



VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Mattias Lassus

Ossi Jääskä

Environmental Sustainability and Customer Perception

Case Study: Posti Oy

Business Economics
2018

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Mattias Lassus, Ossi Jääskä
Opinnäytetyön nimi	Environmental Sustainability and Customer Perception: Case Company Posti
Vuosi	2018
Kieli	Englanti
Sivumäärä	61
Ohjaaja	Jukka Paldanius

Ympäristöongelmat, kuten ilmastonmuutos, on tullut tärkeä aihe ympäri maailmaa, ja se vaikuttaa ihmisten ja yritysten päivittäiseen elämään. mikä on motivaatio ympäristöinvestointeihin? On olemassa jokin muu syy kuin hallitusten asettamat säännöt ja määräykset, yritykset haluavat investoida ympäristöystävällisemmiksi, koska ne antavat heille myönteisen julkisen kuvan.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten ympäristökestävyys otetaan huomioon yrityksissä ja jos yksityiset asiakkaat pitävät tällaisia ponnisteluja jotain tärkeänä käyttäen suomalaista postiyritystä Posti Oy. Opinnäytetyön teoria keskittyy tutkimaan, miten yritykset ovat ympäristöllisesti kestäviä ja miten kyseiset yritykset näkyvät julkisuuteen ja vaikuttavat kuluttajiin. Olisiko yksityiset asiakkaat esimerkiksi valmiita maksamaan korkeamman hinnan tuotteista tai palveluista, jotka on tuotettu tai toteutettu ympäristöä ajatellen?

Kvantitatiivinen tutkimus osoitti, että valtaosa vastaajista (VAMK: n opiskelijat), yli 90 prosenttia, sopi lausunnosta, jonka mukaan ympäristön kestävyys on tärkeä aihe. Vaikuttaa olevan tärkeä kysymys vastaajille, mutta vain noin 57 prosenttia vastaajista todennäköisemmin ostaisi tuotteita tai palveluita, jotka mainostetaan ympäristöystävällisiksi. Kyselylomakkeen tulokset osoittivat, että kun Posti-ympäristön yksityisasiakkaat ja yksityisasiakkaat huolehtivat ympäristöstä ja Posti-hoidosta kestävä toiminnan kannalta, he eivät välttämättä ole valmiita maksamaan enemmän vihreistä postipalveluista

Avainsanat Ympäristökestävyys, Yksityiset asiakkaat, Posti Oy

ABSTRACT

Author	Mattias Lassus, Ossi Jääskä
Title	Environmental Sustainability and Customer Perception: Case Company Posti
Year	2018
Language	English
Pages	61
Name of Supervisor	Jukka Paldanius

Environmental concerns such as climate change has become an important topic around the whole world and it affects everyday life of people as well as businesses. Companies are trying to reduce emissions and it is costing them a great deal of money. But what is the motivation for environmental investments? Other than rules and regulations set by the governments, companies want to invest to be more environmentally friendly as it arguably gives them a positive public image.

The aim of the thesis is to look at how environmental sustainability is deployed within companies and if private customers perceive such efforts as something important, using the Finnish postal provider Posti Oy as a case company. The theory of the thesis focuses on researching how companies are operating environmentally sustainably and how customers are affected by such efforts. Would customers for example be willing to pay a higher price for products or services that have been produced or carried out with the environment in mind? Our quantitative research showed that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (students at VAMK), over 90 percent, agreed with the statement that environmental sustainability is an important topic. It seems to be an important issue for the respondents, however, only about 57 percent of the respondents were more likely to purchase products or services that are advertised as environmental friendly. The results from the questionnaire showed that while young private customers of Posti care about the environment, they aren't necessarily ready to pay more for postal services that are sustainable.

Keywords Environmental Sustainability, Private customers, Posti Oy

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to explore and study Posti's environmentally sustainable practices and its customers reactions towards those efforts. If the thesis will come to the conclusion that it's recommendable for Posti to uphold environmentally sustainable logistical practices that has the support of its customers, it could incentive other major logistics and postal organizations to do the same.

The general topic of sustainability and green movement in companies has been a well-discussed topic since early years of this millennia. Global warming has been challenging countries, companies and individuals to take a greener and more sustainable approach in everyday life.

This thesis mostly is limited Finland and focuses on the number one postal company of the country, Posti, and its business practices. The real aim of the thesis, as stated, is to find out what environmentally sustainable efforts Posti promotes and how young private customers perceive green practices of companies in general and especially of Posti.

In the research part of the thesis, a quantitative method (questionnaire) for the research will be used. The gathered data will then be put together by using tools from Google as well as Microsoft in order for accurate conclusions to be made.

1.1 Research Problem

The research problem of this thesis we ask the following: If Posti continues to develop its green approach and offer more environmentally sustainable services, how does it affect of customers buying behavior? Is there a link between sustainability and positive customer perception? Does it even matter for the consumers what a company does with its green policy? And if we approach the problem from a financial point of view, we could ask "are customers willing to pay more for services that are advertised as green"? These are the questions this thesis is aiming to find out.

Furthermore, Posti's price growth has been a topic of conversation in past few years. Can Posti satisfy the needs of the consumers and still evolve as an environmentally sustainable company that it promotes itself to be? Posti made a statement in the year 2017 that the company promises to cut down its carbon print by 30% till the year 2020 (reference year being 2007). For reaching this goal Posti must invest large amounts into financial, personnel and machinery resources. One may ask if this is financially sensible to do.

However these specific research problems will not be discussed in the following chapters, however, they should be looked at in future studies.

To develop more and more green policies is not an easy task and many companies are avoiding doing so just for the sheer reason of loss of profit. However becoming sustainable can have its financial perks as well. Caring for the environment has become a trend of this decade. This means that consumers are more likely to buy ecological products. The trend has overall shifted from cheaply produced products that are hazardous for the environment to products developed with the environment at conseradions

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis will follow the structure of a research study. The first section, Introduction, will come first and discuss the following: research problem, reasons for choosing the topic, the structure of the thesis and the contents of the thesis on a general level.

Following the introduction will be the Theoretical Frame of Reference, first of the two major sections, which will examine the theoretical literature of environmental sustainability and how its implemented within the case company Posti. Important environmental methodologies (such as CSR) and customer perception of sustainability efforts will also be mentioned in this part.

After the ethical study, the second major section will be introduced: Empirical Research. This section will showcase the process of the research that's going to be conducted.

After having gone through the Empirical Research study, the results section will follow. Here the collected data will be showcased and analyzed in form of text and graphs. The conclusions and summary will be introduced last, where results and future improvements of the research will be discussed.

1.3 Review of related literature

The thesis will be written by using multiple forms of sources. Articles and videos from the internet, books, previous theses, and information from previous courses related to the thesis subject will all be examined in order to acquire a comprehensive view of the subject. Posti's own website (www.posti.fi) will be the main website on the company's information. The internet will be the primary source for our study while we choose fewer but more qualitative works of authors, teachers and similar thesis works previous students have written, such as Albert Gyasi-Mensah's thesis Green solutions for logistic customers. Case Study: DHL.

Appropriate sources will be added along the way until the thesis is complete to ensure there is enough material to conduct a reliable study.

1.4 Research methods

For the research of the thesis, a quantitative survey is going to be created. The survey will be a form of web survey (Google forms) and the distribution channel will be through Facebook and email. The questionnaire consists with of eight questions, where some are simple "yes or no" type of questions and some require an open answer. These questions are meant to help to find out answers to the research problem(s). The questionnaire's main target group is students at VAMK and other young adults who are using Posti's services. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out what are the opinions of the young, educated people regarding Posti and its environmental efforts. The main point of the questionnaire, as previously mentioned, is to help understand the buying behavior and perception linked to environmental sustainability. The success of green companies might be found in the students answers. Knowing the opinion of the future buying power is critical for the companies who want to stay profitable in the future.

2 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

2.1. Definition

To define the term environmental sustainability we need to first define what sustainability means. Herman Daly, pioneer of the topic defines sustainability as *“is the ability to continue a defined behavior indefinitely.”*

In other words *“The state that we hope to achieve in the future when humans live in harmony with nature”*(Worstall 2014; Lillhannus 2015)

So, based on that definition environmental sustainability is to use the environment and its resources without harming it and leaving permanent damage. There is the question of when does the company start being environmentally sustainable, as there is no easy way to determine if a company pollutes more than it is sustainable for the overall planet. There are very few big corporations that enjoy almost a zero carbon dioxide print and are still one hundred percent functional.

2.3 The History of Environmental Sustainability

The idea of sustainable companies started approximately 100 years ago. An academic and scientist Geoffrey Jones traced the green movement begin even beyond World War 1 in London, England. London was one of the first cities to industrialize so it is only natural that the city did take a lead in sustainable industry. The idea of sustainability in a company’s practices cashed not long after in the United States of America. There, one of the earliest company CEO's who had a role in sustainable business was no other than Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company.

The green revolution really sparked during the 21st century when the world truly understand that climate is warming and it is a threat that cannot be taken lightly. As the topic grew more and more popular marketing managers realized the potential perks of the situation. By promoting new sustainable values and green ethics to consumers a company could get new clients. Creating an emotional reaction to consumers is the best way to attract more customers and companies are aware of this.

2.2 About the case company Posti

Posti Group Oyj (furthermore mentioned more commonly “Posti”) was established in Sweden while Finland was part of its kingdom. Posti has been serving Finnish people with its logistical services since 1638 (under a different name.) After the independence of Finland, Posti has been a government own entity and it has lawful responsibility to deliver and service customer-oriented needs. The company provides letter-, parcel-, online and etc. services for either corporation. or private clients. In 2016 Posti’s revenue grew 5,4% from last year. Revenue in 2016 was 456,5 million euros.

Despite the financial growth of the company, Posti has faced financial difficulties which have been in the tabloids often. The main reason for this is digitalization. People prefer emails and social media communications over old fashion letters. Another reason is the declining economy of Finland which impacts logistical services. Let alone that Posti is a government-owned corporation.

Posti as a company has divided its responsibilities into five categories. These categories are meant to complement the main values of Posti. The values are succeeding together with the customer, driving for improvement and innovation, taking responsibility, and winning together. Starting with Management Responsibility, which is built on corner steps of management and code of conduct, the cornerstones of the management at Posti are its values. Posti’s four values for managers are: *“Show the way, Build trust, Create cooperation and Make success happen”* (Leadership Cornerstones, 2016). Posti has created these values with the intent to show the managers guidelines how to lead their employees successfully. The Code of Conduct is a guideline for both the employees and management staff. The code includes the company’s rules and regulations, anti-corruption policy, environmental code, working with third parties, safety, and health code, etc. (Sustainability at Posti 2016)

Financial Responsibility that Posti takes is simply. Posti’s main responsibility is based on transparency and profitability. Posti is a state-owned corporation and therefore is bound to inform its customers any reforming and changes their business operations. A good example of that is the company services price

growth. This is due simply because people are not sending letter and parcels so much anymore. The amount of sent items has decreased 30% for last five years. In 2016 the amount of sent items was 2,1 billion items. Posti is allowed to have 5% operating profit and ROI has to be at least 10%. (Annual Report 2016)

Posti's social responsibility initiative is that it takes care of its customers and provides the services with any mean necessary. The goal is to make the deliveries, which Posti makes as smooth as possible with approximately 2,8 million packages per week. The company has divided Finland into eight different distribution areas. Most customers and therefore the employees of Posti are in Uusimaa and Kymenlaakso region which is understandable since it is capital area where the people density is clearly the highest. In comparison the least customers are in the Lapland region in the North where Posti employs 398 employees wherein capital area the number is 7416. (Annual Report 2016)

Posti advertises that part of its social responsibility act, the company deals with its customers ethically, openly and transparently. Although Posti's people responsibility may sound much similar to previously mentioned social responsibilities there is a gap between these two. While social responsibility focuses more on the customer's, people responsibilities focus lies completely on the company's employees. Just like Posti's website mentions Posti employs around 20,500 people around ten countries and is therefore the single largest private employer in Finland. Therefore many private companies will take example of Posti's people responsibility. How Posti will treat its employees will reflect on Finnish business culture in their HR departments. Posti is playing one of the leading roles at offering and developing summer jobs in Finland. The company takes part of Responsible Summer Jobs Campaign. Campaign's main goal is to offer quality summer jobs for 14-19 years old teenagers. This campaign benefits both employees and employers. Employees get early touch in safe and quality work environment and employers potential future valuable workforce. (Annual Report 2016)

The last responsible area that belongs to Posti's agenda is the most important one aim the thesis stand of point, Environmental responsibility. Being owned by the

Government of Finland, they have a natural inclination to act in a responsible and environmentally sustainable way. Posti can be considered a pioneer of green logistics among the Finnish market with adopting several environmental management tools and standards such as GRI reporting, ISO 14001 as well as UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their environmental management processes in all countries of operations.

Posti has in a lot of different measures for promoting and ensuring sustainable development. They have specifically a four-step action plan: *Avoid, Reduce, Replace and Offset*. First of all, with *avoiding* the aim is to refrain from unnecessary business travels that involves for example flying. *Reducing* relates to its transportation activities as well as buildings. Posti aims to reduce fuel consumption, or car emissions, through sustainable driving. This is achieved through installed driving style monitors for the company's vehicles. Monitoring one's driving style can help employees drive more efficiently, save fuel and therefore reduce carbon-dioxide emissions. The only negative aspect about this is there are no scientific and specific data available of how much these monitors have actually reduced carbon dioxide emissions. Posti also tries to actively reduce energy consumption in their facilities, as can be seen when they joined a voluntary energy efficiency agreement that will last from 2017 to 2025.

With *replace* Posti aims to exclusively use electricity from renewable energy sources, such as biogas, at its Finnish properties. Also have renewable energy production of their own through roughly 2000 solar panels mounted on the roof of their logistics center in Vantaa.

Finally, they also try to *offset* their carbon emissions by offering carbon neutral services. These types of services have net zero carbon emissions, which entails having the same amount of released greenhouse gases prevented or compensated for elsewhere in the world. This is achieved through either funding of different carbon projects, such as forest preservation, or participation in carbon trading. All of Posti's services (food and postal deliveries, online and physical stores, warehousing etc.) are carbon neutral in Finland through their Posti Green environmental program, with Finnish customers being provided for example

carbon neutral mail delivery and an emissions report free of charge. However, by setting a higher price on some of the carbon neutral services Posti could in theory increase their profitability. This will be discussed more in the upcoming empirical section, where one of the questions asks if the possible customer would be ready to spend more on a sustainable delivery option. (A pioneer of green logistics 2018; Sustainability at Posti 2018)

In addition to these initiatives, Posti also promotes environmental awareness among employees (through training as part of the ISO 14001 environmental management system), recycling of work clothing (maximizing the life cycle of work clothing) and waste management (increasing the amount of recoverable waste and decreasing landfill waste).

Environmental targets are then set by a corporate responsibility group while action plans are drawn by each of the four business groups (Postal Services, Parcel and Logistics Services, Itella Russia and OpusCapita). The Posti Group as a whole set a specific goal for its Posti-Green program by 2020: to reduce carbon emissions by 30 percent in relation to net sales. From 2007 to 2017 they managed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 17 percent (or 20 percent with regards to absolute carbon dioxide emissions), with their progress from 2013 visible in the figure:

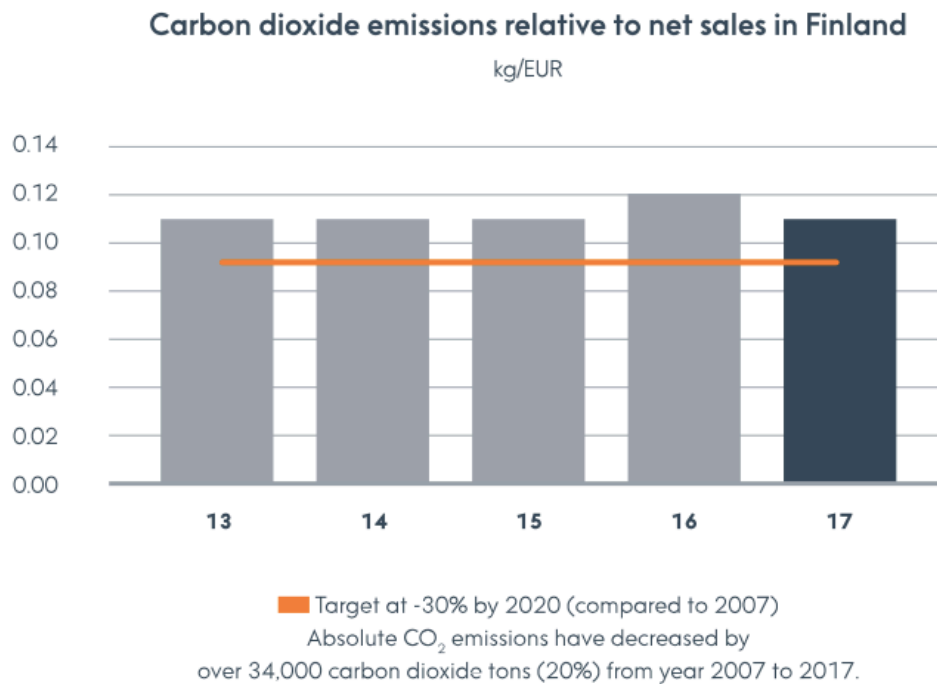


Figure 1. A figure showing the carbon dioxide emissions of Posti Oy from 2013-2017 relative to net sales in Finland

As can be seen from figure 1 Posti has had difficulties making progress during the last few years, with emissions relative to net sales increasing even in 2016. With three years left (from 2017) it will be difficult for the company to achieve their goal of a 30 percent reduction. While they have a multitude of environmental systems in place, Posti needs to add additional measures or change some aspects of their business approach if they are to reach their goal. However, with data from 2017 showing promising results, it's not an impossible task.

3 ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACHES, SYSTEMS AND STANDARDS AMONG CORPORATIONS

This chapter will focus on the approaches, systems and standards that exist for companies to utilize when deciding to become sustainable and achieve environmental goals. The most popular and adopted sustainable approach among companies is Corporate Social Responsibility, which will be discussed at a general level in subchapter 3.1. GRI and its reporting standards will be examined afterward in subchapter 3.2 and International Organization For Standardization with its environmental standards will follow in subchapter 3.3.

3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR hereafter) is a business concept that has surfaced and been adopted by corporations as environmental and social challenges have become more apparent and caused concern across the world. Willis Harman, a co-founder of the World Business Academy, states his opinion on how businesses need to take responsibility: *“Business has become, in the last half-century, the most powerful institution on the planet. The dominant institution in any society needs to take responsibility for the whole”* (Lillhannus 2015). CSR enables companies to voluntarily take responsibility, as it’s self-regulatory in nature, and they themselves decide to what degree they implement environmental and social standards in relation to the law. The European Union defines CSR in this way: *“Corporate Social Responsibility refers to companies taking responsibility for their impact on society. As evidence shows CSR is increasingly important to the competitiveness of enterprises. It can bring benefits in terms of risk management, access to capital, customer relationships etc”* (Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) 2017). CSR can be divided into three different areas of which it aims to improve: economy, society, and environment. These three “pillars” are connected and affect each other when business decisions are made. In theory, when a company’s decision-makers decide to for example use exclusively green vehicles and green packaging in their transportation, they will gain the goodwill of the public (gaining more customers) and improve the environmental conditions as a result. While the definition of the European Union mentions the

positive impacts of CSR, it is not without its criticism. Both viewpoints will be discussed in the following chapters of 3.1.1 and 3.1.2

3.1.1 Positive Views

It is well known that CSR has given corporations benefits and a competitive edge when employed in an efficient and proper way. There are mainly six beneficial outcomes for companies that employ the methodology, according to the article *Six Reasons Companies Should Embrace CSR* of Forbes: Innovation, Cost-savings, Brand differentiation, Long-term thinking, Customer engagement, and Employee Engagement.

Innovation is a big benefit for companies and societies. By pushing for new sustainable solutions, corporations may introduce new products and operations that benefit all three pillars of CSR. Unilever, the global British-Dutch consumer goods producer and marketer, managed through innovation develop a hair conditioner that uses less water, enabling them to decrease their environmental impact while improving the public image. (Epstein-Reeves 2012)

Cost-savings is another positive aspect of CSR, as it allows companies to easily cut costs within areas such as packaging and energy. For example, General Mills managed to save around 600 000 dollars (according to their CSR report in 2011) when they installed energy monitoring meters on pieces of equipment for their plant in Covington. (Epstein-Reeves 2012)

The third and following benefit of CSR is brand differentiation. During the early days of CSR, brand differentiation was one of the primary reasons why companies decided to employ the sustainable methodology into their operations. However, it's the norm rather than the expectation to have environmental friendly values, making it harder for differentiation. The returns of it are diminishing, which is a sign that CSR is taking foothold among corporations. (Epstein-Reeves, 2012)

Long-term thinking, the fourth benefit, gives companies the mindset to plan and bring about decisions that affect their business over a long period of time. This allows companies to grow sustainably and achieve results that impact the society

in a positive way instead of focusing on short-term financial gains. (Epstein-Reeves 2012)

Customer engagement is then the fifth positive aspect of CSR. It has to do with marketing and communicating a company's values and efforts for the environment to the customers. Walmart engaged its customers by running an ad campaign designed to raise awareness about the environment and the product choices customers could make to help the cause. Basically, CSR helps corporations to easier approach its customers as the message is usually seen as something good. (Epstein-Reeves 2012)

Lastly, employee engagement is then more about internal communication within a company and ensuring that employees are aware of the company's policies and values regarding sustainability. In practice, it means setting up specific teams that work with creating strategies for sustainability and holding meetings that keep employees updated about progress made within environmental areas. This will benefit companies as they involve employees to engage with their operations, changing them to care more about their workplace and the quality they put into their work. (Epstein-Reeves 2012)

All the above-mentioned benefits support the three pillars of CSR, enabling a company to increase profits and cut costs (economy), gain a better external as well as an internal image (society) and operate in a sustainable way (environment).

3.1.2 Criticism against CSR

While CSR has become the standard sustainable methodology for companies to incorporate into their businesses, its not without its critics. Blowfield and Murray share some of the negative viewpoints in their book *Corporate Responsibility - A critical introduction*.

First of all, Corporate responsibility is "anti-business". This is mainly the opinion of classical economists that view CSR as a threat to business and to the free market. According to them, CSR advocates view profit as a threat to the greater

good which prohibits the advocates from fulfilling their obligations to the company and its shareholders in terms of producing profit (as they are focusing on other matters). Also, classic economists view CSR as a shallow and unnecessary regulating body that is just “good management practice”, not something that exists above corporations with the power to regulate behavior. (Blowfield & Murray 2008)

Secondly, Corporate responsibility is “pro-business”. If the aim of a business is to maximize profit, CSR rarely manages to make an impactful change. For example, Coca-Cola harmed the environment in India by extracting too much groundwater and releasing pollutants as a result of increasing profitability. Thus, CSR could be seen as unnecessary and weak as it fails to prevent bigger companies from doing what they want. (Blowfield & Murray 2008)

The third and following critical statement is: The scope of corporate responsibility is too narrow. The areas where CSR should be exercised, such as sourcing, lobbying, flexibilization of the workforce and tax avoidance, are according to CSR defenders not regulated enough to be effective. Companies should thus do more to regulate themselves and the industry they operate in, however, it’s difficult if the management’s vision is to increase profitability. One could argue that CSR has been used as a greenwashing tool to hide companies’ wrongdoings, lessening the damaging impacts of public outcry. (Blowfield & Murray 2008)

Lastly, corporate responsibility fails to achieve its goals. CSR can be considered weak as it fails to reach the goals it was meant to address. According to Michael Doane, this may partially be due to the following four realities: the market cannot deliver short-term financial returns and long-term social benefits at the same time, consumers are more sensitive to price than to ethical considerations, corporations deliberately pursue acts of social irresponsibility and developing nations weaken their environmental and social standards in order to attract foreign investments. (Blowfield & Murray 2008)

The four above statements are valid points and one can conclude that CSR doesn’t fully live up to its potential. However, it’s currently the most convenient method for implementing sustainability within the areas of economy, social matters and

the environment if it matches a corporation's specific external and internal structures (size, suppliers, customers, ownership, company culture etc.). A tailor-made approach is needed (especially for SMEs) and proper policies, applicable to companies' business models, needs to be put in place and assisted by governmental organizations in order for CSR to be fully effective.

3.2 Global Reporting Initiative and GRI Reporting Standards

3.2.1 About GRI

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI hereafter) is an independent, multi-stakeholder international organization that has been developing sustainability reporting standards since 1997. They originate from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and provide their services throughout the world from their regional hubs in United States, China, Colombia, India, Brazil and South Africa. With 93% of the world's largest 250 companies reporting on their sustainability performance, 74% of those companies uses GRI, which makes it one of the most widely adopted standards in the world. In addition to their core product, the mentioned sustainability reporting standards, they also provide support for its implementation through their GOLD Community (collaborative global multi-stakeholder network) and Support suite which assist businesses and governments by educating and giving them tools for communicating their impact on issues such as human rights, climate change and social well-being. (About GRI 2017)

GRI is a non-profit organization and is thus supported by various core partners, both governmental and non-governmental entities. They assist in shaping GRI's agenda and also support the work they are conducting. Governmental partners include SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), SECO (Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs), DFID (Department for International Development, UK government), BuZa (The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian government). Important non-governmental organizations of GRI, such as foundations, include Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers Fund. They also have support through their GOLD community from nearly 600

organization, originating from more than 60 countries. These organizations range from different areas, such as civil societies to investors, and provide key funding for GRI's activities. GRI has also important alliances and synergies with other global organizations such as ISO and OECD, connecting its standards to their initiatives, frameworks, and guidance. (Strategic Partnerships)

GRI has then four focus areas which is supposed to assist them with their mission to create social, environmental and economic benefits for all people: 1. "Create standards and guidance to advance sustainable development", 2. "Harmonize the sustainability landscape", 3. "Lead efficient and effective sustainability reporting" and 4. "Drive effective use of sustainability information to improve performance." In summary, focusing on enabling smart policy, increasing the amount of reports as well as their quality and promoting innovation and collaboration. (About GRI 2017)

3.2.2 Sustainability Reporting according to GRI

GRI defines sustainability reporting as something as "a report published by a company or organization about the economic, environmental and social impacts caused by its everyday activities". The report should provide its readers an overview of an organization's values, governance model and commitment in relation to sustainability. It can be considered synonymous with other non-financial reporting standards, such as CSR and triple bottom line reporting, but the method of reporting and contents of a report differs. Reporting company activities helps corporations to measure, understand and communicate their three pillar performance (economic, environmental and social), which in turn helps them to set goals and manage changing conditions. (About Sustainability Reporting)

Benefits of sustainability reporting can according to GRI be divided into two groups: internal and external. Beginning with internal benefits, companies and organizations may first of all gain knowledge of risks and opportunities for their business operations. Influencing long-term business plans, reducing costs and minimizing chances of being part of publicized environmental and social failures are also important benefits. External benefits then include improving reputation and brand loyalty, educating stakeholders to understand an organization's values

as well as intangible and tangible assets and also being able to showcase how expectations about sustainable development both affects and is affected by organizations. (Benefits of Reporting)

GRI sustainability reporting is not without its faults and have been subject to criticism by several scholars and practitioners.

Alberto Fonseca examines the problematic aspects and barriers of the GRI-G3 framework in his research paper *Barriers to Strengthening the Global Reporting Initiative Framework: Exploring the perceptions of consultants, practitioners, and researcher*. A major problematic aspect of the reporting model, according to Fonseca, is GRI's focus on internal organizational performance. Several scholars state that sustainability reporting needs *"to have a detailed and complex analysis of the organization's interactions with ecological systems, resources, habitats, and societies, and interpret this in the light of all other organizations' past and present impacts on those same systems"* (Gray and Milne 2002, 5). Focus on internal performance runs the risk of showcasing reports that misinforms readers about companies actual contributions to sustainable development, as it doesn't take into the context of interaction with the external surroundings (environment and society). While the GRI-G3 framework briefly mentioned the need for sustainability context, it failed to provide guidance in its guidelines on how to achieve it. (Fonseca 2009, 5)

The most recent framework (GRI Standards), released in 2016, didn't seem to introduce any new guidelines nor tools for encouraging context-based sustainability reporting, neglecting the issue yet again. Bill Baue, a sustainability advocate, shares in his article for the Guardian how he and 66 other global thought leaders offered *"functional specifications that GRI could cut and paste [...], or use as a starting point for drafting its own articulation"* with regards to contextual sustainability reporting. GRI ignored their suggestions, which Baue considers to be confounding, as GRI and their partners have advocated loudly *"for companies to address their accountability for contributing to (and helping solve) environmental and social problems."* (Baue 2013)

From a speculative point of view, it seems like GRI isn't ready yet to fully embrace contextual sustainability reporting due to fear of losing a share of their large volume of reports, as an emphasis on contextual reporting could cause negative reactions among its partner organizations.

3.2.3 The System of GRI Standards

The GRI standards, the most current version of GRI, incorporates the key concepts from the previous G4 Guidelines but with an updated and improved structure. According to GRI, the 2016 version brought more flexibility and up-to-date standards with improved integration for governmental and market legislation across the world. The biggest change was with the new modular structure, as the Standards are now organized as a set and interrelated with each other. As shown in the Figure 2 included in the presentation *Introducing the GRI Standards* (Buck & Reinhardt 2016), the GRI standards are divided into 3 universal Standards and 33 topic-specific Standards:

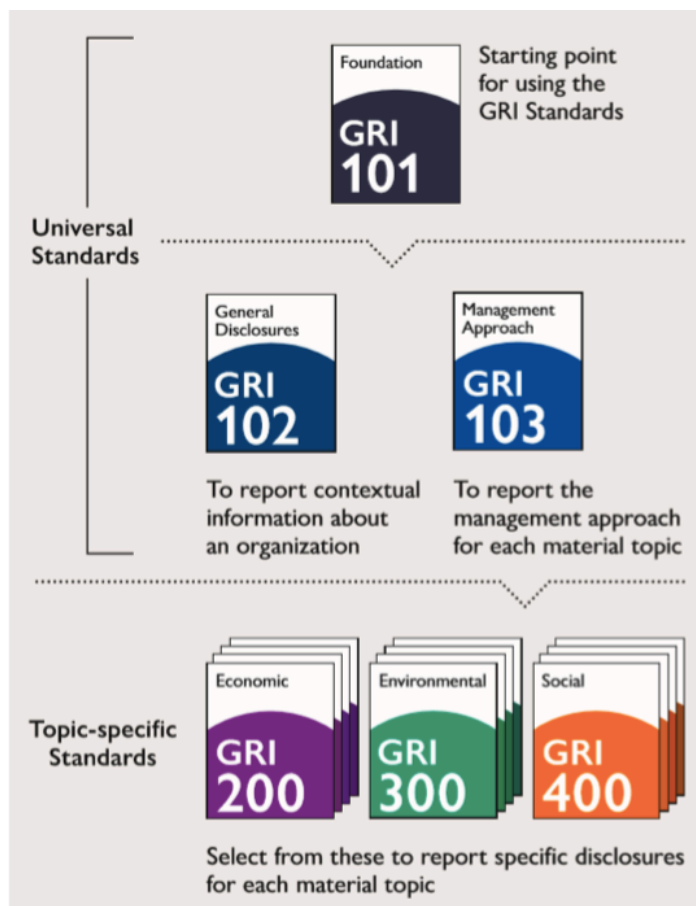


Figure 2. Overview of the structure of GRI Standards.

The universal standards (100-series), including GRI 101 (Foundation), GRI 102 (General Disclosures) and GRI 103 (Management Approach), are used by every organization that utilizes GRI's services. GRI 101: Foundation is the starting point for using the Standards-kit and it provides its readers with the reporting principles and details on how to use and reference the standards. GRI 102: General Disclosures is then a standard that tells how to report contextual information about one's organization. This could include strategy, reporting activities and ethics. Lastly, GRI 103: Management Approach is a standard used to report how an organization manages its material topics (an organization's activities that produce social, economic and environmental impacts) and is used together with each Topic-specific Standard in order to explain why the topic is a material for the organization and where the impacts occur.

Topic-specific Standards are then 33 standards organized into three series: GRI 200 (Economic), GRI 300 (Environmental) and GRI 400 (Social). Corporations include only the topic-specific Standards in their reports that are relevant and based on their material topics. The topic-specific Standards are being updated periodically and continuously aligned with other reporting frameworks, ensuring the Standards reflect emerging trends and stay globally relevant. (Buck & Reinhardt 2016)

3.3 International Organization for Standardization and ISO 14001

3.3.1 About ISO

The International Organization for Standardization, (ISO) is an independent and non-governmental global organization that has developed the world's largest collection of International Standards. These standards are voluntary and give world-class specifications for materials, products, services and processes with the purpose to ensure quality, efficiency, safety and environmentally friendly conduct. ISO has so far published 22 088 standards and are used in almost every industry, from agriculture to technology, making them essential for international trade. In addition to developing International Standards, ISO also tries to spread public awareness of standards, promote the teaching of standardization and help its members through training. (About ISO)

The widespread development and implementation of these standards are made possible by ISO's 161 national standards body members. Only one member, a national standards organization, is able to represent ISO in its country. An individual or a company are both prohibited to join and cannot become members. There exist three levels of membership: Full members, Correspondent members and Subscriber members. Full members, or member bodies, may influence the development of ISO standards by voting in technical and policy meetings. They also promote and adopt the ISO International Standards in their own nations. Correspondent members then again merely observe the development of ISO standards and doesn't participate in meetings. As with full members, they also sell and adopt the ISO International Standards nationally. Lastly, subscriber members only keep themselves updated on ISO's activities and cannot participate nor sell

or adopt the standards nationally. (ISO: a global network of national standards bodies)

ISO saw its beginning in 1946 when delegates from 25 countries met in London at the Institute of Civil Engineers. The purpose of the gathering was to create a new international organization in order to facilitate international coordination and unification of industrial standards. ISO was officially formed the next year in February 1947, with 67 technical committees consisting of groups of experts focusing on a specific subject.

24 years later ISO made advancements into the environmental field by creating its first two technical committees focusing on the environment: Air and Water quality. Since then other environmental committees and standards have appeared, focusing on subjects such as soil quality and environmental management. The environmental management system standard released in 1996 as ISO 14001, which provides tools for companies and organizations to help identify and manage their environmental impacts. The 14000 ISO family of standards will be discussed later in detail in this chapter.

3.3.2 The ISO standards

The ISO standards were developed with the purpose to answer the question: “What’s the best way of doing this?”. Starting from having standards for weights and measures, it has now progressed into everything from shoes to Wi-Fi networks. The ISO standards provide safeness, reliability and high quality for consumers as well as businesses across all aspects of life, having standards for industries such as healthcare, construction, food and information & telecommunication. ISO also pushes for environmental protection, as already mentioned, and has standards for products and services that aim to protect the planet and the people. For businesses, the ISO standards bring economic benefits through cost reductions such as lower energy consumption. (The main benefits of ISO standards)

ISO standards are developed by independent technical experts nominated by ISO members. The nominated experts form technical committees that is responsible

for specific subject areas. The process of the committees begins with writing a draft for a specific market and is later shared with the members of ISO for deeper discussion. A voting takes place afterwards, where the draft is either approved for being developed into a standard or sent back to the committee for further modification. The whole process, from proposal to publication of standard, lasts for about three years (How we develop standards). The main stages of the process can be examined in the Figure 3:

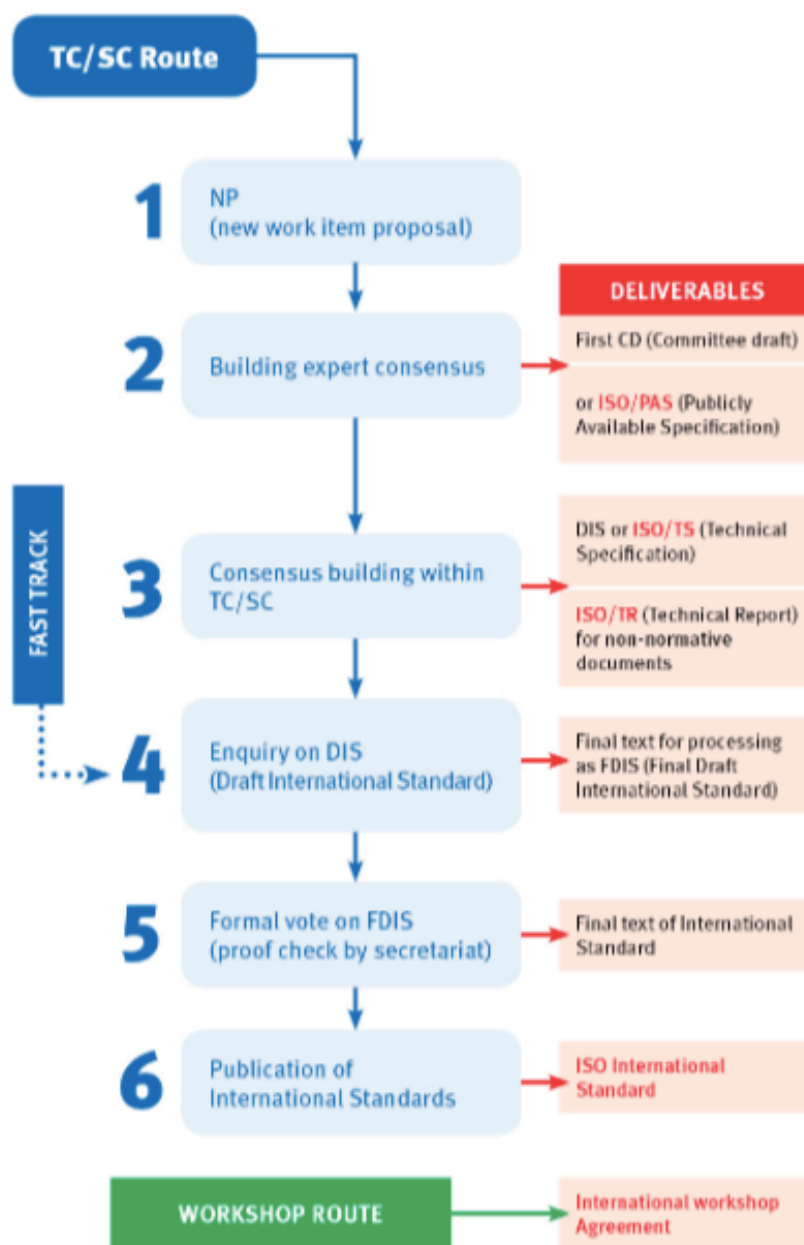


Figure 3. ISO standards development process.

The above ISO process is guided by four key principles: ISO standards respond to a need in the market (ISO develops standards according to stakeholder demand), ISO standards are based on global expert opinion (developed by technical committees that are comprised of experts from all over the world), ISO standards are developed through a multi-stakeholder process (the technical committees are

comprised of government, academia, consumer associations etc.) and ISO standards are based on a consensus (all stakeholders are able to make their voice heard) (How we develop standards).

The main deliverable of ISO is the International Standards, however, they also produce other deliverables that assist the development of ISO standards: Technical Specifications (early version of a Standard that fulfills a market need, giving insights and feedback for future transformation into an International Standard), Technical Reports (contains data obtained from surveys and reports with the purpose to assist the development of standards), Publicly Available Specification (early version of a Standard that responds to an urgent market need, representing a technical committee or external organization's opinions, with the goal to fill the market need and obtain feedback for future transformation into an International Standard), International Workshop Agreements (a document with a six year lifespan, after which it can be either transformed into an ISO Standard or withdrawn, that is developed outside the committees so market players can join the negotiations and provide their expertise) and Guides (guides that helps ISO's readers to understand more about the benefits of International Standards). (ISO deliverables)

3.3.3 14000 ISO Family - Environmental Management

The 14000 ISO Family is a collection of environmental focused standards that provides tools and systems for organizations to help them improve their environmental efforts. This family of standards has everything from environmental systems to specific approaches such as life cycle analysis and is used by most large to medium-sized companies, with ISO 14001:2015 having more than 300 000 certifications in 171 countries. (ISO 14000 family - Environmental management)

The following environmental standards exist: Environmental management systems (ISO 14001:2015, ISO 14004:2016, ISO 14005:2010, ISO 14006:2011), Environmental auditing and related environmental investigations (ISO 14015:2001), Environmental Labelling (ISO 14020:2000, ISO 14021:2016, ISO 14024:2018, ISO 14025:2018, ISO 14025:2006, ISO 14026:2017, ISO/TS

14027:2017), Environmental Performance Evaluation (ISO 14031:2013, ISO/TS 14033/2012, ISO 14034:2016, ISO 14063:2006), Life cycle assessment (ISO 14040:2006, ISO 14044:2006, ISO 14044:2006/Amd 1:2017, ISO 14045:2012, ISO 14046:2014, ISO/TR 14047:2012, ISO/TS 14048:2002, ISO/TR 14049:2012, ISO/TS 14071:2014, ISO/TS 14072:2014, ISO/TR 14073:2017) and Greenhouse gas management and related activities (ISO 14064-1:2006, ISO 14064-2:2006, ISO 14064-3:2006, ISO 14065:2013, ISO 14066:2011, ISO/TS 14067:2013, ISO/TR 14069:2013). (Standards catalogue)

Beginning with the standards of Environmental management systems, the most popular one used by companies is the above mentioned ISO 14001:2015 standard. It specifies the requirements for an environmental management system and helps organizations to fully utilize it and achieve its intended outcomes. The standard provides value on a three-pillar level, similarly to CSR, putting emphasis on the environment, the organization itself and interested parties. Specific benefits for organizations, if they are consistent with their environmental policies, include facilitation with regulatory requirements, increase in leadership involvement and employee engagement, competitive and financial advantage through reduced costs and higher efficiency and also better environmental performance of suppliers. Premier Foods, a British food manufacturing company, is an example of the benefits of the ISO 14001:2015 standard. They made great progress with their recycling rate as they are now recycling and reusing 100% of their waste, improving the relationship with their surroundings as a result. They also managed to make staff more environmentally engaged and aware of their impact on the environment. (ISO 14001 2015)

ISO 14001:2015 is suitable for all types and sizes of organization, whether they are not-for-profit or governmental. What is of importance is the commitment to continual improvement of environmental concerns and improving the systems that support those efforts.

The second group of environmental standards, Environmental auditing, and related environmental investigations are important for assessing whether the environmental management systems are properly managed. Assisting standards,

such as the auditing standard ISO 19011, helps audit environmental and quality management systems.

Environmental labeling, the third group of standards, touches upon a range of different labels and declarations (self-declared environmental claims and environmental information about products and services) with the ISO 14020 series.

ISO 14031 represents the fourth group of standards called Environmental Performance Evaluation, which provides guidelines on how organizations can assess their environmental performance. The standard also prepares performance indicators against criteria set by management, with which the information collected they can use as a basis for internal and external reporting on environmental performance.

The fifth group of standards, LCA, helps to identify and evaluate the environmental footprint of products and services from the extraction of resources needed to produce those services/products to the eventual disposal of them. The standard 14040 provide guidelines on the conduct of LCA studies that produces information for organizations on how they can reduce the environmental impact of its products and services.

Greenhouse gas management and related activities, the sixth and last group of environmental management standards, relates to standards which provide clear and verifiable requirements for supporting organizations with greenhouse gas emission projects. ISO 14064 (parts 1, 2 and 3) and its complement ISO 14065 make up the most important pair of the greenhouse gas management standards. (ISO 14001 2015; Environmental Management 2009)

All in all, the ISO 14000 family of standards provides useful tools for organizations to control environmental output and assessing green performance. They bring benefits such as reduced energy consumption, reduced raw material/resource use, improved process efficiency and utilization of recoverable resources, contributing both to sustainable and economic goals.

4. CUSTOMER PERCEPTION

4.1 Introduction of Customer Perception

“A marketing concept that encompasses a customer's impression, awareness and/or consciousness about a company or its offerings. Customer perception is typically affected by, advertising, reviews, public relations, social media [...] “ (Customer Perception). Customer Perception is a process where the potential customer will select, organize and interpret information which will form a personal core opinion of the brand or a product. Each person interprets these steps in their own way based on their own unique needs, expectations, values, and bias. Customer perception is one of the most important key aspects for companies. Especially for young start-up companies, customer perception can either make or break the company. Customer perception is very much linked to customer loyalty to a brand. If a customer's first impression of a company is positive, he/she will return to the company and start a long-term customer-company relationship, which is the goal of any company.

When a company is still in its infancy, the management needs to think of the best approach of how to shape a customer's perception of the company. Customer perception can vary much if there is a comparison between two customer groups. For example, age is one of the main elements when it comes to Customer Perception. One can examine, for example, the energy drink companies and their advertisement styles. One of the biggest brands in the field is Red Bull. Red Bull is known for its unique advertisement style where the company sponsors motocross sports, race driving and so on. Red Bull's biggest campaign was sending Felix Baumgartner to the stratosphere where Baumgartner jumped a record-breaking jump back to Earth. This sort of advertisement approach is more appealing for the younger target audience who understands better this type of extreme culture.

This leads to the following question: if a customer knows the brand/company before and has a positive CP of it, how much can a company can change before

losing its original clients perception? There is no easy answer to that. Every person is an individual and some people have a higher threshold for change than others. But it is clear that a company cannot change its core values too much or at all if they still want to be respected in the eyes of its customers. Many respected business magazines, such as *Harvard Business Review*, have written articles about this topic (Dixon, Freeman & Toman 2010).

4.2 Elements of Customer Perception

Customer perception can be associated with the following three stages: exposure, attention, and sensation. These are considered to be part of the traditional view of perception where perception is the outcome of an interaction between stimuli, characteristics of perceivers and situational factors. (Aspfors 2010, 13-14)

Exposure stage entails the customer is subjected to a stimulus, which could be everything from sounds to sights. The exposure may either be accidental or voluntary, and some of it is not even noticed consciously. Selective exposure occurs at the same time, where the customer filters and ignores the stimulus that is uninteresting.

The attention stage follows right after and involves customers activating their mental capacity for temporarily paying attention to the stimulus. There are three ways a customer behaves with a stimulus: planned, involuntary or spontaneous attention. Planned attention is conscious and goal-directed, with the customer e.g. browsing the internet with the intent to purchase a product or service and finding an ad related to said product or service. Involuntary attention arises when external stimuli are being imposed on the customer's conscious thoughts, hijacking their attention from what they are concentrating on (e.g. fire alarm). Spontaneous attention is again referring to a mindset where customers are not concentrating on anything specific, unlike planned attention, and are open to other stimuli (e.g. when shopping for a birthday gift). Selective attention, similarly to selective exposure, occurs at the same time and refers to customers focusing on stimulus that interests them and avoiding those which are irrelevant and threatening (also known as perceptual defense).

The third stage in the traditional perception process is a sensation, which is about our sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, skin, and mouth.) responding to environmental stimuli and transmitting the information to the brain via the nervous system. Simply put, this process represents the first step in how the brain processes information. Selective sensitization is also affecting the sensation where customers are more open to transfer stimulus that is consistent with their own needs, beliefs or attitudes. (Wozniak 2013, 77)

These three stages are deeply connected to traditionally viewed perception and play a major role in how we understand different situations. However, it doesn't include the most important aspect of customer perception: interpretation.

Selective interpretation occurs after the sensation when a stimulus has been transferred to the brain through the nervous system and we consciously process it. When interpreting a stimulus, we search our own memories for relevant information, gained from previous experiences, together with our expectations and intentions in order to figure out the true meaning behind the stimulus. However, selective interpretation is subjective due to individuality and the meaning obtained may not necessarily match with the intended meaning. One example of misinterpretation is with the major sports clothing company Nike, which had to recall 38 000 pairs of shoes due to them bearing a logo that resembled the word, Allah. It stands for "God" in Arabic and having the name of a deity on shoes was perceived by some to be highly offensive. Nike was forced to apologize as a result and transfer 30 000 pairs of shoes away from sensitive marketplaces like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to other markets. (Wozniak 2013, 85)

Other important elements and theories of customer perception are perceptual overloading (failure of an individual to perceive all stimuli that compete for his/her attention), adaption (becoming indifferent and overly accustomed to a stimulus), threshold levels (absolute threshold: the lowest intensity level at which one can detect a stimulus, terminal threshold: a point where no further stimulus increases produce a greater sensation), situational variables (environmental circumstances, such as physical surroundings and time, that affects how an individual perceives a stimulus), gestalt psychology (a modern view of perception

that states it is made up of cohesive wholes, meaningful patterns and total impressions instead of separate and singular stimuli), perceptual inference (beliefs of individuals, based on previous experiences, that are consciously or unconsciously assigned to products and brands) and lastly risk perception (individuals making subjective judgements about uncertain situations in the form of social, physical, and psychological situations). (Wozniak 2013, 87-105)

4.3 Customer Perception of Green Companies now and future

Today when one of the most current topics is climate change and the future of the planet is uncertain, the topic of customer perception with regards to environmentally sustainable companies is more discussed than ever. The Paris Climate Agreement, which was put to start by United Nation in 2015, is a good example for that. The agreement is within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The goal of the agreement is to reduce greenhouse emissions and adapting to changes that the future will bring by 2020. As of June 2018, 195 UNFCCC-countries had signed the agreement. China and India, being one of the most polluting countries in the world due to their high population, are one of the most capitalist countries that signed the agreement. One of the biggest downsides was that the United States of America withdrew the agreement. This was one of the promises that the current acting president of USA, Donald Trump, promised when he ran for office. Because of the availability of more source material and knowledge, we are paying more attention to the environment than ever before. In a 2000 study, 89 percent of teenagers said that they “*would likely switch brands to one associated with a good cause*” (Hyllegard, Yan, Olga, & Attmann, 2010). This research indicates that in the future, corporate values are more important for the customers than brand loyalty.

Still, many people do not share the same concern regarding eco-friendliness. Sheic M. Isaac from Walden University writes in his doctorate, *Consumer Perceptions of Eco-Friendly Products*, that two of the most influential social class elements of positive Green Consumer Perception are education and age. In his doctorate Isaac conducted a survey where he asked questions and put forth statements about environmental responsibility. For example, one statement was

the following: *“If I had the choice of discarding an old electronic device I would use a drop-off recycling facilities”* (Isaac 2015, 23). He targeted people with different age, social and economic groups. The survey shows that the more highly educated people would buy ecological products over the “normal and old ones”, which are causing more pollution and waste in the environment. Of course, it is important to remember that social status almost always walks hand in hand with economic status. People with higher education tend to have a higher income level. Therefore, they can afford more expensive and ecological products. However, the more our technology develops the cheaper it becomes for people with low income to buy these eco-friendly products. (Isaac 2015)

Environmental friendliness can largely be seen in the clothing industry. Big clothing brands like MAKIA or H&M are making trendy new clothing using recycled material. H&M, along with many other major clothing chains, have taken upon the mission to become more green. Part of their green policy is that customers can drop off their old clothes in the recycle bins that are placed inside H&M stores. Using the fabric of these old clothes, H&M is producing new clothing with minimal waste. On their website, under the sustainability section, H&M states: *“At H&M group, we believe it’s senseless that so many clothes and discarded textiles end up in landfills. Recycling is one of many ways fulfill our goals towards a sustainable future, and so far, we’ve collected more than 17,771 tons of textiles — the equivalent of 89 million T-shirts.”*

5. EMPIRICAL STUDY- CASE COMPANY POSTI

The thesis has focused seeking until now on the theoretical aspects of environmental sustainability. Topics such as the history of sustainability, environmental approaches and standards (CSR, ISO) and customer perception have been discussed from chapter 2-4. In the following chapter the thesis will focus on the research that was conducted with regards to customer perception on environmental sustainability with Posti Oy as the case company.

The chapter will first of all divulge into what type of research methods are looked at and why we chose the method we did in subchapter 5.1. Following this will be validity and reliability, subchapter 5.2, which will discuss the accuracy of the research and elements that could have affected the outcome. The final subchapter 5.3, data analysis, will present and analyze the collected data.

5.1 Research Method

When examining what type of research method would be suitable to answer our research question, we looked at two major methods: qualitative research and quantitative research.

Qualitative research can be defined according to “*An unstructured methodology based on small samples, intended to provide insight and understanding*” (Sabel 2016). The qualitative methods allow the respondents to formulate their opinions and express their views in a more detailed manner, aiming to describe the feelings of the respondents. The outcome for qualitative methods are more open as the results are not restricted to alternatives expected by the researchers, as opposed to quantitative methods.

Qualitative research is usually applied in three different situations: when studying subconscious feelings, when studying complex phenomena (e.g. customer behavior with different reactions to situations that is impossible to capture with quantitative methods) and when studying holistic dimensions (when trying to acquire a complete picture of the context of a phenomena, such as the interrelationship between elements that contributed to satisfaction with a service).

There are two types of qualitative research procedures: Direct (non disguised) and indirect (disguised). A direct approach refers to when the purpose of the research is revealed to respondents while an indirect approach is the opposite, with respondents being unaware of the purpose and also at occasions unaware they are part of a research project.

Interviews belong to direct approach and can be conducted in groups or on a one-to-one basis. Group interviews are overseen by a moderator who leads the discussions in an unstructured way with the aim to have the group members (3-10 members) achieve reflective discussions. Depth interviews are then on a one-to-one basis and, like group interviews, is non-structural in its way of obtaining information. An in-depth discussion usually lasts from half an hour to an hour, trying to find out the motivations, beliefs and feelings on a topic during that time. Observation techniques, the other type of qualitative research method, is part of the indirect approach and involves observing the habits and customs of people in everyday situations. It tries to capture the natural characteristics of people and display thoughts that may not be expressed through words. (Sabel 2016)

The qualitative research methods weren't a good choice in the end as the research problem required answers in terms of quantity rather than depth. The focus was to establish how many respondents were aware of Posti and cares for environmental friendly services instead of the motivation behind their choice. Furthermore, a qualitative method wouldn't have fit our tight schedule as we had a limited amount of time to conduct the research due to one of us having to leave the country. Thus, we decided to opt for a quantitative research method.

One definition of quantitative research, according to Sabel, is "a structured questionnaire given to a sample of a population and designed to elicit specific information from respondents". It's the most common method in marketing research (primary data collection) and also the easiest one to manage.

Questionnaires are direct in their process and have questions that are placed in a prearranged order with mostly fixed-response alternatives. This makes analysing and interpreting the data easy and reliable as there is little room for "interviewer-impact" compared to qualitative methods. However, it also contributes to loss of

validity as fixed-responses may not represent the respondent's opinions accurately. Formulating a question and putting it into words is difficult when a respondent may not interpret it the same way as the researcher intended. If confusion arise there exist no realistic option for figuring out the intended meaning, at least when it comes to methods where the interviewer is not directly involved.

There exists three common quantitative survey methods: telephone, personal and mail interviews.

Telephone method involves calling potential respondents and asking questions from a questionnaire which the researcher fills in. It's a method that allows to cover a wide area with low costs. It does however require work and time from the researcher as he or she needs to call potential respondents individually.

Personal methods entails face-to-face encounters: in-home and in-office and street interviews. Face-to-face interviews are both costly (in-home and in-office interviews) and time-consuming, which also have resulted in the dropped usage of it. Street interviews are the better option of the two, with less costs, but still not as efficient as other methods.

Lastly, mail methods includes both traditional mail interviews as well as electronic mail interviews. With traditional mail method the researcher mails an envelope to possible respondents from a mailing list that includes a cover letter, questionnaire (usually contains more pages compared to other methods), return envelope and also at times an enticement to increase chances of a response. People who haven't responded are at least reminded once to do so. Even so, the response rate for traditional mail interviews are low due to the hassle of sending back the envelope. Electronic mail interviews are conducted, as the name implies, through email. It's the easiest and most convenient method to use as it is fast for collecting data and has low cost. It's also easier to reach possible respondents as most are in possession of an e-mail account and the response rate is higher due to easiness of replying. The only issue is to get ahold of a complete list of email addresses that are up-to-date and corresponds to one's target group of respondents.

Regardless of quantitative method, the questionnaire design is of great importance. There are five important points that needs to be taken into account: *Specification of information* (data obtained should be related to the research problem), *question content* (determining the usefulness of a question, if it's necessary) *unwillingness of responding* (need to consider possible reasons that respondents will avoid answering or guessing their answers, such a lack of knowledge, sensitive information, effort etc.), *order of questions* (questions should be in a proper order with general questions at the beginning and later specific ones) and *layout* (the position and spacing of questions is important as it may have an effect on the results). (Sabel 2016)

After looking through all above mentioned quantitative methods we decided to go with mail method, more specifically electronic mail questionnaire. The survey was distributed using mass email chain. The survey's main target group was higher education receiving students, so the questionnaire was sent to students of VAMK. A total of 147 answers were received.

Electronic mail was chosen due to a couple of factors. First of all, our timetable was strict so we had to choose a method that would be fast for collecting data. Secondly, the occupation of our respondents were students. It made sense to use email as a research method due to having access to most of the university students' emails. Lastly, the mission with the survey was not to go deep on why people are or aren't choosing environmentally sustainable products and services. The main purpose was to find out how many would choose a certain way. Therefore, no interviews or any qualitative methods were used.

5.2.2 Validity and Reliability

The term validity is defined by how accurately it measures a given concept. For example, a quantitative study which aims to measure happiness but is actually measuring success is not valid. In this thesis validity is met by asking specific questions that are meant to help answering the research problem.

A few measures were taken to ensure that the research had validity: Firstly, a draft of the questionnaire was given to the supervisor for her to assess it and address possible mistakes. Some questions were modified and removed while also new

ones were added. The structure was also altered based on the supervisor's suggestions. Secondly, a pre-test was done where we completed the questionnaire ourselves to see that everything was working as it should be. We also checked that there were no problems accessing the questionnaire through the provided links, so the respondents could answer the questions without technological hindrance.

Reliability refers to the results acquired from a research and if it will produce the same results after similar repeated research has been made by someone else than the original researcher. The reliability was strengthened by not having the respondents interact with the researchers while also keeping their anonymity by not asking personal questions, ensuring they weren't affected negatively when answering the questionnaire.

There was one aspect though that could have had an effect on the reliability of the data: images included in the questionnaire. Images depicting nature and our case company Posti was included, after around 100 to 120 answers, for the questions one to eight. The nature images may have influenced respondents to have a more favorable opinion of environmental sustainability while the Posti images could have facilitated the recognition of the logistic company. However, only around 18 per cent of the respondents would have been affected by this, having a minimal impact on reliability.

5.2.3 Data analysis

As previously mentioned, the questionnaire was analyzed with the help of Google's online questionnaire tool and Microsoft Excel.

The questionnaire was sent out by mass-email and was answered by 147 people, with the total range of possible respondents being around 3300 students. This makes the response rate 4,4 percent. The goal was to reach 100 answers, or 3 percent, which was well over target. The respondents were students from the business, technology and nursing programs at VAMK. With no personal information gathered there was no way to determine the distribution of the respondents by degree programmes, nationalities or gender. It was not needed, however, for answering the research questions that was set out from the

beginning. Furthermore, it could have impacted the research in a negative way with respondents generally not being comfortable providing such information.

Eleven questions were added for the survey of which two were open-ended and nine with pre-fixed options. The first three questions were more general in nature, asking about the perception of environmental sustainability, while the rest of the questions went more in depth about our case company Posti. All in all, it was a smooth process for creating the questionnaire, analyzing the data and transforming it to graphs was carried out without any considerable problems. Below follow the questions in the survey:

1. What is your opinion of the following statement: "Environmental sustainability is an important topic for me"

147 responses

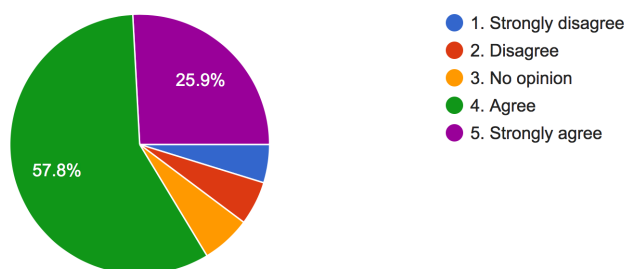


Figure 4. Question 1.

This question had to be the first one of the survey. It is a bedrock for the following questions because it shows us how many higher educated students care about the environment and sustainability. The results of the other questions will be reflected and compared to these answers, which shows how many students think that environmental sustainability is important to them.

It was predicted the data would show favorable results towards people who agree with the statement that environmental sustainability is important, based on the

previously mentioned study that appeared in the research of Hyllegard, Yan, Olga, and Attmann. The study resonates with the result, as the pie graph shows that 85 students (57,8 percent) answered *Agree* and 38 students (25,9 percent) *Strongly agree* with regards to environmental sustainability being an important topic. It shows an overwhelming majority of the respondents truly care for the environment.

2. In general, are you more likely to purchase products or services that are advertised as environmental friendly?

147 vastausta

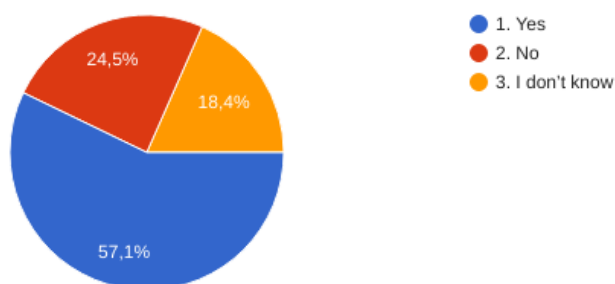


Figure 5. Question 2.

The second question follows the same patterns with the previously one, although significantly layers. In the first question around 82 percent of students agreed that being environmentally sustainable is important. Here in question two we see that 57,1 percent are likely to purchase green products or services while 24,5 percent are not likely to do so. A significant amount of students who perceived environmental sustainability as important in the first question chose to answer *No* here, seeing a decrease of about 25 percent regarding to respondents answering favorably.

The neutral option received an increase compared to the previous question (where 6,1 percent answered *No opinion*), with 18,4 percent of respondents answering they are not sure if they would be more likely to purchase products and services

that are advertised as environmental friendly. It is likely that these students are taking into account pricing and also the type of product and service they are purchasing when making a decision. Likewise with the *No* respondents, one can assume pricing is an important factor that is keeping them from choosing sustainable options as students have in general a lower income.

3. What is your opinion of the following statement: "I would pay a higher price for the shipment of a product if it is environmentally sustainable."

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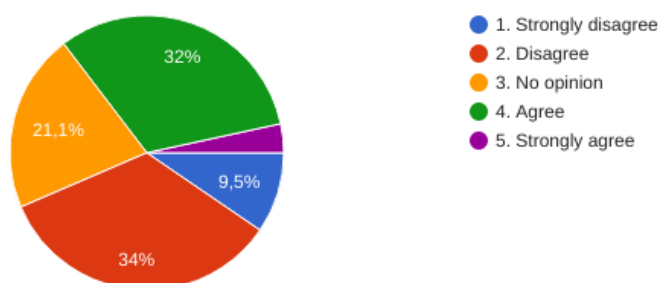


Figure 6. Question 3.

The third question of the questionnaire show the respondents as being more divided compared to the two previous ones. *Agree* and *Disagree*, the two polar opposite answer options, received 32 percent and 34 percent respectively while the extreme polar opposite answer options *Strongly agree* and *Strongly disagree* received only 3,4 percent and 9,5 percent respectively. The higher percentages are not found within the extreme options and have rather the smallest percentages out of all choices. The neutral option, *No opinion*, placed in the middle with 21,1 percent.

The answer options that were negative against the statement have combined the highest percentage compared to the positive ones, with 43,5 percent against 35,4 percent. A reason for this could be that majority of students have a lower income level, as previously stated, and cannot or do not want to pay extra for shipment

fees. However, the fact that 21,1 percent had no opinion on this statement also means a significant number of respondents may be persuaded to pay extra for sustainable deliveries, since 82 percent of students agreed with the statement that environmental sustainability is an important topic.

All in all the question is divisive and there is no clear indication for either opinions.

4. Are you familiar with the Finnish company Posti?

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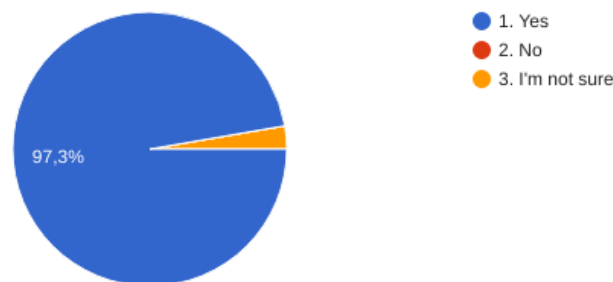


Figure 7. Question 4.

The purpose of question number four was to find out if the target group is even familiar with the company. It would create an interesting dilemma if a majority of the target group would not know Posti from before, as the following two questions are dependent on the respondents answering option 1 or 2. But as predicted, with Posti being the largest logistic company in Finland, over 97 percent of the people were aware of the company existing before answering this questionnaire while 2,7 percent were not sure. Interestingly enough not one person answered *no*, showing the dominant presence Posti holds in the Finnish market.

This was very important to the credibility and validity of the thesis. If the majority of the target group would have not recognized the company beforehand it would have had a negative impact on the credibility and validity of the thesis.

5. Have you been using Posti's postal services?
(option 2, please skip to question 7)

If you answered

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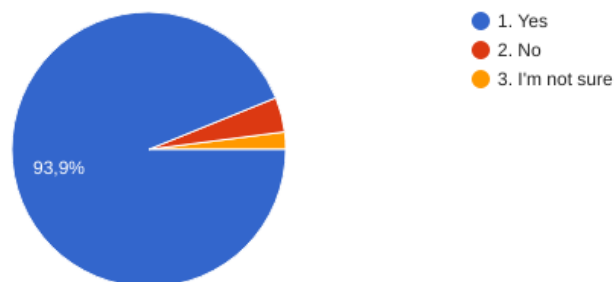


Figure 8. Question 5.

Question number 5 correspond to the previous question *Are you familiar with the Finnish company Posti?* It is a natural follow-up question and if people have heard about Posti they have also more likely used the company's services. As stated previously, 97,3 percent has heard about the company and now we can see that 93,9 percent have actually used their services. A high percentage was expected for the *Yes* option, but this is even more than anticipated. These results confirm that Posti is well known among students and one can draw the conclusion they are one of the most used, if not the most used company, for private deliveries.

6. How often do you use Posti's services on a monthly basis?

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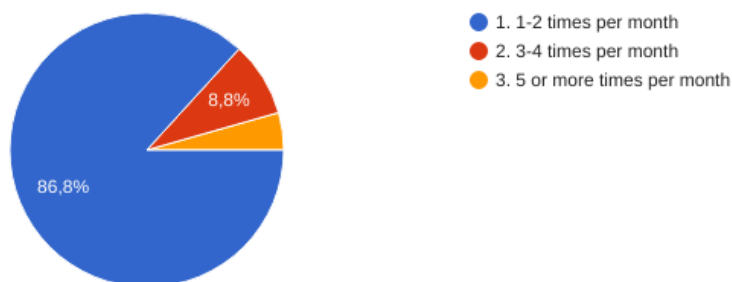


Figure 9. Question 6.

Since Posti is the biggest domestic delivery firm in Finland, it is a logical assumption that our target group uses it the most. The usage option that received most of the answers is once or twice per month with 86,8 percent of the answers while the rest of the options only received 13,2 percent combined.

There is a small issue with this question when drawing conclusions. The answer options are limited and does not give enough options to fully represent the students. The question and its options should not have solely focused on usage per month and instead taken a longer time period into account, seeing as students may not use Posti's services on a monthly basis due to a limited budget. This is especially true for the respondents answering *I'm not sure* in the previous question. However, it doesn't affect the overall reliability of the thesis in any significant way as the results wouldn't change. The data shows a clear majority of students using Posti's services on a basis of 1-2 times per month and it could even be less and not every month for a small group of people who answered the first option. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that 11 respondents chose not to answer the question at all whereas it should only be 6 respondents based on the previous question.

7. Does it matter to you that Posti is environmentally sustainable?

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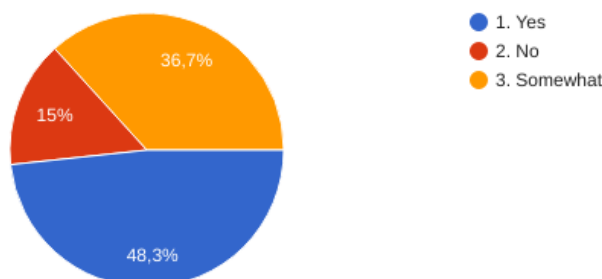


Figure 10. Question 7.

The data from the first question showed the majority of respondents stating that environmental responsibility is something important. Looking at question seven, the data follows the same distribution but with a less clear majority. Around 48 percent of students chose option 1, *Yes*, and 36 percent *Somewhat* while 15 percent the target group did not think it matters if Posti is environmentally sustainable or not. The negative option and more neutrally leaning option, *No* and *Somewhat* respectively, increased their answer compared to the positive *Yes* option when looking at the first question.

We can only speculate why 15 percent of students answered *No*. Maybe they do believe that Posti's environmental contributions really matter or impact the environment in a significant way. In any case, 85 percent of the respondents still care for Posti to be environmentally conscious, but to a varying degree.

8. Are you aware of Posti's environmental efforts?

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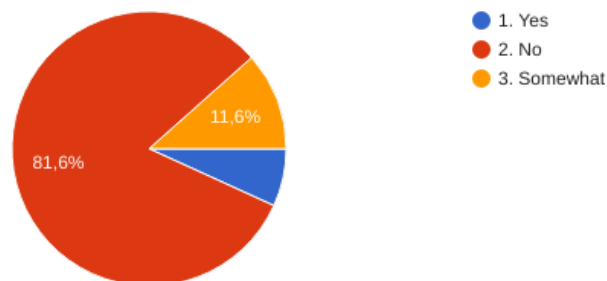


Figure 11. Question 8.

Question number 8 is vital to this thesis. We want to examine how many people actually know that Posti is environmentally friendly and are aware of their/ it's sustainable policies. It shows how effective Posti is with the marketing of their sustainable services and if the target group is perceiving the efforts.

The results are not what was expected. As much as 81,6 percent of respondents answered *No* while 11,6 percent picked *Somewhat* and 6,8 percent *Yes*. The previous answers showed that students care about the environment, are familiar with Posti and also use the company's services 1-2 times per month or less. One can then ask: Why are they not aware of Posti's environmental efforts? This may be well due to lack of promotion of their green policies. While the company do have their/it's marketing name, Posti Green, visible shown on their transporting cars it is not seemingly enough. There is no clear advertising for example on their website, with no visible topic headline where you can navigate to find more information about Posti's sustainable services. There needs to be a more aggressive advertising.

8.5 If you answered option 1 or 3 above, please give examples of those efforts

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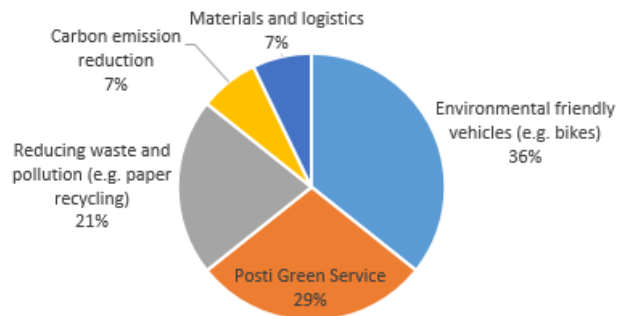


Figure 12. Question 8.5.

The follow up question is answered by students who didn't pick the option *No* in question 8. A small amount of people, 14 to be exact, replied. The chart shows us that *Environmental friendly vehicles*, *Posti Green Service* and *reducing waste and pollution* got most of the answers, with 5, 4 and 3 respondents respectively.

Environmentally friendly vehicles and Posti Green Service are more or less connected, with the latter being a marketing term for their sustainable operations that can be seen on their vehicles. Posti should push the visibility of Posti Green Service and also promote their environmental vehicle fleet of cars and bicycles.

9. Have you been using any postal services of Posti's competitors?

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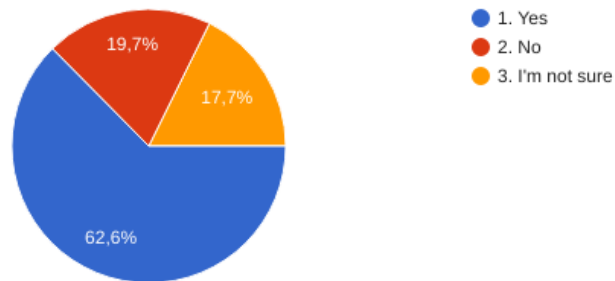


Figure 13. Question 9.

The objective of this question was to find out how many respondents from the target group are aware of and uses some other Postal services than Posti. It isn't directly connected to the environmental aspect of the thesis, however, the purpose was to establish who the main competitors of Posti are and compare their environmental efforts to Posti. It would give a sense of how well the Finnish logistics company is doing environmentally compared to its competitors.

The results shows that a majority of the respondents have been using postal services of some other company than Posti with 62,6 percent answering *Yes* while 19,7 percent answered *No*. Interestingly enough, 17,7 percent were not sure if they had used any other company's services. A reason for the uncertainty could be a faulty memory and also unclearness with who is handling the delivery of a product, with some online stores not specifying who is the shipper.

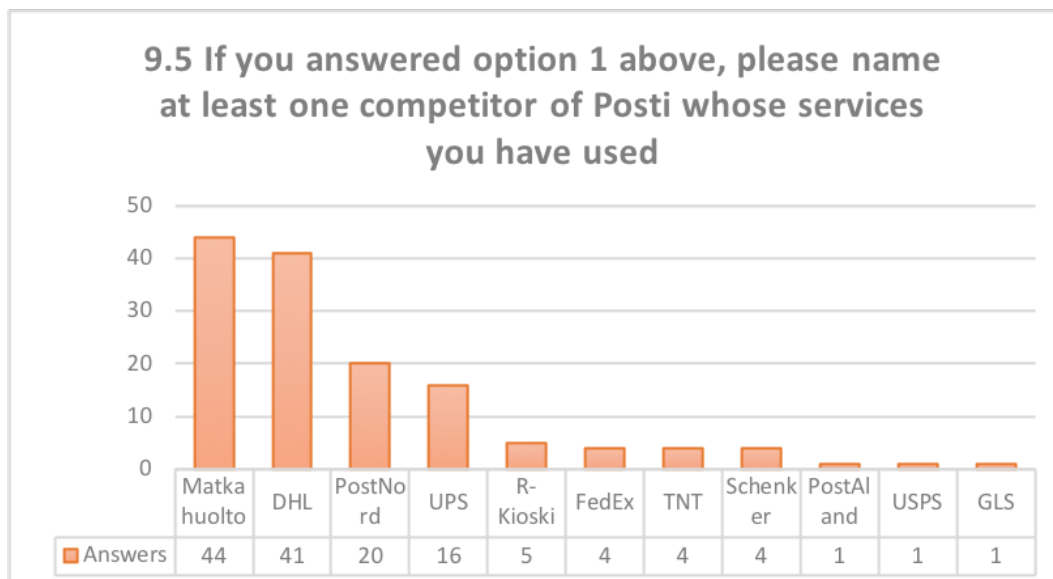


Figure 14. Question 9.5.

The last question of the survey and it is a follow-up question for question 9. We wanted to know which companies students use instead of Posti and the results are what was estimated. Around 90 students responded to the question and they had the option to name several logistics companies, which is why there are in total 141 answers. Matkahuolto and DHL received the majority of the responses, with the former having 44 answers (31%) and latter 41 answers (29%). Both companies are big names in the Finnish postal field, with Matkahuolto being a large domestic operator for bus transports and freight services and DHL the leading logistic provider in Europe.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In the previous chapter the empirical study of the thesis was discussed regarding what type of a research method was used, the reliability of the questionnaire and also the analysis of the results. In this final chapter the results from the electronic questionnaire will be discussed and general conclusions will be drawn.

Improvements that could be made will be stated and a summary on the whole thesis will be given at the end.

6.1 Conclusion and Discussion

The research questions were the following: What is the link between sustainability and positive customer perception? Does the green policy matter to the consumers what a company does with its green policy? And, if approaching the problem from a financial point of view, we could ask “are customers willing to pay more for services that are advertised as green”? The history of companies conducting green business tells us that it is possible to gain market share and new customers if one properly employs methods and policies that improves sustainability and afterwards advertise those efforts to the public. There is a high public awareness of the environmental threats facing the earth (climate change, depletion of natural resources etc.), as can be seen when the UN Intergovernmental Panel on *Climate Change* released a negative report on the 8th of October and subsequently creating alarming news headlines all around the world. Customers are embracing sustainable options and investing time and money into environmental related topics.

Corporations would be wise to target customer groups with a higher education and higher income, as according to the previous mentioned doctorate (Sheic M. Isaac, Consumer Perceptions of Eco-Friendly Products) they are more likely to purchase green products and services. However, possible customer groups with a lower income but higher education (such as university students) should not be disregarded. They may not invest in environmentally sustainable products or services that would have a higher cost, but they could be potential customers in

the future. As showed in a study conducted by Hyllegard, Yan, Olga, & Attmann, younger customers are more inclined to switch brands to one associated with a good cause and are persuaded by corporate values.

A clear benefit that a company may thus receive from sustainable operations is a more favorable brand image among the public while a higher profitability is not guaranteed in the short term.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents, over 90 percent, agreed with the statement that environmental sustainability is an important topic. It seems to be an important issue for the students of VAMK, however, only about 57 percent of the respondents were more likely to purchase products or services that are advertised as environmentally friendly. Furthermore, even less the respondents were willing to pay a higher price for the shipment of a product if it was environmentally sustainable, with around 35 percent of the students agreeing with the statement. Interestingly enough, when asked if it matters for the respondents that Posti is environmentally sustainable, positive answers were combined 85 percent with around 48 percent answering *yes* and 37 percent answering *somewhat*. These results indicate that while the students of VAMK may put value on the environment and Posti's efforts for maintaining sustainable operations, they aren't necessarily ready to pay additional costs for it. With the respondents being exclusively students, this outcome is not surprising as students' financial situation is limited in general. They are not interested in paying additional costs, even if it would be for a good cause.

The questionnaire results also showed that the respondents have a poor knowledge of Posti's environmental efforts, with around 82 percent being unaware of methods that Posti employs. This is surprising as an overwhelming majority of the respondents, around 97 percent, were aware of Posti's existence and 85 percent stating they care for them to act in a more sustainable way (48.3 percent answering *yes* and 36.7 percent answering *somewhat*). There seems to be a lack of awareness with Posti's green policies and it needs to be on a higher level if Posti is going to have return on investments.

The respondents who answered *yes* and *somewhat* on question eight regarding awareness of Posti's environmental efforts (18.4 percent or 14 answers) listed on

the follow-up question the following methods they were aware of:

Environmentally friendly vehicles (five answers), *Posti Green Service* (four answers), *Reducing waste and pollution* (three answers), *Carbon emission reduction* (one answer) and *Materials and logistics* (one answer).

Environmentally friendly vehicles and Posti Green Service received most of the answers, with the latter being a marketing name for an environmental sustainable program that offers carbon neutral services. Posti has advertised their Posti Green Services on its transport vehicles, which has resulted in a few customers connecting environmental sustainability with Posti's vehicles. However, it is not enough as the majority of respondents were not able to name if or how Posti is sustainable. Lastly, the final ninth question asked the students if they have used services of Posti's competitors. While this was not directly connected to the environmental aspect of the questionnaire, the question was included as it could show whose logistics services the respondents are using besides Posti and if environmental conduct is of big importance to those companies.

A large share of the respondents had used postal services of Posti's competitors, with 62.6 percent answering yes. Matkahuolto Oy was the most shared answer with 44 answers (31 percent) of a total 90 respondents, closely followed by DHL with 41 answers (percent).

Matkahuolto is a Finnish based company that offers bus transport and freight services while DHL is an international logistics company that originates from Germany. Matkahuolto doesn't appear to have any extensive sustainable programs in place nor do they provide any information about it on their website. They do, however, transport all parcels together with their bus transports, saving on carbon emissions, but compared to Posti they are seemingly not putting any substantial efforts towards being more environmentally friendly.

DHL has, in contrast, an extensive system in place, being a much larger player in the logistics industry, and have similarly with Posti an environmental sustainable program which they market as *DHL GoGreen Solutions*. There exists a whole separate section for green logistics solutions on their website where they provide information about its contents, such as Carbon Reports and Green Optimization.

DHL offer their corporate customers the chance to calculate and report their carbon emissions associated with their shipments through DHL's carbon reports and reporting tools (e.g. online Carbon Dashboard). Through their Green Optimization efforts, DHL analyzes customers' logistics system and optimizes the freight routes and modes through its carbon reports while also also optimizing energy levels in warehouses and improving aircraft and vehicle fleets in order to reduce carbon emissions further.

DHL also offers Climate Neutral services that aim to offset greenhouse gas emissions that Green Optimization cannot address through participating in a voluntary emission trading systems and subsequently investing in climate protection projects. Part of the climate neutral services is mail and parcel shipments and express shipments for both private and business customers. In similarity to Posti, emissions generated from parcels will be offset free of charge for private customers in their country of establishment (Germany) while international deliveries are charged an extra fee. Business customers receives DHL's marketing logo *GOGREEN* on all its Climate Neutral shipments, demonstrating commitment to the environment, while also being rewarded with an official certificate than can be used for PR purposes. (Green Logistics Solutions 2018)

Posti Oy has similar initiatives as DHL and the Finnish postal company seem to have an active approach to improving its environmental activities. Posti is providing environmental focused services for their customers, free of charge in some cases, and even follows GRI reporting guidelines and the ISO 14001 standard in order to maintain a level of accountability.

Putting a higher price on sustainable services doesn't seem to be the best option for Posti, at least when it comes to young private customers. While the perception towards Posti's environmental services was favorable, young private customers of at VAMK are not ready to spend additional money on sustainable deliveries. The market as a whole also seem to focus on granting its customers affordable or even free green services. Their focus should lie on increasing awareness about their environmental efforts, as they are pioneers in the Finnish field of sustainable

logistics and involve customers to a higher degree in order to maximize benefits from their environmentally friendly approach.

6.2 Future improvements

The thesis as a whole focused on the application of environmental sustainability in corporations and the perception of such efforts among young private customers. While the thesis accomplished to achieve its purpose and draw appropriate conclusion based on its findings, there are some areas that could be improved upon in future studies.

In the theoretical study, alternative environmental approaches to what was presented in chapter 3 should be examined. There are doubts with the benefits of CSR and it may well lose foothold in the future to more bold environmental approaches such as regulatory models.

Regarding the research methodology, it is recommendable to take into consideration the motivation behind the respondents' answers. For example to *why* respondents answer as they do. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods should be employed to achieve this. Furthermore, the target group of respondents should be broadened and more inclusive in order to have a more accurate view on what the overall perception towards Posti's environmental effort is.

The questionnaire itself should include key demographic questions, such as age and sex, so a more comprehensive analysis could be conducted. SPSS or a similar program should be used for this, which would allow correlations to be drawn between the respondents' demographic information and the answers given regarding environmental sustainability.

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