may decide not to buy or use certain items because they believe they are contaminated, which could result in an oversupply and eventual disposal in landfills. Second, items must be separated for proper disposal or recycling during EoL evaluations. Contaminated contact may cause sorting mistakes that result in the landfill disposal of otherwise circular items.
Regarding hindered circulation of material, early consumer decisions to steer clear of items might make it more difficult for businesses to determine market demand for circular business prospects, which can thwart the establishment or growth of such operations. For instance, if customers avoid

using cloth diaper services because they worry about contamination, this may restrict their ability to expand. Figure 5 shows how contaminated interaction can cause barriers to circular economy flows.

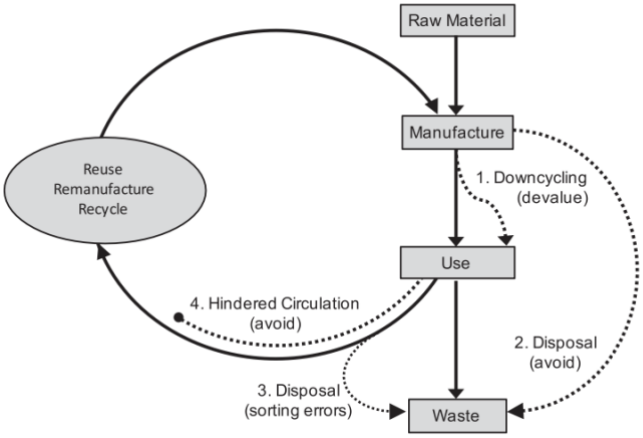

Figure 5: Barriers to circular material flows caused by contaminated interaction Baxter et al. (2017)

Moreover, Lewandowski et al. (2015) discuss three main challenges that must be overcome to transition from a linear to a circular business model. The first challenge is aligning the value proposition, including the take-back system, with customer segments. The second challenge is aligning the cost structure and revenue streams. The third challenge involves adapting and adopting circular business practices, which include making changes to operations and supply chains and dealing with regulatory compliance. These challenges require significant effort and coordination across the organization and involve various stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and regulatory bodies.

In addition, Smil (2013) identifies the following reasons that complicate circular practices: logistics, high costs, and negligible energy savings. Furthermore, long-life products and repairs are avoided because it is much cheaper to sell new products than to repair and maintain old ones, and short-life products are favored because they are cheaper (European Environment Agency, 2017).

Another fundamental challenge is that suitable business models must be designed that align with the CE, as Kircherr et al. (2017) have found that this aspect is neglected in many considerations but is essential to guiding the change.

2.3 Outdoor Textile Brands

Clothing and textiles make up a significant portion of the global economy and are essential to daily living. Most people wear clothes practically constantly; for many, wearing them is a significant way

to express their personality. Since production volumes have doubled over the previous 20 years, the global apparel market is currently worth USD 1.3 trillion and employs over 300 million people throughout the value chain (Morlet et al. 2017 & Ellen McArthur, 2017). However, today's clothing system pressures resources, pollutes the environment, and creates negative societal impacts.

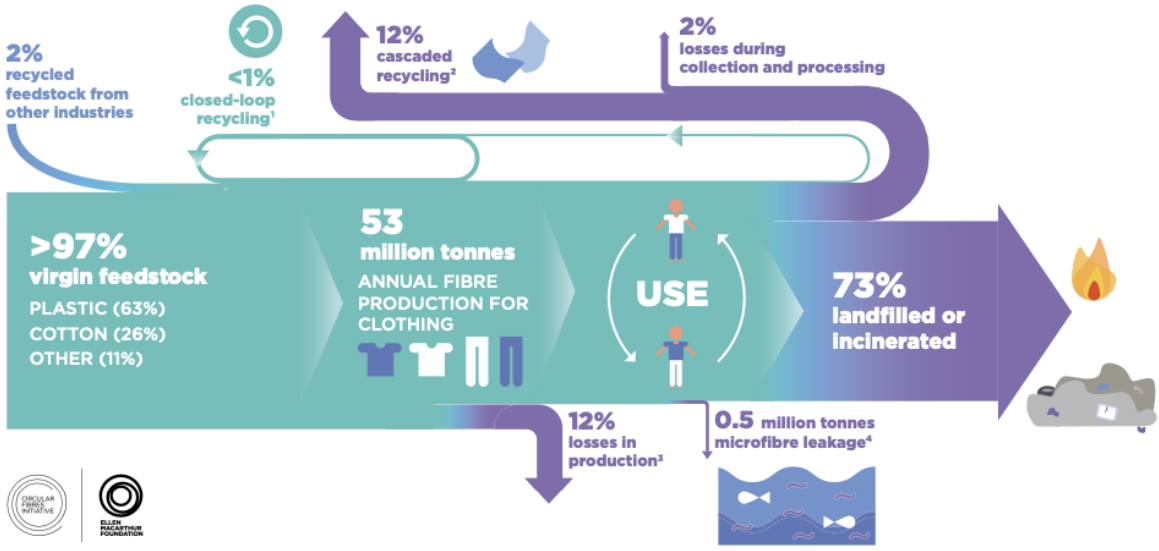

Figure 6: Global material flows for clothing in 2015 (Ellen Mc Arthur, 2017)

Fifty-three million tonnes of fibers are used annually for cloth production, and 73% of cloth is landfilled or incinerated after use. Less than 1% of the material used to make clothing gets recycled into new apparel, representing a material loss of more than USD 100 billion annually. Only 12% of the total material input in the clothing industry is recycled in some form after use, as shown in figure 6.

The prediction made by Ellen Macarthur Foundation by 2050 expects the negative effects of the textile sector to grow significantly. It forecasts the resource consumption to reach 300 million tonnes by 2050 and the textile industry's share of the carbon budget to reach the peak of 26% of CO2. Following the Ellen Mc Arthur prediction, the microfibers in the ocean will reach over 22 million tonnes added by 2050. The textile business uses non-renewable resources such as oil to make synthetic fibers, fertilizers to grow cotton, and chemicals to produce, dye, and finish fibers and textiles.

2.3.1 Circular Practices

As stated, in the fashion industry, non-renewable materials are mined to make clothes that are frequently worn for a short period before being thrown away, which is hugely detrimental to the

environment and society. In less than a year, more than half of the fast fashion that is produced is discarded. The current system harms the environment, depletes resources, and offers economic opportunity (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2017). Systemic problems are becoming apparent as the demand for apparel rises, and the existing industry trajectory is expected to have even more disastrous effects. Current harms to resources, the environment, and people could seriously threaten the industry's ability to make money in the future. The 'take-make-dispose' approach is used most frequently in the existing system for creating, distributing, and using garments. Clothes are commonly used for a bit before being discarded or burned, requiring enormous amounts of non-renewable resources to be extracted (Morlet et al. 2017).

The outdoor industry is heavily exposed to climate change and environmental damage impacts since its business models and offerings rely on an intact ecosystem. Due to extreme weather conditions in 2021, many outdoor experiences became impossible or were significantly impacted by drought, wildfire, or flooding, diminishing outdoor experiences. This ecosystem is fragile. Compared to other sectors, these events have encouraged outdoor businesses to take a more proactive approach to sustainability efforts and climate preservation (Gossen et al., 2022). For example, the author discusses the concept of sufficiency-oriented marketing, which promotes a shift from a focus on material possessions to experiences and encourages customers to reduce their overall consumption. Sufficiency-oriented consumption is defined by Gossen et al. (2022) as reducing the amount of reduction, shifting to a consumption mode that is less-resources intense, extending product life pans, and sharing products among individuals. These consumption behaviors include actively choosing not to purchase new goods, selecting goods of high quality that are made in socially and environmentally responsible ways, and using return systems or engaging in activities like clothing swaps or repairs to extend the life of goods. Outdoor businesses are increasingly promoting sufficiency-oriented consumption through marketing. However, it is impossible to predict the impact of sufficiency-oriented consumption, but the literature presents different results. Regarding sufficiency-oriented practices in the outdoor industry, scientific knowledge about specific consumption practices is lacking. Nevertheless, the research presents opportunities for more sustainable consumption. Companies within the outdoor industry have the potential to act as role models and drivers for change.

Examples showing the commitment of outdoor textile branding in providing CE solutions will be presented further on in the following chapters, demonstrating the commitment to the engagement of CE practices as well as in the initial production. Researchers claimed that the CE has the potential to transform the textile and apparel sector into one that is more ecologically friendly and sustainable.

However, this field is still rather unexplored, and there is a need for more research to fully understand the potential and the impact that this practice has (Jia, 2020).

2.3.2 Enablers and Challenges for Circularity

Jia et al. (2020) summarize the existing research on CE in the textile and apparel industry. The author systematically reviews academic papers on the topic, focusing on the strategies, challenges, and opportunities for achieving a CE in this sector. **Drivers** are identified in organizational, consumer, and institutional fields to build sustainable supply chain management (SSCM). Organizational drivers, availability of information, employee involvement/motivation, and collaboration among organizations are examples of some of the sub-drivers named by the author. Moreover, community pressure, customer awareness of green initiatives, funding from the government, and reusing and recycling materials and packaging are sub-drivers of consumers. As regards the institutional driver, Jia et al. (2020) identify environmental collaboration with the supplier as the most important sub-driver. More frequent **enablers** include collaboration, pilot projects, educating and energizing people, and tracking technology. Jia et al. (2020) also identified, on the other hand, the **barrier** to building an SSCM toward CE. Organizational, financial, and policy barriers have been identified. Company policies, lack of appropriate performance metrics, lack of training and education, lack of strategic planning, and lack of training and education are some of the sub-drivers named by the author as regards the organizational barrier. As follows, financial barriers, the lack of financial support, the lack of working capital, and the lack of information and technological system are some of the financial barriers identified by the author. Finally, the lack of systems, regulations, and enforcement laws are identified as sub-drivers of the policy barrier. The author finally proposes a framework that offers a synthesis and an understanding of how barriers, drivers, and performance all work together to shape CE practices. Another major **challenge** for outdoor textile brands was confirmed to render CE practices profitable. The challenges include a lack of design for circularity expertise, difficulties converting complicated products to circular practices, issues with reverse logistics, limited consumer demand, and inadequately developed technological solutions.

In addition, Filho et al. (2022) mention the complex and long supply chain in textile manufacturing, which makes it difficult to turn every step towards circularity.

Research showed challenges and enablers of CE practices for outdoor brands, aiming to identify which CE practices are best suited for the outdoor sporting goods industry (Fuchs et al. 2022). The authors discuss the challenges and enablers of CE practices. Specifically, reduce, reuse, repair, rental, and use circulating materials that the outdoor sector faces when transitioning to a CE. In addition, the authors conducted interviews with stakeholders in the Outdoor Sports and Gear Industry to identify

the internal and external challenges as well as enablers that companies face in implementing CE practices.

Furthermore, within outdoor textile brands, the culture and team's commitment to sustainable practices is high, such as the willingness of managers to deepen their knowledge in that field, making it easier to implement CE (Govindan & Hasanagic, 2018). This internal motivation does not just happen internally. Externally too, CE offers the potential to attract consumers and generate deeper consumer loyalty (Agyemang et al. 2018).

On the other hand, outdoor industry-specific enablers are identified, such as design for durability and repairability and the need to link the degree of circularity to product types (Jia et al. 2020). The brands focus on extending the lifespan of their products through durability and repairability and encourage customers to engage in responsible consumption.

3. Theoretical Framework

To make this research analytically generalizable, which will be explained in depth in the following paragraph, this research uses a designed theoretical lens to observe and analyze the object of interest. The designed theoretical lens is the framework that is presented in the following. The theoretical lens helps to explore, analyze, and answer the stated research question.

3.1 Brand Identity

In today's global economy, consumers are faced with a multitude of choices between products and services offered by multinational, local, and regional firms. Consumers want consistent quality and reliability, which underlines the importance of brands and corporate reputation as signals and guarantors (Greyser, 2009). Brands are highly valuable, intangible assets that influence consumer behavior and produce added benefits for the business (Kapferer, 2012). According to Kapferer (2012), brand identity is stable and long-lasting as it is tied to the brand roots and fixed parameters. It entails the set of brand associations that embody the brand's aim, meaning, and uniqueness. According to Melin (2002), the purpose of brand identity is to provide an emotional added value to the brand. A clear corporate brand identity offers direction and purpose to a brand. It enhances the standing of products, aids in recruiting new employees, and helps protect a firm's reputation in times of trouble. (Greyser & Urde, 2019). In social psychology, identity refers to a unique set of characteristics, beliefs, values, roles, and experiences that define an individual or a group. It encompasses the sense of self and how individuals perceive and express themselves concerning others and the world around them. Conversely, this distinguishes oneself from others (Coulmas, 2019). This also applies to brands. With the growing competition in a globalized market and the number of daily purchase decisions and options consumers face, a strong brand can differentiate a company from its competitors, contributing to its economic success and growth (Kapferer, 2012).

3.1.1 The Corporate Brand Identity

A corporate identity is “a firm’s strategically planned purposeful presentation of itself” (Westcott Alessandri, 2001, p.177). According to Urde (2013, p. 742), "A well-defined corporate brand identity is the bedrock of the management and overall long-term building of such a brand". Urde (2013) also

mentions that a corporate brand has an organization behind it and that the company more likely talks about itself as 'we'. A corporate brand can be used to build a strategy (Urde, 2013) and contributes to brand performance (Gromark & Melin, 2011). In addition, management can support how internal and external stakeholders perceive a brand (Urde, 2013).

3.1.2 The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

The corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM) from Urde (2013) helps define corporate brand identity and the corresponding elements. It is divided into nine components on three levels (see figure7).

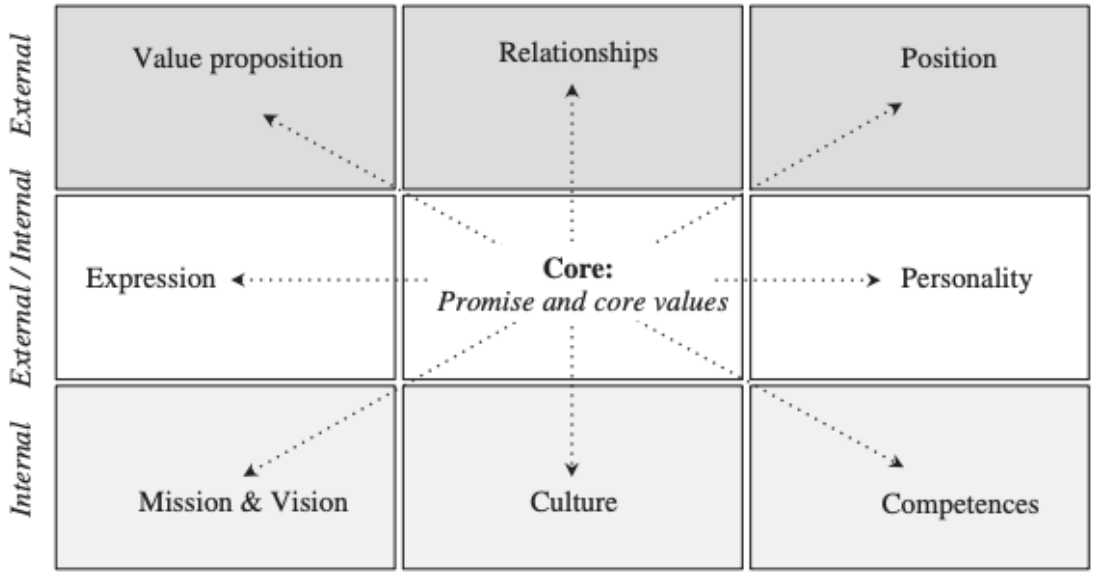

Figure 7: The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013)

The base one shown is the internal level of the sender, which is characterized by 'mission & vision', 'culture', and 'competences' and focuses on an organizational value. The mission defines the reason and motivation for the existence of a brand (Collin & Porras, 1998), while the vision gives the inspiration to achieve a goal in the future (de Chernatony, 2010). The culture is reflected in the attitudes, values, and beliefs (Hatch & Schultz, 2011), like how employees work together and what they believe in. Finally, 'competence is showing in what they are good at (Urde, 2013).

At the head, the external level, that of the receiver, consists of the three components 'value proposition', 'relationship', and 'position'. The value is the transmission to customers and stakeholders. First, the brand sends an image according to how they want to be perceived. Next, the 'value proposition' is communicated to customers and stakeholders (Frow & Payne, 2011). The goal is a purchase decision based on a 'relationship' between the brand and the customer (Aaker, 2004), which

is the next element. With the 'position' a brand defines its place in the market and the consumer's mind. Competitive advantages influence this.

In the center are the three elements 'expression', 'personality', and 'core', both external and internal. The 'personality' shows characteristics and qualities derived from the employees' personalities as brand representatives. The 'expression' is about how the brand communicates, including all verbal and visual ways like the tone of voice or the logotype (Mollerup, 1997). The so-called brand core is the heart of corporate brand identity and consists of a promise and core values supporting it. The brand core is crucial as it gives management "focus, guidance, and coordination" (Urde, 2013, pp. 752). To achieve coherence of the corporate brand identity, the core must reflect all elements and vice versa.

Four axes run through the matrix, always connecting two opposing elements, except the 'core'. In the middle row, the axis ranges from 'personality', i.e., the individual character, to 'expression', i.e., how a brand communicates verbally and visually. "This personality is, to a large extent, shaped by the way it is expressed (Bernstein, 1986, p. 752). There is also a correspondence between 'relationship' and 'culture' because culture influences the actions and behaviors of employees, which, in turn, contribute to the organization's reputation. Finally, a diagonal axis connects the position with the mission and vision because there is a need for alignment between why the brand exists and how it is positioned.

3.2 The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix

The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (CBIRM) (see figure 8) is based on the corporate brand identity matrix but added the important reputation factor. While identity occurs internally and is expressed in managers' understanding of the organization, reputation is external and is the stakeholders' perception (Roper & Fill, 2012; Balmer, 2012). It has already been discussed that the brand wants to send an image out, which can be defined as a current perception that only lasts the short term. In contrast, reputation is "an accumulation of images over time" that lasts long-term (Urde & Greyser, 2016, p. 95). This "collection of opinions and judgments" (Urde & Greyser, 2016, p.96) is based on the company's actions (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004).

The CBIM consists of nine elements defining the brand's identity (see figure 7). All these elements are connected in pairs through arrows (see figure 8). Furthermore, the nine parts are surrounded by communication which illustrates that communication is essential to achieve an appropriate reputation.

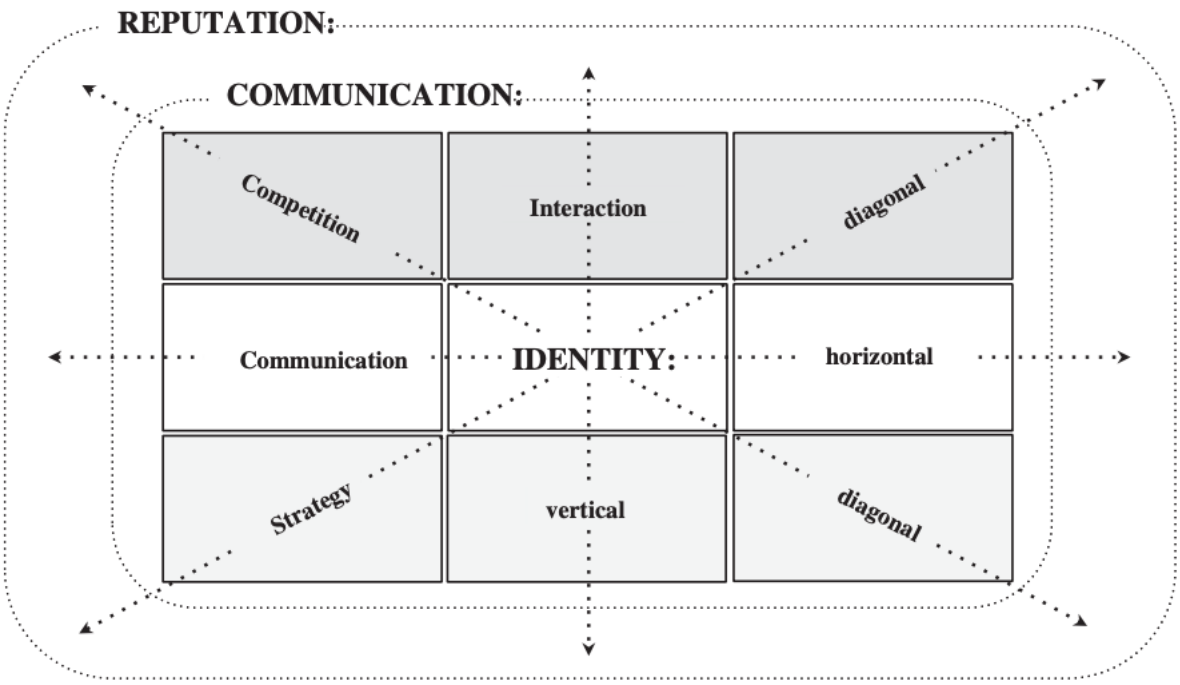

Figure 8: The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2016)

When adding reputation to the framework, one must know that the most cited elements are credibility, performance, responsibility, and trustworthiness (Urde & Greyser, 2016). Other elements that can also have an impact on reputation are "product and service quality, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, comprehensive reputation, customer service, market position, innovation, profitability, corporate social responsibility and vision, and leadership" (Roper & Fill, 2012, p. 42). The CBIRM adds these four different axes to systematically explore "the relations between pairs of corporate brand identity and reputation elements" (Urde & Greyser, 2016, p. 104) (see figure 8 & 9).

The **communication horizontal** points from the identity element ‘expression’ and the reputation element ‘recognisability' to the identity element 'personality' and the reputation element 'credibility' (see figure 9, box with a blue and orange background). While the 'personality' is about human characteristics, the 'credibility' asks how believable and convincing they are. The opposite is the 'expression', which defines how the organization communicates and what uniqueness lies in it so that the brand guarantees 'recognisability’ in being visible, distinctive, and consistent.

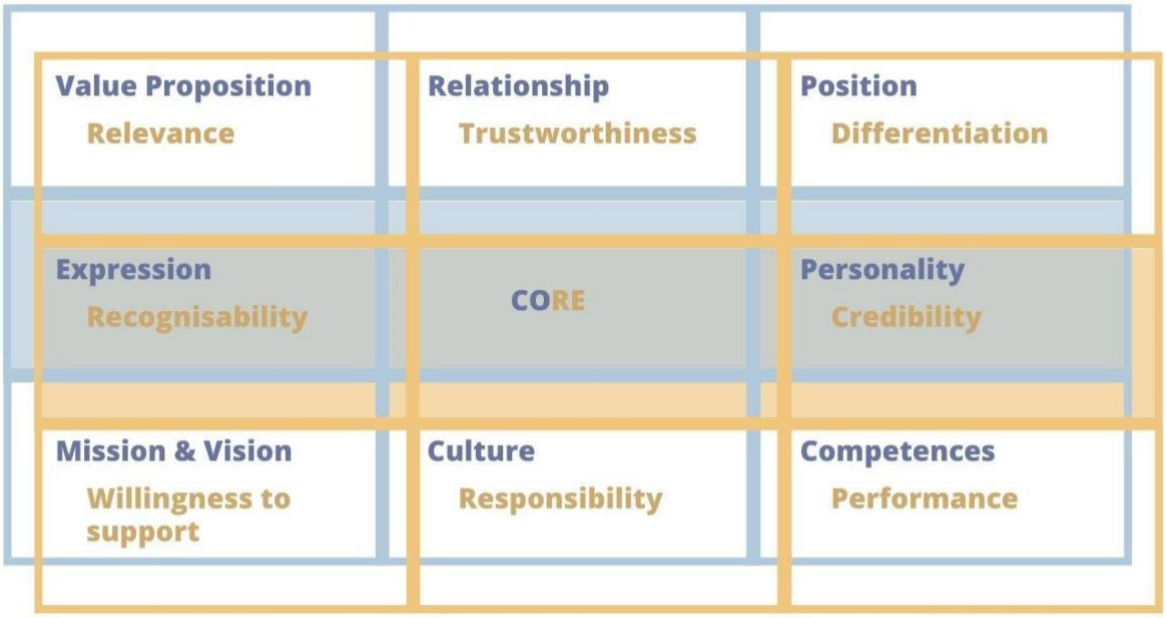

Figure 9: Own figure based on Urde & Greyser (2016)

Effective communication supports creating a shared understanding of the organization's identity and building credibility and trust among stakeholders and customers. On the other hand, reputation is the perception and evaluation of an organization's brand image in the eyes of its stakeholders and customers. It is influenced by the organization's actions, behaviors, and communication. A strong and positive corporate brand identity that is effectively communicated can contribute to a favorable reputation by aligning stakeholders' perceptions with the desired brand image. Clear and consistent communication that aligns with the corporate brand identity helps build a positive reputation by enhancing stakeholders' and customers' trust, confidence, and loyalty. On the other hand, inconsistent or ineffective communication can lead to reputational risks and negative perceptions. For this reason, brand identity, communication, and management must be considered holistically.

The CBIRM allows uncovering an imbalance between brand identity and reputation in different ways that represent different combinations of brand identity and reputation: 1) Strong identity & strong reputation - the organization has a well-defined and consistently communicated identity that aligns with the perception of externals which results in a positive reputation, 2) Strong identity & weak reputation - the reputation is not aligned with the desired image which indicates a disconnection between the communicated identity and the external perception, 3) Weak identity & strong reputation - the brand identity is unclear or weak, but the reputation is positive and 4) Weak identity & weak reputation - the brand is struggling with both, the identity and the reputation which is a challenge.

Since the framework (see figure 9) is used to analyze brand identity and communication (box with a blue and orange background), the three other axes are briefly explained for completeness but are not applicable.

The **strategy diagonal** connects the lower left corner 'Mission and Vision' as the brand element, ' willingness-to-support' as the reputation element, and the upper right corner 'position' as the brand element and 'differentiation' as the reputation element. The 'mission and vision' and the 'willingness-to-support' are about engagement. The first defines what an organization wants to engage, in which direction it wants to go, and the second, how employees are engaged to achieve this. The 'position' determines how the brand wants to be perceived and what it stands for, while the 'differentiation' is about how strong the position is in the market.

The **competition diagonal** connects the 'value proposition' as the identity element and the 'relevance' as the reputation element both on the left-down corner with the identity element 'competence' and the reputation element 'performance'. Competence is about what the organization is good at and how to build a competitive advantage. Together with the 'value proposition' as the second identity element that defines the key offerings, they form an overall promise. On the reputation side, 'relevance' asks about the meaningfulness of the values, and the 'performance' about the consistency of an organization's quality.

The **vertical interaction** stretches from the middle top with 'relationship' as identity and 'trustworthiness' as a reputation element to the middle bottom with 'culture' as identity and 'responsibility' as a reputation element. The 'culture' is described by the attitude of an organization and which ways employees work and behave. The commitment and accountability is described by the 'responsibility'. On the opposite side, the 'relationship' is about the connection between the organization and customers or non-customer stakeholders. At the same time, 'trustworthiness' proves dependability on words and actions from an organization.

3.3 Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

In the CBIRM by Urde and Greyser (2016), communication is not dealt with in depth. Nevertheless, as it is part of the research question of this thesis, logos, ethos, and pathos will now be briefly and concisely discussed, as these enable to analyze in depth how and what brands communicate sustainability and circularity.

Philosophy, sociology, and rhetoric started early to investigate the connections between language, politics, and rhetoric (Wróbel, 2015). The three concepts of logos, ethos, and pathos can be traced

back to Aristotle's Rhetoric. Aristotle defines three modes of persuasion: "the first kind depending on the character of the speaker, the second kind on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind, and only the third kind being that of providing proof, or more precisely, the apparent proof conveyed by the words of the speech itself“ (Wróbel, 2015, p.409). If the character of a speaker and the way the speech is delivered match, credibility is created (Aristotle, 2006). In order to be persuasive, the following three conditions are needed: "The speaker is to be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand emotions—that is, to be able not only to name and describe them but to derive their causes and how they can be excited" (Wróbel, 2015, p.409). Logos is about logic and reason and appears in rational arguments, facts, or logical reasoning to support an argument. Logical frameworks persuade the audience and encourage critical thinking. Ethos is about credibility and ethics, which is achieved by a speaker's expertise, trustworthiness, and moral character, which results in trust from the audience about the speaker's expertise. Finally, pathos appeals to emotions and feelings, creating a connection with the audience. As a result, the audience feels empathy and identifies with the subject matter (Aristotle, 2006).

Plett (2001) goes one step further and develops different styles and techniques into logos, ethos, and pathos. Logos is about achieving common sense and is divided into the 1) informative docere (to instruct) - emotion-free and objective information about an issue and the 2) argumentative probare (to prove) - Scientific data is used to support credibility for the underlying logical argumentation and the 3) logical-ethical monere (to warn) which is about educating the audience on a moral level. Plett (2001) divides ethos into the 1) purposeful technique conciliare (to conciliate) to persuade the recipients to guide the audience behavior towards a particular direction and the contrary 2) purposeless technique delectare (to delight) to give enjoyment and entertainment to the audience. According to Plett (2021) pathos has a style called movere (to move), which expresses strong emotions through the technique of a dramatic style.

3.4 Strategic Management

For companies to become ecologically sustainable, it is necessary to connect this with strategic management. Hart (1997) first found this in literature as he devised a sustainability vision for businesses but did not get specific about it. Looking at the literature on ecological sustainability, McDonough and Braungart (2002) say that products should not impact nature's cycles and its ability to decompose waste. Stead and Stead (2004, 2010) focus more on manufacturing and the value chain.

Close-the-loop and cradle-to-cradle cycles are used to avoid damage to nature. As strategic management is largely oriented towards traditional and linear business models and the focus is only now shifting more and more towards sustainability, the connection between ecological sustainability and strategic management is lagging.

Borland et al. (2016) designed a framework that is an intersection between strategic management and strategies for ecological sustainability. It is fundamental first to understand what a traditional strategy looks like before stepping into the framework from Borland et al. (2016) in more detail. In addition, according to Borland et al. (2016), there is a hierarchy between the different strategies. Thus, the transitional and transformative strategies he designed stand above the traditional strategy since they have an increasingly less negative impact on the environment. The processes within traditional strategies are linear and static (Teece, 2007). The meaning of this was already explained earlier in the literature review under 2.1 Linear economy. According to Borland et al. (2016), "this linear process {...} can be described as an open loop because it does not close the circular loop of life and leaves used products as waste {...}" (p.298). The business economy and the natural ecosystem are separated and coexist without interaction.

3.4.1 Transitional Strategy

In contrast, the **transitional strategy** includes eco-efficiency (Donough & Baumgart, 2002). Eco-efficiency is a concept that focuses on reducing the environmental impact of economic activity by making it more efficient. Eco-efficiency can be achieved by maximizing the use of resources while minimizing waste and pollution. This approach, which limits damage, involves using cleaner production methods, product design that reduces waste and pollution, and adopting new technologies that improve resource use efficiency.

The Borland et al. (2016) framework represents the transitional strategy by the five transitional Rs: reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, and regulate. Reducing means using fewer materials and consuming fewer products. When a product is used as long as possible, and materials and products are fully applied, it is called reuse. The demand is also reduced when a repair of products is happening, and the product's life is extended. When a product can neither be reused nor repaired, recycling is possible. The product does not become waste after use but is broken down into individual components that can be used again to produce new products. This reuse avoids landfill and waste incineration. The fifth transitional R is called regulate, where there are limitations on the company's freedom of action that are enforced by law or regulation. Companies are more reactive than proactive in doing the minimum

requirements. The disadvantage of transitional strategies is that "{...} these assumptions do not fundamentally change how firms make products or how consumers dispose of them" (Borland et al. 2016, p. 298). For example, the fibers lose quality during recycling, and even recycled products become waste. Baxter et al. (2017) present recycled textiles as contaminated interact. The authors argue that "recycled textiles, even when taken down the fiber and fundamentally reprocessed, reportedly cause disgust and are not being bought" (p. 511). Another disadvantage is that recycling is energy-intensive, so it should be the lowest option of circular practices. Borland et al. (2016) criticize that "businesses that use transitional strategies still operate within a closed business system with very little interaction, interrelationship, or responsibility toward society or natural ecosystems" (p.298). All five transitional Rs only come into play after the products are already produced but do not consider raw materials and the environment from the first step on (Martin & Kemper, 2012).

3.4.2 Transformational Strategy

The **transformational strategy** takes a different approach and does not out-rule the transitional strategy but goes further as it avoids creating waste or toxic chemicals that nature cannot break down and relies on using safe biomaterials. In the framework of Borland et al. (2016), this is visualized by the transformational 5Rs rethink, reinvent, redesign, redirect, and recover, which draws on the cradle-to-cradle perspective of Mc Donough and Braungart (2002). In their book, the authors advocate for a paradigm shift in how businesses approach production and consumption to create a sustainable and regenerative economy. As mentioned earlier, cradle-to-cradle eliminates waste and proposes a circular approach where materials and resources are continuously cycled and reused, creating a closed-loop system. When discussing rethink, which is one of the 5Rs (Borland et al. 2016), the product is questioned and reduced to its function to fulfill it in a new, environmentally conscious way. A more creative approach is taken with the R reinvent, exploring entirely new concepts through innovation, technology, and alliances between diverse partners. Another R is a redesign to ensure the new concepts meet the ecological requirements. Redesign means that materials are chosen to generate no waste or toxic substances. Redirect describes how to deal with products at the end of their lifecycle when they become waste. A distinction must be made between waste materials that have to be returned to the industry in the form of pollutants to protect the environment. And between biodegradable materials that can be returned to nature without causing any harm. The last of the 5 Rs also occurs at the end of a product's lifetime. Materials are recovered so that they can be used again in production, and their value is preserved. The cycle is closed and can be run through an infinite number of times. Only when consumer demand increases do new resources, need to be mined. In

summary, the transformational 5Rs follow cycles like cradle-to-cradle and close-the-loop and mimic natural cycles like a leaf falling from a tree to the ground, being decomposed, and the tree being able to reabsorb the resulting nutrients to form new leaves. Achieving this requires a sustainable vision pursued by managers over the long term, with sustainability being the primary consideration (Hart, 1997). In Borland et al. (2016), managers are the ones who can rethink, reinvent, redesign, redirect, and recover. The advantages of this transformational strategy are that fewer materials are required, and costs can therefore be reduced. In addition, companies can communicate the actual sustainability of their products without making hollow claims. Furthermore, a transformational strategy enables new business models that move away from the pure sale of products and towards a more circular direction, for example, rental.

3.4.3 Ecocentric Dynamic Capabilities

The transitional and transformational strategies are completed by the five **ecocentric dynamic capabilities (EDC**: sensing, seizing, reconfiguring (Teece, 2007), remapping, and reaping (Borland et al. 2016). Being proactive on sustainability can be a competitive advantage (Esty and Charnovitz, 2012). According to Teece (2007), dynamic capabilities consist of a process of three steps: "the capacity to (1) sense and shape opportunities and threats, (2) to seize opportunities, and (3) to maintain competitiveness", like "embrace the enterprise's capacity to shape the ecosystem it occupies" (pp.1319-1320).

The EDC works together with the transformational 5 Rs and leads step by step to ecocentric leadership. According to Borland et al. (2016), "Ecological sustainability is ecocentric: It puts all species on an equal footing and thereby includes the balance of nature and human development in perpetuity" (p. 295). This process starts with rethink, which is connected to sensing, and we follow reinvent together with seizing, redesign with reconfiguring, redirect with remapping, and lastly, recover with reaping. Ecocentric leadership results in eco-effectiveness, competitive advantages and innovation and collaboration, which in turn leads to a sustainable vision.

As EDC refers to the strategic and organizational capabilities that enable organizations to effectively integrate ecological sustainability into their core business practices and adapt to environmental changes, they offer a great opportunity to not have an impact on the environment at all. The EDC involves a proactive and comprehensive approach to embedding ecological sustainability into the organization's strategic goals, operational processes, and decision-making, which is why they have to be part of an organization's identity. The concept of EDC highlights the strategic importance of

integrating ecological sustainability into organizational practices and building the capacity to navigate and succeed in a rapidly changing environmental landscape.

Borland et al. (2016) summarize the three different strategies as follows:

> "Transformational strategies are progressive, developmental, and dynamic, as well as positive toward ecosystems, human development, and welfare. Ecocentric transformational strategies require a change in ethos, comprehension, and core values, moving toward sustainability through heightened understanding, combined with an identification with and desire to change things for the future. They are not transitional strategies, focused on incremental change created by market forces." (p. 305).

While when managers follow regulations and standards as a result of increasing pressure is part of the transitional strategy, the transformational strategy would include to rethink, redesign, et cetera (Schaefer, 2007).

Management and communications will be proven as enablers to achieve one of the three mentioned strategies. Communication plays a crucial role in integrating ecological sustainability into an organization's practices as a requirement for EDC. Managing EDC involves strategic decision-making and organizational practices that prioritize ecological sustainability. Management must provide leadership and create a culture that values and supports sustainability goals. This practice includes setting clear sustainability objectives, allocating resources for sustainable initiatives, integrating sustainability into performance measures, and aligning sustainability with overall business strategies. Effective management ensures that EDC is embedded throughout the organization and integrated into its day-to-day operations.

3.5 Summary

The theoretical lens that is used to examine the topic of this thesis is a combination of the already introduced theories. The CBIM (Urde, 2013) and the CBIRM (Urde & Greyser, 2016) lay the foundation as shown in figure 10 to get a full understanding of the identity of each outdoor textile brand. Attention is paid to the shaded level, as this deals with communication and this thesis wants to find out what and how circularity is communicated. Above, a triangle composed of logos, ethos, and pathos is placed to study communication in depth. Phatos is about expression, so it's on the left

above the element ‘expression’ and ‘recognisability’ from the matrixes. As logos and ethos both create credibility, they are positioned on the right side above the elements ‘personality’ and ‘credibility’. Then it will be examined whether circular practices of outdoor textile brands can emerge from this basis and what actions are already in place. The 5Rs already presented make it possible to divide the different practices into transitional, transformational and ecocentric dynamic capabilities. The latter is shown at the top (see figure 10) because, according to Borland et al. (2016), it is the most desirable as it has the lowest impact on the environment.

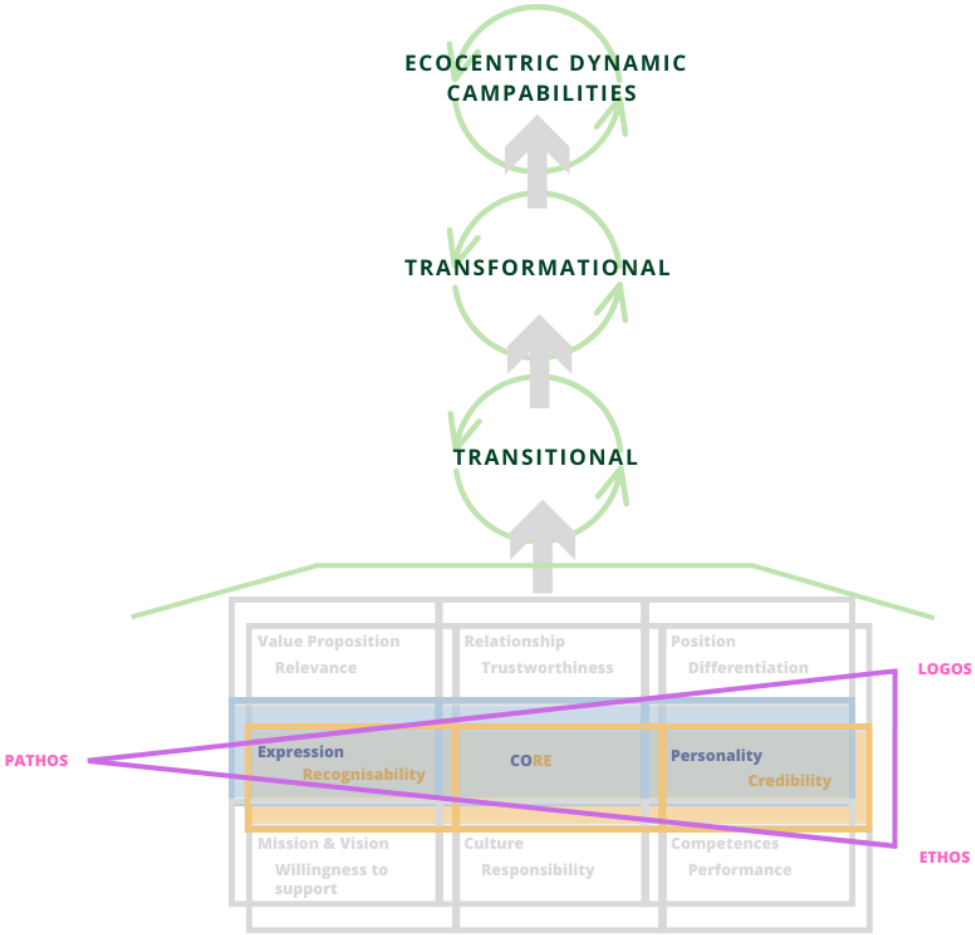

Figure 10: Theoretical Lens (own figure based on Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser, 2016; Borland et al. 2016 and Aristotle, 2006)

4. Methodology

This thesis examines the management steps already being taken in different outdoor textile brands that are circular and thus have the least possible or no impact on the environment. When circular practices are applied, it is examined which enablers and drivers and barriers and obstacles can be found. Furthermore, this study wants to analyze the brand identity of different outdoor textile brands to analyze how the brands identify themselves and what role the connection to nature and sustainable action play in this. The communication of the outdoor textile brands is then examined in detail to find out what and how they are communicating about sustainability and circularity and whether this corresponds to the brand identity. And on the other hand, to what extent can communication support the implementation of circular processes internally and externally. Finally, all three aspects of brand identity, communication, and managerial actions are considered together to find out how they can help an outdoor textile brand to be more sustainable and circular.
The current situation is problematic due to the rapidly progressing climate change, and the countermeasures undertaken so far can also be complex. Due to this rapid change and the associated damage to nature, there is an urgent need for action that has been proven to contribute positively to combating climate change. This research contributes to understanding the actions of brands and shows ways to counteract this change. This research contributes new knowledge in CE practices within the outdoor textile segment connected with brand identity, communication, and management. It is relevant since it gives a status quo of how far circular practices are already implemented in outdoor textile brands to become more sustainable.

The following section will cover the methodological part of the thesis, which means “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome” (Crotty, 1998, p.3). The following paragraph first focuses on the research design, followed by a philosophical view. Then the method of investigation was adopted to answer the research question and how the collected data were analyzed. In addition, the quality of the research and its limitations are discussed. As Crotty (1998) suggests, any research process should consider methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology, as discussed below. The foundation of this research is following the four elements that inform one another and follow the order of epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods (Crotty, 1998, Figure 1, p.4).

4.1 Research Approach

Different research philosophies “refer to systems of beliefs and assumptions about knowledge development” (Saunders et al. 2019, p.159). Different research philosophies also include assumptions about how the world is perceived and thus also shape research. That is why it is essential to classify this research in the research philosophy (Saunders et al. 2019).

The research approach for this study will be covered in the following section, following the ‘Research Onion’ proposed by Saunders et al. (2019, p.130). This research works within the social constructivist approach's scientific, philosophical paradigms, ontology, and epistemology. Ontology refers to assumptions regarding the nature of reality. In contrast, epistemology refers to assumptions regarding knowledge, what qualifies as appropriate, valid, and legitimate knowledge, and how information is shared with others (Saunders et al., 2019). Epistemology operates with the nature of knowledge (Hamlyn, 1995). It provides “a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p.10). On the other hand, “ontology is the study of being” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). While ontology wants to understand what it is, epistemology wants to understand what it means to know (Crotty, 1998).

The philosophical assumptions arising from the methods of epistemology and ontology are divided into subjective and objective. Assumptions from the arts and humanities are included in subjectivism, which claims that social reality is created by social actors' perceptions and subsequent acts (people). The concept of subjectivism embraces the concept of social constructivism, where reality is formed intersubjectively through social interaction in which social actors produce partially shared meanings and realities (Saunders et al. 2019).

Morgan and Smircich (1980) underline the importance of drawing attention to the ground assumptions of social theory and research because of different grounds for knowledge and resulting different conceptions of social reality. They argue that a continuum exists between subjectivist and objectivist approaches within ontological assumptions, assumptions about human nature, and epistemological stances. This results in various assumptions reflected by different worldviews, which implies different knowledge bases about the social world. Knowledge thus changes along the indicated continuum between objectivity and subjectivity. Moving to the very edge of the objectivist view within the epistemological stance, the researcher needs to examine the nature of relationships among the elements, and there is a need to understand and map out the social structure. Moving

entirely to the opposite edge, the subjectivist view, it is essential to understand the process "through which human beings concretize their relationship to their world" (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 494). In addition, Morgan and Smircich (1980) raise the question of whether any form of knowledge can ever be obtained free of subjective construction since this is always experienced or perceived by a person.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) analyze the four paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and related ideological positions, and constructivism. A research paradigm for the authors describes methods that guide the researcher. When analyzing the four paradigms, Guba and Lincoln (1994) use three questions about ontology, epistemology, and method, which also help to understand the terms better. The authors developed 1) The ontological question: What is the form and nature of reality, and, therefore, what can be known about it? 2) The epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower, and what can be known? and 3) The methodological question: How can the inquirer (would-be knower) determine what they believe can be known? (p. 108). Twelve approaches result from the interfaces between the four paradigms and the three questions. Positivism and ontology are based on realism, meaning a reality exists based on natural laws. Positivism and epistemology consist of dualists and objectivists, where the researcher and the researched object are independent without any influence in both directions. Methodology and positivism are described as experimental and manipulative as questions or hypotheses are verified by testing them. Postpositivism and ontology are titled with critical realism because apprehending reality can never be reached, even though critically examined. Postpositivism and epistemology result in a modified dualist/ objectivist approach, focusing on so-called external guardians of objectivity, such as critical traditions and the critical community. If the findings fit to preexisting knowledge and the same results are found repeated, it is probably true. Positivism and methodology are modified experimental/ manipulative and about falsifying hypotheses. Critical Theory and Related Ideological Positions combined with ontology result in historical realism, where reality is built over time and shaped by social, political, and cultural factors. Critical Theory et al. and epistemology are titled transactional and subjectivist. The researcher is influencing the researched object, and a connection exists between the two. Critical theory et al. and methodology are based on a dialogic and dialectical approach. This leads to a dialogue between the researcher and the object to be researched.
The interface between constructivism and ontology is described as relativist, where different realities are constructed and shared among individuals. Constructivism and epistemology are transactional and subjectivist methods where the researcher and the researched object are linked with the result that the findings are created within the investigation proceeds. Constructivism and methodology consist

of hermeneutical and dialectical. As social constructions are variable and individual, there is the need to interact between and among researchers to get a consensus construction. Each position has a consequence on the research and the interpretation of findings.

Within a range of epistemologies, this study belongs to social constructivism, where social phenomena are constantly changing since social interactions between actors are an ongoing process (Saunders et al. 2019) and "there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Morgan and Smircich (1980) classify Reality as Social Construction on its already explained continuum on the subjective approaches side. Within ontological assumptions, as already mentioned, the social world is a continuous process, and individuals build their meaningful definitions. These arise from symbolic modes like languages, actions, or routines, which lead to shared but multiple realities. Consequently, to comprehend what is happening or how realities are experienced, a researcher must thoroughly examine a situation, considering its historical, geographical, and socio-cultural settings (Saunders et al. 2019). Human beings create their realities and are not only interpreting their situations (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

When choosing an approach to theory development, the reasoning depends on the research philosophy, the research's emphasis, and the research topic's nature (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This research adopts an abductive approach to theory development, combining deductive and inductive methods. With deduction, researchers start from a theory and test it, while inductive researchers develop ideas from the first collected data (Suddaby, 2006). When using abductive reasoning, initially, a 'surprising fact' (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010) is identified, serving as a solution and not a prerequisite. Subsequently, possible prerequisites are established that could have led to this solution. The conclusion is also true if all prerequisites are accurate (Saunders et al. 2019). With the abductive method, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions. It allows generating new theories or changing existing ones, as well as integrating current theories where appropriate to create new theories or change existing theories (Saunders et al., 2019). This approach will be applied especially with regard to the field of circular economy since theories already exist. However, this system is still in its infancy, and only the first attempts are being made to implement it. Also, the fact that this research wants to find out about a topic with a wealth of information but mainly focuses on one context with less information upon it lends to an abductive approach (Saunders et al. 2019). As this research is "collecting data to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and explain patterns, to generate a new or modify an existing theory [...]" (Saunders et al. 2019, p. 153), it uses an abductive approach. Therefore sufficiently detailed and rich data is needed to explore the phenomenon

(Saunders et al. 2019). The research carried out as part of this master's thesis is based on the choice of approaches to theory development to develop a suitable research design and choose the appropriate research strategy and methodological choice.

The methodological approach chosen for this research is a qualitative mono method. Qualitative data can be defined as any type of research that does not comprehend statistical qualification (Earstby-Smith, 2015). According to Frey et al. (1992), qualitative researchers refer more to analyzing situated form, content, and social action experience instead of focusing on mathematical data. It aims to collect and analyze non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, and experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2022). The qualitative data helps understand subjective perceptions, feelings, assumptions, consumer behavior, culture, and already-mentioned opinions (Easterby-Smith, 2015). Epistemology and ontology, as already presented, epistemology and ontology are the reasons for choosing social constructivism, which predominantly only allows qualitative and exploratory research (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, the CE is a new area and outdoor textile brands have only begun to dispute it, so the area needs to be explored in depth. It allows an understanding of managers' perspectives, experiences, and beliefs within the organization. Furthermore, the CE is a highly complex field, and the individual assessment of different outdoor textile brands is very subjective, making it difficult to quantify or measure using numerical data. Overall, qualitative research can provide valuable insights into the complex and multifaceted issues surrounding sustainability, focusing on circularity in the outdoor textile industry.

4.2 Research Design

The research design describes the “strategy or plan of action [...] that shapes our choice and use of particular methods and links them to the desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). The case study is the selected strategy that has been decided to use in this research. “The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate decisions or sets of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result“ (Schramm, 1971 cited in Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2003), case studies are employed when the researcher has little or no control over the events and when the emphasis is on current phenomena within a real-world setting. Nevertheless, this research retains control over the phenomenon with the appropriate choice of method and processing of the data, which will be discussed later. In addition, the quality of the study is discussed, which also contributes to control. Moreover, the author stated that case studies are usually used when the research question is settled as a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question. Case studies are used

in many different situations, from individual to group or social as well as political and all related phenomena.

Yin (2003) differs between single- and multiple-case designs. For the single case, he defines five rationales. The first one is when the issue is critical, as given through the climate crisis, and when testing a well-formulated theory provided through the use of the CE and the used theoretical frameworks already introduced. A second rationale is about if there is an extreme or unique case on hand. This is because the outdoor textile industry has a particularly deep relationship with nature and is moving strongly towards sustainability and CE. The third rationale is the representative or typical case that captures everyday conditions. This is true as the practices in the outdoor textile industry are typical for this segment. The revelatory case is the fourth rationale for a single-case study. This occurs when a phenomenon wasn't accessible before. In the research conducted here, this is not necessarily the case, as the brands under consideration were already accessible. However, the phenomenon of circular practices is new and, as it is only now emerging, is only now accessible. The fifth and last rationale is the longitudinal case which studies the same case at two different times and does not apply to this research.

For the reasons mentioned, a single-case design makes sense. Furthermore, the case study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the practical implication of the research area, and it enables the researchers to preserve the comprehensive and significant aspects of real-world occurrences. Finally, using a case study is helpful as it allows an in-depth examination of specific outdoor textile brands and their circular practices.

An embedded single-case design with the context of outdoor textile brands was carried out (Yin, 2003). The case is embedded in more units of analysis by considering seven different outdoor textile brands, which allows a comparison between them.

4.3 Data Collection Method

Methods are "techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The data for creating the literature review and the theoretical frameworks were collected on the one hand by the University of Lund Library database via LUBSearch. On the other hand, Scopus, Elsevier's largest abstract and citation database for peer-reviewed specialist literature, was used. The key search words were the circular economy, climate change, the Paris Agreement, the (outdoor) textile industry, brand identity, and communication

strategies. Furthermore, to answer the research question, secondary data, and primary data were collected.

Secondary data is being used to analyze the websites of selected outdoor textile brands and their corporate documents in the form of sustainability reports to define their brand identity. In addition, which circular practices are already applied and how they are communicated are being investigated. On brands' websites, a focus was placed on the brand's description, often found under the 'About Us' category. In addition, a focus was placed on the communication of sustainable and circular topics. The web shop received no attention in the analysis. Only the sustainability reports were considered the company documents because they contain relevant information on the topic researched here.

Primary data is new information collected directly by the researcher, while secondary data is research information that already exists in the form of publications or other electronic media (Easterby- Smith, 2015). Primary data was collected through interviews with employees from seven outdoor textile brands. The focus was on their understanding, opinion, and impression of the brand they work for, how far it is towards CE, and how they communicate about it. This is discussed in detail below. In addition, the secondary data, such as keywords and concepts of both the websites and the available brand reports, were analyzed and compared to what was found in the primary data collection. Furthermore, both secondary and primary data were used to fill out the CBIM (Urde, 2013) and the CBIRM (Urde & Greyser, 2016) for each of the seven brands (see appendix 3).

4.3.1 Qualitative Content and Rhetoric Analysis

The secondary data, both the sustainability reports and the brands' websites, were analyzed through qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2016) and rhetoric analysis (Plett, 2001). The former allows a "systematic, rule-based, and theory-driven analysis of content" (Voci, 2022, p.8). The latter focuses on rhetoric, which describes how language must be used to persuade the audience (Voci, 2022). By using this method, the focus is on how sustainability and circularity are communicated. For this, rhetoric's modes of persuasion -logos, ethos, pathos - are used as analysis tools to understand the intention of the communication, including text, pictures, and videos. These three methods of persuasion serve as a basis for detecting them in the content selected. In this way, the question of what and how outdoor textile brands communicate sustainability-related issues to lower their environmental impact can be answered.

4.3.2 Online Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative method selected for the research were online semi-structured interviews carried out in April and May 2023 using the Zoom and Teams platform. Collecting qualitative data requires preparation from the researcher's side and creating an interview guideline (Easterby-Smith, 2015). Questions based on a particular purpose and the following answers provide in-depth data about relevant insights and the exploration of the topic of interest (see appendix 2). “Interviews provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation [...] and elucidate subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints’ (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). This research is used because it enables “access to information in context and to learn about phenomena otherwise difficult or impossible to observe” (Easterby-Smith, 2015, p. 134.) Furthermore, conducting the interview online removes geographical barriers and enables the study to speak to managers from different brands in different locations, such as Scandinavia, Italy, France, Switzerland, and Canada.
Furthermore, the online interview creates familiar and comfortable circumstances as all participants stay in their environment. With careful planning and considering this research's specific goals, this guideline was used as a step-by-step guide. This study aims to discover the case of the outdoor textile industry. Identifying the key topic’s sustainability and CE practices, brand identity, and communication ensured that all these essential aspects were covered. Before conducting the actual interview, a pilot test was conducted to identify potential issues such as unclear questions. All interviews were conducted in English, the common language all participants spoke.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The researchers already knew the units needed to answer the research question, and individuals were assigned based on specific criteria. The respondents were selected from experts working in the outdoor textile industry. First, brands were chosen that belong to a higher-priced premium segment of textiles and are in nature, such as a mountain range. The interviewees had to be employees of this kind of brand and experts in the broader sustainability, communication, or strategy field. They were contacted via LinkedIn and our personal network. All seven respondents (see table 2) and their characteristics were compiled in a table. For privacy reasons, the names of the respondents are not shown.
Moreover, a brand was asked to remain anonymous to be treated and named as a ‘Scandinavian Brand’, and some information and content of the interview will not be revealed for privacy reasons to guarantee anonymity. Both women and men were included in the study to have different backgrounds on this side. Additionally, the respondents had different geographical scenarios, including Italy, Germany, France, Scandinavia, and Canada.

A series of open-end questions that permitted exploring the topic was used to guide the interviewer and the interviewees. As already mentioned, the interview was semi-structured, which gave the interviewer more flexibility in adapting the questions based on the responses from the interviewees. In addition, the interviewees had slightly different areas in which they are experts, such as working more on the product or communicating. And the level at which they operate, from vice president to product developer, is also different. Space was also given to these differences, which enables contextual understanding, personalization, and participant involvement. On the other hand, the interviewees were free to bring in additional questions as well. Questions that can be answered with yes or no were strictly avoided, as these do not allow the interviewees to express their opinion or experience.

Each interviewee received a web link in advance for an online meeting via the Zoom platform. This email also contained a summary of the problematization and an abbreviated version of the interview guideline, which was subject to change. While one researcher acted as the active part and conducted the interview, the second inactive researcher started the audio recording, taking notes with the interviewee's permission, and was allowed to ask questions at the end of each interview. The questions were asked in a logical sequence to ensure a smooth flow during the interview. It started with an introduction, indicating that it would be a recorded session and the possibility to ask questions. After this, an icebreaker question that was easy to answer was asked to establish a relationship between the respondent and the interviewer and create a comfortable environment. Next, a series of questions about the covered job position in the outdoor company and information regarding the motivation and interest of people working in this field was asked. The sequencing continued with gradually moving into more specific and probing questions. For example, under the heading 'MANAGEMENT STEPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY & CIRCULARITY' (see appendix 2), it was asked how the company currently approaches sustainability and circularity, asking to name some current practices as examples as well as some possible ideas that the company would like to implement in the future but that are not in place yet. Moreover, the respondent was asked to stage some of the challenges and enablers the brand faces regarding CE practices. Finally, questions regarding external respondent opinion about external pressure regarding managing the brand and how CE practices will develop in the future are asked. These questions aimed to explore each brand's management actions and attitudes toward CE practices.

The second part of the interview explored the concept of brand identity. Interviewees should describe the brand and how important the idea of sustainability is for the brand and delineate how the brand works with the company's sustainability goals. The third part of the interview aimed to explore the

concepts of communication. At first, it was asked to describe which picture the brand gets across regarding communication, build on which role the communication about circular economy processes plays, and how the brand makes sure that circularity stands out. It was moreover asked which kind of communication concepts the brand follows. As the last aspect, it is explored which kind of promise the brand carries to the outside world when regarding sustainability and what are the biggest challenges and enablers the brand faces regarding this promise. The interview ends by asking the interviewee if there is anything else they want to add or if there is something in their mind they want to talk about or share that is not covered in the interview yet. In this way, the interviewee can provide any additional information or insights they may have forgotten to mention earlier in the interview or add some interesting aspects or inputs they have in mind. At no time was the research question itself posed or information about the research objective given to the participants.

Company	**Position of respondents**	**Gender** (female/ male)	**Headquarters**	**Code**
Arc'teryx	Director Social + Environmental Sustainability	F	North Vancouver, Canada	AC
La Munt	Brand Manager, Group Sustainability Manager, Executive Board Member	F	Bolzano, Italy	LMI
La Sportiva	Product Manager Apparel	M	Ziano di Fiemme, Italy	LSI
Mammut	Head of Business Unit Apparel	M	Seon, Switzerland	MI
Salewa	Sustainability Specialist	F	Bolzano, Italy	SI
Salomon	Vice President	M	Annecy, France	SF
Scandinavian Brand	Sustainability Specialist	F	Scandinavia	SBS

Table 2: Profile of Sampling (own presentation)

4.3.3 Thematic Coding Procedure

The purpose of the interview was to dive as deep as possible, trying to get a complete view of the interviewee's opinion. The interviews were transcribed with the help of the online website Otter, and the thematic coding procedure was the selected method used to analyze the interview content. The

streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry (Saldaña, 2013) was used to get from code and categories to assertions and theory. This theory starts with the codes which build categories and concepts (cluster of codes). Both the codes and the category can consist of subcodes, respectively, subcategories.

Ryan (2003) states that themes or categories classify more discrete concepts. This is also shown in the model of Saldaña (2013) as the process follows continuums from real to abstract and from particular to general. The method of thematic coding can aid in finding patterns in the data and offers a structure for studying and interpretation. As suggested by Ryan (2003), the transcript of the interviews was reread several times, and the process of identifying themes began with the transcription of the recording. Initial coding was then carried out in the sorting sentence to enter as much intimacy as possible with the data. It was possible to identify the following themes: *managerial actions, brand identity, and communication.* It was therefore decided to leave out the other aspects and focus on these issues as they were considered the most relevant to answer the research question. As Ryan (2003) suggested, these themes were marked with different colors. Under these themes, different categories and subcategories were developed to compare the data better. For example, two categories were identified in the theme of managerial actions: circular *economy and sustainability.* Consequently, different subcategories were developed: *current actions, challenges, enablers, future of the circular economy, and external pressure).* In the theme of brand identity, the category *description of the brand* and its *relationship with nature* was identified. In the last theme, communication, two categories were established: *communication in general and communication circularity.* Different subcategories were moreover identified: *external communication, internal communication, chances of communication, and challenges of communication.* For clarity, the three themes have been plotted on a y-axis and the different sub-categories on the x-axis, creating a diagram (see figure 11). The participants' statements were entered into the fields created through virtual post-it. All post-it is visible in detail in appendix 2.

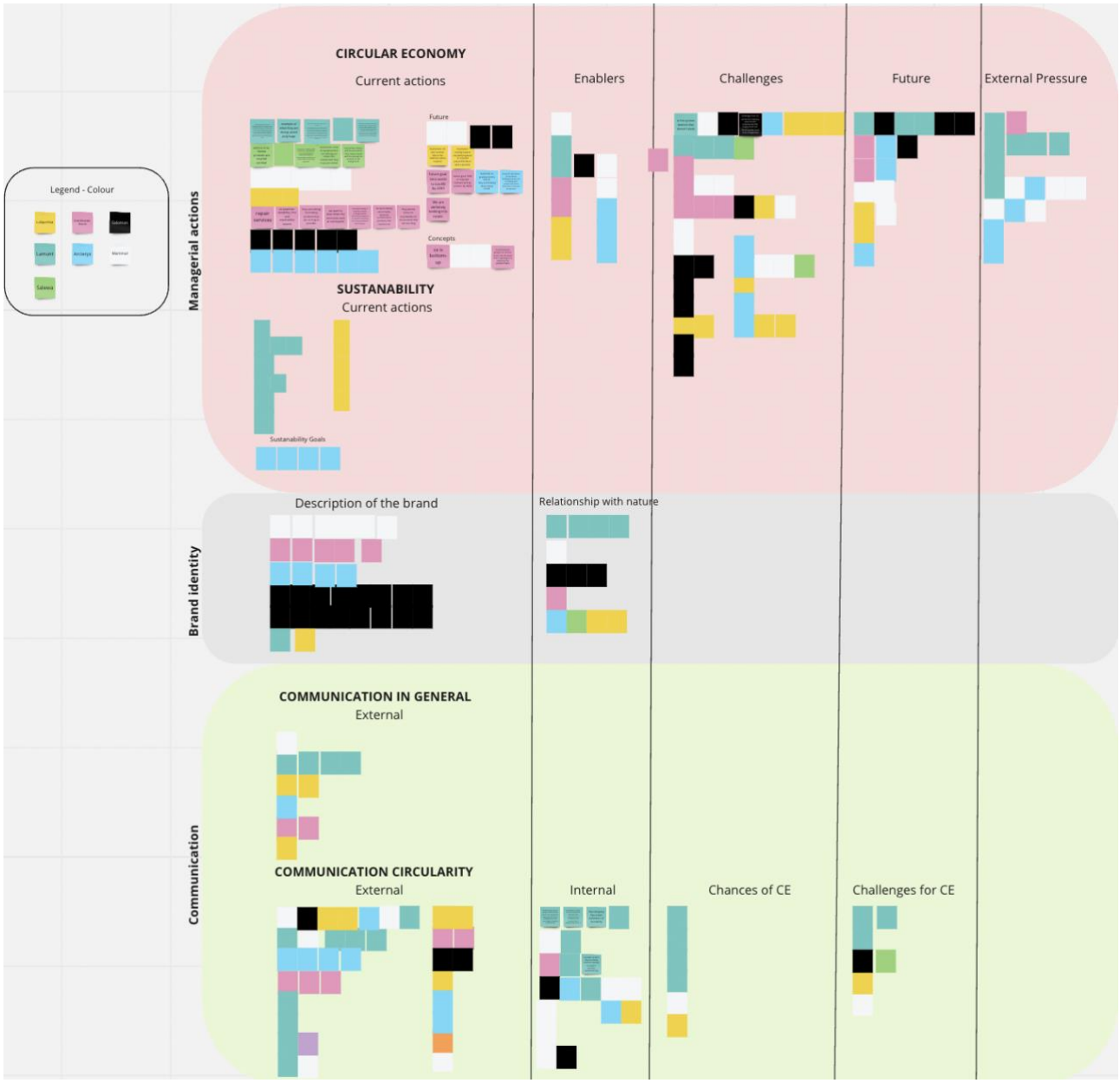

Figure 11: Example of Board for the thematic coding showing theme, category, subcategory, code (own presentation)

This clear and systematic subdivision enabled us to find repetitions, similarities, differences, metaphors, and analogies. Furthermore, in this way, "individual data fragments can easily be identified and retrieved" (Easterby-Smith, 2015, p. 186). Finally, the classification and the arrangement of the data were conducted over several days so that the process was given sufficient time to interpret and process the data in the best way possible.

The thematic coding technique has several disadvantages. The one bias represents the main one. To prevent this, the already described theoretical lens was used to avoid bias and subjectivity. Still, the possibility of coding being affected by bias on the researcher's part is a danger not to be underestimated. Despite this, it has been decided that this method remains the most relevant.

4.4 Quality of Research Design

The quality of the qualitative research is essential to make the work relevant and attractive to other readers. Mainly, the quality depends on the researchers' approach to the research subject, which has already been described in detail. Using the theoretical framework, which works like a theoretical lens, is the main guarantor of the quality of this research. Reflexivity and transparency also guarantee quality. The researchers in this study always reflected on how they could avoid influencing the interviewees. In addition, all important work steps were documented in detail, made transparently, and presented comprehensibly to outsiders. Another guarantee for the quality is that researchers in this study have taken enough time to let the data rest and then turn to it again. Moreover, the fact that the interview guidelines and questions were built on theoretical frameworks and were first discussed with the supervisor increases the internal validity of the research.

In addition, Yin (2003) gives criteria in the form of four tests and the associated case study tactics and phase of the research in which the tactic occurs for judging the quality of a research design and specifications for case studies. The first test is named construct validity and was met during the data collection of both secondary and primary data in the thesis with the usage of multiple sources of evidence and through establishing a chain of evidence. The composition phase can be tested with a review from informants upon the case study report. Construct validity is given by establishing correct operational measures for the research field and not being subjective in the judgments about the collection of data. The second test is internal validity which can be achieved in the data analysis phase by following pattern-matching, explanation-building, addressing rival explanations, and using logic models. As this is an exploratory study, the internal validity cannot be met as it is only for explanatory or causal studies, where it should be determined whether one event leads to another. In addition, according to Yin (2003), external validity is testing the generalizability of the study, which means if the findings can be applied to other cases or specifying to which extent the study results can be generalized. The case study, as used within this research, is “[...] generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes,” and it “[...] does not represent a sample[...]” but the goal is to “[...] expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (Yin, 2003, p. 10). This is reached when using theory in a single-case study when developing the research design, while again, the theory works as a theoretical lens for analyzing the phenomenon. This research uses the outdoor textile industry as a case, as this area is at the forefront of sustainable and circular practices. Even though circular processes vary depending on the industry, the entire economy is confronted with climate change. An abductive

approach thus permits to generalize of the interaction between the specific and the general, permitting to reach an analytical generalizability that is the aim of this research. The fourth and last criteria of Yin (2003) to judge the quality of the research design is reliability. It describes the repetition of a study with the outcome of the same results. The suitable case study tactic in the data collection phase is to use a case study protocol and develop a case study database to make all steps clear and visible and allow repeating the study. Furthermore, this research has consistently focused on minimizing bias and errors.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015, p. 216) also set quality criteria in their book.

I. Worthy topic: The topic around climate change is relevant because it is irreversible at one point and has a negative impact on the daily life of society. The outdoor textile industry is interesting because it is deeply connected to nature but still has a negative impact on it. Furthermore, little research has been done so far.

II. Rigour: The study uses appropriate data in the form of primary data, online interviews, secondary data, websites, and reports, and uses relevant concepts just like the CE and further methods like the CBIM (Urde, 2003) as a theoretical lens to analyze the phenomenon.

III. Sincerity: The study is always transparent; for example, the interviewees received information beforehand when conducting the interview. Furthermore, the researchers reflect upon their influence.

IV. Credibility: The research process is detailed (see 3. Theoretical Framework and 4. Methodology).

V. Resonance: The changes brought about by climate change are already impacting the world, which is why many different businesses have started making their actions more sustainable. Therefore, the findings of this master's thesis can be transferred to many other areas.

VI. Contribution: The theories, concepts, methods, and practical impacts were carefully selected and introduced. Moreover, respondents have different positions and roles in the company, giving further insights.

VII. Ethic: The research considers ethical issues by not harming the participants and respecting their dignity. Furthermore, privacy and anonymity are guaranteed, and the data is stored securely. For example, one of the interviewed companies wanted to stay anonymous, which was respected.

VIII. Meaningful coherence: The study aims to discover the potential for circular practices within outdoor textile brands in the background of climate change.

4.5 Data Analysis

This session will provide information regarding how the researcher used and applied the theoretical framework presented in the first part of this thesis to answer the research question.
As mentioned, primary and secondary data were used for the analysis. The latter was used for the study of the websites and corporate documents of seven different outdoor textile brands (Arcteryx, La Munt, La Sportiva, Mammut, Salewa, Salomon, and Scandinavian Brand) as well as their corporate documents to define their brand identity. The websites, including texts, pictures, and videos, were viewed in April and May 2023. Therefore, the nine elements: value proposition, relationships, position, expression, core, personality, mission & vision, culture, and competencies of Urdes CBIM (2013), were used. The CBIM was filled out for each of the seven brands (see appendix 3). This application laid a practical understanding of the brand internally and externally.
While the brand identity is happening more internally, this thesis also wants to investigate the external side. Therefore, communication horizontal from the CBIRM (Urde, 2019) is used on an internal and external level. When analyzing secondary data, recognizability and credibility are added to the brand identity elements of expression and personality. In addition, it is being investigated which circular practices are already applied. On the one hand, this involves checking which transitional and transformational 5Rs (Borland et al. 2016) are already being applied or planned for the future. These actions are divided into reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, and regulate, which Borland et al. (2016) define as limiting damage. On the other hand, the five R's rethink, reinvent, redesign, redirect, and recover are reviewed to analyze what practices are used before the product is even created. A fundamental distinction is made regarding whether the step can be assigned to the close-the-loop or slowing the loop principle.

4.6 Limitations

One limitation is that the respondents were mainly from the European Union, so it is impossible to generalize the findings since they represent a Western view. Based on the theoretical lens used in this research, it is only generalizable to this specific geographical region. Generalizability is also limited by the fact that a particular industry is considered. Outdoor Textile Brands were specifically selected for this study. Still, they are also unique, and the results are not entirely applicable to any other industry but give more inspiration and a direction as outdoor textile brands play a pioneering role. Another limitation is the time frame. As climate change is an ongoing process and sustainable

practices and the CE are in steady development, the findings may quickly become outdated. This results in a need for a longitudinal study. Another limitation is a bias which is systematic errors or deviations from the truth that leads to distorted or inaccurate results. This can happen because of the researchers' beliefs, measurement instruments, or the researcher's environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

It was impossible to reach saturation in the research due to the short time available to conduct the research, which resulted in a limited number of respondents. However, an expansion of the sample size, in addition to the seven conducted interviews, would have provided additional information. Also, the chosen research design of online semi-structured interviews has its limitations. For example, as all the interviews were conducted online, non-verbal cues such as body language or facial expressions were limited, which could have provided valuable insights if the interview had occurred face-to-face.

A further limitation is that although the reputation is addressed, it is not analyzed as the focus lies on the business and internal processes. A future study could therefore focus on the perception of stakeholders and customers. Furthermore, future studies could include a broader range of interviewees and consider using different research methods to mitigate the risk of bias. In addition, to answer the research question, social media could also have been considered so that the communication part could be analyzed even more in-depth, but given the lack of time needed to be able to analyze social media satisfactorily, it was decided to delineate the research to what was done.

5. Results

This chapter reports the data, first the secondary data followed by the primary data, concisely. A description of the main findings follows this through elaborating patterns, trends, relationships, and themes that emerged from the data analysis supported by a visualization using a table and matrixes.

5.1 Secondary Data

The secondary data, including the sustainability reports and websites from the outdoor textile brands, were divided into brand identity using the CBIM (Urde, 2013) and the CBIRM (Urde, 2019), the sustainability and circular processes and the communication, which was analyzed with using the three principles logos, ethos, and pathos. Since the reports on the sustainability of all brands considered here use the same principles and techniques in their communication, this will be presented before each brand is examined individually.

5.1.1 Arc'teryx

Brand Identity

The brand is introducing itself as "a Canadian global design company based in the Coast Mountain Range in British Columbia (BC) that specializes in technical high-performance apparel and equipment" (Arc'teryx, 2022). Their reason for being is connecting with the mountains, where all the inspiration comes from (Arc'teryx, n.d.-f). In a statement of the Chief Executive Officer from Arc'teryx, Stuart Haselden, his understanding of the brand is that it designs products for mountain athletes (Haselden, 2021). According to the Climate Report (Arc'teryx, n.d.-d), they "want to empower people to find inspiration in nature, design, and one another". For the brand to spend time in nature makes people happier, healthier, and more creative, which is why it should be protected. The guiding principles for the brand are durability and performance.

Sustainability

The CEO says there is a need to protect the most important natural resource as its existence depends on it (Haselden, 2021).

Arc'teryx Climate Report from 2021 is embedded on their website and is entitled 'Sustainability: Designed for the long run' (Arc'teryx, n.d.-d). For the brand, the climate crisis made it urgent to consider the products' impact on people and the planet. The sustainability approach consists of design and material (Arc'teryx, n.d.-g). The focus is on durability to ensure that products can be used as long as possible to spread the environmental impact across the lifetime and on products that should

increasingly consist of lower-impact materials (Arc'teryx, 2022). In addition, the brand started in 2020 to set climate goals that focused on reducing emissions (Haselden, 2021) through the commitment to halve the environmental footprint (Arc'teryx, 2022). To achieve this goal, make a structural change, and meet the Paris Agreement, the brand has, among other things, a collaboration with the UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Actions. Another collaboration with bluesign and the Restricted Substance List ensures that the whole supply chain has an as low as possible impact on the environment. Arc'terxy is also committed to using 100% renewable energy and improving energy efficiency for its owned operations. In addition to mainly global production, they have a manufacturing facility (ARC'One) in Vancouver, Canada, and focus on locally and globally responsible manufacturing as most of the environmental impact originates in the supply chain. Arc'teryx also has partnerships within the community because they are convinced that improving their actions is necessary. These collaborations have, among other things, the goal of protecting nature, while others have a more social character.

Circular Economy

In the statement, Haselden said: "Looking ahead, we are building the future of sustainability and circularity at Arc'teryx, ensuring this is the bedrock of every business decision we make, and that sustainability and circularity objectives are inseparable from our core business" (Haselden, 2021). The Climate Report (Arc'teryx, 2022) also comments on this: "We align with the circularity principles of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and are pursuing circularity as part of our path to net zero," and they "Commit to working towards a circular economy".

All the actions where circularity is brought to life are happening within the ReBird hub. At the same time, the design plays a central role in the three initiatives **resale**, **upcycling,** and **care** and **repair** (Arc'teryx, n.d.-a). One action Arc'teryx has taken is the ReGEAR program because they argue that the most sustainable choice for a consumer is to buy nothing new. Instead, used gear is refurbished and afterward resold. The resale takes place through Arc'teryx online store and is available in Canada and the US. In addition, submitted equipment that can no longer be used will be cut apart and transformed into new unique parts, referred to as ReCut (Arc'teryx, n.d.-b). The last of the three initiatives is ReCare, where Arc'teryx provides tips on how customers can care for and repair their used garments to make them last longer (Arc'teryx, n.d.-a).

Communication

Logos: Under the 'Sustainability' section, the brand stores all objective information on its actions towards lowering the environmental impact (Arc'teryx, n.d.-d). In addition, the brand is using the so-called Platform ReBird as a hub for all circularity actions. This section on their website informs the

consumer about initiatives in care and repair, resale, and upcycling. Both sections use informative docere (to instruct) (Arc'teryx, n.d.-a). Furthermore, in the brand's so-called 'Bird Blog', they post articles about things they care about, which are also about sustainability and circularity. Arc'teryx uses facts to encourage critical thinking, which is matching to informative docere (to instruct) and logical-ethical money (to warn), as it is also educating on a moral level (Arc'teryx, n.d.-e).

Ethos: The already mentioned ReBird hub is also about persuading people to be more circular, connected to purposeful conciliare (to concilate) Arc'teryx (n.d.-a). Arc'terxy website has a so-called 'Bird Blog' and 'Films' that are about people, places, and mountain sports, to build up credibility, which is about purposeless delectare (to delight), so entertainment and enjoyment. For example, one film is about winter and why it is essential to protect nature (Arc'teryx, n.d-c).

Pathos: The just mentioned cinematic film also uses movere (to move) to express strong emotions through a dramatic style (Arc'teryx,n.d-c) (see figure 12).

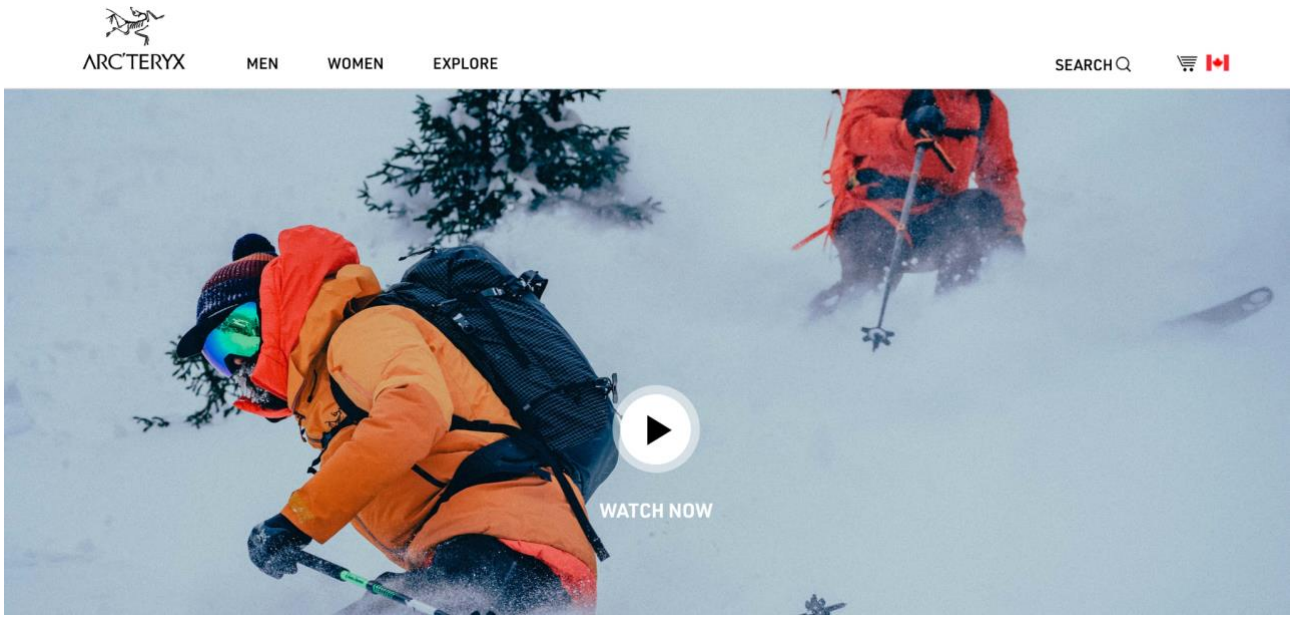

Figure 12: Arc'teryx Films, Sunbirds, 11 min. (Arc'teryx,n.d.c)

Throughout the explanation on its website about sustainability, the brand uses a dramatic video from one person standing on top of a mountain looking at a vast mountain scenery. In this way, feelings and emotions are created. Furthermore, in this concept, the brand connects to the audience through profiles, including a picture and a statement of employees to develop empathy. In this case, it is a picture and statement from the Director of Sustainability (Arc'teryx, n.d.-e).

5.1.2 La Sportiva

Brand Identity

La Sportiva was founded in 1928 in Fiemme Valley, next door to the Dolomites, and produces footwear and apparel to enable people, from enthusiasts to professionals, to experience the mountains. Integrity, fairness, honesty, and transparency built the four principles of how the company runs its business. The company's characteristics are Innovation, passion for the mountains, and respect for the environment (La Sportiva, 2021).

Sustainability

La Sportiva's main aim is to satisfy customers while respecting the surrounding environment (La Sportiva, n.d.-a). The least possible impact on the environment is reached by following the eco-sustainability concept. A statement from the CEO and President of La Sportiva underlines that sustainability is core to La Sportiva: "Being sustainable for La Sportiva means holding on to our heritage - the mountain environment that surrounds us [...]. Reducing our impact [...], always enhancing the sustainability of our choices, and improving our community's quality of life are values that we have upheld [...]." (La Sportiva, 2021, p.5). In its sustainability report, La Sportiva addresses 11 of the 17 UN sustainable development goals, which help them manage and report the organization's impacts. La Sportiva is using the word Ecolution to describe the approach to reach the aim of reducing CO2 emissions or processing waste and packaging. The approach is described by development in harmony with the environment and eco-compatible innovations such as recycled raw materials. The brand also uses the word Ecolution to describe innovation, including research and development, which combines quality with sustainability. A collaboration with bluesign allows La Sportiva to get certificated. Furthermore, the company wants to reduce emissions and increase the usage of renewable energy. Through the collaboration with bluesign, La Sportiva guarantees a socio-environmental textile production supply chain. 78% of all suppliers for La Sportiva are based in Triveneto, the surrounding region, 18% come from the greater region of Italy and another 2% from Europe, and 2% from the world.

Circularity

For example, the so-called Mythos, a climbing shoe launched in 2017, was made from 95% **recycled** or reduced environmental impact materials (like metal-free tanning, biodegradable leather, and water-based adhesives). This eco-sustainable approach started in the 1970s when La Sportiva used recycled racing car tires to make soles for its footwear. La Sportiva is introducing a so-called Materiality Matrix in its sustainability report (La Sportiva, 2021), which points out the priorities of the company and the stakeholders. The most important topic for both is shown in the upper right corner, 'Circular

economy (effective management, recovery, and re-use of raw materials in production). The goal is to increase circularity by researching new solutions, for example, using production waste. To extend the product life cycle, repairs are made. The company has set up **recycling systems** to recycle 50% of all waste materials in production (La Sportiva, n.d.-b). The sustainability report also has a chapter entitled 'Circular Economy' with the first subheading 'Efficiency', where the brand aims to reduce waste. Using laser cutting, the raw leather is used as precisely as possible, and rubber as a waste product is recycled and reused within the company. Reuse is the second subheading in this report. Since 2019 the apparel team has produced new garments made entirely or partially from polyester from recycled plastic bottles. The third subheading in the CE chapter is Resoling. Within this process, customers can give their shoes to authorized resolers, reuse their product with a new sole, and prolong the product's life cycle. Since 2012 this business has been growing.

Communication

Logos: In bringing up rational arguments, La Sportiva is using the 'Company Policy' section on their Website to inform about the issue of the negative impact the business has on the environment and explains the actions to lower this impact as much as possible with the technique of informative docere (to instruct) (La Sportiva, n.d.-a). The same applies to the recycling program, where the brand is staging emotion-free facts about how much waste can be recycled (La Sportiva, n.d.-b). The same applies to the communication around products made from recycled polyester marked with the label 'Recycled fabric & Insulation' and with a symbol of three arrows forming a triangle. The brand wants to create awareness by communicating the importance of reuse, recycling, and reclamation. For example, in 2020, the brand used the hashtag #LaSportivaCares in a competition to test participants' knowledge about the company's programs around recycled materials, the CE, resoling, and more. This technique is about logical-ethical monere (to warn) as it educates on a moral level. The same goes for internal training on sustainability issues to empower the values throughout the whole organization.

Ethos: According to the report, La Sportiva (2021) wants to increase the information and give consumers more guidance about using and taking care of products. To inform the customer about sustainability, some articles in their 'Blog' are about this topic. For example, one article gives tips on respecting the environment when trail running (La Sportiva, n.d.-c).

5.1.3 Mammut

Brand Identity

For the Swiss brand Mammut, the focus is on the mountains. They are convinced that mountains move people like no other place in the world, and therefore they make products to enable everyone to have this experience (Mammut, n.d.-d). They started their business in 1862 and still create products that guarantee functionality and performance with the highest quality standards, including hardware, apparel, and footwear. The brand uses the following claim to define its purpose 'To create a world moved by mountains' (Mammut, 2022). To develop means to provide products that make it possible to experience the mountains safely. Moving means challenging people to go out, have fun, experience limits, and inspire them to respect the mountains and protect the planet. Mammut has a design philosophy about creating innovative, low-impact gear that goes for the long run and that is engineered for a more circular approach (Mammut, n.d.-c).

Sustainability

In their Responsibility Report (Mammut, 2022), they discuss their business's social and environmental impacts and outline the targets they have embedded in their strategy. Under the heading of responsibility, the brand writes about sustainability. Their goals are connected to the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. Mammut wants to focus on the following goals: Good Health and Well-Being (3), Clean Water & Sanitation (6), Decent Work & Economic Growth (8), Responsible Consumption and Production (12), Climate Action (13), and Partnerships for the Goals (17). The Responsibility Report (Mammut, 2021) provides information about collaborations to which Mammut committed. Between 2006 and 2019, 18 collaborations were created, such as with the Fair Wear Foundation or the Blue Sign. As the climate is in crisis and the environment the brand loves is changing, they must take responsibility. Mammut's climate strategy motto is 'do our best, remove the rest'. By signing the Paris Agreement's UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, they want to reduce their carbon footprint to reach zero by 2050 to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Mammut is challenging its business practices by a) powering our operations and sourcing from factories using renewable energy, b) Increasing our use of lower-impact materials and production processes, c) Rethinking how we move products around the world, d) Ensuring products last longer and can be easily repaired, e) Exploring alternative circular business models and f) Engaging consumers and supporting stronger regulations to accelerate policy change.

Circularity

Under the heading Impact & Strategy, the so-called materiality matrix can be found that defines priorities. Topics are sorted by priority for the brand and importance to stakeholders. The three most important issues in the upper right corner of the matrix are Climate, Product Quality & Longevity, and Circularity, which means that Mammut wants to focus on this and invest energy and resources. For example, the Responsibility Report (Mammut, 2022) states that over 14,000 repairs were carried out by the in-house repair team in 2021. To help the brand "create products that are more durable, ethical, and part of a circular economy, team members from across our organization defined the WE CARE framework and goals" (Mammut, 2022, p. 31), including Clean Production, Animal welfare, Reduce footprint, Ethical production. Cleaner production takes care of materials and chemicals and which impact they have on the environment. To reduce the footprint, Mammut uses **recycled** polyester instead of virgin plastics to use fewer fossil fuels, resulting in nearly 30% of all the products, at least half of the fibers consisting of recycled polyester. Ethical production improves working conditions and protects human rights. Under the heading 'Circularity & Services, ' the brand has provided an illustration (see figure 13) summarizing what is currently being done in this area.

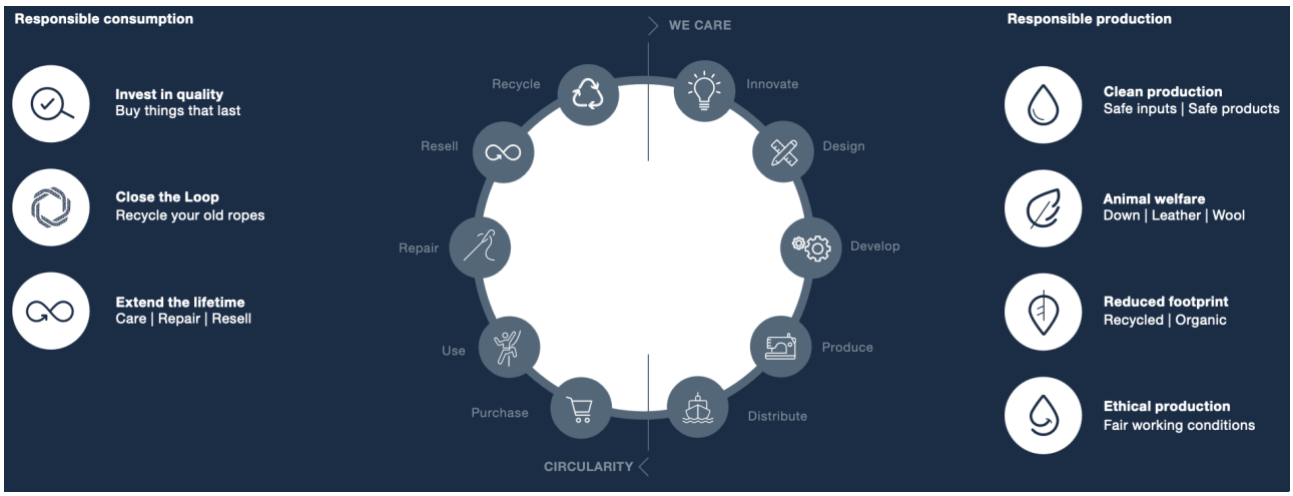

Figure 13: Mammut 2021 Responsibility Report, Circularity & Services (Mammut, 2022)

As already mentioned, the first step for Mammut is to have a durable, high-quality product that breaks the linear 'make-take-waste' system that has become, in their eyes, prevalent in modern consumer society. Mammut also **works towards** business models that include **repair, resell,** and circularity to extend the lifespan of the products even further. One pilot project started in 2020 is called Close the Loop. Through a take-back program, climbing ropes were collected, **recycled,** and used in new products, primarily shirts (Mammut, n.d.-a). In the future, Mammut wants to expand this project by

setting up this program in fourteen other European countries. To guide the customer and extend the life cycle of Mammut's products, the brand gives care instructions, such as how to wash a garment. Furthermore, to avoid products turning into waste, two repair studios, one in Switzerland and one in Germany, take care of damaged products and **repair** them. Mammut partnered with The Renewal Workshop for a **resale pilot project** in 2021 to better understand the topic before launching a resale platform. The biggest challenges for this are the quality of the products, the material categorization, and the logistical issues.

Communication

Logos: The 'Responsibility' section (Mammut, n.d.-c) uses informative docere (to instruct) in bringing rational arguments like which materials they are using or how they can ensure ethical production. Mammut is also using the technique of logical-ethical monere (to warn) as they are educating about the planet being a crisis and appealing to the people to take over the responsibility to respond to this change.

Ethos: In addition, under their 'Responsibility' section (Mammut, n.d.-c), they use the technique of purposeful conciliare (to conciliate) to guide people in the direction of acting more sustainably.

Pathos: Mammut uses a so-called 'Journal' on its website to connect to the audience through emotions, for example, by telling stories about athletes and their challenges and achievements (Mammut, n.d.-b).

5.1.4 Oberalp Group

The Oberalp Group is based in the Dolomites in Italy and "wants to inspire people by and for mountains through [...] mountain sports products" (Oberalp Group, 2023, p. 7). The main customers are mountaineers. Their values are passion, ethics, people, courage, responsibility, sweat together, innovation, and future. The culture is to encourage employees to bring positive change. It consists of six brands Salewa, Dynafit, Pomoca, Wild Country, Evolv, and La Munt, of which two will now be considered in more detail. Since the two brands under consideration, La Munt and Salewa, belong to the same company called Oberalp Group, one report provides information for both brands.

Sustainability

The Oberalp Group states in their Contribute Report (Oberalp Group, 2023) in the very beginning that they "believe sustainability is not some distant goal, but a mindset, reflected in our daily actions and choices. It's about how every one of us chooses to do things. Every day." (p.1). The main objective is to reduce emissions in line with the Paris Agreement and become climate neutral by 2030. One action point is the ecological headquarter, endowed with a photovoltaic system to use green

energy and a heating and cooling system to save energy. To reach climate neutrality, the Oberalp Group set the goal of factories being best in class, which means fair working conditions. They collaborate with the Fair Wear Foundation, an independent non-profit organization striving to achieve fair working conditions. The Oberalp Group is also working on reducing the impact of its product packaging and ensuring that no chemicals used in the production go into the environment. The Oberalp Group is identified 13 out of 17 goals from the Sustainable Development Goals from the UN where they, as a company, can impact. They tie a plan of action to each purpose underlying their sustainability strategy already presented.

Circular Economy

On the third page of the Contribute Report from the Oberalp Group (2023), circularity, besides the purpose of best-in-class factories, is the path to reach the overall goal of becoming climate neutral. Circularity to the Oberalp Group means reducing the use of virgin raw-material and decreasing generated waste, which "includes longevity, [...] repairability of products and improved service offers" (p. 44). Overall circularity consists of five different areas (see figure 14):

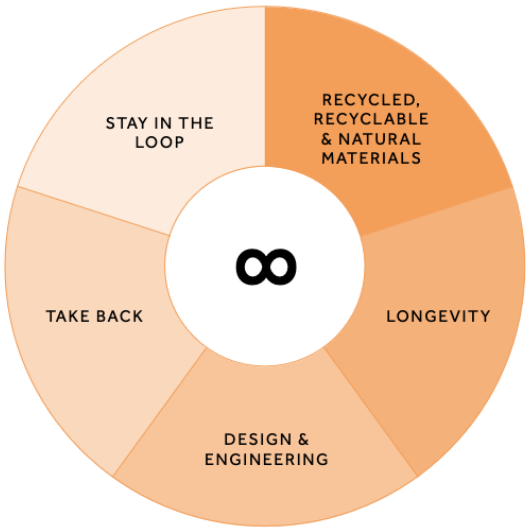

Figure 14: Oberalp Group 2022 Contribute. Sustainability Report, Circularity (Oberalp Group, 2023, p. 46)

The area of Design & Engineering focuses on the very beginning of product creation. It indicates the importance of designing and engineering products to last long or that can be taken apart for repair or **recycled** or **refurbished**. Therefore, the Oberalp Group created a Circular Design Guide in 2022 to help the product development division to a) select materials that are recycled, recyclable, or natural (such as hemp or wool), b) create durable products that last, and c) design products that are repairable or recyclable. Furthermore, a Life Cycle Assessment works as an analyzing tool to explore the

environmental performance of products. The take-back and the stay in the loop area are closely connected but not fully implemented yet into the business. **Repair and resell** are in the **test phase,** with products returned by consumers. That includes second-life platforms and refurbishing or renting services so products are re-used as often as possible.

Communication

Ethos: The Oberalp Group "want to encourage [...] consumers to have as many adventures with [...] products for as long as possible, have them repaired and either trade them or return them, when no longer needed." (Oberalp Group, 2023, p.66). For this reason, they communicate care instructions to the customers, guiding them towards a direction based on the expertise of a purposeful conciliare brand (to conciliate). The same applies to internal training encouraging employees to gear their daily work towards circularity. The Life Cycle Assessment mentioned above and the Circular Design Guide also count here.

5.1.4.1 La Munt

Brand Identity

La Munt is a new premium mountain sports brand founded in 2021 following the motto made by women for women. The focus is on confident women who experience the mountains in their ways. The products provide the best fit and shape solutions and combine functionality with aesthetics (Oberalp Group, 2023). (La Munt, n.d.-a).

Sustainability

The brand cares for the planet using natural fibers because they are renewable (La Munt, n.d.-b). Furthermore, they ensure that the manufactured garments contain no harmful substances.

Circularity

Besides natural fibers, La Munt also uses **recycled** materials (La Munt, n.d.-b).

Communication

Logos: The text the brand uses under 'La Munt Cares' falls under the technique of informative docere (to instruct), as the fragile environment people love to spend time in is used as a reason to care about the planet. The website also has a magazine that publishes articles addressing sustainability issues. For example, one article lists 19 reasons La Munt cares (La Munt, n.d.-d). With a criteria overview for proving their sustainability on each product in their catalog (La Munt, n.d.-c), they use argumentative probare (to prove) to support credibility and to create transparency. In addition, the brand is introducing facts about how they can be more sustainable in using certain materials.

Furthermore, they use logical-ethical monere (to warn) in educating customers on how to extend the product life through cair & repair.

5.1.4.2 Salewa

Brand Identity

Founded in Munich, Germany 1935, Salewa is all about mountain sports. Combining traditional materials and progressive designs leads to technical products, allowing one to experience the mountains. But it's not only about performance but also about getting inspired and developing personally. Salewa identifies deeply with its operating region (Oberalp Group, 2023 & Salewa, n.d.-a & Salewa, n.d.-c).

Sustainability

Overall Salewa is striving to create products that are socially and environmentally responsible Salewa (n.d.-d). Under their 'Social and environmental care' section, they point out what actions the brand is taking to lower its carbon footprint, manage the used chemicals, reduce the amount of microplastic, increase the number of textiles made from recycled fibers, and educate on care and repair (Salewa, n.d.-e). Furthermore, 40% of the entire shoe production of Salewa takes place in a factory in Europe in Romania.

Circularity

To create a circular experience for the customers, Salewa started three new programs at their Store in Bozen/ Bolzano, which consists of a **repair** service to keep gear longer going, a **second life** that offers already used clothing, footwear and equipment, and a **rental** service (Salewa, n.d.-b).

A **pilot project** wanted to discover how wool from post-consumer sources and waste left over from the Alpine Merino base layer production can be **recovered, recycled, and reused.** Salewa paired up with the non-profit platform Accelerating Circularity which brings together all the actors besides the supply chain.

Communication

Logos: Salewa uses so-called Committed icon marks on the products to communicate strict internal criteria to customers and explain their environmental impact (Salewa, n.d.-d). As they provide emotion-free facts about an issue, it is about informative docere (to instruct).

Ethos: The website of the brand Salewa uses a blog to communicate to their customers, where they also bring up sustainability topics. One article is about how Salewa contributes to reducing its business's environmental impact in a more circular and closed-loop society. As the brand guides people in a direction, this belongs to purposeful conciliare (to conciliate). Furthermore

Phatos: In the Salewa store mentioned above, the products from the 2nd Life are provided with a label on which the original owner can write a story that she or he associates with this garment. Emotions and feelings are aroused, and value is created.

5.1.5 Salomon

Brand Identity

The brand comes from the French Alps, from Annecy, and has existed since 1947 and produces footwear, apparel, gear, and winter sports equipment (Salomon, 2022) and stands for unbound inventiveness (Salomon, n.d.-f). The products enable outdoor sports experiences and a deeper connection with nature, "allowing people to unleash the best version of themselves so that they might positively impact the world" (Salomon, 2022, p 5).

Sustainability

On Salomon's website, the brand states it is committed to a responsible tomorrow and aims to drive change within its community (Salomon, n.d.-f). In Salomons Impact Report for 2022 (Salomon, 2022), they stage their mission statement and split it into the brand purpose 'Tomorrow is yours' and the sustainability vision 'Change our tomorrow'. To implement the latter, the company transformation was laid as a foundation. This consists of three parts a) embed sustainability in all processes & digital transformation, b) development of tools for data-driven sustainable performance, and c) culture transformation. On top of this fundament, the ambition of Salomon is twofold, bringing change within communities and innovation. The overall transformation's roof is the vision that transforms people into so-called agents of positive change. Salomon conducts training or events such as the Sustainability Week, and 42% of the Annecy Design Center and retailer team have been trained in sustainable development issues and challenges. The path to a responsible tomorrow for Salomon also includes acting within the outdoor sports industry because 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together (Salomon, 2022, p. 21). For example, the brand is a member of Protect Our Winters, which advocates for policy solutions to climate change and is committed to the United Nations Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Actions to derive a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and become Net Zero by 2050. Salomon also has guidelines for the usage of chemicals to avoid the pollution of the environment. To reduce waste, 66% of the waste in the Annecy design center is reused or recycled (Salomon, n.d.-c).

Circularity

Salomon sets the goal for the innovation part that 100% of new products are designed according to one or more CE principles. The vision to drive responsible performance and innovation is based on

the 3-level responsible product framework where products are “made from safe & **recycled** or renewable inputs, **used more**, and made to be made again” (Salomon, 2022, p. 53). The fundament is to improve all products in terms of more sustainable materials, chemicals, packaging, etc., followed by the progress in eco-design in using more recycled materials and finished with becoming a champion of responsible innovation and performance, for example, the Index.01 shoe. The shoe was launched in SS21 and is the first road running shoe that can be fully **recycled** in a closed loop inside Salomon. According to Salomon (2022), the challenge lies in the complexity of the product because it consists of many different material types. In the Index.01 Salomon only used two materials that can be separated and recycled after usage. The brand launched the Index.02 at the beginning of 2023, which is also 100% recyclable but has improved in performance as it is lighter and more comfortable (Salomon, n.d.-b). In addition to recycling, Salomon presents solutions to make the products last beside the high quality of products which strives for the longest possible product life cycle, which can be achieved through a local repair initiative. In some outlets, Salomon has a winter sports second-hand market where second-hand ski gear taken back from retailers is sold by the end of the ski season so others can **reuse** the products. Salomon offers solutions to repair products, for example, through local repair initiatives or in selling spare parts (Salomon, n.d.-d). The brand is also **exploring** new business models like **upcycling** products and material leftovers and **rethinking** design. For the future, Salomon sets the goal of “develop [our] circularity approach with new principles, new business models & scale-up of circular products” (Salomon, 2022, p.84).

Communication

Logos: Salomon is using a certain number of posts related to sustainability to achieve a change within communities. Salomon is planning to invest 1% of the turnover in informing communities through grants, inspirational films, and campaigns, and 2,5% of the payroll is planned to be spent on learning and development (in 2021, they reached 2,2%), which both belong to informative docere (to instruct). This also includes that the brand wants to drive transparency in 2025 100% of the products should display their environmental performance to the consumers as it is now not visible at all (Salomon, 2022). The communication about the already mentioned Index.02 was placed on the Website under ‘Stories & Guides’ in the form of an online article. It uses a chart with data to visualize the co2 emissions for the shoe, which is argumentative probare (to prove), which is to gain credibility.

Ethos: Salomon published a series of eight YouTube-Videos with the title ‘Sustainability Stories' embedded on the website (see figure 15). This technique is about purposeless delectare (to delight) as it uses fun to entertain the audience and to bring enjoyment (Salomon, n.d.-e).

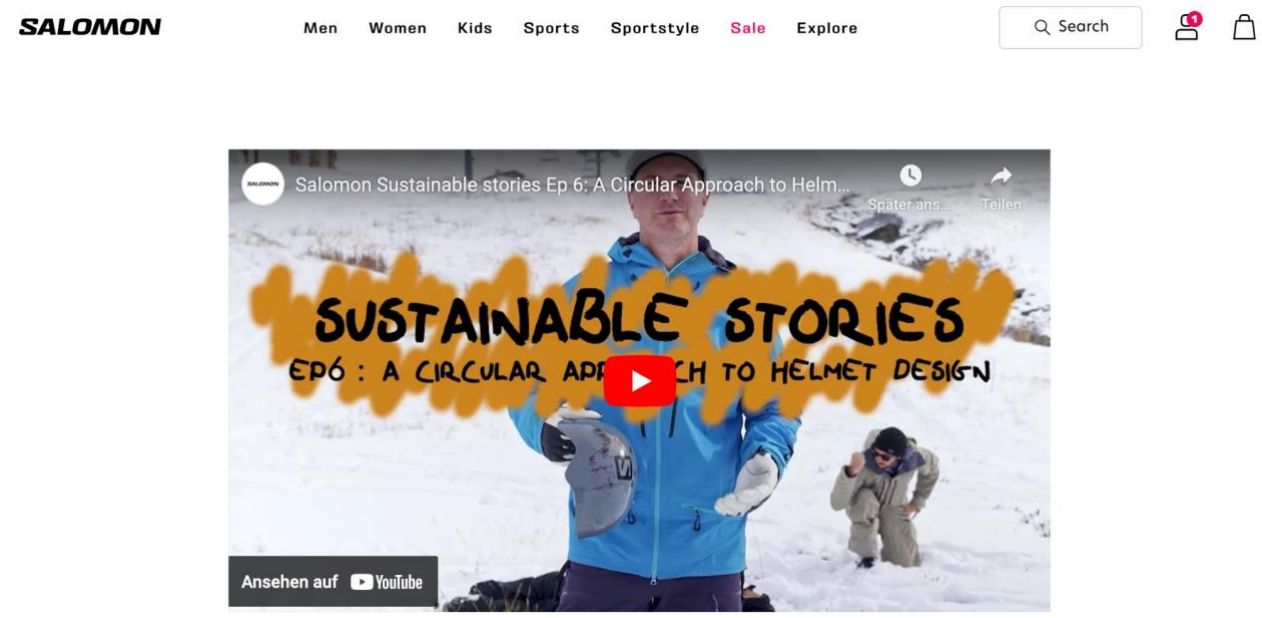

Figure 15: Salomon, Sustainable Stories, Episode 6, 10 min (Salomon, n.d.-e)

To make products last as long as possible, they present tutorials on their website for care and repair advice which gives guidance and therefore is about purposeful conciliare (to conciliate) (Salomon, 2022).

Phatos: The just mentioned video series about sustainability also uses emotions and feelings to connect with the audience and therefore is to be assigned to movere (to move) as it uses a dramatic style.

5.1.6 Scandinavian Brand

Since the brand and the associated employees we interviewed wished to remain anonymous, neither the associated website nor the report can be viewed, as this would allow conclusions to be drawn about the brand's actual name. However, the statements of the interview are analyzed and reproduced anonymously.

5.1.7 All brands

All reports have in common that when communicating, they encourage critical thinking and use emotion-free and objective information to report about the issue about the impact of the business on the environment, which is in logos and informative docere (to instruct). To create credibility, the brands underline their arguments with scientific data, which is in argumentative probare (to prove).

The brands not only present their efforts to reduce their negative impact on the environment as much as possible but also want to use their expertise to show their community how they can act more sustainably by using the technology purposeful conciliare (to conciliate) within ethos. The text in the reports is completed with images showing dramatic scenes of nature or athletes. Employees are also shown social projects that are supported. This evokes emotions that belong to phatos and movere (to move).

Entering all the information from all brands in the CBIRM (Urde & Greyser, 2016) (see appendix 3) enables the communicational horizontal to be viewed. First, the individual core, consisting of promise and values, can be found in all brands in the respective element of personality and expression within the CBIM (Urde, 2013). For example, the core value of passion Salewa is reflected in the personality of passion for the outdoors in caring for the environment and in the expression of the passion for sharing it with others and thus encouraging them to outdoor adventures. Furthermore, all personalities have high credibility and are convincing. For example, La Sportiva's personality is connected to the love of their origin, the Dolomites, and this is credible and convincing because the brand supports many local projects and events to strengthen and protect the region. The expression is also in line with the recognizability as it is highly visible, distinctive, and consistent. For example, La Munt presents care instructions to make sure that consumers enjoy their adventures with the products as long as possible.

5.2 Primary Data

As anticipated, this session can be broken down into four main themes: Managerial actions, Brand identity, and Communication.

5.2.1 Managerial Actions for Circular Economy

In this part of the interview, it was explored which kind of managerial actions regarding both CE and sustainability the different brands take. Moreover, the enabler and challenges of CE practices were discussed, as well as the role of external pressure regarding CE practices and the future role the latter is expected to play.

5.2.1.1 Current Actions

When asked about the current actions that the brand is currently taking with respect to circularity, more brands felt the need to also speak about the sustainability aspect of the brand. There was awareness of doing that since SPI, for instance, claimed that the topic of sustainability is a little bit "on the side" with respect to the one of circularity, but the respondent felt anyway the need to mention some of the sustainability actions that the brand is currently taking. Air purifying in the production, social projects including people with disabilities, the sustainability report, PFC-free products, and the attention put into the production of organic cotton were some of the practices mentioned by SPI.
LMI claimed that sustainability happens at a group level, and it's incorporated and embedded in the company processes, happening everywhere in the company. LMI mentioned the three sustainability peaks of the company: reducing the emission, being the best-class factories not only socially but also environmentally, and the circularity aspect in both products and processes. AC also mentioned the sustainability goals of the brand, such as the commitment of 80% of the production to be Fairtrade certified by 2025, the science-based target for climate working on reaching 100% of renewable energy in the operations, and the work about the Fair Labor Association where the accreditation should be completed next year.

When asking about CE practices, some brands also brought up some concepts, such as that the CE is "bottom-up", where small initiatives are going on in various teams, but the team that is working on them is mostly the product team (SBS). Moreover, MI stated that all the circular projects are very high on the list and that several trials have been made in many different directions.
Respondents moreover staged examples of different CE practices. As already stated, the primary data collected in this session provide confirmation of what was already found out through the collection of secondary data.
Every brand staged some examples and concepts regarding CE practices for the brand. SI staged that products are recycled and certified, and the new second life store in Bolzano was also mentioned, staging that it is working better than expected. The practice of repair and resell in the Second Life shop was elaborated with the concept of emotions in the background. Moreover, the practice of rental is now implemented only for equipment but not for clothing, "for now is too complicated and we have just started". SI is also doing textile trials but it is really difficult since matching different textiles with different chemicals and mechanisms was described as difficult and expensive.
MI mentioned the close to the loop project, for which the brand received the sustainability award in 2021, which was about recycling climbing ropes and making recycled shirts from the ropes. MI stated

that they are trying to make the product's lifestyle longer since “quality also means long lifecycle of a product”.

SPI focuses a lot on organic products, and they collaborate with a retailer to provide recycled protective garments. The brand focuses mostly on the durability and reparability of products, extending the lifestyle of products.

SBS mentioned the repair services that the brand has implemented. Moreover, it was explained that durability is first placed and reparability second. The brand is looking to make products that last as long as possible, slowing the product's life since the brand provides highly technical performance products that need to last. It was staged that there is a focus on recyclability for the product that does not last long.

SF staged the practice of repair and rental as a new business model. The example of the shoe index 01 was moreover staged, a 100% recyclable shoe will become part of apparel, ski boots, or skis. The brand is, moreover, in general, focused on extending the product's lifetime.

Of the same idea is AC, which is keen on building and projecting durable goods, looking at both product design and business models. First, the brand looks at what goes into the product if the materials are recycled, regenerative, renewable, or repairable. Then attention is paid to what makes the product last long, and in trying to build reparability into the durability equation, ensuring that what the brand offers is a good warranty, with repair services and resale options.

Respondents claimed and explained some of the future practices they are considering implementing. MI, for example, thought about starting rental practices and engaging some people in the topic and practice of renting. SPI is planning to offer a collection for next summer where 82% of the products will be recycled. Moreover, the brand is increasingly moving toward recycled polyester or recycled polyamide fibers, where possible. SF stated that the goal for the brand is to have every product by 2025 that will touch circularity, having recycled products or rental or new business models in place. The vision is that every new product will adopt the concept of sustainability, and the old products will gradually disappear, touching one circularity principle. SBS stated that one of their future goals is to reach zero waste to landfill by 2030 and 50% of recycled content and by volume by 2050. Moreover, SBS stated that they are looking into resale. Finally, AC noted that the brand is thinking about implementing the practice of rental, thinking about implementing business, not only on making your product but on the alternatives of service and product.

5.2.1.2 Enablers

Challenges and enablers of CE were as well discussed and explored. The results show, in general, that respondents find more challenges than enablers as regards CE practices. Challenges were, in fact, generally discussed more. The most discussed enablers by respondents were the aspect of collaboration. Two brands, LMI and SF, claimed that outdoor brands' collaboration would be a significant enabler for CE practices. Salomon suggested using the same online platform, for example, regarding the practice of resale. MS claimed that "the industry realized over the years that you need to work together", referring to the practices of the CE. Other changes discussed were, for example, the new legislation coming and the opportunity to add value to the company, discussed by SBS. SPI sees chances to educate the customer and the grown general interest in the outdoor industry customers. MS also discussed that the positive pressure from customers is an enabler for CE practices. MS moreover claimed that "the biggest chance means because it makes a difference". AC finally discussed that the external pressure from competitors could represent a positive pressure and an enabler for CE practices since competitors can, for example, show you what they are doing is possible. Moreover, AC sees creating more products and services around a product as an enabler for CE challenges.

5.2.1.3 Challenges

As just anticipated, the challenges of CE practices were generally discussed mainly in comparison to the enablers. The most discussed challenge was the system behind the CE processes needed to make the whole process work. First, there is a need to reshape all systems (MS), especially in a traditional industry, that is, the ski industry (SF). There is a need to reorganize and rethink the whole system (LMI), starting from the supply chain (AC, SF). The lack of infrastructure is a big challenge for both the recycling system and properly closing the loop (SPI).

The second most discussed challenge was the concept of profit. "Switching to a circular business model requires time before it becomes profitable" (SBS). The challenge is to do the right thing and be sustainable but at the same time make a profit (SPI, MS). SBS claims that "repair doesn't make money, is more a marketing thing [...] while with resale there is more the possibility to make money". The challenges related to rental were also discussed, this practice has a lot of complexity (SBS), mainly regarding the hygiene factor (MS). As regards renting, one must rethink the whole process, and if you try to do it on your own, it is challenging (MS).

MS also claimed that in the textile industry, there is no transparency. For example, one cannot know in detail how much energy consumption one needs to produce something. AC discussed the same claiming that one challenge of CE is that it is very difficult to measure and "is difficult to understand which kind of impact a jacket will have," for example. There is a lack of standards (MS). Certifications on products in respect to sustainable processes require a lot of money. Instead of getting a stamp, sometimes developing a better product or making tests themselves would be better, as Salewa does (SI).

In general, CE processes are difficult to execute (MS), mainly when a company has a significant dimension since there are more types of products to manage (SF). The challenge is to find a compromise between recycling and performance, thus using recyclable material while remaining highly technical and responding to material needs (SPI). For example, outdoor brands use durable products, so when a customer finishes using a jacket, the latter still has life in it, so recycling it (AC) is difficult. For a company to make something of low intensity is easy (for example, reuse), but to make something high intensity with actual labor time is challenging (AC). It's easier to transform one material into another material (for example, from plastic bottles or fishing nets) instead of recycling fabric to make it fabric again (SPI). If materials are not designed to be recycled, it is hard to bring the material back to the loop, it is then challenging to properly close the loop and make the material raw material again (SPI).

Another challenge SF discussed is that to practice CE processes. One must change the culture of a company and the concept behind it. For a historical company, it is more challenging to change that, instead of for a new start-up which is new. SF also finds as a challenge the impact of suppliers regarding carbon emissions. It is useless to act in a certain way if the supplier doesn't behave in the same way. It was moreover discussed if the consumer would have been willing to spend more to have a product or service offered with CE processes (MS).

A final aspect was underlined by SBS, which can be seen as both a challenge and an enabler. The legislation can push the industry, which could have been seen as an enabler. But at the same time, it is hard to push an industry that doesn't fully understand, which represents a challenge for outdoor companies.

5.2.1.4 Future

Most respondents see an exponential growth of CE processes as a future prediction for the CE in three to five years. This theme is becoming increasingly important, there is, in general, much more awareness and especially in the outdoor industry, where everybody is committed to the thematic of

sustainability (LMI, SF, MS). The argument of CE will therefore become normal (SI). Three respondents out of seven claimed that rental services would probably be a more common future circular practice (SBS, SF, AC). Moreover, two respondents see in resale a potential growth (SBS, AC), “I think the resale is well suited to outdoor. Because most of us are building quite durable product” (AC). The role of the consumer was moreover discussed. SPI sees that the education of consumers will be one of the future trends, and MS claims that consumers will have the power to make an impact. Moreover, SPI sees potential in new raw materials such as algae and fungi. “In the future, there will be more transparency”, with probably the introduction of standards that are now missing, as anticipated in the challenges paragraph (MI). Finally, AC expects the presence of more different business models.

5.2.1.5 External Pressure

When exploring the topic of external pressure, all the brands generally feel that those are somehow necessary. Some of the brands stated clearly by saying “they are part of the game (LMI) " or “external pressure is needed” (SBS). Three brands mentioned the pressure coming from the customer. The latter ask for certifications or sustainability criteria (LMI), expecting an outdoor brand to behave in a certain way (AC). MI described this pressure as positive, and creating transparency and understanding of consumers will probably be necessary. MI expects more substantial pressure from the younger generation since “they care”. It also discussed the pressure from politics and EU regulations, for instance, PVC (MI, AC). SI also affirmed that the external pressure comes from retailers, which are more about certifications. AC mentions the pressure as well coming from competitors and employees, since the latter would like to be part of a business, they can be proud of.

5.2.2 Brand Identity

In the following paragraph, all primary data on the brand identity are presented and are divided between the description of the brand and it’s relationship to nature.

5.2.2.1 Description of Brands

A common aspect that was noticed among all the outdoor brands is the humility of the outdoor brand. SF underlined this concept clearly, stating that the word humble is a proper part of the company's brand identity, and SPI claimed that they point to “not shout too much”. Another aspect that more

brands have in common is the concept of taking care (LMI, MS, SF). Moreover, the concept of sustainability is embedded in the brand identity of some companies (LMI, SI), aligning the sustainability goals to what the brand is (SF). While for one brand, the concept of sustainability is relevant since customers are still interested in what the brand is doing and how it is acting, but customers "don't buy from us for the sustainability reason" (SBS).
Moreover, it was underlined how MI and SPI focused on specific products, showing that is a core aspect of the brand identity. "Climbing shoes are our core, the history where we are born" (SPI). MI was born as a rope company and thus, the concept of safety is really at the center of the brand identity of the brand. "Memories are all about safety" (MI).

5.2.2.2 Relationship with Nature

All respondents showed a strong visible interest in the outdoors, with a lot of passion for what they are doing, manifesting commitment when it comes to sustainability practices. "I'm very enthusiastic about outdoor sport" (SPI), "I'm a passionate sport guy by myself" (MI), "I grew up in the mountains" (LMI) are some examples. SBS claimed, "what motivates me nowadays in this role is basically really seeing that you're making a difference not only to the company but wider in the field as well". Moreover, SI stated, "we knew that our employees and the people lived in the mountain, they're all very sensitive to the topics, it is a very fertile playground", referring to sustainability. SI also added that he "worked in environmental sustainability for years. So, I've been close to the topic for probably 20 years". Thus, everyone we interviewed has, in turn a special relationship with nature and a personal interest in preserving it.
Moreover, more brands claimed that the outdoor industry has a particular relationship with the outdoors. SI described this relationship as a sort of "obligation". Moreover, SF claimed that "the more you understand the playground, the more you understand it".
As we will see in the findings of internal communication, to communicate externally, it is first necessary to communicate it internally, and all the people are very much involved in this, given precisely the interest shown and perceived during the interview.

5.2.3 Communication about Circular Economy

The communication aspect was explored from both the internal and external level, and from both a general perspective and with a focus as regards circular economy practices.

5.2.3.1 External

The general communications of the different brands differ from one another, every brand has its way to communicate the general concept of the brand. Take care and contribute are for example, the main concepts communicated according to LMI, the message “trusted by professional” is the main general concept for SBS and the support communicated to people in becoming custodians of their gear instead of just costumer is an example of what AC is doing in the general communication. Moreover, communicating transparency and authenticity are general aspects that more brands mentioned (SPI, LMI, MI).

As regards the external communication of the brand in regard to circularity, six brands out of seven claimed that they communicate less in respect of what they are doing, and the seventh brand (SBS) have a complete lack of external communication regarding sustainability. SBS in fact indirectly communicates through a general concept of general communication the longevity of products, but there is not a strategy and one can find more detail in the description of the product of the website to have more detail about how the product was produced. SI moreover claimed that there shouldn’t be too much advertisement on sustainability practices.

For SPI, communication in footwear is present, especially during events for instance, with the presence of repairing stations for climbing shoes nearby. SF mentioned some examples of what they are doing in communicating circularity for example, the use of the hashtag #trashisgold on social media where all the plastic that was leftovers are reused is the ski for instance, as well as the communication as regards the shoe index 01 and index 02, a shoe made out completely of recycled fabric. AC used the communication to differentiate from competitors, they were in fact, leaders in terms of going to the market with a resale platform. The brand uses the tool of storytelling in everything they do, for example durability components, platforms for resale and repair, the concept of timeless, and the custodianship of being. LMI added that as regards CE, there is a lot of not knowing, with the need to educate in order to not have wrong ideas in mind. LMI also added and admitted that communication is currently one of the weak points, stating that it is hard to find the right message to communicate. SPI points out as well that there is now a starting point in communicating some concepts from business to consumer, or mostly during the selling phase. MI finally explored the aspect that partners also play an important role in communicating CE practices. MI also claimed that a big part of the communication about CE was made for the “close to the loop project” for which the company won a sustainability award in 2021.

5.2.3.2 Internal

Regarding internal communication, LMI explained that the company has its own definition of circularity, which is much more about the mindset in the company instead of the single solution and projects. The company also uses an internal word and an internal project called “accelerating circularity” to make sure that all the people in the company are on the same page regarding sustainability. SBS, LMI, and SF organize different workshops with the different departments of the company about circularity to create a common understanding in the company, since it might be that everyone has a different idea about it. SF organizes training with a focus on the product development department, to make them aware. At the same time, SI and MI manage different activities and workshops with schools and universities. SF staged that sustainability is communicated through employees, where people are involved and excited (AC). According to LMI, involving people is fundamental, and MI claimed that it is fundamental to show internally the strategy unless people get frustrated since they have a lot of passion and thus, internally “it really needs to be managed well”. MI moreover stated that it is critical and important to create positive energy internally, and there is hardly any topic that creates such a lot of energy between employees, as the topic of CE does. AC suggested trying to connect the brand and product team to communicate from the inside to the outside. On the other hand, SPI stated that internal communication is not present and that they just started a couple of years ago to talk about circulatory and sustainability internally during meetings.

5.2.3.3 Chances

Different chances were discussed as regards the communicating CE. As also staged before in the chances of CE, people are getting more involved, and this is seen as a chance from MI since it will be an opportunity for the brand to communicate CE concepts. A similar concept was explored by SPI, who saw a chance in directly educating the consumer. LMI is of the idea that to keep trying and failing is also a chance since it permits you to understand the best way to communicate circularity. Moreover, LMI is seen as an enabler of communication to follow the GRI guideline. SI explore the concept of emotions. Communication is a lot about emotions and using them to talk about circularity makes it more direct and more accessible. For instance, SI, in the shop placed in Bolzano with the concept of second life, as regard the practice of resale, people were invited to write on the clothes they decided not to use anymore, a small dedication of the items, for example where the items were used, on which mountain.

5.2.3.4 Challenges

As regards the challenges of communicating in a CE, SF claims that "if you speak then everybody looks at what you are doing". The same idea is SI, which express the same concept where the more you communicate, the more people will look at what you are doing, and the line between CE and sustainability and green washing is close to each other. Another challenge explained by LMI is that the message doesn't have to be either too difficult and neither too easy, nor that is the big challenge: communicate the message in an understandable way, since as we already stated in the previous findings there is a lot of not knowing from the customer perspective. Thus, as staged by MI, one needs to do the right things to be attractive to consumers. A similar concept was pointed out by SPI who claimed that the challenge is first to educate the retailer, who must be in line with what the customer wants and inform the consumer.

To have a visual and more explicit representation of how the brands are operating, CE practices of the seven brands have been put in a table. The following table summarizes the practices of the seven brands, showing which strategic management actions the outdoor brands interviewed are adopting, following the theory proposed by Borland et al. (2016). The table was completed considering the information collected through both primary and secondary data, to have the more complete possible view of the topic.

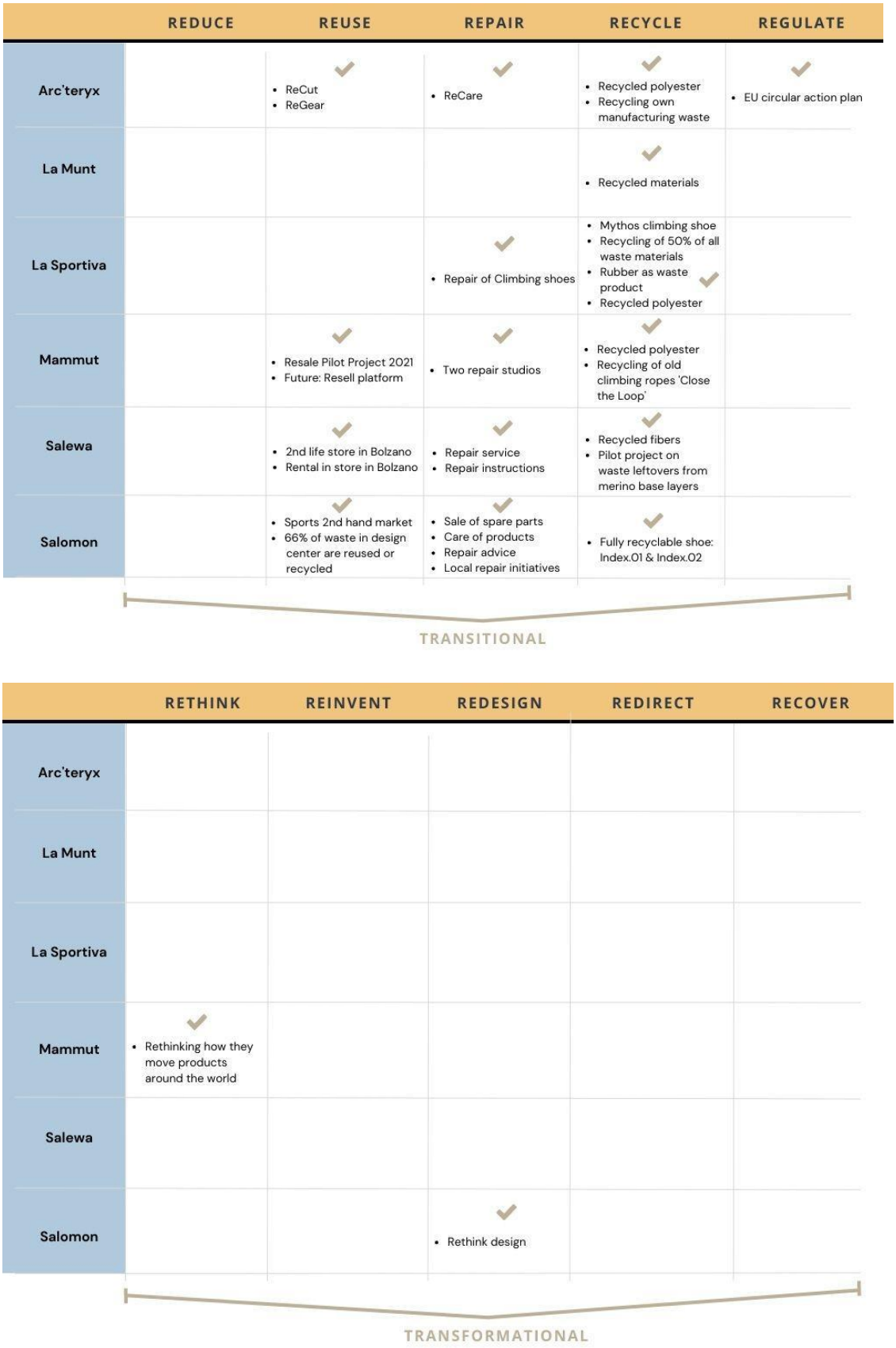

Table 3: Summary of strategic management actions of outdoor textile brands, following the theory proposed by Borland et al. (2016).

As one can observe from the table, transitional practices are more present than transformational ones. Thus, as we saw in the literature, businesses use mostly transitional strategies, operating within a closed business system and where the five Rs come into play after products are already produced, but they do not consider raw material and the environment from the first step.

The transitional practices adopted by the companies only reduce negative impacts but without eliminating them completely has, we would observe with transformational 5s and ecocentric dynamic capabilities. In the transformational strategy, in fact, new business model is implemented to shift from a consumption production towards a more circular direction. We see from the table that rental is one of the practices that businesses adopted, and that Rethink is the most used among the five transformational R's. The word rethink was moreover used in multiple types during the interview from respondents, as we have seen before. Multiple expressions, for instance "there is the need to rethink all process and system" were used.

6. Discussion

Green identity - outdoor brands act sustainable and actively

Applying the CBIM (Urde, 2013) and the CBIRM (Urde & Greyser, 2016) shows that the **connection to nature is central to all brands** and that products should allow experiencing it. All employees have a deep relationship with nature. As stated in the literature, the events related to environmental changes pushed outdoor brands to act proactively in protecting and preserving the outdoors (Gossen et al. 2022). Operating within a unique field, outdoor brands share a distinctive connection with the outdoors. It was evident throughout the interviews that individuals associated with these brands, who possess a deep passion for outdoor activities and often have a personal history intertwined with nature, have a profound sense of attachment to the environment. This passion drives the brands to question their processes and to keep the impact on the environment as small as possible. If comparing the brand identity with the management, it shows that the **identity successfully sets the direction and the purpose** (Greyser & Urde, 2019) because the actions are in line with the brand identity, as outdoor textile brands make efforts to become more sustainable and to lower their impact on the environment. Multiple brands emphasized that they bear a sense of "obligation" to contribute towards protecting the outdoors, recognizing the topic as both highly significant and fertile ground for action. This sensitivity towards environmental preservation can be attributed to the close alignment between the brand's identity and core values. For outdoor brands, having employees who are genuinely engaged and committed to the cause is an integral part of their brand identity. The connection between employee engagement, brand identity, and effective communication also became apparent during the interviews. It was stressed that to communicate CE practices to external stakeholders effectively, internal engagement is fundamental. This approach has been successful due to the inherent passion, motivation, and strong commitment displayed by individuals operating within the outdoor industry. Their genuine involvement and enthusiasm form a solid foundation for fostering effective internal communication, which in turn facilitates the external dissemination of CE principles. In summary, the interviews highlighted the interconnectedness between external environmental pressures, the deep personal connection individuals have with the outdoors, the obligation of outdoor brands to protect the environment, and the subsequent alignment of brand identity and communication strategies. This collective synergy underscores the importance of internal engagement and the intrinsic motivation of employees, serving as a driving force in effectively promoting CE practices to external audiences. Kapferer (2012) points out that the brand identity also embodies its uniqueness, but when comparing

the nine elements of the CBIM between the brands, it shows that they differ from each other only in minor nuances, for example in focusing on garments that provide security or on the use of natural, regional garments. Other than that, the **brand identities from all outdoor textile brands are very close to each other,** for example, in the passion for outdoor sports or in the goal of creating durable products. Looking at the communicational horizontal in the CBIRM (Urde & Greyser, 2016) shows that there is an alignment between expression & recognizability and personality & credibility, but the matrix also points out the importance of communication to create a shared understanding of this part of the identity. It gets clear that it is important to let the world know to get people on board.

Sustainability close to the heart - to act circular is hard

A common thread among the brands was recognizing the need for systemic change towards lowering the impact on the environment as much as possible with one approach through CE, which simultaneously represents the most significant and formidable challenge. The research revealed that **outdoor textile brands face a complex landscape of CE practices**, concluding that there are many different approaches. As a relatively new concept for everyone involved, the pursuit of circular methods while also considering some aspects like logistics and profitability represent significant challenges for outdoor brands. Compounding these challenges is using highly technical materials inherent to the outdoor industry. These materials' exceptional quality and technicality make the implementation of CE practices even more intricate and demanding. This creates a paradox where outdoor brands are expected to act sustainably, yet the technical nature of their materials makes it difficult compared to other industries. A recurring challenge discussed during the interviews was the delicate balance between sustainability, high performance, and differentiation from competitors. Determining the optimal path to align sustainability, logistics, and profit remains uncertain, with ongoing efforts focused on exploring various approaches. Each brand grapples with this question, striving to navigate the intricate interplay between these factors and seeking the most suitable course of action.

The analysis of respondent feedback shed light on the intriguing dynamics surrounding external pressure within the context of outdoor brands, such external pressure from consumers, governments, and other companies. Many respondents highlighted the **necessity of external pressure** and its transformation into a unique opportunity for these brands. Rather than viewing external pressure as a negative force, it was observed that outdoor brands often embrace it with a positive attitude. This positive outlook stems from the realization that external pressure catalyzes continuous improvement, compelling the brand to strive for higher levels of performance and accountability. In essence, external pressure is perceived as a valuable impetus that propels outdoor brands to surpass their

existing capabilities, enabling them to evolve, innovate, and adapt in response to societal expectations and environmental challenges. Consequently, external pressure is reframed as a beneficial force that fosters growth, propels positive change, and pushes outdoor brands toward ever-improving sustainability practices.

During the interviews, the two brands highlighted their challenge regarding the **color system, spare parts, expertise, and logistics regarding the circular practice repair.** On the one hand, used products by consumers must get to a place where they can be repaired, which entails logistics. Then the fitting spare parts must be available on-site that match the quality of the products. Finally, there must be expertise from the person who repairs the product about their peculiarities.

Circular Expedition: Outdoor Brands Pave the Way for Sustainable Tradition

Many respondents believed that the **future of CE practices holds great promise**, with expectations that it will gain increasing importance over the next three to five years. Respondents claimed that the topic of CE will become more and more normal, since sustainability is becoming more critical and thus will develop significantly. Transforming **the current system requires collaboration**, which the brands identified as the key enabler. For example, Mammut partnered with The Renewal Workshop for a resale pilot project in 2021 to better understand the topic before launching a resale platform. Besides collaborating with external partners, **a cooperation between outdoor textile brands is needed**. Respondents agreed that cooperation between brands is crucial to drive meaningful change and successfully implement CE practices. Consequently, a collective effort is anticipated, where outdoor textile brands collaborate with a shared objective of safeguarding and preserving nature. Some brands have already proposed practical measures, such as establishing a common online platform for resale, aimed at reducing costs and enhancing sustainability. As the industry progresses, the **cooperation and exchange of ideas among outdoor brands are expected to foster innovative solutions and drive the adoption of circular practices,** facilitating the protection and preservation of the natural environment that lies at the heart of their operations.

Moreover, looking ahead, an important expectation for the future is establishing **a comprehensive system to assess and quantify the sustainability aspects of products** within the outdoor textile industry. This need arises from the recognition that measuring the sustainability impact poses a formidable challenge for brands. During the interviews, two brands specifically emphasized the difficulties associated with quantifying the sustainability dimension of their products. Without a structured system in place, effectively evaluating and measuring sustainability remains elusive. Implementing a robust measurement system holds great significance as it would enable outdoor textile brands to accurately gauge the environmental impact of their products throughout their

lifecycle. Such a system would provide a standardized framework to assess key sustainability indicators, including resource consumption, carbon emissions, waste generation, and social implications. By establishing clear metrics and benchmarks, brands could effectively evaluate their progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions to enhance their circular performance. The development of a reliable measurement system is a complex undertaking, as it necessitates the consideration of diverse factors, methodologies, and data sources. It requires collaboration and consensus-building among industry stakeholders, sustainability experts, and regulatory bodies. The goal is to establish a transparent and credible framework that ensures consistency and comparability across brands and enables meaningful sustainability assessments. The implementation of a robust measurement system would not only facilitate internal evaluation but also empower consumers to make informed choices. Transparent sustainability information would enable consumers to assess the environmental footprint of products and align their purchasing decisions with their values and sustainability goals. Furthermore, it would foster healthy competition among brands, encouraging continuous improvement and innovation in sustainable practices. While the path to developing a comprehensive measurement system may be challenging, it is a critical step toward advancing circularity within the industry. By overcoming the current hurdles and collaboratively designing an effective framework, brands can take a significant stride towards achieving their sustainability objectives and pushing even harder towards circular practices.

Overall, sustainability is a strongly represented topic on the websites of all brands. It is explained that the **brand is closely related to nature** and therefore needs to be protected by minimizing the impact of the brand as much as possible. The steps taken by the brands to become more sustainable are explained. However, the subject of CE hardly ever comes up, and when it does, it is hardly mentioned. On the other hand, the brands in their sustainability reports usually go into the CE on the first few pages, also call it with this term and name it as a central goal to become more sustainable. The reports show that seven **brands want to move from a linear economy to a circular economy**, but this is not communicated or communicated less clearly on the website. This gives the following assumption:

Powerful moves, silent grooves: Strong actions, weak communication proves

Based on respondents ' responses, it was possible to observe and deduce that every brand admits that their communication efforts do not adequately reflect the extent of their sustainable practices. Six brands out of seven, in fact stated in the interview that they communicate less of what they do, and the seventh brand presents a complete lack of external communication as regards sustainability and circular practices.

One **reason** why outdoor textile brands communicate less of what they are doing regarding circular practices can be linked to the brand identity of the brands. During the discussion on brand identity, it became apparent that **outdoor textile brands tend to embody a sense of humbleness.** This observation was both claimed by respondents and substantiated through empirical observations. Consequently, the relatively limited engagement in communicating CE practices can be attributed to this overarching humility exhibited.

Another reason for this phenomenon emerged from the feedback from respondents, namely that **consumers have a relatively low interest in sustainability and being environmentally conscious**. This suggests that consumers do not exhibit a strong inclination or enthusiasm for engaging with the specifics of sustainable initiatives undertaken by these brands. This represents a confirmation of something already present in the literature review. Fuchs (2022) stated that the lack of interest from consumer sites represents one of the main challenges regarding CE practices in the sports and outdoor goods industry. Gussen (2021) moreover stated that people don't always consciously consider the consequences of their actions and decisions, nor do they always have access to the data needed to do so. This refers to the fact that consumers don't often reflect on how a product is produced, so even whether companies would expose the information and communication of the CE, this does not represent a certainty for consumers to show interest and act in respect of it. In addition, interviewees noted that there is **no standardized measurement of the sustainability or circularity** of the products. Each brand has its measurement, which makes it difficult for the customer to make comparisons and assess what is more sustainable.

Moreover, within the context of the interviews, one brand put forth the argument that communicating **CE practices is not necessarily imperative**. The reason behind this is that outdoor brands are really engaged in tangible efforts to preserve the environment. Consequently, for this respondent, the very existence of these sustainability and circular initiatives serves as a sufficient reason to refrain from excessive communication about CE practices. In essence, it is assumed that such efforts are already taken for granted, thus negating the need for insistent communication campaigns.

Another reason why external communication is not present is that **communication simply represents a weakness, highlighting the brand's relative shortcomings in effectively disseminating information about their sustainable practices**. Consequently, some brands tend to prioritize the allocation of their available resources, such as budgets, towards other areas of importance, such as research and development, rather than investing heavily in communication efforts. This strategic decision reflects the belief that optimizing resources in research produces greater long-term benefits than emphasizing communication efforts, which may have limited impact or face challenges within their operational framework.

An additional reason behind the limited extent of communication by outdoor brands is rooted in their **apprehension of attracting excessive scrutiny**. It was contended that once brands actively engage in communication, there is a heightened risk of being closely observed, with stakeholders and the public paying increased attention to their actions. Consequently, the fear of intensified scrutiny serves as a deterrent for outdoor textile brands to refrain from excessive communication about CE practices. This apprehension is further compounded by the acknowledgment, expressed during the interviews, that the demarcation between genuine sustainability practices and the deceptive practice of greenwashing is often perilously close. The potential for misinterpretation or unfounded accusations further accentuates their reluctance to engage in extensive communication campaigns that may invite scrutiny or skepticism.

Emotion in Motion: Chance for Outdoor Textile Brands to Fuel Circular Economy's Devotion

When using logos, ethos, and pathos to find out more about the way brands communicate circularity, it was found that the communication of all brands is strongly represented in the logos area and gives reasons, arguments, facts, and data to inform and educate. However, communication no longer moves so much around ethos, and within ethos, communication still provides guidance rather than being entertained and consumers delighted. Surprisingly only one out of seven brands use enjoyment to communicate about circularity. The least represented is pathos, which means that **emotions and feelings are rarely used in communication about circularity**. This is in contradiction with the strong passion that is a feeling that all brands have in their identity.

Active education tends to be more application-related, for example, by explaining how a garment is repaired or washed so that it lasts as long as possible.

Bocken et al. (2016) also discuss the role of emotions and attachment when designing long-life products. Making products that consumers will cherish, value, and trust over time is referred to as a design for attachment and can assist in achieving this. Emotional durability is a part of this strategy, which comprises creating items capable of forming sympathetic customer relationships. Designing for physical durability entails creating things that can withstand use and abuse without degrading. This concept can also be successfully applied to communication about circularity. It was discussed by one of the respondents, that in implementing resell and reuse practices, the role of emotions play an important role. One **example** was when reselling outdoor products, a label with a note from the previous owner was left for the future owner, creating an emotional bond. Also, another brand points to the concept of emotion, mostly through communication, with the notion of timeless and the custodianship of being as regards outdoor gear.

Overall, an intriguing observation emerged regarding the perception of the **CE's communication as a significant opportunity**, particularly in relation to consumer education on CE practices. Despite the factors mentioned above influencing the restrained communication strategies of outdoor textile brands, it was recognized that effectively communicating the principles of the CE presented a notable chance for these brands. By leveraging communication channels, they could raise awareness and **educate consumers about the importance and benefits of embracing CE** practices. Two respondents from the interviews claimed that the education of the consumer is a big chance and is essential for them too. This recognition underlines the potential of communication to serve as a powerful tool in fostering consumer understanding and engagement with sustainable practices, offering outdoor textile brands an opportunity to actively contribute to the spread of knowledge and the promotion of responsible behaviors within the context of the CE.

Fuchs (2022) holds the same opinion that consumer demand and awareness can be raised through marketing efforts, and this was also confirmed by Gussen (2021), who affirms that marketing practices can make people more aware and interested and companies can therefore educate consumers.

Circularity vs. Longevity: Outdoor Textile Brands chose the path of durability

The following table summarizes the practices that the outdoor textile brands are currently doing, highlighting the different practices regarding business and product design models. It was already discussed in the chapter of the finding that it was clear that the brands are more active in using a transitional adoption of the 5 R's proposed by Borland (2016).

CE practices of outdoor brands were summarized in the following table as well, following the theory provided by Bocken et al. (2016), since it makes it more clear, whether outdoor brands adopt CE practices within a more product design approach or a business model approach.

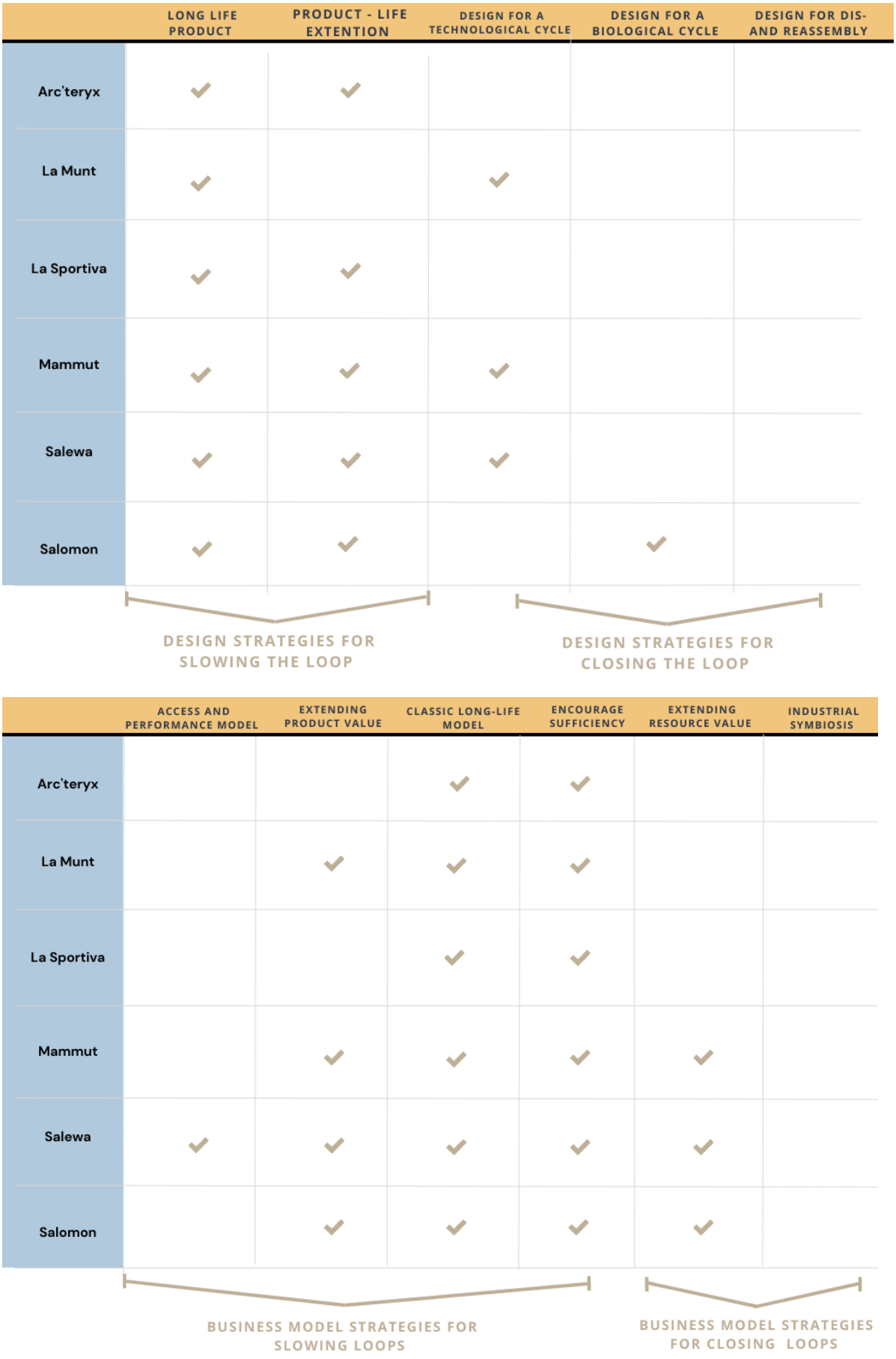

Table 4: Summary of design strategies of outdoor textile brands, following the theory proposed by Bocken et al. (2016).

As can be observed, all brands already have a circular practice at the beginning of the design phase, in which they use recycled materials for the new products. The reason for this is that this is a simple step that does not require changing the entire business model because it is not touching all the points of the product life cycle. The same applies to circular processes such as resell, rental, second life, repair, and care. All these practices only start at the end of the product life cycle. A closer examination of the data presented in the table reveals that brands are **more proactive and successful in extending the lifespan of their products**. This is understandable given that outdoor textile brands are known for offering durable and high-quality products. However, implementing CE practices that close the loop and achieve full product circularity proves to be more intricate and demanding. The absence of a well-established system specifically tailored to the unique characteristics of outdoor brands' materials further compounds the challenges associated with achieving closed-loop practices. Consequently, it currently makes more practical sense for brands to focus on extending the life of products rather than fully closing the loop.

One respondent highlighted the energy-intensive and resource-demanding manufacturing processes involved in producing synthetic products, particularly jackets. However, when these **products are designed to be long-lasting, it extends the impact of the materials used over a significant period of time, effectively amortizing energy and resource consumption**. Respondents referred to studies that indicate doubling the lifespan of a product essentially cuts its environmental footprint in half. Thus, any efforts to eliminate or delay the initial energy-intensive steps in production significantly improve the product's environmental footprint.

The evidence suggests that brands can make substantial strides toward reducing their environmental impact by prioritizing the durability and longevity of outdoor products. Extending the lifespan of products allows for a more efficient utilization of resources, minimizes waste generation, and lessens the need for energy-intensive manufacturing processes. Consequently, the focus on product design and lifespan extension aligns with the overarching goals of CE principles, promoting sustainability and resource conservation.

While closing the loop and achieving full circularity remains complex, the positive environmental outcomes associated with extending product life spans cannot be understated. As the industry progresses and a more comprehensive system for circularity is developed, outdoor brands may explore additional avenues to enhance their sustainability efforts. But, for now, the emphasis on extending the life of products showcases a tangible and impactful way to reduce the environmental footprint of outdoor brands and pave the way towards a more sustainable future.

Moreover, there is a need to discuss the practices related to design strategies for closing the loop. According to the literature review provided by Bocken et al. (2016), the cradle-to-cradle philosophy should ensure that the materials can be continuously and safely recycled into new materials or products, maintaining a constant flow of resources throughout the technological cycle. However, outdoor brands that implemented product design strategies for a techno cycle assure to **close the loop for one circle but not forever**. For example, Mammut recycling climbing ropes, or Salomon recycling running shoes. Both brands close the loop once, but the raw material does not become raw material in the loop. Thus, if we take a literature review to the letter, we are not sure these practices are designed for techno cycle. Furthermore, we learn from the literature that the transitional 5Rs from Borland, where most of the brands are active, only reduce the negative impact but not eliminate it.

It was moreover interesting to observe that the interviewed perceived **rental practice as one of the most promising avenues for future implementation**. However, it is important to note that despite its potential, rental also presents significant challenges that must be addressed. This dichotomy arises from the fact that outdoor brands recognize the immense potential of the rental as a practice and have already contemplated and experimented with its implementation, thereby gaining valuable insights into the associated challenges. The enthusiasm surrounding the rental practice stems from its alignment with the principles of CE and sustainability. By offering rental services, outdoor textile brands can extend the lifespan of their products and reduce the demand for new production. This practice can potentially reduce resource consumption, minimize waste generation, and promote access over ownership, which resonates well with the values of outdoor enthusiasts and environmentally conscious consumers. Some of the challenges with this practice are that, according to interviewees, it has much complexity within the system and the hygiene factor, for example. **Reselling has been identified as the most likely to be profitable** circular practice.

Their prior exploration and experimentation with rental practices have provided valuable insights and learnings, allowing them to anticipate and address the associated challenges more effectively. By leveraging their experience and expertise, brands can refine their rental strategies, develop innovative solutions, and collaborate with industry stakeholders to overcome hurdles and make the rental a viable and impactful practice within the outdoor sector.

This results in the interest and enthusiasm surrounding rental as a future practice within the outdoor industry are evident. While acknowledging the challenges it presents, outdoor brands are committed to exploring and implementing rental services due to their alignment with circular economy principles and sustainability goals. By addressing logistical complexities, ensuring product durability, and

establishing sustainable pricing models, brands can unlock the full potential of rental and contribute to a more sustainable and accessible outdoor experience for consumers.

Seamless Sustainovation: Brand Identity, Communication, Circular Creation

In conclusion, brand identity, communication and management are deeply connected and cannot be separated. They also support each other and can be used to promote the CE. One notable **example highlighting the successful integration of brand identity, CE practices, and communication within** outdoor textile brands is LaSportiva, which effectively linked these elements to create a cohesive and impactful approach. As a company specializing in footwear, particularly climbing shoes, the brand's core business revolved around this product category. In line with their brand identity, LaSportiva actively engaged in CE practices by offering repair and recycling services for climbing shoes. Communication played a central role in this alignment, particularly during events where dedicated stands were set up for customers to repair their climbing shoes, underscoring the brand's commitment to sustainability. By aligning their core values and products with sustainable initiatives, such brands create a cohesive narrative that resonates with their target audience. The integration of communication amplifies the message, enabling brands like LaSportiva to effectively convey their commitment to sustainability while strengthening their brand identity within the outdoor industry.

7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the alignment between brand identity, management actions, and communication of outdoor textile brands to become more circular and lower the impact on the environment as much as possible. It was discussed how communication, brand identity, and management actions are deeply interwoven and almost inseparable (see figure 10). Outdoor textile brands cannot eliminate their impact on the environment. However, they actively strive to lower their environmental footprint by making conscious choices. By embracing sustainability as a core principle because of their deep connection to nature, outdoor textile brands provide direction and purpose to their operations and acknowledge the necessity of responsible practices within the industry. Outdoor textile brands understand that eliminating their environmental impact is a challenging task. However, by actively aligning their brand identity with their management actions and effectively communicating their circularity initiatives, these brands provide direction, purpose, and transparency. While sustainability may already be inherent in their identity, outdoor textile brands continuously strive to become more circular and see circular business models as chance to contribute to their broader goal of creating a more sustainable future. Outdoor textile brands are leading the way and showing how a transformation from a linear to a circular economy could work.

It was explored how and why outdoor textile brands communicate little about CE practices. Circularity is present in the sustainability reports of the interviewed brands but is not mentioned on websites that strong. But communication strategies play a crucial role in creating awareness and educating consumers about CE principles. By leveraging their brand identity and emphasizing the chances for CE, brands effectively create awareness, educate consumers, and inspire collective action. This integrated approach reinforces the brand's commitment to sustainability, encourages consumer participation, and contributes to the transition toward a more circular and sustainable future. Outdoor textile brands can communicate more effectively when using emotions and feelings as well as entertainment and enjoyment to spread the word about circularity.

Currently, the management actions of outdoor textile brands are focused on implementing practices around one aspect: producing durable products. By prioritizing durability, brands aim to extend the lifespan of their products. Furthermore, the brands in the outdoor industry share a common goal of transitioning to a more circular model. While recycling and repair are already established circular

practices, reuse, such as the resale of textiles that have already been worn, is used less and the first pilot projects are starting.

Nevertheless, a shared objective of a circular future creates opportunities for learning and collaboration among brands. While they may compete in the market, the brands recognize the importance of knowledge exchange and cooperation to accelerate the transition toward circularity.

Various challenges in the transition form a linear to a circular economy were discussed, such as the lack of interest from the customer side, the complexity in changing all system in the transition and the particular complexity for outdoor textile industry due to the high technicality of the products.

Despite that, various chances motivate brands to push for circularity. External pressures, such as regulations imposed by governments like the European Union and pressure from customers, can create a sense of urgency and provide incentives for brands to adopt circular practices. Moreover, the high internal motivation pushes outdoor brands to take actions. In conclusion, the three pillars brand identity, communication, and management actions, which are very closely intertwined, are essential in driving the transition towards more circularity in outdoor textile brands. In addition, the circular economy is still in its infancy and due to the efforts of outdoor textile brands, this will develop in the future.

7.1 Future research

Future research may include an analysis of social media besides the one already conducted on websites. By conducting an in-depth analysis of social media, researchers can attain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how brands communicate their commitment to CE practices. In addition to content analysis, researchers can utilize social network analysis techniques to map and analyze the relationships and interactions between brands, consumers, influencers, and other relevant stakeholders. Future research could also consider the consumer perspective, focusing on how they perceive the communication and the management actions taken by the brand. Thus, future research could involve understanding consumers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward sustainability and how these factors influence their interpretation and evaluation of brand messages. By adopting a consumer-centric approach, researchers can explore the effectiveness and impact of brand communication strategies, identifying key drivers and barriers that shape consumer perceptions and behavior.

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Appendix 1- Interview Guideline

Research Question:

- How can Outdoor Brands align their Brand Identity with their management actions and communication to become more circular and thus more sustainable?

Sub Question:

- How do the communication strategies of outdoor brands align with their management decisions (in promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible practices)?
- How do management actions affect the transition of brands towards a more circularity?
    - Or: How can management actions push the transition of a brand towards more circularity?

- Welcome and thank you for joining
- Irene/Ira will lead the conversation and Irene/Ira will also ask questions if they want to explore something better
- I just wanted to make you aware that we will record this session
- Start Recording
- Briefly describe the project again and progress to this point.
    - The two of us met in Masters Programme in Lund
    - Irene from Italy, Ira from Germany and both passionate about Outdoor Textile and both already worked in the field
- If you are not familiar with any type of words we will use during this session, just please let us know and we will give you definition
- Do you have any questions now? Also allowed to ask questions during the interview

INTRODUCTION

- Can you please introduce yourself ? Like the job role you cover and in which company ?
- What sparks your interest in this field ?
    - What are your key motivators in this field ?

MANAGEMENT STEPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY & CIRCULARITY

- How does your company currently approach circularity?
    - Can you name some practices/ processes where you already work in circular ways?
    - Can you name some ideas that are already in discussion that are not implemented yet?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you are facing regarding circular economy practices?
    - What are some of the biggest chances you see for outdoor brands to become more circular?

- What is your opinion regarding external pressure in terms of managing the brand? (climate change, society, government)
- In which way do you think circular practices are developing among outdoor brands over the next 3-5 years?
    - How does this impact your work?

BRAND IDENTITY

- How would you describe the brand you are working for (or you last worked) at?
- How important is sustainability to your brand ?
- Can you describe how your brand works with your company's sustainability goals?

COMMUNICATION

- Which message/ which picture do you want to get across in your communication ?
    - Which role does the communication about circular processes play?
    - How do you make sure that circularity stands out?
- How does this shape/ support your brand?
- Which communication concepts does the brand follow?
- What kind of promise does the brand carry to the outside world when it comes to sustainability?
    - What are the biggest challenges that stand in the way of this promise?
    - Would they be any drivers that help keep the promise?

END

- Give Ira/ Irene the chance to ask some questions that came up on the way
- Are there any thoughts you want to share with us in addition to what we talked about?
- We are still missing interview partners and wanted to ask if anyone comes in to your mind
- Thank you for taking the time to being part of this interview, we are really appreciating the effort and we will share our results beginning of June

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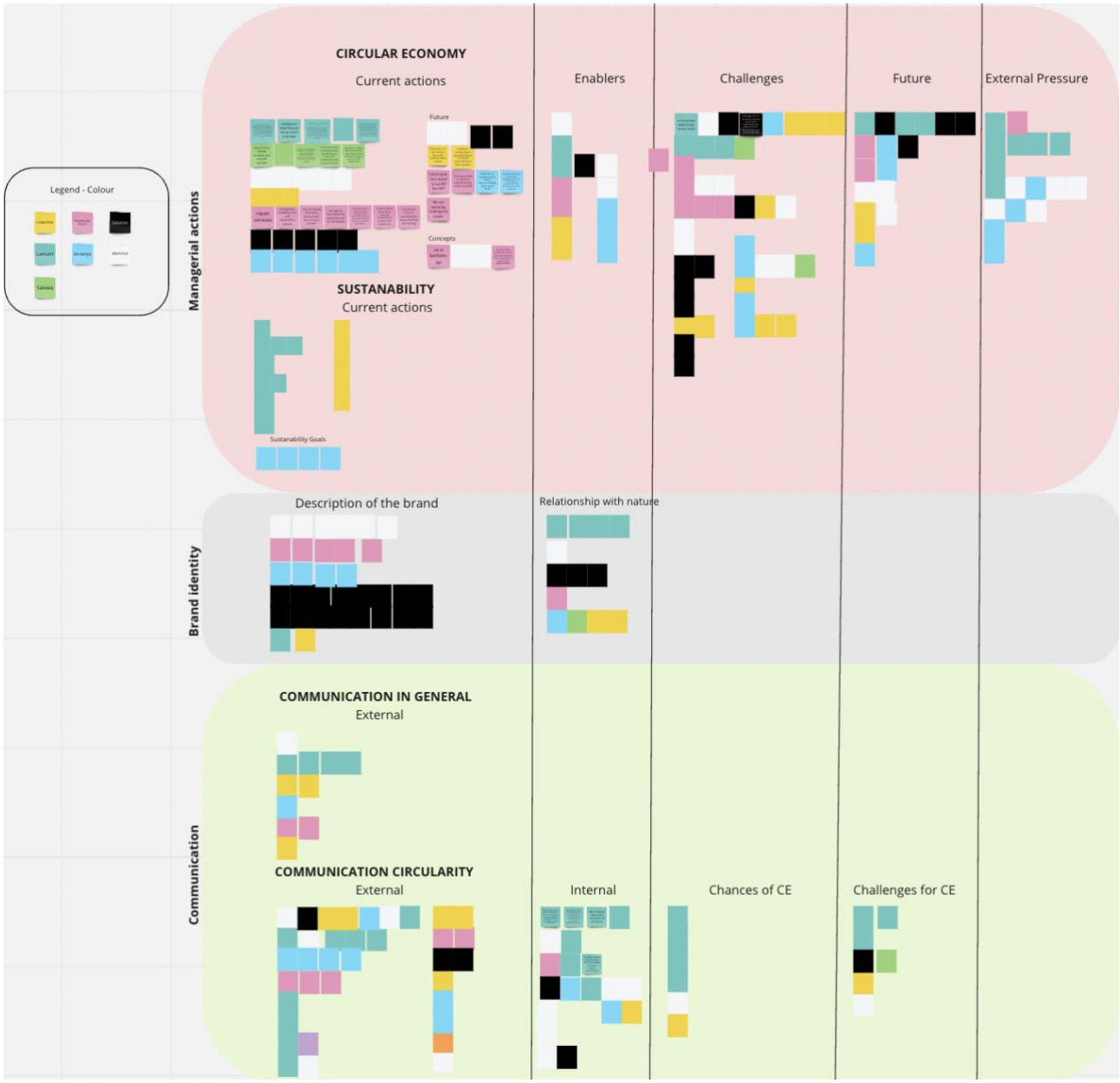
Definitions:

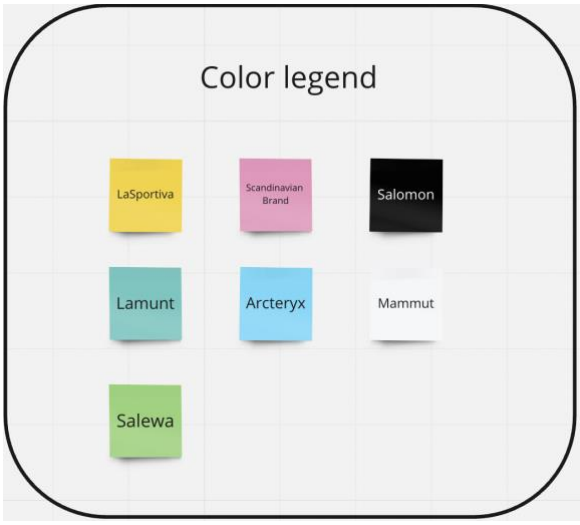
Circular economy
An economic system based on the reuse and regeneration of materials or products, especially as a means of continuing production in a sustainable or environmentally friendly way.

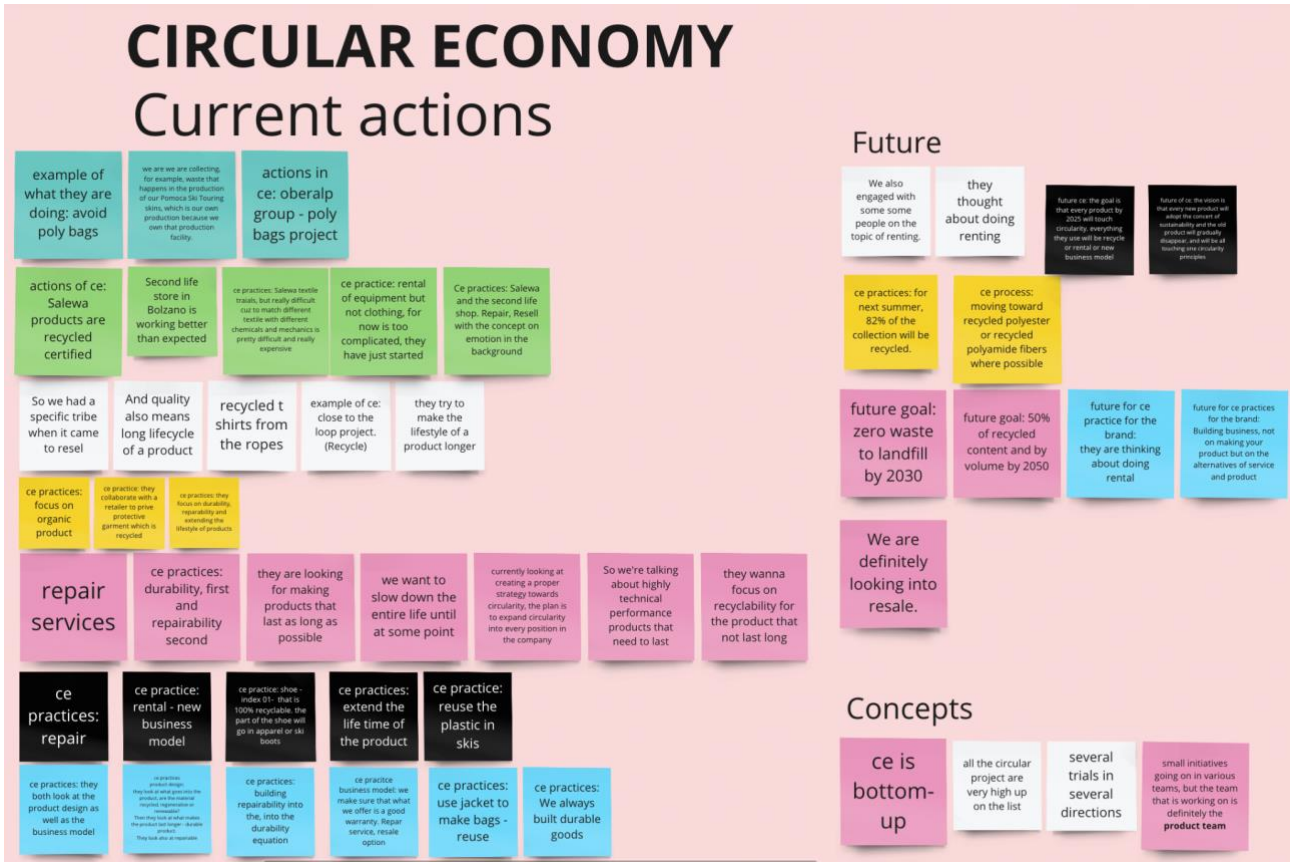
Brand identity
A brand identity is a set of tools or elements used by a company to create a brand image. A brand image is a customers' perception of the brand consisting of various associations related to it and memories about interacting with it.

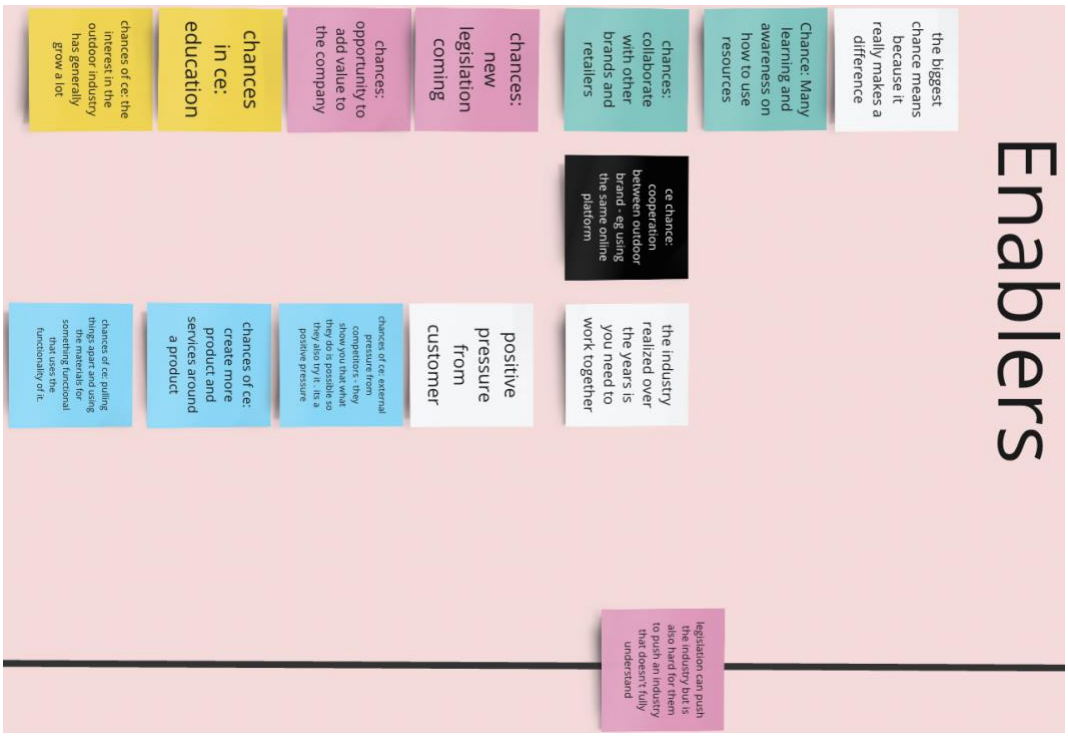
Appendix 2 Coding Material Interviews

Board used for the coding

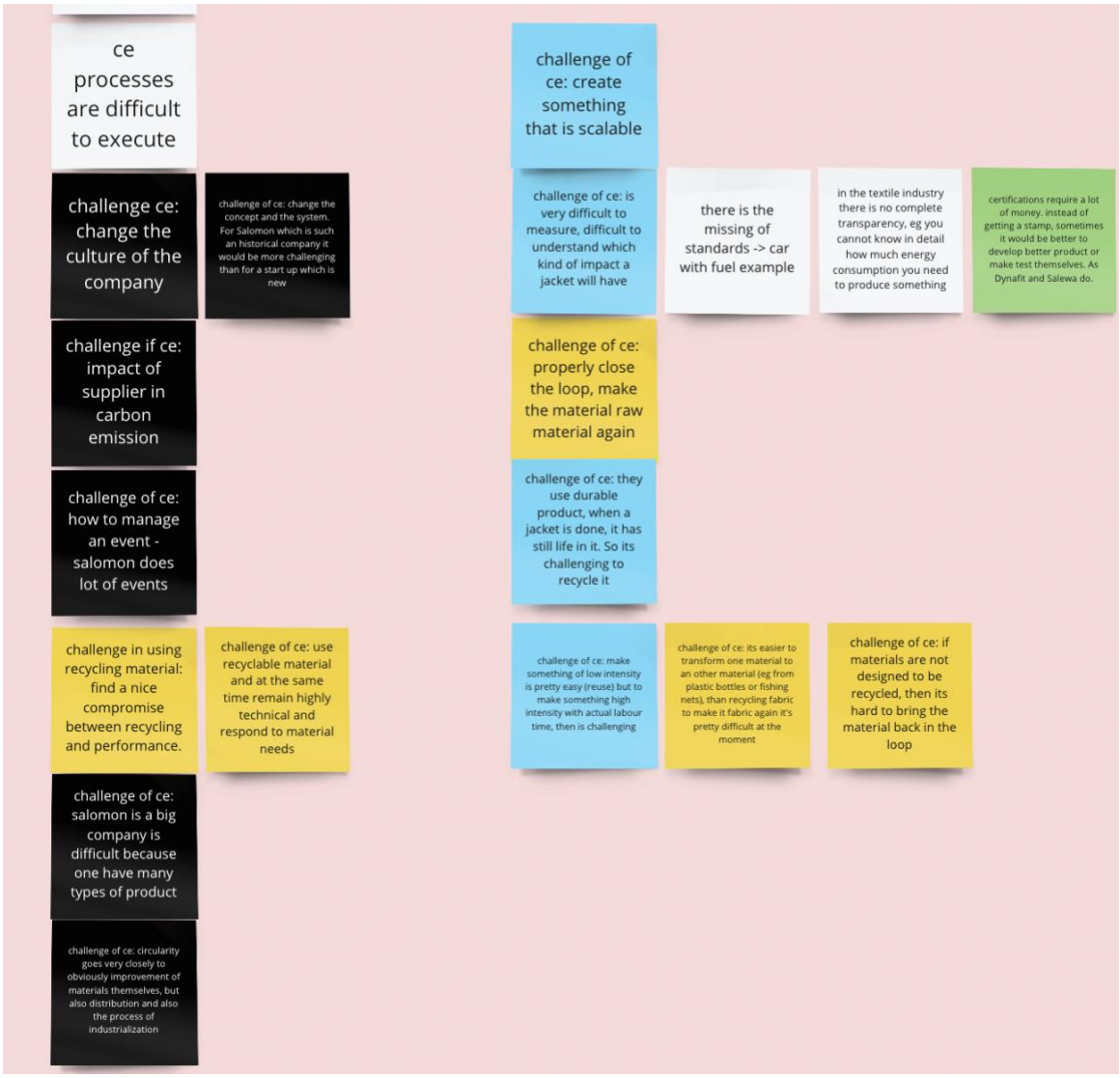

Legend - Colour
Managerial actions
CIRCULAR ECONOMY
Current actions
Future
Concepts
SUSTAINABILITY
Current actions
Sustainability Goals
Enablers
Challenges
Future
External Pressure
Brand identity
Description of the brand
Relationship with nature
Communication
COMMUNICATION IN GENERAL
External
COMMUNICATION CIRCULARITY
External
Internal
Chances of CE
Challenges for CE

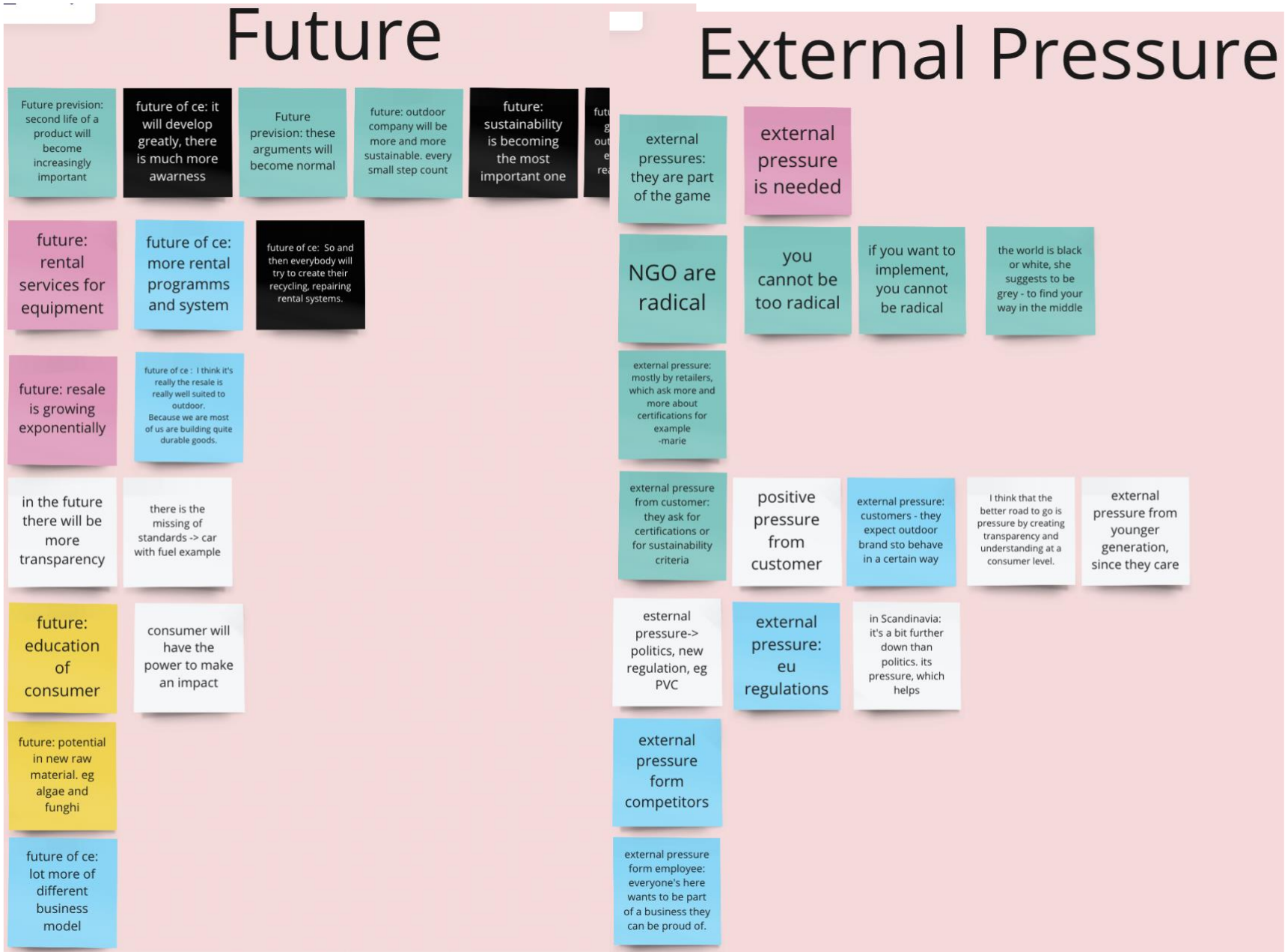

Color legend
LaSportiva
Scandinavian Brand
Salomon
Lamunt
Arcteryx
Mammut
Salewa

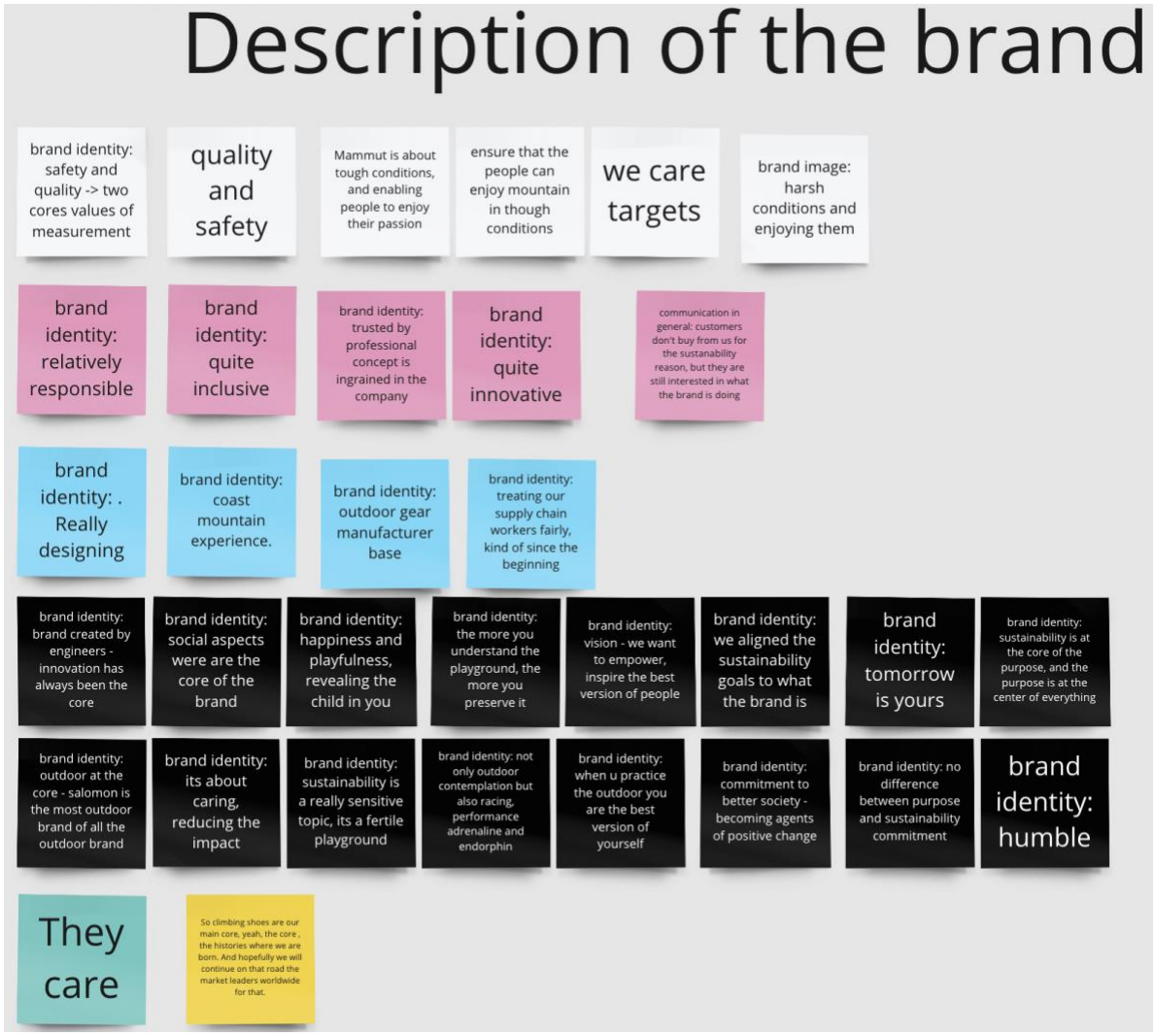

CIRCULAR ECONOMY
Current actions
example of what they are doing: avoid poly bags
we are we are collecting, for example, waste that happens in the production of our Pomoca Ski Touring skins, which is our own production because we own that production facility.
actions in ce: oberalp group - poly bags project
actions of ce: Salewa products are recycled certified
Second life store in Bolzano is working better than expected
ce practices: Salewa textile traials, but really difficult cuz to match different textile with different chemicals and mechanics is pretty difficult and really expensive
ce practice: rental of equipment but not clothing, for now is too complicated, they have just started
Ce practices: Salewa and the second life shop. Repair, Resell with the concept on emotion in the background
So we had a specific tribe when it came to resel
And quality also means long lifecycle of a product
recycled t shirts from the ropes
example of ce: close to the loop project. (Recycle)
they try to make the lifestyle of a product longer
ce practices: focus on organic product
ce practice: they collaborate with a retailer to prive protective garment which is recycled
ce practices: they focus on durability, repairability and extending the lifestyle of products
repair services
ce practices: durability, first and repairability second
they are looking for making products that last as long as possible
we want to slow down the entire life until at some point
currently looking at creating a proper strategy towards circularity, the plan is to expand circularity into every position in the company
So we're talking about highly technical performance products that need to last
they wanna focus on recyclability for the product that not last long
ce practices: repair
ce practice: rental - new business model
ce practice: shoe - index 01- that is 100% recyclable. the part of the shoe will go in apparel or ski boots
ce practices: extend the life time of the product
ce practice: reuse the plastic in skis
ce practices: they both look at the product design as well as the business model
ce practices: product design: they look at what goes into the product, are the material recycled, regenerative or renewable? Then they look at what makes the product last longer - durable product. They look also at reparable
ce practices: building repairability into the, into the durability equation
ce practice business model: we make sure that what we offer is a good warranty. Repair service, resale option
ce practices: use jacket to make bags - reuse
ce practices: We always built durable goods
Future
We also engaged with some some people on the topic of renting.
they thought about doing renting
future ce: the goal is that every product by 2025 will touch circularity. everything they use will be recycle or rental or new business model
future of ce: the vision is that every new product will adopt the concept of sustainability and the old product will gradually disappear, and will be all touching one circularity principles
ce practices: for next summer, 82% of the collection will be recycled.
ce process: moving toward recycled polyester or recycled polyamide fibers where possible
future goal: zero waste to landfill by 2030
future goal: 50% of recycled content and by volume by 2050
future for ce practice for the brand: they are thinking about doing rental
future for ce practices for the brand: Building business, not on making your product but on the alternatives of service and product
We are definitely looking into resale.
Concepts
ce is bottom-up
all the circular project are very high up on the list
several trials in several directions
small initiatives going on in various teams, but the team that is working on is definitely the product team

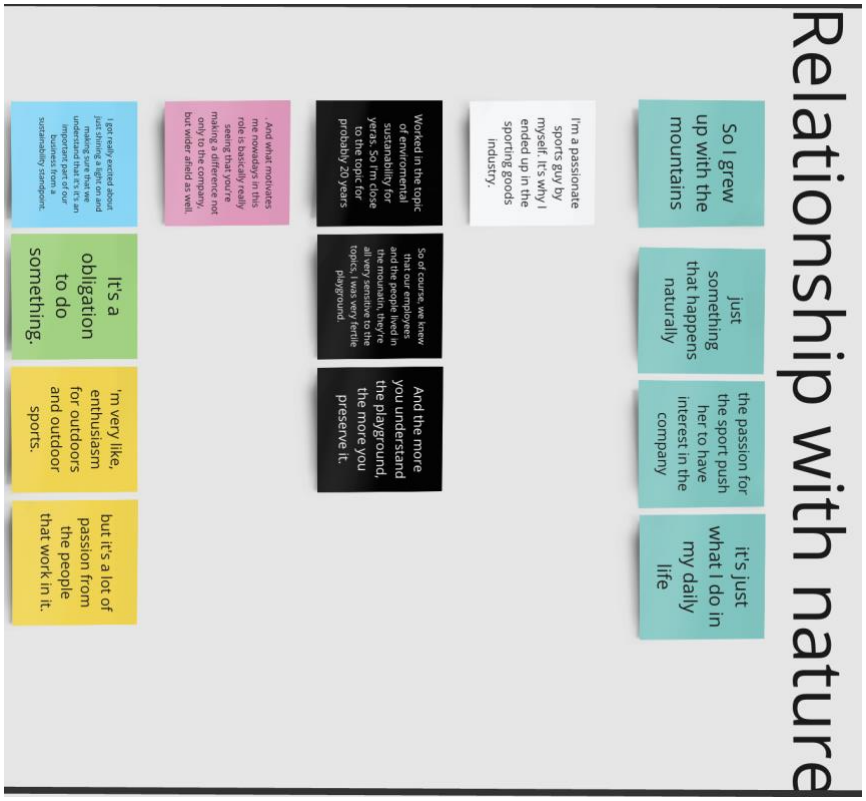

Enablers
chances of ce: the interest in the outdoor industry has generally grow a lot
chances in ce: education
chances: opportunity to add value to the company
chances: new legislation coming
chances: collaborate with other brands and retailers
Chance: Many learning and awareness on how to use resources
the biggest chance means because it really makes a difference
ce chance: cooperation between outdoor brand - eg using the same online platform
chances of ce: pulling things apart and using the materials for something functional that used for functionality of it.
chances of ce: create more product and services around a product
chances of ce: external pressure from competitors - they show you that what they do is possible so they also try it - its a positive pressure
positive pressure from customer
the industry realized over the years is you need to work together
legislation can push the industry but is also hard for them to push an industry that doesn't fully understand


Challenges
is the system behind that doesn't work
you need to reset the system
challenge in ce: reshape an industry which is very traditional, especially the ski industry
challenge of ce: no sensei the company uses circular practices but the supply chain not. the all system need to be reorganized
challenge of ce: the all structure of the business, starting from the supply chain
challenge in recycling: missing of a system and infrastructure
challenge of ce: create a structure and proper process for recycling fabrics
Challenge of ce: not possible to close the loop for the lack of infrastructure
Challenge: Logistic
Logistic challenge: you have to rethink the all system
Logistic challenge: you have to rethink the all system
Challenge infrastructure
legislation can push the industry but is also hard for them to push an industry that doesn't fully understand
challenges for a brand is that every single part of the business is set up in the opposite way
rental has a lot of complexity
Challenge for renting: hygiene factors
challenge of renting: you have to rethink the all process, and if you do it on your own its difficult.
to switch to a circular business model requires time before it become actually profitable
repair doesn't really make money, is more a marketing thing
with resale there is more the possibility to make money
challenge: remaining sustainable and at the same time perform well and at the same time doing profit
challenge of ce: try to manage everything and still do business and stay profitable
you need to do what is right but at the same time make profit
would the consumer be willing to spend more ?

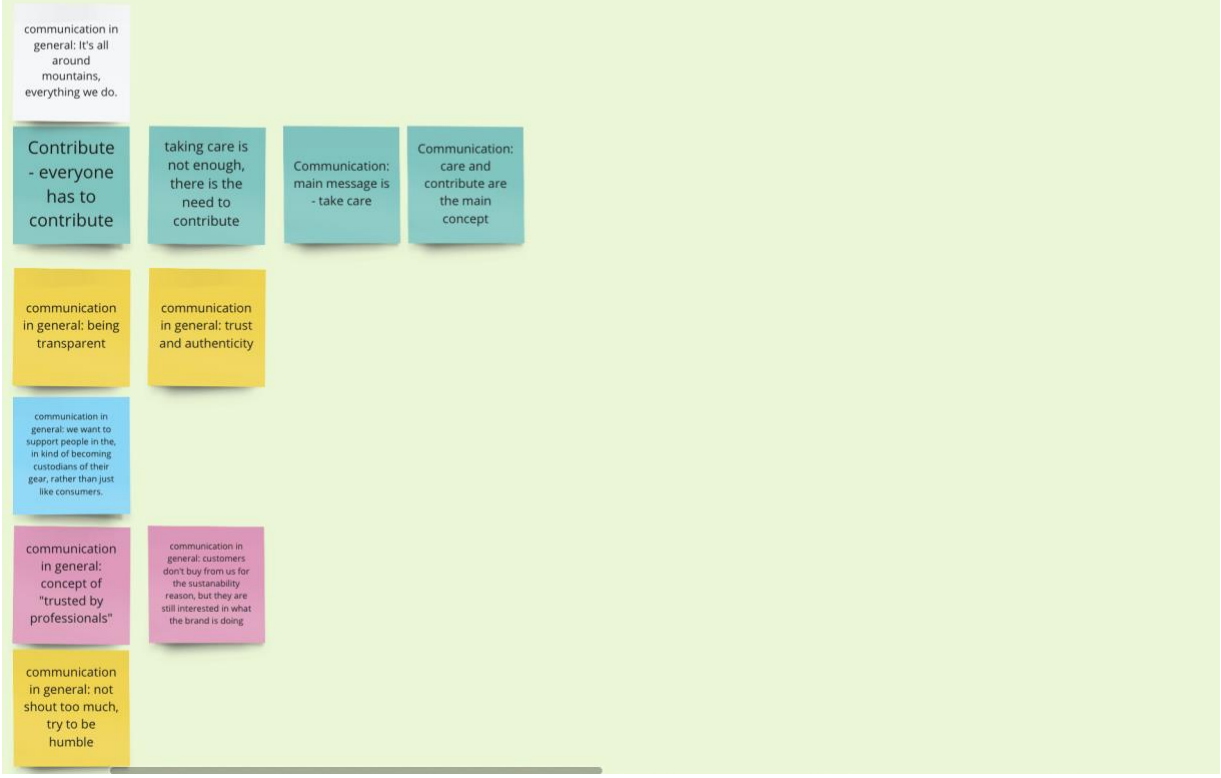

ce processes are difficult to execute
challenge ce: change the culture of the company
challenge of ce: change the concept and the system. For Salomon which is such an historical company it would be more challenging than for a start up which is new
challenge if ce: impact of supplier in carbon emission
challenge of ce: how to manage an event - salomon does lot of events
challenge in using recycling material: find a nice compromise between recycling and performance.
challenge of ce: use recyclable material and at the same time remain highly technical and respond to material needs
challenge of ce: salomon is a big company is difficult because one have many types of product
challenge of ce: circularity goes very closely to obviously improvement of materials themselves, but also distribution and also the process of industrialization
challenge of ce: create something that is scalable
challenge of ce: is very difficult to measure, difficult to understand which kind of impact a jacket will have
there is the missing of standards -> car with fuel example
in the textile industry there is no complete transparency, eg you cannot know in detail how much energy consumption you need to produce something
certifications require a lot of money. instead of getting a stamp, sometimes it would be better to develop better product or make test themselves. As Dynafit and Salewa do.
challenge of ce: properly close the loop, make the material raw material again
challenge of ce: they use durable product, when a jacket is done, it has still life in it. So its challenging to recycle it
challenge of ce: make something of low intensity is pretty easy (reuse) but to make something high intensity with actual labour time, then is challenging
challenge of ce: its easier to transform one material to an other material (eg from plastic bottles or fishing nets), than recycling fabric to make it fabric again it's pretty difficult at the moment
challenge of ce: if materials are not designed to be recycled, then its hard to bring the material back in the loop


Future
Future prevision: second life of a product will become increasingly important
future of ce: it will develop greatly, there is much more awarness
Future prevision: these arguments will become normal
future: outdoor company will be more and more sustainable. every small step count
future: sustainability is becoming the most important one
future: rental services for equipment
future of ce: more rental programms and system
future of ce: So and then everybody will try to create their recycling, repairing rental systems.
future: resale is growing exponentially
future of ce : I think it's really the resale is really well suited to outdoor. Because we are most of us are building quite durable goods.
in the future there will be more transparency
there is the missing of standards -> car with fuel example
future: education of consumer
consumer will have the power to make an impact
future: potential in new raw material. eg algae and funghi
future of ce: lot more of different business model
External Pressure
external pressures: they are part of the game
external pressure is needed
NGO are radical
you cannot be too radical
if you want to implement, you cannot be radical
the world is black or white, she suggests to be grey - to find your way in the middle
external pressure: mostly by retailers, which ask more and more about certifications for example -marie
external pressure from customer: they ask for certifications or for sustainability criteria
positive pressure from customer
external pressure: customers - they expect outdoor brand sto behave in a certain way
I think that the better road to go is pressure by creating transparency and understanding at a consumer level.
external pressure from younger generation, since they care
esternal pressure-> politics, new regulation, eg PVC
external pressure: eu regulations
in Scandinavia: it's a bit further down than politics. its pressure, which helps
external pressure form competitors
external pressure form employee: everyone's here wants to be part of a business they can be proud of.

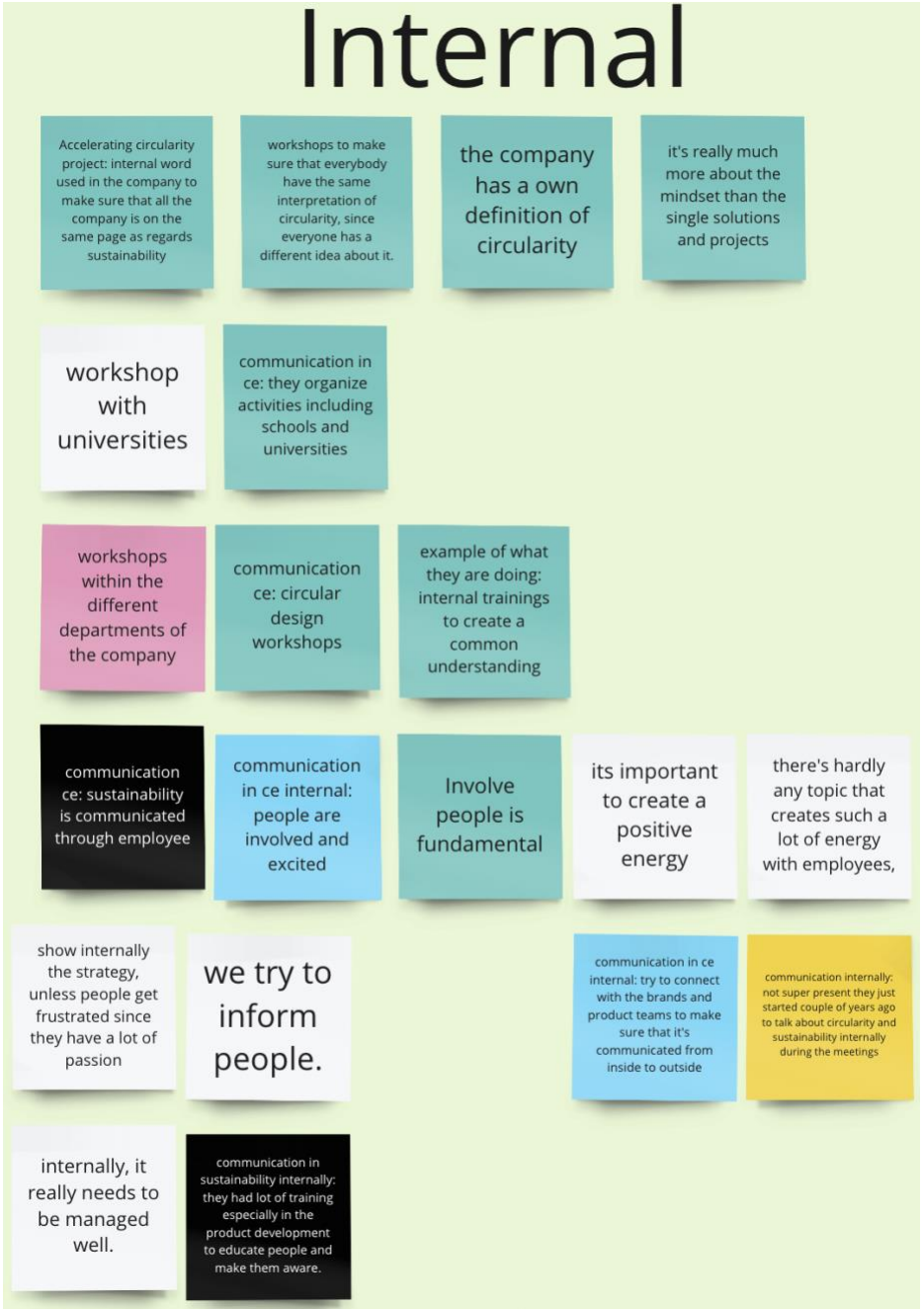

Description of the brand
brand identity: safety and quality -> two cores values of measurement
quality and safety
Mammut is about tough conditions, and enabling people to enjoy their passion
ensure that the people can enjoy mountain in though conditions
we care targets
brand image: harsh conditions and enjoying them
brand identity: relatively responsible
brand identity: quite inclusive
brand identity: trusted by professional concept is ingrained in the company
brand identity: quite innovative
communication in general: customers don't buy from us for the sustanability reason, but they are still interested in what the brand is doing
brand identity: . Really designing
brand identity: coast mountain experience.
brand identity: outdoor gear manufacturer base
brand identity: treating our supply chain workers fairly, kind of since the beginning
brand identity: brand created by engineers - innovation has always been the core
brand identity: social aspects were are the core of the brand
brand identity: happiness and playfulness, revealing the child in you
brand identity: the more you understand the playground, the more you preserve it
brand identity: vision - we want to empower, inspire the best version of people
brand identity: we aligned the sustainability goals to what the brand is
brand identity: tomorrow is yours
brand identity: sustainability is at the core of the purpose, and the purpose is at the center of everything
brand identity: outdoor at the core - salomon is the most outdoor brand of all the outdoor brand
brand identity: its about caring, reducing the impact
brand identity: sustainability is a really sensitive topic, its a fertile playground
brand identity: not only outdoor contemplation but also racing, performance adrenaline and endorphin
brand identity: when u practice the outdoor you are the best version of yourself
brand identity: commitment to better society - becoming agents of positive change
brand identity: no difference between purpose and sustainability commitment
brand identity: humble
They care
So climbing shoes are our main core, yeah, the core , the histories where we are born. And hopefully we will continue on that road the market leaders worldwide for that.


Relationship with nature
So I grew up with the mountains
I'm a passionate sports guy by myself. It's why I ended up in the sporting goods industry.
Worked in the topic of enviromental sustainability for yeras. So I'm close to the topic for probably 20 years
. And what motivates me nowadays in this role is basically really seeing that you're making a difference not only to the company, but wider afield as well.
I got really excited about just shining a light on and making sure that we understand that as an important part of our business from a sustainability standpoint.
just something that happens naturally
So of course, we knew that our employees and the people lived in the mountain, they're all very sensitive to the topics, I was very fertile playground.
the passion for the sport push her to have interest in the company
And the more you understand the playground, the more you preserve it.
it's just what I do in my daily life
It's a obligation to do something.
'm very like, enthusiasm for outdoors and outdoor sports.
but it's a lot of passion from the people that work in it.

COMMUNICATION IN GENERAL
External



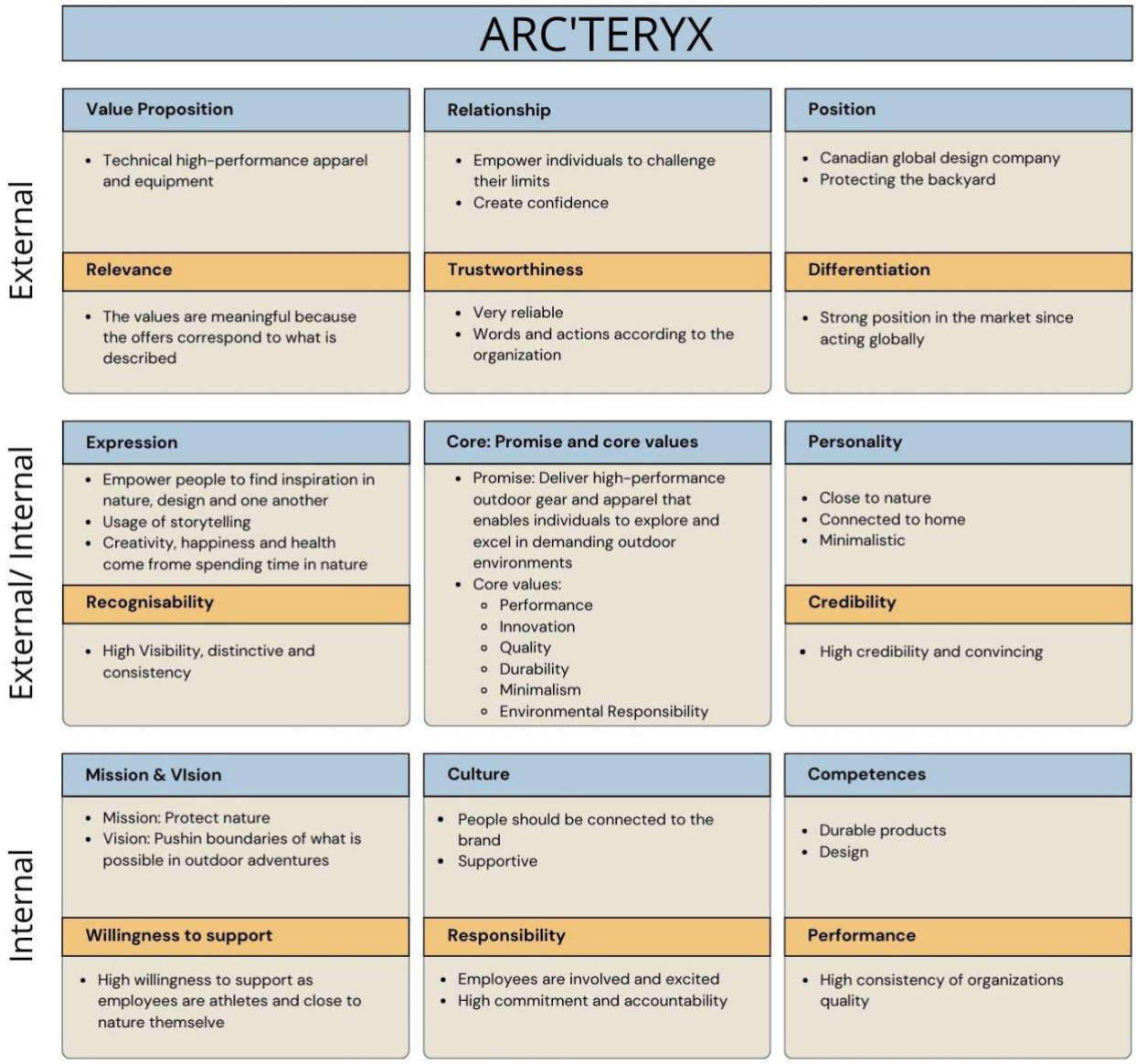
COMMUNICATION CIRCULARITY
External


Internal
Accelerating circularity project: internal word used in the company to make sure that all the company is on the same page as regards sustainability
workshops to make sure that everybody have the same interpretation of circularity, since everyone has a different idea about it.
the company has a own definition of circularity
it's really much more about the mindset than the single solutions and projects
workshop with universities
communication in ce: they organize activities including schools and universities
workshops within the different departments of the company
communication ce: circular design workshops
example of what they are doing: internal trainings to create a common understanding
communication ce: sustainability is communicated through employee
communication in ce internal: people are involved and excited
Involve people is fundamental
its important to create a positive energy
there's hardly any topic that creates such a lot of energy with employees,
show internally the strategy, unless people get frustrated since they have a lot of passion
we try to inform people.
communication in ce internal: try to connect with the brands and product teams to make sure that it's communicated from inside to outside
communication internally: not super present they just started couple of years ago to talk about circularity and sustainability internally during the meetings
internally, it really needs to be managed well.
communication in sustainability internally: they had lot of training especially in the product development to educate people and make them aware.


Chances of CE
enablers of communication: communication is more emotions, and more direct and easy
chance in communication ce: educate directly the consumer
enablers of communication: trying and failing
people are more aware and involved
enablers of communication: follow the GRI guideline
if you want to find more information you need to you need to you need to guarantee that you can find them Yeah.

Challenges for CE

Appendix 3 *Corporate Brand Identity Matrix/ Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix applied to all seven Outdoor Textile Brands*



LA SPORTIVA

External

Value Proposition	Relationship	Position
• Hiking shoes and Climbing shoes are main core	• Enable people from enthusiast to professional to experience the mountains	• Founded in 1928 in Fiemme Valley next door to Dolomites • Heritage: Long years of expertise for producing hiking and climbing shoes
Relevance	**Trustworthiness**	**Differentiation**
• The values are meaningful because the offers correspond to what is described	• Very reliable • Words and actions according to the organization	• Strong position in the market especially in the wider surrounding ot Dolomites for climbing and hiking shoes

External/ Internal

Expression	Core: Promise and core values	Personality

• Built trust and authenticity	• Promise: Enabling athletes of all levels to practice outdoor sports while protecting the mountains
	• Core values:
	  ◦ Integrity
	  ◦ Fairness
	  ◦ Honesty
	  ◦ Transparency
	  ◦ Sustainability
	  ◦ Passion for the mountain
		• Passion for mountains
		• Respect for the environment
		• Home love dolomites

Recognisability		**Credibility**
• High Visibility, distinctive and consistency		• High credibility and convincing

Internal

Mission & VIsion	Culture	Competences
• Mission: Customer satisfaction while respecting the surrounding environment • Vision: Improving community's quality of life	• Employees have a lot of passion for outdoor sport	• Innovation including research and development which combines quality with sustainability • Eco-sustainability
Willingness to support	**Responsibility**	**Performance**
• High willingness to support as employees are athletes and close to nature themselve	• Employees are involved and excited • High commitment and accountability	• High consistency of organizations quality

MAMMUT

External

Value Proposition	Relationship	Position
• Hardware, apparel, footwear that guarantee functionality and performance with highest quality standards	• Enable people to have the experience in the mountains • Challenge people to go out, have fun and experience limits • Family of athletes	• Swiss brand started in 1862 • Products for enjoying harsh conditions
Relevance	**Trustworthiness**	**Differentiation**
• The values are meaningful because the offers correspond to what is described	• Very reliable • Words and actions according to the organization	• Strong position for products that guarantee security of the athletes

External/ Internal

Expression	Core: Promise and core values	Personality

• Everything the brand is doing is about mountains	• Promise:
	  ◦ Creating innovative, low-impact gear that goes for the long run and guarantees for safety
	• Core values:
	  ◦ Quality
	  ◦ Safety
	  ◦ Protect the planet
		• Fun
		• Experiencing limits
		• Inspire
		• Respectful

Recognisability		**Credibility**
• High Visibility, distinctive and consistency		• High credibility and convincing

Internal

Mission & VIsion	Culture	Competences
• Mission: Mountains move people like no other place in the world • Vision: To create a world moved by mountains	• Respectful behaviour towards the mountain • Employees are passionate sports people themselve • Create positiv energy	• Products guarantee safety on the mountain
Willingness to support	**Responsibility**	**Performance**
• High willingness to support as employees are athletes and close to nature themselve	• Employees are involved and excited • High commitment and accountability	• High consistency of organizations quality

LA MUNT

External

Value Proposition	Relationship	Position
• Products give solutions for the best fit and shape and combine functionality with aesthetics • Mountain me-time	• Inspire people by and for mountains through mountain sport products • Create confidence	• Premium sports brand founded in 2021
Relevance	**Trustworthiness**	**Differentiation**
• The values are meaningful because the offers correspond to what is described	• Very reliable • Words and actions according to the organization	• Weak position as brand just started their business and is not well known yet

External/ Internal

Expression	Core: Promise and core values	Personality

• Encourage consumers to have as many adventures with products for as long as possible	• Promise:
	  ◦ Made by women for women
	• Core values:
	  ◦ Care -
	  ◦ Passion
	  ◦ Ethics
	  ◦ People
	  ◦ Courage
	  ◦ Responsibility
	  ◦ Future
		• Responsible

Recognisability		**Credibility**
• High Visibility, distinctive and consistency		• High credibility and convincing

Internal

Mission & VIsion	Culture	Competences
• Mission: Shape her identity • Vision: Mindful decisions made every day	• Encourage employees to bring positive change • Mindset: believe in sustainability reflected in daily actions and choices	• Sustainability centered approach • Combine functionality with design
Willingness to support	**Responsibility**	**Performance**
• High willingness to support as employees are female, athletes and close to nature themselve	• Employees are involved and excited • High commitment and accountability	• High consistency of organizations quality

SALEWA

External

Value Proposition	Relationship	Position
• Providing high-quality, durable mountain sports products while leaving as little trace as possible in nature	• Products allow people to experience mountains and to develop personally • Sweat together • Everyone has to contribute	• Founded in Munich 1935 • Identification with the region the brand is operating in
Relevance	**Trustworthiness**	**Differentiation**
• The values are meaningful because the offers correspond to what is described	• Very reliable • Words and actions according to the organization	• Strong position in the market especially for combination of technical products, traditional materials and progressive design

External/ Internal

Expression	Core: Promise and core values	Personality

• Encourage consumers to have as many adventures with products for as long as possible
• Take care
	• Promise:
	  ◦ Traditional materials and progressive designs lead to technical products, which allow experience in the mountains
	• Core values:
	  ◦ Passion
	  ◦ People
	  ◦ Courage
	  ◦ Responsibility
	  ◦ Future
		• Connected to home
		• Caring
		• Emotionally
		• Direct and easy

Recognisability		**Credibility**
• High Visibility, distinctive and consistency		• High credibility and convincing

Internal

Mission & VIsion	Culture	Competences
• Vision: Mountains are a space to learn, grow and explore	• It's not only about performance but also about getting inspired and personal development • Everyone has to contribute	• Technical products • Combination of traditional materials and progressive designs • Innovation
Willingness to support	**Responsibility**	**Performance**
• High willingness to support as employees are athletes and close to nature themselve	• Employees are involved and excited • High commitment and accountability	• High consistency of organizations quality

SALOMON

External

Value Proposition

- Footwear, apparel, gear and winter sports equipment
- Its also about racing, performance, adrenaline and endorphin

Relevance

- The values are meaningful because the offers correspond to what is described

Relationship

- Products enable outdoor experiences and a deeper connection to nature
- Bringing change within communities - Transform people into agents of postivie change

Trustworthiness

- Very reliable
- Words and actions according to the organization
- Dialog with communitie

Position

- Comes from French Alps, Annecy, since 1947
- Brand created by engineers

Differentiation

- Strong position in the market especially for functional, innovative radical design styles

External/ Internal

Expression

- Allowing people to unleash the best version of themselves so that they might positively impact the world
- A deeper connection with nature and people makes us all better

Recognisability

- High Visibility, distinctive and consistency

Core: Promise and core values

- Promise:
  - When you are practice the outdoor you are the best verions of yourself
- Core values:
  - Innovation
  - Outdoor
  - Sustainability
  - Commitment to a better society

Personality

- Happiness
- Playfulness
- Caring
- Humble
- Simple

Credibility

- High credibility and convincing

Internal

Mission & VIsion

- Mission: We want to empower, inspire the best version of people
- Vision: Tomorrow is yours & Change our tomorrow

Willingness to support

- High willingness to support as employees are athletes and close to nature themselve

Culture

- Revealing the child in you
- Becoming agents of positive change
- Employees are sensitive towards environemtal protection

Responsibility

- Employees are involved and excited
- High commitment and accountability

Competences

- Unbound inventiveness
- Radical in design
- obsessive in style
- Superior in function

Performance

- High consistency of organizations quality