Relevancy of Retailers in Sustainability Communications

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Bachelor's Thesis

2022

Bachelor of Business Administration

Abstract

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| **Degree** |
| Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business |

| **Report/thesis title** |
| The Relevancy of Retailers in Sustainability Communication |

| **Number of pages and appendix pages** |
| 47 + 4 |

This thesis aimed to discover the relevancy of retailers in the commissioning company's sustainability communication strategy. Through researching this topic, the researcher aimed to discover the importance of sustainability and its communication for retailers and their consumers and what types of content they would like to receive.

The theoretical portion of this thesis focused on understanding sustainability and how it can be communicated. The researcher also looked into how sustainability communications can impact brand image, consumer behavior, and what leads to greenwashing.

The research was conducted in two phases to obtain primarily quantitative data. The first phase of the study was to conduct a survey. The survey was emailed to all of the commissioning company's retailers. Only 19 companies responded to the survey. Most of the respondents were based in Europe; however, two respondents were in the USA and China. The survey was created in Webropol and analyzed in SPSS and Excel. Through the survey, the researcher received data to use in the second phase of the research. The second phase compared the retailer's sustainability values to an existing company-performed survey results.

The responses showed that there was room to improve the company's sustainability communication; however, the data collected showed an interest from retailers in participating. The retailers shared what they are doing for their sustainability communications and the marketing activations they use. Overall, the data showed that the commissioning company has various options in how they can choose to communicate through their retailers.

The commissioning company already has established information about various sustainability topics. The recommendation the researcher formulated based on the survey data, and the commissioning company's channels are to share their materials with their retailers so that their consumers could find this information whenever they are interacting with their products and services regardless of if they go through retailers or the commissioning company's own channels.

| **Keywords** |
| Sustainability Communications, Outdoor Industry, Marketing Communication Strategy, |
| Sustainability Marketing, Brand Image, Consumer Behavior, Retailers |

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1   Introduction

This research-based bachelor's thesis is for the International Business degree program in the Customer Relationship Management specialization at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. This thesis covers the topic of sustainability communication and the different marketing channels that companies can use when communicating the topic. The research in this study was primarily quantitative, and the data was collected through a survey.

The main goal of this thesis is to discover how sustainability can be communicated along with whether incorporating external parties, such as retailers, can elevate a marketing communication strategy. The thesis focuses primarily on retailers and how the commissioning company can better utilize them to promote sustainability communications.

1.1   Background

In recent times sustainability has become a trending topic. With natural disasters and the emergence of new diseases becoming a norm, climate change has made itself prevalent in everyday life. New data shared daily highlights hyper-consumerism's negative impact on the planet (Zhuravlev & Mukhlynkina 2019). The lack of information about a company or its products' environmental impact removes the possibility for its consumers to make informed decisions. Without vital information, consumers mindlessly shop for goods without realizing their purchase decisions' negative implications on the planet. According to a study conducted by Arora and Gagneja (2020), social comparison significantly affects consumer behaviors and the habits they decide to adopt. This research shows the possible large-scale impact companies may have if they communicate about sustainability. Sustainability information can help educate and encourage consumers to make more informed decisions and, in turn, positively influence their purchase behavior along with their social environment.

To better understand how companies within the outdoor industry can promote their sustainability. This thesis will explore the role that retailers play in sustainability communication. This thesis is done in collaboration with the commissioning company, Haglöfs.

1.2   Research Question

This thesis aims to understand better retailers' and stakeholders' values on sustainability communication and discover whether communicating sustainability through retailers is beneficial for the commissioning company. The thesis outcomes provide knowledge on

Haglöfs retailers and their values towards sustainability. The international aspect required by the International Business program is covered by the research group being located internationally.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis was **how can Haglöfs develop its sustainability communication strategy to increase relevancy for its stakeholders and retailers?** The research question was divided into investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ 1. How important do retailers consider sustainability-related content to be in Haglöfs marketing communication strategy?
IQ 2. What types of sustainability content do the retailers consider useful in Haglöfs B2C marketing?
IQ 3. How does the Haglöfs' stakeholder matrix on sustainability topics compare with the retailers' results?

Table 1 below presents the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, research methods, and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Survey Questions	Results (chapter)
IQ 1. How important do retailers consider sustainability-related content to be in Haglöfs marketing communication strategy?	Sustainability marketing, sustainability communications, and retailers	Retailer survey	4, 5	4
IQ 2. What types of sustainability content do the retailers consider useful in Haglöfs B2C marketing?	Sustainability marketing, sustainability communications & retailers	Retailer survey	6, 7, 8, 9, 11	4

IQ 3. How does the Haglöfs' stakeholder matrix on sustainability topics compare with the retailers' results?	Sustainability marketing, sustainability communications & retailers	Company's prior research and comparative analysis with matrices	10	4

1.3 Demarcation

The research was restricted to the commissioning company's retailers, consumers, and employees. The researcher surveyed only Haglöfs' retailers and used the company's materiality matrix from 2020. The primary focus of the thesis is on the company's retailers; therefore, the researcher used the 2020 company materiality matrix for comparative analysis and justification of the retailer survey results. The research will solely focus on sustainability communication and will not research greenwashing. However, in Chapter 2, greenwashing is discussed to provide a deeper understanding of sustainability communication since it is a vital aspect of the topic.

1.4 Benefits

The commissioning company, Haglöfs, can benefit from this thesis since they will gain information on their retailers and their views on sustainability communication. The information gathered will help determine how beneficial it is to communicate via their retailers compared to communicating directly to their consumers while also discovering possible ways Haglöfs can further utilize their retailers in providing information for their consumers.

Companies within the outdoor industry can benefit from this research since it provides insight into how retailers within their industry feel about and communicate sustainability. The information provided by this research can help provide a basis for them to reevaluate their own retailers' role in their communication strategies.

The research can benefit retailers because it will help lay a foundation for collaboration in the future between them and Haglöfs.

The researcher will benefit from this research since it will allow them to learn more about sustainability and communication strategy. With the understanding of the different topics discussed throughout this thesis, the researcher will be able to apply the learned knowledge in future academic and professional endeavors.

1.5   Key Concepts

Sustainability communication refers to a business strategy used to incorporate sustainability into a company's external and internal operations. It allows companies to express what sustainable measures they are taking to their employees, customers, stakeholders, or interested individuals. (Bhatia 2021.)

B2C marketing promotes purchasing goods or services from a business to an individual (Tsur 2001).

A **Communication Strategy** is a well-thought-out approach a company takes toward communicating to its consumers (Genç 2017).

A **Retailer** is a business that sells a variety of different brands of "goods and services … to final consumers for personal or household consuming" (Hameli 2018, p. 2).

A **Stakeholder** is an individual that is either affected or contributes to the company's progress toward objectives (Benn, Abratt & O'Leary 2016, p. 2-3).

1.6   Commissioning Company

The commissioning company for this thesis is Haglöfs, an outdoor-wear brand founded in Sweden. The company was established in 1914 by Wiktor Haglöf. The company's mission is to create durable products that can face any weather. Haglöfs is based in Stockholm, Sweden, and operates internationally. The company maintains traditional Swedish values such as sustainability throughout its business practices and product concepts. (Haglöfs 2021a.)

The topic of sustainability is an important topic for Haglöfs. They are constantly finding new ways to improve their overall brand and products to become more ethical. They have conducted consumer research on their consumers' sustainability preferences and are constantly seeking more information that they could use to improve their marketing strategy. The company sells its products mainly through its online and physical shops and its retailers. Currently, they are interested in discovering how to utilize their communication channels better and determine where to put more focus. The company releases an annual sustainability report that provides a materiality matrix highlighting the importance of different sustainability issues to their stakeholders. (Haglöfs 2021a.)

2   Communication of Sustainability

This chapter will review different concepts vital for understanding this thesis's IQs. The theoretical framework provided in this chapter is used to support the questions used in the survey and the data produced. The researcher will discuss general sustainability along with its role in marketing communications. This section will expand on different concepts contributing to sustainability communication to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the topic.

2.1   Three pillars of Sustainability Communication

In the 1980s, the term sustainability became a trending topic of discussion. Since its conception, there have been numerous ways to define the term due to its ambiguity and broad nature. (Portney 2015.) However, most individuals refer to the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) definition from 1987. The WCED defined sustainability as ensuring the ability of the present population to develop while simultaneously guaranteeing the same capacity for future generations to meet their expected needs. (UN Documents Cooperation 1987.) Due to the broad scope of the topic, sustainability is often split into three pillars: environmental, social, and economic sustainability, which are all interdependent (Goodland 1995, 2; Portney 2015).
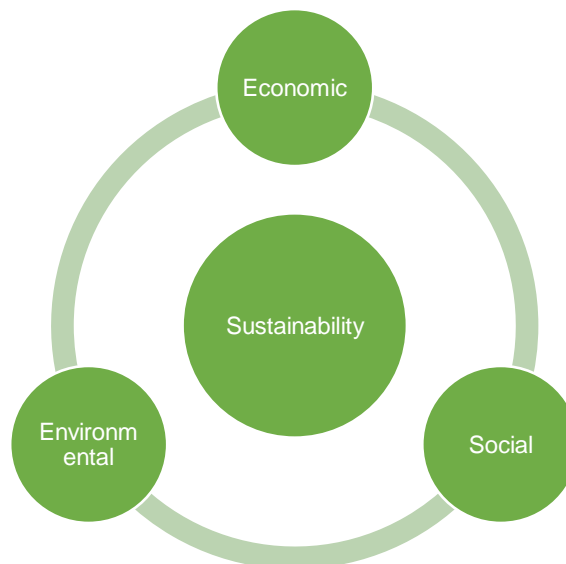
Figure 1. Pillars of Sustainability (Adapted from Goodland 1995)

The environmental pillar ensures the preservation of natural resources needed to sustain human life. This form of sustainability ensures that the environment has time to replenish and recover. This allows for resources to be preserved for future generations and secures the preservation of the planet and the various ecosystems it hosts. (Goodland 1995, 3.) The economic pillar aims to preserve the ability to operate long-term, job guarantee, and

development opportunities. The social pillar focuses on providing a healthy work environment and helping elevate the social environment in which they operate. A company can advance many aspects of its business while ensuring long-term success by considering the three pillars regarding sustainability. (Kemper & Ballantine 2019.)

As the climate crisis worsens, consumers realize their consumption habits impact the planet. Due to the increased awareness, companies have noticed the importance of adhering to their consumers' demands on sustainability. Companies have begun using their marketing to enforce sustainable change in their operations. This form of marketing is referred to as sustainability marketing. Sustainability marketing is hard to define because there are different ways to interpret the term; however, the transformative sustainability marketing (TSM) concept is used within this thesis. TSM is defined as using marketing operations to help direct society towards a sustainable direction. This concept also promotes the idea that sustainability is dependent on both the company and its consumers. Without action from both parties, it is difficult to ensure long-term results. By focusing on the overconsumption of goods, companies can tackle the root cause and enforce institutional change. Often this institutional change can be made through informal and formal actions. Enforcing change through formal actions means advocating for laws and regulations, while informal actions usually address social norms through marketing campaigns. (Kemper & Ballantine 2019, pp. 24- 26.)
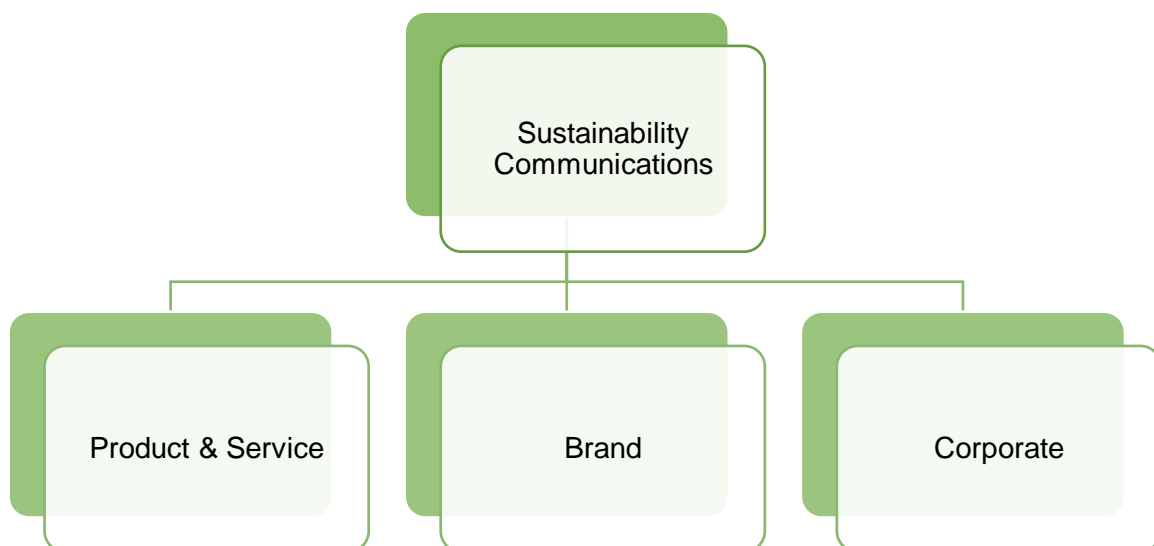
Figure 2. Pillars of Sustainability Communications for a Company

Companies often divide their sustainability efforts into different sections to ensure long-term success in achieving their sustainability goals. These sections are product/service,

brand, and corporate communications (Figure 2). By dividing their sustainability communications into smaller sections, companies can effectively track what areas they are excelling in and areas of improvement. By evaluating the different aspects of their communication, they actively assess their resource allocation and ensure an optimal communication strategy to reach their desired goals.

2.1.1   Product & Service-level Communications

In the retail industry, environmentally conscious consumers are interested in brands that promote ethical consumption and provide information for their consumers to make informed purchase decisions. To reflect this growing trend toward ethical consumerism, companies have started sourcing more sustainable materials and increasing the quality of their products to ensure a long-life cycle while starting initiatives to help promote it. (Park & Kim 2016.)

Many outdoor industry companies have adopted sufficiency-oriented consumption to promote sustainability. This form of consumption encourages the reduction of excessive purchasing and promotes extending product longevity and product swapping. To implement this mindset amongst their consumers, companies have begun creating initiatives such as a repair program that allows customers to send their products back to the company whenever they need repair. Some companies have also added a second-hand program that allows customers to send back clothes they do not use anymore to the company for repair and to be resold. A second-hand program makes the company more accessible due to second-hand products usually being mark-down in price; however, this would also allow consumers to find more accessible sustainable clothing. Companies have also created return programs that allow their customers to return products to the company despite their purchase date. This allows the company to dispose of their products correctly, and if they have a second-hand program, they can resell salvageable products. Some companies have even created clothing swaps that allow consumers to swap clothing with other customers through their websites to create a sense of community. (Gossen & Kropfeld 2022, 721.)

Other than encouraging their customers to buy less, many brands have begun finding ways to promote their sustainability efforts by educating their consumers about their purchase decisions' impact on the planet while increasing their brand equity (Grubor & Milovanov 2017). Brands have created educational information for their consumers' different shopping experiences. An example of this would be a California-based fashion company called Reformation (2020). Reformation (2020) created a scaling system for their products that allows their customers to track the environmental impact of their

products by showing the breakdown of water usage, material waste, and carbon dioxide release produced through the manufacturing process. Creating tools and materials that provide more depth to a product allows consumers to create more informed decisions and promotes thinking in ways that they usually would not (Gossen & Kropfeld 2022). Companies can influence their consumers' buying habits more they educate their customers (Gossen & Kropfeld 2022; Verplaken & Wood 2006).

2.1.2 Brand-level Communications

Even though companies should transform their companies from within to reflect their sustainability, companies also need to evolve their brand to reflect their efforts and goals. Through a company's branding, they can use it to increase its brand's value and differentiate itself from its competitors. With the growing awareness of climate change, consumers change their shopping preferences to reflect more sustainable consumption. Considering the change in shopping preferences and increase in sustainability policies, companies' standard of operations and communication have risen. The increased standards that companies are expected to operate at have created sustainability to be the bare minimum, making it hard to stand out solely based on their products and services. As all companies strive to meet the exact expectations, certain features and services become a requirement instead of a unique selling point. Therefore, companies need to optimize their branding to help them stand out and provide additional value to their consumers. (Speisser, Marazza & Pinetti 2021.)

Suppose a company does not use its brand to communicate its sustainability. In that case, there is a possibility of being exposed to consumers lacking understanding of things such as high prices or more extended delivery periods, or other factors that may arise in sustainable production and distribution processes. This lack of understanding and connection to the brand will prompt consumers to choose a cheaper alternative from a competitor with the same sustainability benefits. By creating an effective brand strategy, the company can prompt consumers to develop a deeper connection with the brand and create a preference for their products and services due to the positive association. (Speisser et al. 2021.)

2.1.3 Corporate-level Communications

Even though a company needs to have sustainability on a product/service and brand level, corporate sustainability is crucial for long-term success. Corporate sustainability aims to create long-term value for its stakeholders through a holistic business strategy. The form of sustainability is driven by motivations of increasing the company's growth,

return on investment (ROI), and managing risk sustainably to prompt the company's development. (Ashrafi, Acciaro, Walker, Magnan & Adams 2019.)

Corporate sustainability could be communicated through corporate social responsibility (CSR), which aims to encourage a business to operate in a manner that economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Through CSR, companies must reevaluate different aspects of their business, such as environmental management, responsible sourcing, stakeholder engagement, working conditions, and human rights, to name a few. (UNIDO 2022.)

2.2 Aspects of Sustainability Communication

Sustainability communications can be multifaceted; however, it often refers to a company's communication of its sustainability efforts to the public. This form of communication is used to help contribute to a more sustainable society and promote consumers to become more eco-conscious. With the growing concerns about the ability to sustain life on earth, individuals demand that companies become more accountable and provide more insight into their operations. Companies must begin actively and honestly communicating about their efforts to help increase sustainability and influence unaware consumers to improve their shopping decisions. Overall sustainability communications goal is to direct companies and consumers toward a more sustainable and accountable society. (Elving 2020.)

2.2.1 The process of sustainability communications

It is vital to understand how topics are chosen and their communication methods to understand sustainability communication. To determine what sustainability efforts should be addressed, a company must create a process. Elving (2020) created a model that displays the steps needed for communication to lead towards a sustainable direction (Figure 3).

Figure 3. From A to Sustainability Model (adapted from Elving 2020)

The first step to determining what topic needs addressing would be to find what the company or its consumers view as urgent. Narrowing down the possible topics to ones of

interest for the company or its consumers allows them to exert resources to address them effectively. Not focusing on every possible issue ensures the possibility for long-term change. (Elving 2020.)

For long-lasting results, awareness needs to be brought to topics that the company or its consumers deem urgent. Awareness allows individuals to realize the implications of specific actions and that habits and behaviors must be changed to have more favorable results. (Elving 2020.) Creating awareness can range from creating social media content to in-store dialogues; however, communication strategy varies depending on the company and its consumers. Companies should determine which communication channel has the best engagement and communicate from there. This ensures that enough potential or existing customers can be exposed to the information and, in turn, will help evolve how consumers interact with the company and its goods. (Han, Henninger, Apeagyei & Tyler 2017.)

Beyond educating their consumers, companies need to act. Even though educating consumers can help create action, a company still needs to devise a plan to maintain momentum and produce evident results. Creating action can happen in numerous ways, such as lobbying for regulations and laws or creating campaigns; however, companies should focus on creating initiatives that address important topics for them and their stakeholders. Through initiatives, companies can actively address issues and possibly provide ways for their consumers to contribute. Allowing consumers to contribute to these initiatives allows the company and its customers to contribute to a collective goal. By communicating their initiatives, the company allows for an ongoing dialogue about the issues they are trying to address. This, in turn, will lead to further education for its consumers. (Elving 2020.)

It is vital to maintain a dialogue about different topics and initiatives despite enacting action. An ongoing dialogue allows the company to remain updated about its consumers' values and needs while simultaneously providing its customers an understanding of their company goals and plans. Through discussion, companies can receive feedback on how they could improve and highlight possible blind spots. Without dialogue, companies expose themselves to falling behind in their sustainability efforts. (Elving 2020.)

2.2.2 Marketing Communication Strategy

Communication is sharing information between two or more parties (Radovic Markovic & Salamzadeh 2018). Through sharing knowledge, parties can convey an idea, convince opposing parties, encourage others, or gain a mutual understanding. Communication is an

essential function of a company's operations since it allows companies to share knowledge externally and internally. By communicating on an internal level, companies can make and carry out plans which will enable them to establish and meet their goals. Through effective internal communications, a company can create valuable information to be communicated to external parties such as their customers. (Genç 2017.)

Shrivastava & Dawle (2020) define a marketing communication strategy as when a company creates a course of action to "reach to their targeted market through various types of methods of communication." Through having a marketing strategy, companies can educate existing and potential customers (Shrivastava & Dawle 2020).
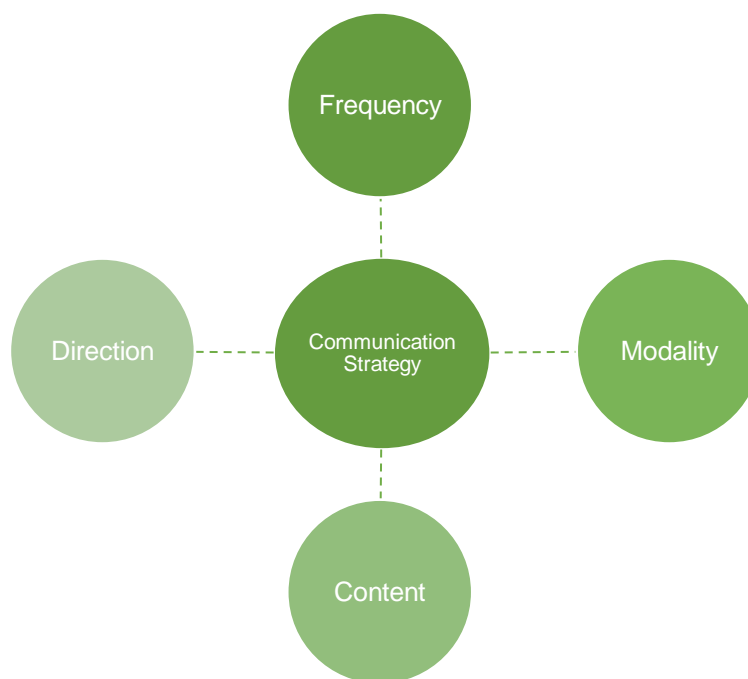

Figure 4. Keys to a Communication Strategy (Adapted from Mohr & Nevin 1990, 38.)

According to Mohr & Nevin (2020), a communication strategy has four main factors: content, direction, frequency, and modality (Figure 4). Content refers to the message being conveyed within a communication strategy, and direction refers to the need to determine where the communication should be aimed. By determining the frequency of communication, companies can plan how long and often they need to communicate about a particular issue. Modality in a communication strategy is what channel is used to convey the information. (Mohr & Nevin 1990, 38-40.)

Companies should use a marketing mix within a communication strategy to optimize their impact and achieve their goals. Depending on their desired outcome, they should adjust what marketing activities they use to best suit the target market they are trying to communicate to. (Lane Keller 2001.)

The seven Ps of marketing created by Booms and Bitner (1981, in Sethna & Blythe 2016, 11-12) are mentioned when discussing marketing mixes. When creating a marketing mix, companies often consider at least four of the seven Ps of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. The full seven Ps of marketing are as follows (Sethna & Blythe 2016, 11-12):

- **Product** refers to the benefits that the consumer receives through their purchase
- **Price** refers to how much the consumer will need to spend to complete their purchase
- **Place** refers to where and how the consumer will receive their product
- **Promotions** are the content that customers consume to discover what they would like to buy
- **People** are the individuals that the customers interact with to acquire their product
- **Processes** refer to how the product or service is delivered to the customer
- **Physical** is the environment in which the customer experiences when interacting with the company

Gossen and Kropfeld (2022, 727-728) conducted a study to discover what marketing tools companies in the outdoor industry are using to support sustainable sufficiency-oriented consumer behavior. Their study determined that 58% of outdoor companies use product policies in their marketing tools, and 38% use promotion policies and place a lower emphasis on price and place (Gossen & Kropfeld 2022, 727-728).

Companies can transfer this ideology to their marketing communication strategy by considering the seven Ps of marketing. According to Shrivastava and Dawle (2020) and Lane Keller (2001, 820-821), some of the marketing activations that companies should use to communicate with their consumers within their strategy are:

- Media Advertisements
- Point-of-Purchase Advertising
- Trade Promotions
- Public Relations
- Consumer promotions
- Event marketing and sponsorships
- Personal Selling
- Seminars
- Downloadable materials
- Packaging

Through having different communication methods, companies can adjust their strategy to become Marketing communication's primary purpose is to create and maintain demand and preference for a product/ service and brand. By creating this form of value, the company can experience long-term benefits such as brand preference. (Shrivastava & Dawle 2020.)

2.2.3 Greenwashing

Despite the positive intentions of sustainability communications, companies can face negative repercussions if they do not tell the truth. Greenwashing occurs when a company embellishes its sustainability efforts not to reflect the reality of its actual impact. This embellishment is often motivated by the pursuit of increased market value. (Dahl 2010; Szabo & Webster 2020.) A greenwashing firm could be described as a firm that positively communicates its sustainability but has bad environmental performance. This form of communication misleads consumers by using ambiguous language or even lies. (Delmas & Burbano 2011.)
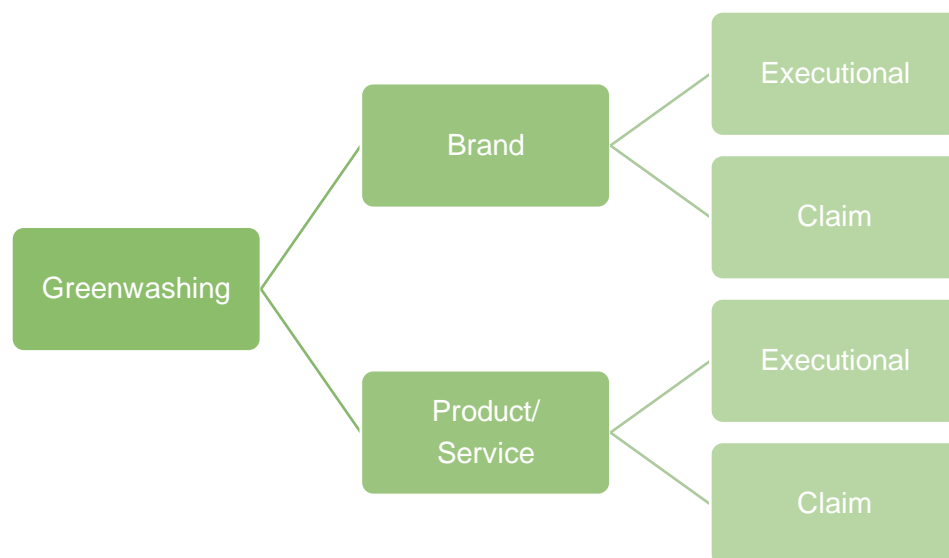

Figure 5. Forms of Greenwashing (adapted from de Freitas Netto, Sobral, Ribeiro & da Luz Soares 2020.)

Greenwashing primarily occurs on a brand or product/service level. These can provide misleading information about their company or products/services through two forms of greenwashing (Figure 5). The first form of greenwashing is claim-based, meaning that a company provides text statements that either claim or imply their brand or their products/services are environmentally friendly. The second form of greenwashing is executional. Executional greenwashing is when a company implies its sustainability through implicative elements such as nature-based imagery, which leads consumers to make assumptions about the brand. (de Freitas Netto et al. 2020.)

Despite the adverse effects of greenwashing, unsustainable companies can face pressure on multiple levels, prompting them to positively communicate their sustainability regardless. The pressure to greenwash can come from three primary levels: external, organizational, and individual pres4sures (Figure 6). Demands created by the company's market and non-market groups can prompt external pressures. The market groups usually

consist of consumers, investors, and competitors, while the non-market groups can be comprised of regulators and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 71-72.)
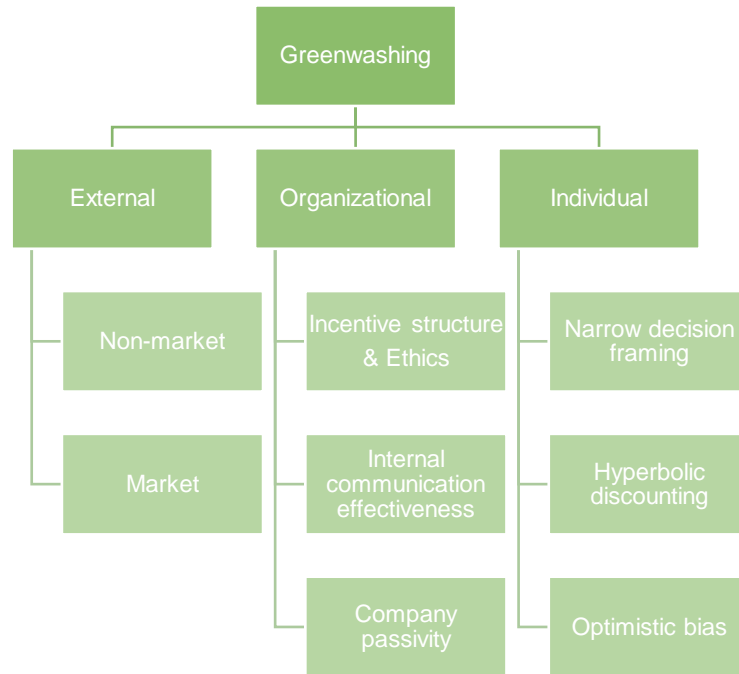

Figure 6. Pressures to Greenwash (adapted from Delmas & Burbano 2011, 68)

Market groups create pressure by demanding sustainable products, services, and corporate operations from a company that cannot fulfill the market group's demands. Due to the inability and disinterest to meet these needs, a company may mislead consumers about its sustainability efforts and operations to increase short-term sales leading to its greenwashing. However, if a company wants to maintain its long-term growth and build its customer trust, then through honest communication and finding ways to work towards sustainability, they could avoid greenwashing. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 71-72.)

On the other hand, greenwashing companies can be pressured by non-market groups comprised of NGOs and regulators. The overall goal of NGOs and regulators is to raise awareness of greenwashing and hold companies accountable. This accountability is created through different campaigns and movements, ranging from social media campaign posts to informational websites to boycotting the brand. With consumers becoming more aware and interested in sustainability issues, the actions of NGOs and regulators hold more weight and can help put pressure on greenwashing companies to change. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 69-71.)

On an organizational level, the pressure to greenwash may arise from various factors; however, one of the biggest influences is the company's traits. For instance, product-

based companies face more significant pressure to be environmentally friendly than service-based companies due to more product-level regulations. Also, larger companies face pressure from investors to be environmentally friendly due to having more public attention than smaller companies with less attention. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 72-73.)

Company culture is another significant influence on whether it will greenwash. Company culture refers to the shared goals, values, and beliefs within a company (Groysberg, Lee, Price & Cheng 2018). A company can encourage specific goals, values, beliefs, and behaviors through its incentive structure, company ethics, internal communications, and overall reactiveness. The company's priorities can influence the likelihood of greenwashing. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 73.)

A company's incentive structure influences what kinds of behaviors and ethics it promotes throughout its operations. An example of how companies create incentives could be rewarding specific accomplishments such as reaching marketing or sales quotas. An incentive structure can promote a self-interested ethical climate which exposes the company to the risk of unethical behavior. For a company to limit unethical behavior, it is vital to create a code of conduct. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 73-74.)

Without an effective internal company, communication can unintentionally expose itself to greenwashing. This can occur due to ineffective communication between the different departments within the company. For instance, a company's marketing department could overstate the sustainability of a product due to miscommunication with its product team. For this reason, it is essential to create effective ways to share knowledge to minimize the risk of greenwashing. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 75.)

Employees, managers, and company executives can individually prompt greenwashing within the company. This level of greenwashing is prompted by numerous psychological factors such as having a narrow decision frame, hyperbolic discounting, and optimistic bias. When forced to work with limited knowledge and resources, these factors significantly impact individual decision-making and problem-solving skills. Narrow decision framing occurs when individuals decide on a current problem without considering other issues or long-term effects. Narrow decision framing can be limited through a well-established incentive structure that enables broader decision-making. Hyperbolic intertemporal discounting poses a similar issue when an individual's short-run decisions do not align with their long-term goals. This can lead to companies claiming that they aim to achieve specific sustainability goals in the future without taking active steps towards it. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 75-77.)

On the other hand, an optimistic bias occurs when individuals over or under-estimate the likelihood of positive or negative events. This can lead to greenwashing due to individuals not being able to realistically predict the results of the plans and seeking information to confirm their bias. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 75-77.)

2.3   Sustainable Brand and Consumers

As mentioned in the previous subchapters, a company's brand and customers are interinfluenced. Through brand activities, a company can influence its existing consumers' perceptions. (Zhang 2015.) This section will review both brand image and consumer behavior regarding sustainability.

2.3.1   Brand Image

A brand is created through the characteristics consumers associate with a company. These characteristics are formed through various functional and emotional qualities that provide consumers value and a unique experience with the company. Branding allows companies to communicate and promote their values, interests, and goals, which helps them attract consumers with similar values. Consumers can use brands to help express their values, interests, and personalities through products and services. The relationship between consumers and branding is intertwined since both reflect one another. Through communication, companies can influence their markets' attitudes and values. By communicating their brand and its values, they can attract individuals who share similar interests and goals while also influencing their current customer base to reevaluate their own choices and values. (Grubor & Milovanov 2017, 79-80.)

Brand image refers to how consumers perceive and interact with the brand. A company's brand image is developed through multiple factors such as the consumer's general shopping experience and satisfaction, which can lead to consumers developing brand trust and loyalty, which will benefit the brand long-term. (Zhang 2015.) A positive brand image can lead companies to experience long-term benefits such as overall positive brand performance, a competitive advantage, and a clear market group. (Jung, Kim & Kim 2020, 295.) In a study conducted by Jung, Kim & Kim (2020), they concluded that sustainability marketing activities influenced consumers to have a more positive perception of a brand.
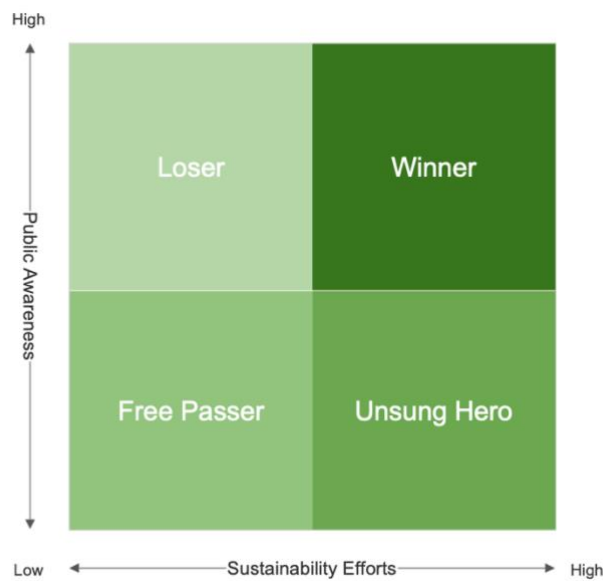
Figure 7. Brand Image based on sustainability and public awareness (adapted from Grubor & Milovanov 2017, 80-81; Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-67)

To determine a company's sustainability and branding intersect, Landor Associates, Newsweek, and Penn Schoen Berland created four terms for different brand images, as displayed in Figure 7 (Grubor & Milovanov 2017, 80-81). The definitions of the terms are as follows:

- The **Unsung Hero** is a company that prioritizes sustainability and works towards it; however, the public is unaware of its efforts.
- The **Free Passer** is a company with sustainability as a low priority and does minimal work towards it; however, the public is unaware.
- The **Winner** group are companies that prioritize sustainability and actively work towards and have public recognition for their efforts.
- The **Loser** is a company with sustainability low on its agenda and does the bare minimum; however, the public is aware of it and may receive criticism.

By determining how a company's brand is perceived, they can determine what areas of their business they could elevate or change to improve their brand image (Grubor & Milovanov 2017, 81). By investing in the company's brand image, the company can expect to experience increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and trust, which will, in turn, lead to lead to increased sales and brand equity (Jung, Kim & Kim 2020, 295-296; Zhang 2015).

2.3.2   Consumer Behavior

A consumer is an individual who uses or benefits from a product or service; however, the actions and decisions an individual makes when obtaining or using a product or service are referred to as consumer behavior. Numerous psychological and environmental factors influence a consumer's behavior. The factors that contribute to consumer behavior are a consumer's in-tended behaviors, thought processes, emotions, and personal and

environmental factors (Figure 8). Consumer behaviors can be understood through market segmentation comprised of demographic, behavioral, psychographic, and geographic segments. Understanding the different facets of the company market can use this to their advantage since they will understand how their customers form their decisions and what influences them. (Sethna & Blythe 2016, 6-11.)
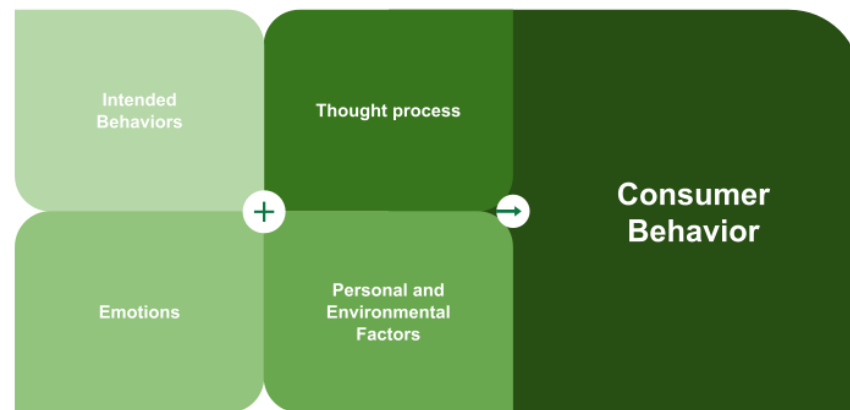

Figure 8. Contributing factors to consumer behavior (Adapted from Sethna & Blythe 2016, 9)

Despite many consumers wanting to fulfill their needs and wants sustainably, there is a gap between their attitudes and behaviors (Trudel 2018). To develop sustainable consumer behavior, individuals must adapt and change their behaviors to become more environmentally friendly (Jansson, Marell & Nordlund 2010). Deloitte (2021) conducted a survey in 2021 to investigate UK consumers' willingness to adopt sustainable behaviors. When consumers were asked why they have not adopted more sustainable habits, the top three responses were lack of interest, lack of money, and not having enough information. When asked about what companies can do to help them adopt more sustainable behaviors, 64% of respondents expressed that they would like to have more sustainable packaging and reduction of plastics. In addition to that, 50% stated that they would like clearer disposal and recycling instructions, while 46% wanted more information about the product's origins. (Deloitte 2021.)

Companies within the outdoor industry have begun promoting sufficiency-oriented consumption to encourage sustainable behaviors. This form of consumption encourages the reduction of excessive purchasing and promotes extending product longevity and product swapping. This concept values quality over quantity and promotes consuming products on a need over want basis. To encourage consumers to modify their behaviors, many outdoor brands have begun educating their consumers about their purchase decisions' im-pact through different marketing channels to help empower their consumers

to make informed decisions. (Gossen & Kropfeld 2022.) Overall, sustainable consumer behavior could occur in various ways, ranging from reducing product consumption to purchasing more sustainable products to disposing of products ethically (White, Habib & Hardisty 2019).

Figure 9. SHIFT Model (adapted from White et al. 2019)

White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019) developed a model that explains how consumers' behaviors are influenced. Companies can encourage their consumers toward a sustainable direction by understanding the SHIFT concept. Companies should investigate the five concepts used in SHIFT: Social Influence, Habit formation, Individual self, Feelings and cognition, and Tangibility (Figure 9) (White et al. 2019, 23).

An individual's social environment significantly impacts how an individual's identity, desires, and social norms develop; therefore, it is vital to understand it to create long-lasting change. Social norms deem what is socially acceptable; therefore, individuals might opt for sustainable behaviors if it is common in their social environment. Social identity refers to how individuals view their role in their social environment. (White et al. 2019, 23-25.) Meanwhile, social desirability refers to an individual's likeliness to partake in specific actions depending on the message it conveys to others (White et al. 2019, 23-25; Chung & Monroe 2003, 291). In a study conducted by Arora and Gagneja (2020), 90% of their questionnaire respondents claimed that social comparison was one of the main influences on their consumer habits development, showing that social environments heavily influence a person's behaviors.

Individuals need to change their habits to promote sustainable behaviors. A person's habits determine what behaviors they are more likely to participate in due to repeated

actions. Habits can be changed through various methods such as setting intentions, creating easy processes to help ensure the success of new habit formation, receiving messages to remind of sustainability, and providing incentives. (White et al. 2019, 24-25.)

Consumer behaviors are also influenced by how consumers view themselves. Consumers can positively reinforce their perception of themselves through their consumption of their self-concept. By using their possessions as an extension of themselves, consumers may use their purchases to affirm whom they believe to be while also communicating that to the world. By using their possessions as a tool of self-affirmation, individuals will seek ways to provide consistent positive reinforcement for their identities. Self-consistency will influence individuals who have already participated in sustainable behaviors to repeat those behaviors. (White et al. 2019, 27-28.)

When receiving information about sustainability or participating in a sustainable behavior, an individual's emotion impacts what behaviors they choose to adopt. Through experiencing positive emotions while performing sustainable behaviors, individuals are more likely to want to participate in them, while the opposite occurs with negative emotions. To reduce the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions while performing sustainable behaviors, companies can educate their consumers to understand the benefits and consequences of their actions. By having this knowledge, consumers are better able to support their behaviors. (White et al. 2019, 28-29.)

Due to consumers being more prone to behaviors that provide immediate results in their present reality, it may be hard to choose behaviors that will only actualize in the distant future. Through companies communicating about present issues and providing evidence of the immediate impact of behaviors, consumers can conceptualize their influence. (White et al. 2019, 30-31.)

Overall, the SHIFT framework aims to help companies understand the different facts that contribute to their consumers' behaviors. By understanding their consumers' behaviors, they will also understand the barriers preventing them from certain behaviors. By developing a holistic view of their consumers, companies will be able to create strategies to either address these issues or work around them. (White et al. 2019 30-31.)

3   Research Method and Data Collection

This chapter will review the research methods used throughout this thesis. This section will also provide justification and insight on what data collection and analysis methods were used to obtain results for this study.

3.1   Research Design

The researcher focused on obtaining mainly quantitative data and used qualitative questions to clarify specific questions. A quantitative research method provides the basis for generalizing based on the responses needed and confirms theories. In contrast, a qualitative research method allows for an explanation and a deeper understanding of an issue. (Creswell 2018.) By focusing on obtaining quantitative data, the researcher can provide definitive answers as to what are the retailers' interests and answer the IQs of the thesis.

The study aimed to provide a definitive answer of what are Haglöfs' retailers' sustainability communication interests. Due to this, the research conducted was quantitative; however, for the first phase, qualitative sub-questions were provided in the survey to understand specific questions further.
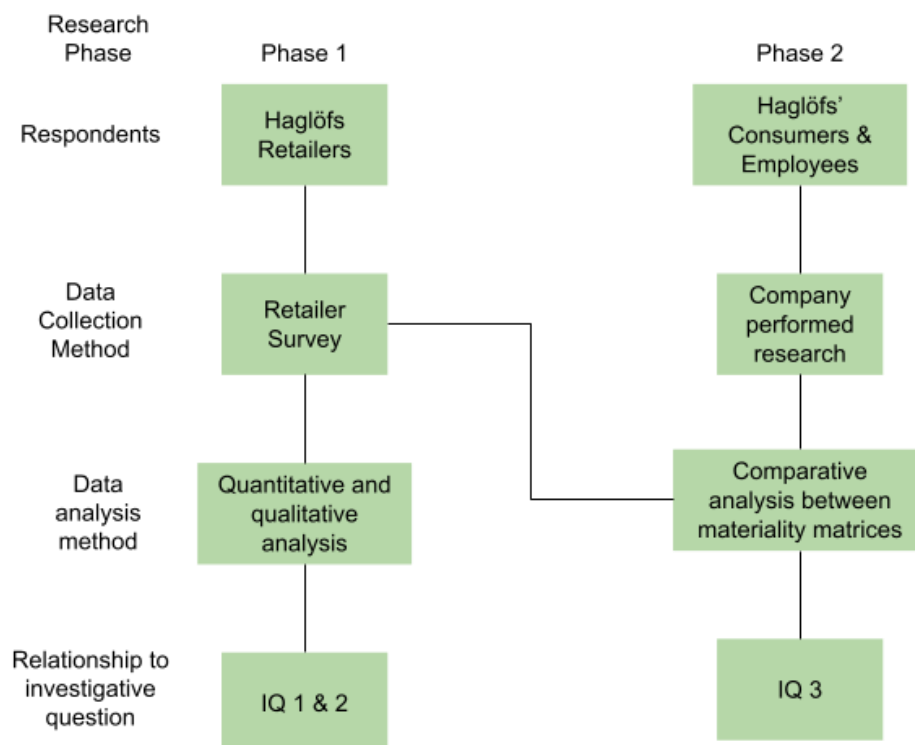

Figure 10. Research design

In the study's first phase, the researcher created a survey to send to all of Haglöfs' retailers. The survey primarily asked quantitative questions; however, one of the quantitative survey questions had a qualitative sub-question. The purpose of conducting a survey instead of an interview was to save time and receive definitive answers. Once the data from phase one was collected, the researcher conducted mainly quantitative analysis since the qualitative data produced was minimal.

The second phase of the research process used data collected from the retailer survey and data collected by the commissioning company. The data produced from the tenth question in the retailer survey was compared with data collected by the commissioning company. The commissioning company produces an annual sustainability report in which they provide a materiality matrix, and the matrix highlights what areas of sustainability are important for their stakeholders. (Haglöfs 2021b.) The purpose of the second phase was to use the data collected from the tenth question to create a retailer-specific materiality matrix that will showcase their values and allow the researcher to see where their interests differ from Haglöfs' stakeholder collective.

3.2   Data Collection

An online survey was used to obtain the data needed in this study. The leading research group was Haglöfs' retailers. The researcher decided to conduct an online survey instead of other data collection methods for two main reasons: time and convenience. Online surveys are helpful when researching a larger group or receiving international responses. Online surveys are also beneficial because they are less intrusive while being more controlled and eliminate other possible risks that could occur in other research methods. Despite providing a greater possibility of reaching more respondents and providing more control, online surveys have weaknesses. Some of the possible downsides to an online survey are that it is mistaken for junk mail, posing privacy issues, feeling impersonal, and receiving a low response rate. (Evans & Mathur 2005, 208-211.)

Considering that the primary research group was Haglöfs retailers, which are located worldwide, the online survey made the most sense considering the pros outweighed the cons. It would have been impractical to conduct interviews in the researcher's limited timeframe. Factors such as busy work schedules and different time zones would have made planning multiple interviews difficult.

Due to most retailers having busy schedules, conducting interviews did not seem practical compared to an online survey. The researcher's primary concern about conducting an online survey was receiving a low response rate and not being able to collect enough data

to proceed with the research. To address this concern, the respondents received a three-week timeframe to respond to the survey. During this timeframe, the respondents received a reminder email if they forgot to respond or if the survey was lost in their inbox. The survey was distributed to Haglöfs retailers worldwide over three weeks, from the 7th of March till the 25th of March.

The survey was created through Weborpol and was sent out by email. The survey comprised thirteen questions, of which four questions asked for personal information. The researcher asked for personal information about the retailers' companies to help track which retailers responded to the survey and see which companies should be sent reminder emails. To encourage retailers to respond to the survey, Haglöfs conducted a sweepstake to win one of their jackets.

3.2.1 Survey Questions

The survey comprised mainly multiple-choice, rating, and ranking questions with occasional open-ended sub-questions. The researcher tried to minimize the number of open-ended questions to help save time for both the respondent and the data analysis process while still prompting quality responses.

Table 2. Survey Questions in relation to IQ

IQs	Survey Question	Question form
IQ 1: Importance of Sustainability and Communication	4. If you had to describe Haglöfs with one of these terms, which would it be?	Multiple choice
	5. How important is sustainability for your company and for your consumers?	Likert scale matrix
	6. How important is it for your company to receive sustainability related information from Haglöfs?	Likert scale matrix
IQ 2: Sustainability Content	7. Which communication channel does your company use to promote the brand's sustainability efforts to your consumers?	Multi-selection
	8. How would you rate the sustainability related information communicated by Haglöfs?	Likert scale matrix
	9. How would you improve our communication of our sustainability related information?	Open-ended
	11. How important is it for your company and your consumers that Haglöfs offers and focuses on the following:	Likert scale matrix
IQ 3: Retailer Materiality Matrix	10. Ranking sustainability issues in level of importance	Ranking

The survey comprised five open-ended questions, one multiple-choice question, four Likert scale questions, a multi-selection question, and a ranking question, as shown in Table 4. The first three survey questions and the thirteenth question were used as identifying questions and were open-ended.

Questions 5, 6, 8, and 11 were Likert scale questions, and these were used to gauge where the retailers' interests lay. Through the Likert question, retailers were asked either about the importance of an issue or the quality of communication. The respondents were provided a 5-point scale with 1 representing not important or below expectations while 5 represented either very important or above expectations. Respondents who provided a rating of two or lower for question number eight received an open-ended sub-question. The sub-question allowed respondents to provide clarity, which helped the researcher identify problem areas based on their feedback.

Question 7 aimed to discover what communication channels retailers use to discuss sustainability. The question was a multi-selection; therefore, the retailers were allowed to select all the appropriate options. They were provided with predetermined options along with the options of others and none at the moment.

The tenth question of the survey provided retailers with a ranking question based on Haglöfs' (2021b) existing materiality matrix. By creating a materiality matrix specifically for retailers, the commissioning company can consider what issues their retailers would also be interested in communicating.

3.3   Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the survey was analyzed through the SPSS software, and Excel was used for specific data sets. Excel was used to create tables and figures of all the analyzed data, as shown in Chapter 4.

The researcher decided to analyze the frequency of responses for multiple-choice and multi-selection questions; however, they analyzed the mean and frequency of responses for Likert scale questions. By analyzing the mean and frequency of responses for Likert scale questions, the researcher provided a general overview of responses and insight into the answer breakdown.

The researcher analyzed the mean for the tenth question, a ranking format. Through analyzing the mean, the researcher was able to rank the issues in question by their mean

to determine their importance to the retailers. Through the established new rankings, the researcher compared them to the company's existing materiality matrix.

3.4   Reliability and Validity of Design

When creating a research plan, it is vital to establish the reliability and validity of the study. Reliability refers to producing consistent results by replicating the study, while validity references how accurately the study can measure the researched issue (O'Brian & Orn 2018).

The research took multiple factors into account to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. First, to ensure the reliability of the survey, the researcher used prior company-performed surveys to help formulate the survey questions. Using a priorly conducted company survey, the researcher ensured that the survey would be similar and could be used in a comparative study.

To ensure the study's validity, the researcher worked with Haglöfs employees and a Haaga-Helia teacher to receive ongoing feedback throughout the survey creation process. Through receiving feedback and suggestions, the researcher ensured that the questions were written in a way that was easy to understand and provided the desired results.

4   Research Results

This chapter will present the results of the survey along with an analysis. The survey was distributed to Haglöfs retailers worldwide over two weeks. In total, the survey received 19 responses. The data collected is mainly quantitative; however, there was one qualitative question. The survey comprised 13 questions, of which four asked for personal information. In subchapter 4.1, the survey respondents are introduced, while subchapters 4.2 to 4.4 will review the data collected from the given responses.

4.1   Survey Respondents

The survey was distributed worldwide solely to all Haglöfs retailers to gain insight into their views on sustainability and understand how Haglöfs can better include them in their sustainability communications. The survey received 19 responses which were all usable for analysis.
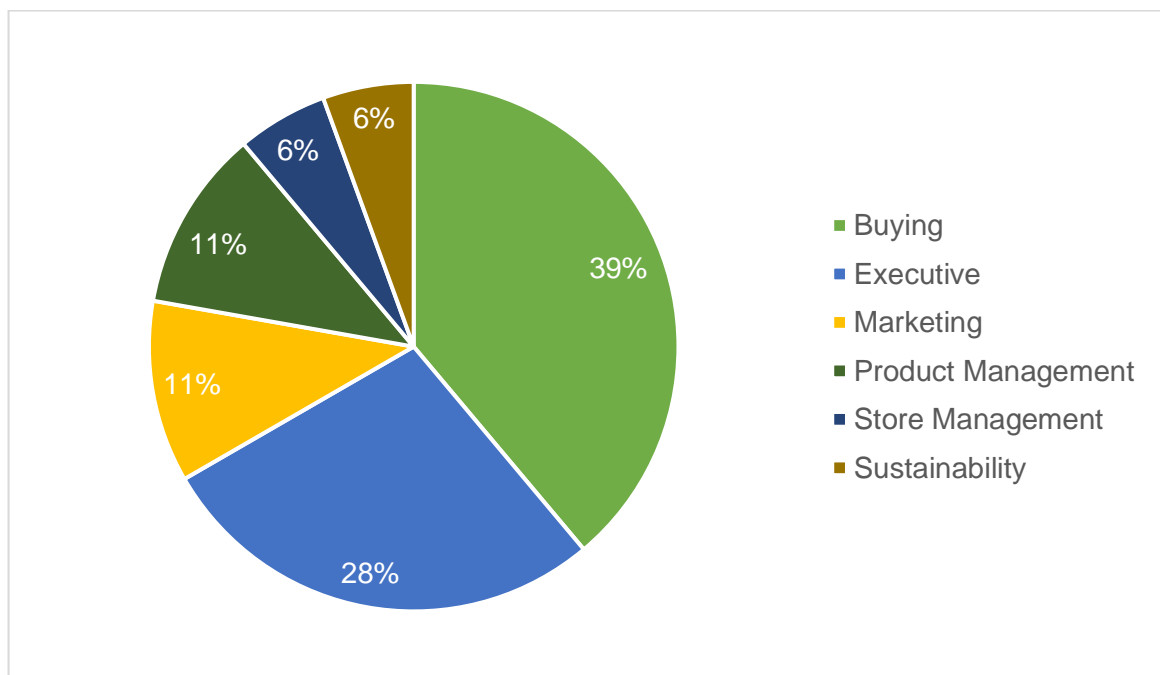

Figure 11. Respondents' Role in Company (n=18)

The respondents were asked to provide information on their role within their company, and 18 of the 19 respondents provided this information. As shown in Figure 11, around 39% of the respondents reported that their position was within Buying, while 28% were an executive at their company. Marketing and Product management each made up 11% of the respondents, while Store management and Sustainability-related roles each made up 6% of respondents.
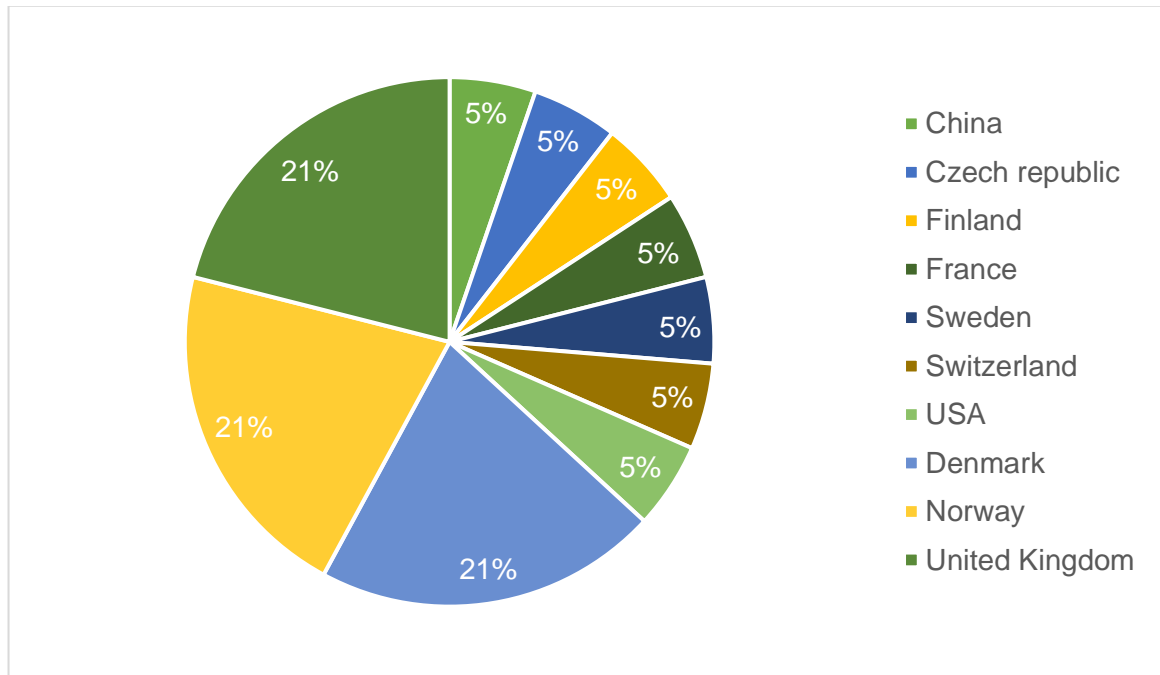
Figure 12. Country of retailers

The survey was distributed to all of Haglöfs' retailers around the world. Retailers from the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Norway predominantly responded to the survey making up 63% (Figure 12). Only two respondents were located outside Europe in countries like the USA and China.

At the end of the survey, the respondents were also asked about the likelihood of recommending Haglöfs to family or friends. This question was asked on a scale of one being not at all likely while ten being extremely likely. Around 94.8% of the respondents responded with a rating of 8 or higher, while 5.2% rated a 7. Of the 94.8% who rated an eight or higher, 47.4% rated a 10, meaning they would be extremely likely to recommend Haglöfs to their social circles.

4.2 Importance of Sustainability and Communication

The respondents were asked a series of questions to determine the importance of sustainability and its communication for their company and consumers.

Table 3. Retailers' perception of Haglöfs sustainability and communication

Terms	Frequency	Percent
Unseen Hero	17	89.50%
Winner	2	10.50%
Passive	0	0
Free Passer	0	0
Total	19	100%

Respondents were asked to identify Haglöfs through four terms developed by Landor Associates, Newsweek, and Penn Schoen Berland (Grubor & Milovanov 2017, 80-81). The terms provided were Unseen Hero, Winner, Passive, and Free Passer. All four terms were provided with a definition to help give context to the respondents. As seen in Table 3, around 90% of the survey respondents believe that Haglöfs is an Unseen Hero, while around 10% view Haglöfs as a Winner regarding sustainability. None of the respondents viewed Haglöfs as a "passive" or "free passer" company.
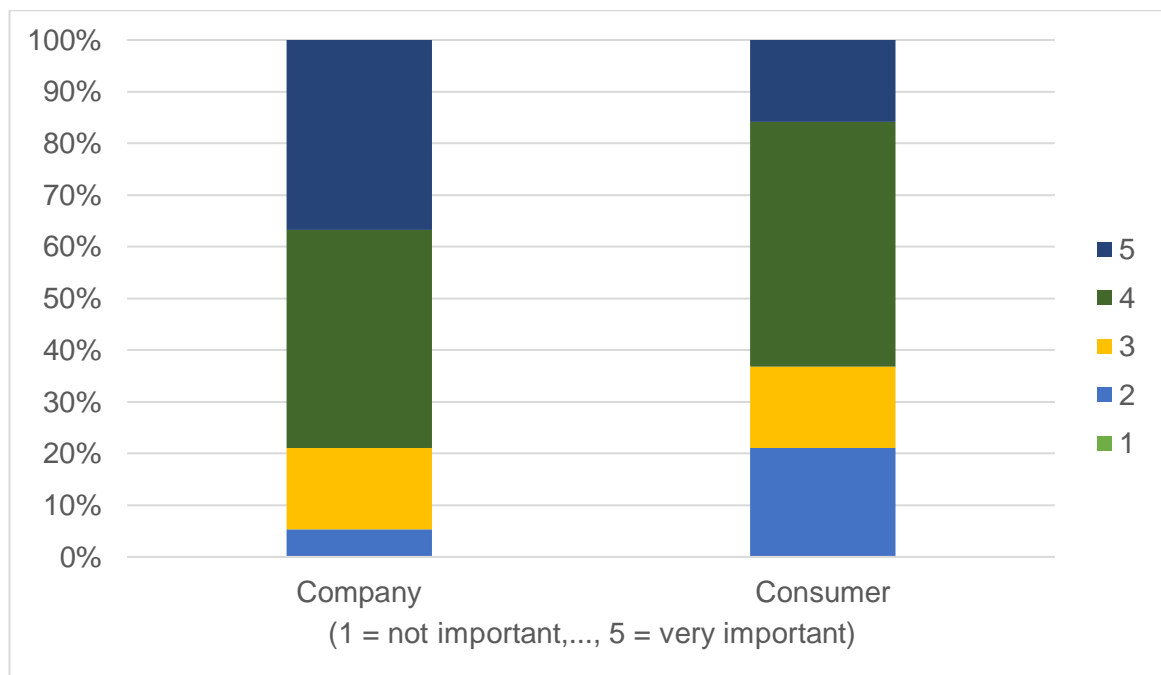

Figure 13. Importance of sustainability for retailers and their consumers (n=19)

The respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 for the importance of sustainability for their company and consumers. The rating of one meaning not important, while five signified very important. Through the data collected, it was determined that retailers believed that sustainability was of a lower concern for their consumers than their company. They gave consumers an average rating of 3.58, while for their company, they had an average answer of 4.11.

21.1% of the retailers responded that they viewed the importance of sustainability for their consumers as a 2 out of 5; however, only 5.3% of retailers gave a 2 out of 5 rating for their company (Figure 13). On the other hand, around 37% of retailers rated the importance of sustainability at a 5, while approximately 16% of retailers rated a 5 for their consumers' view on sustainability.
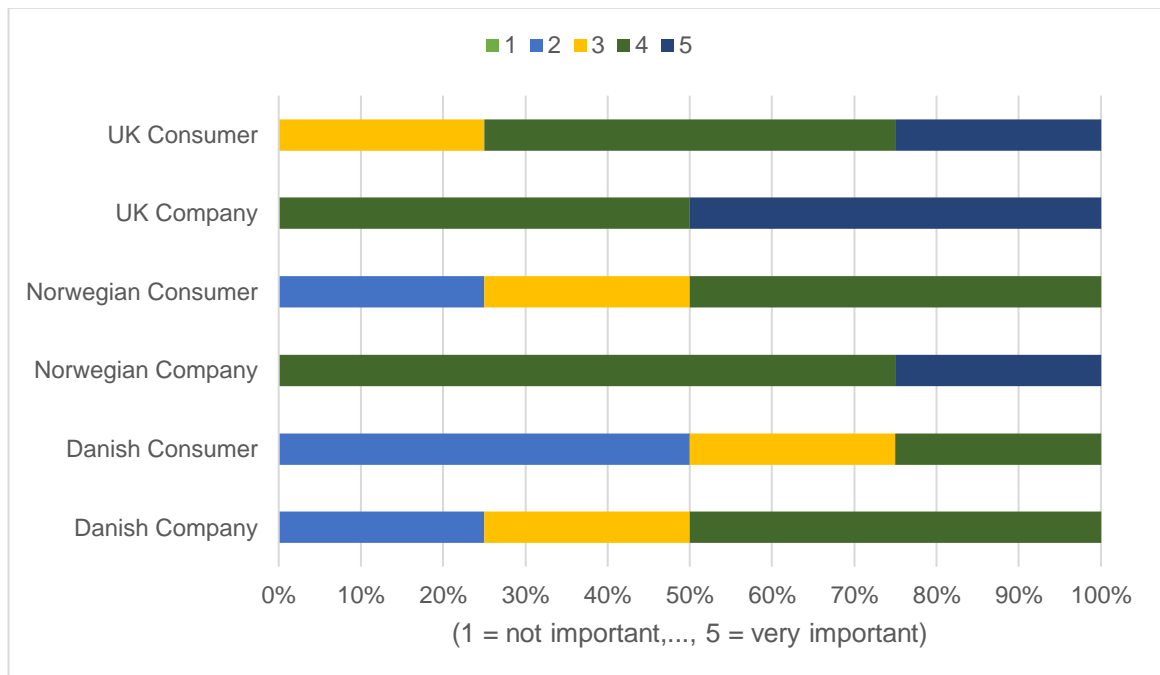
Figure 14. Importance of sustainability for retailers and their consumers based on top Countries (n=12)

The researcher decided that it would be interesting to analyze the importance of sustainability for retailers and their consumers based on countries. Due to the survey receiving a limited number of responses from multiple countries, the researcher decided to only focus on countries with at least four respondents. Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom each had four respondents and made up most of the survey responses; therefore, they were used for analysis.

As shown in Figure 14, retailers from the United Kingdom, on average, rated that sustainability was more important for their company than for their consumers. However, compared to Norway and Denmark, the average level of importance between retailers and their customers was closer together. 50% of retailers rated either a four or five in the level of importance for their company. On the other hand, for their consumers, 25% of retailers rated a three or a five, while 50% rated a four.

As for Norwegian retailers, there was a slight difference in the level of importance between their company and their consumers. 75% of retailers rated a four for their company, while 25% rated a five. As for their consumers, 25% of retailers rated a two or a three, respectively, while 50% rated a four.

Denmark overall had a lower rating for sustainability importance for both their company and their consumers. 50% of Danish retailers rated a two for the level of importance for their consumers, while 25% rated a three or four, respectively. As for their company, only

25% rated a two in the level of importance. Another 25% rated a three, and 50% rated a four.

4.3   Sustainability Content

The survey asked three questions with one sub-question about the retailers' current level of sustainability communications and what forms of content they would be interested in seeing. The survey also asked how retailers view Haglöfs sustainability information, which provides insight into Haglöfs' communication weaknesses.
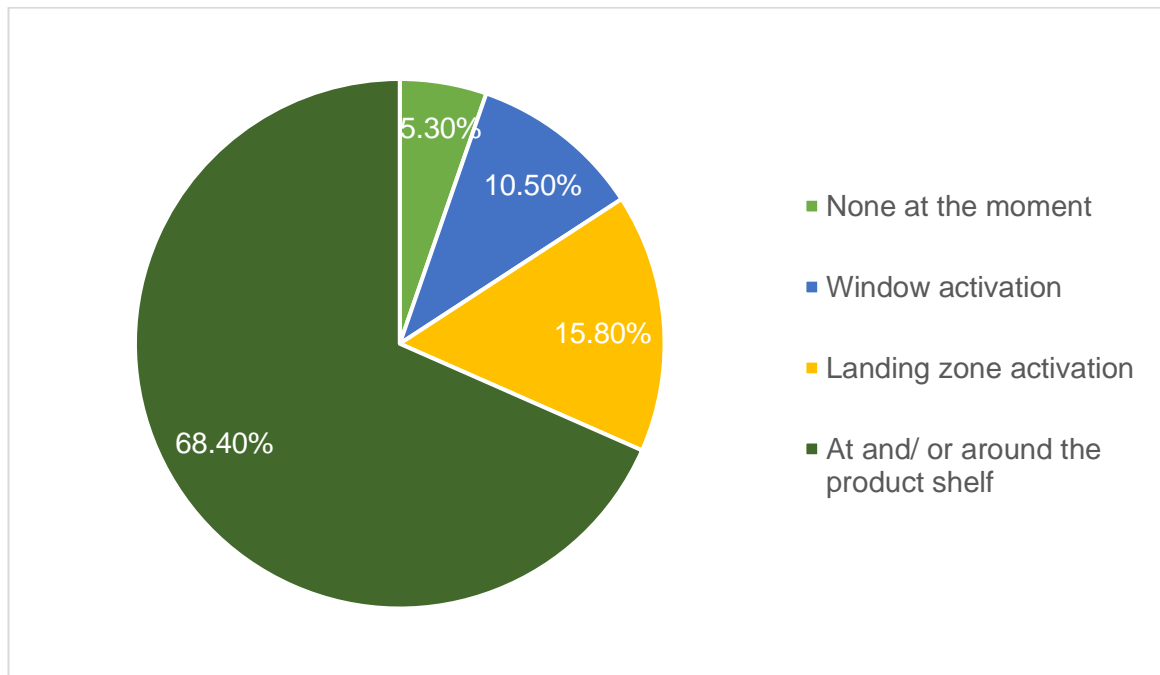

Figure 15. In-Store Activations used by retailers

To determine what communication channels retailers predominately use for their sustainability communications, they were asked a two-part question on where they usually conduct their sustainability-related activations. As shown in Figure 15, around 68% of the respondents conduct their sustainability-related activations at or around their product shelving area for in-store activations. Additionally, around 16% of respondents claimed to do landing zone activations, while approximately 11% executed window activations. On the other hand, around 5% of respondents claimed that they do not have any in-store activations for their sustainability communications.
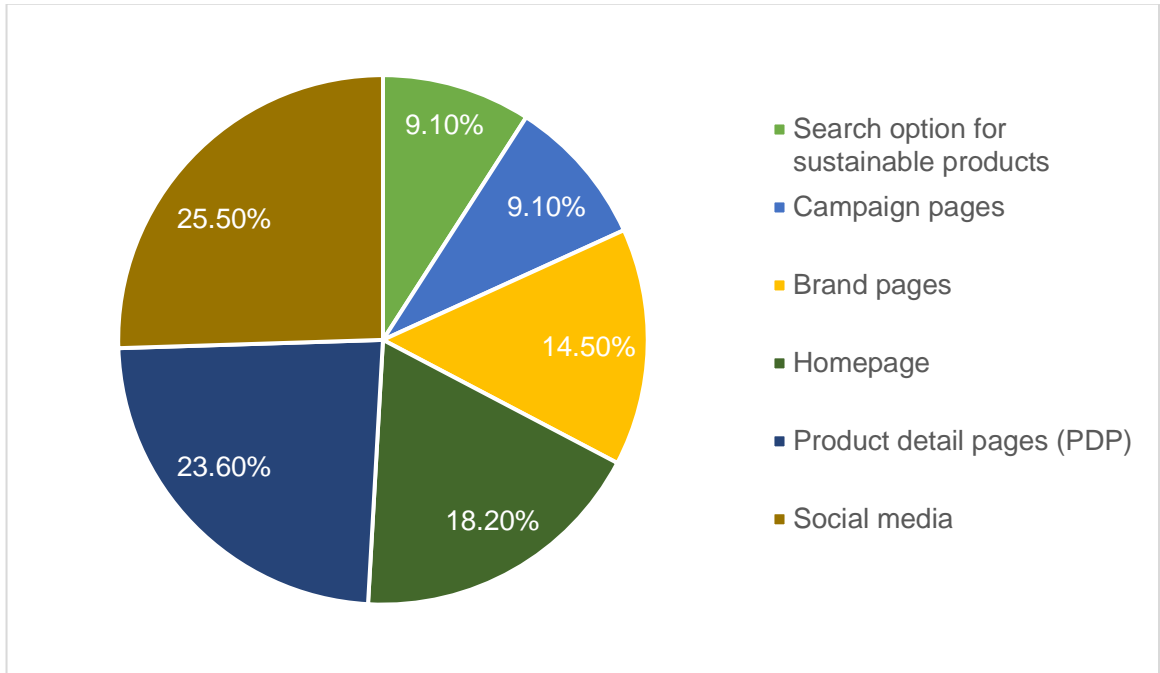
Figure 16. Online Activations used by retailers

When asked about online activations (Figure 16), retailers seem to vary more in how they conduct their online activations than their in-store activations. The most selected online activations were social media activations making up 25.5%, and product detail pages (PDP), comprising 23.5%. Activations on the homepage and brand pages seem less common; however, retailers' campaign pages and a search option for sustainable products were the least used. None of the respondents said they had no online activations for their sustainability communications, and none expressed another form of an online activation that their company may be using.
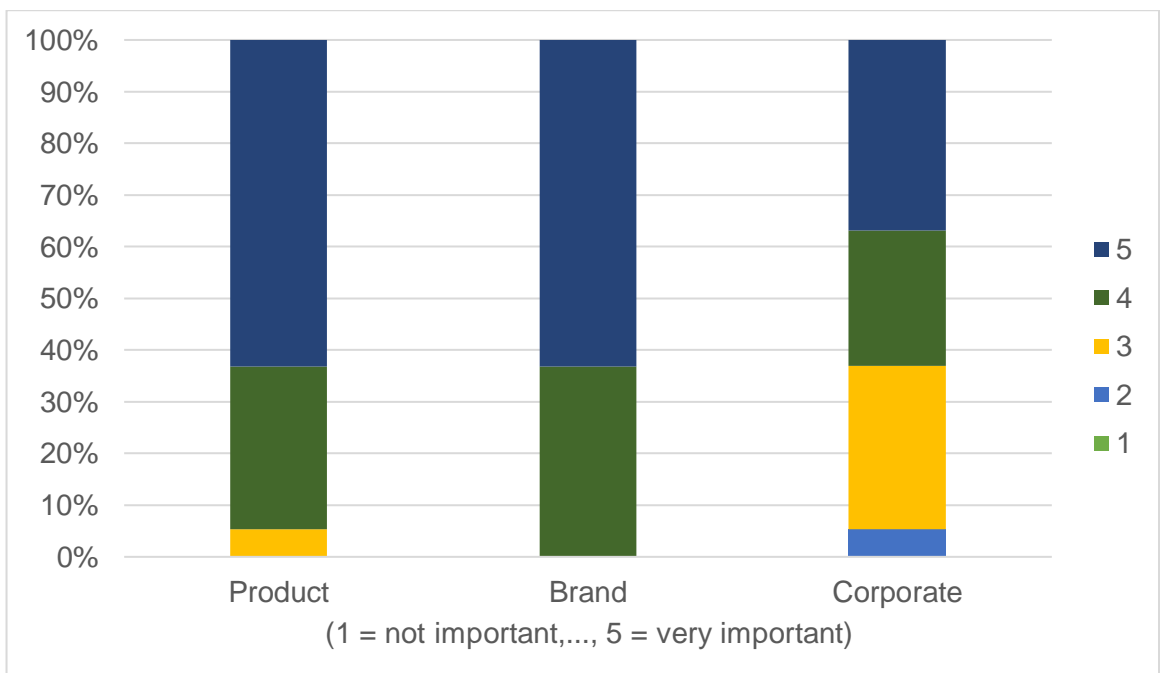

Figure 17. Importance of receiving sustainability information (n=19)

The respondents were also asked to rate the importance of receiving information on sustainability. This question asked the retailers to rate the importance of sustainability information on a corporate, brand, and product level. The question provided three sections so that there could be a differentiation between what kinds of information are the most useful to communicate. Overall, brand and product-level sustainability information were rated the highest, with brand-level information averaging 4.63 and product-level information averaging 4.58. Corporate-level information was ranked the lowest with an average of 3.95.

Figure 17 shows that 63% of retailers rated brand-related information as five, while the remaining 37% rated it a four. As for product-related information, around 63% of the respondents rated a five, while 31% rated a four and only 5% rated a three. Corporate-related information had more variety in responses, with 5% of retailers rating a two, 32% rating a three, 26% rating a four, and around 39% rating five.
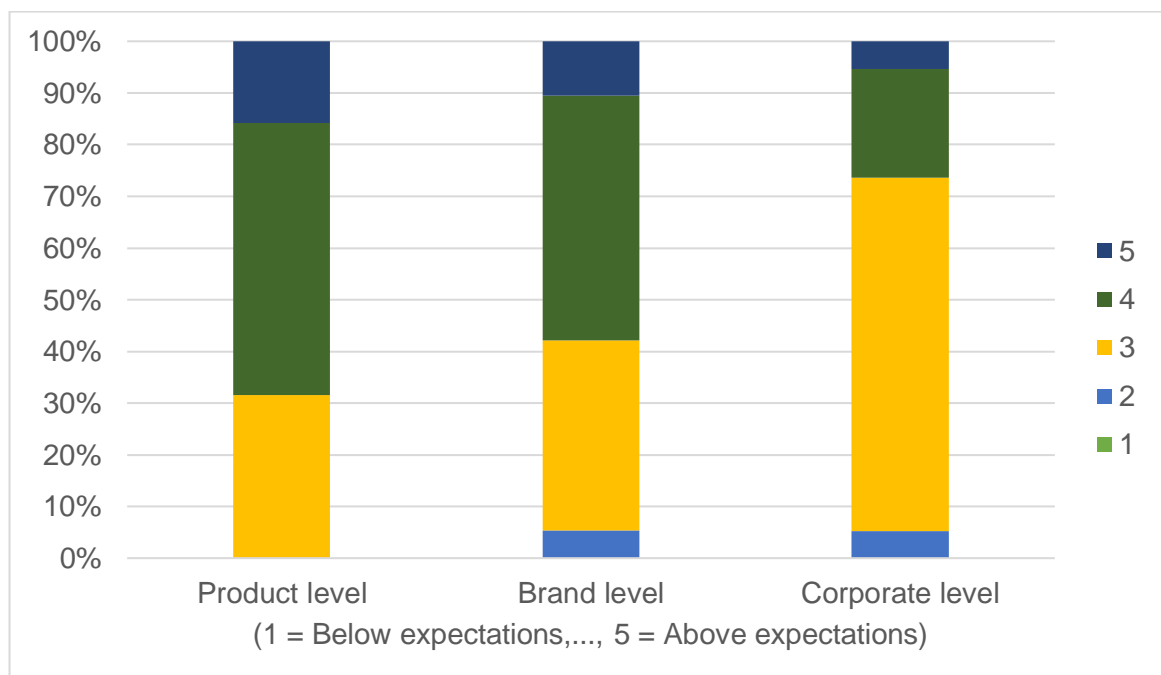
Figure 18. Retailers' view on Haglöfs sustainability information (n=19)

When asked about the quality of Haglöfs' sustainability information (Figure 18), retailers rated Haglöfs' corporate-level sustainability information the lowest, averaging 3.26. Meanwhile, Haglöfs' product-level sustainability information was rated the highest with an average of 3.84, and Haglöfs' brand level information had an average of 3.63.

If respondents scored two or lower for how they view Haglöfs sustainability information, they were asked to specify through an open-ended question. Only two respondents

scored a two on Haglöfs corporate and brand level sustainability information. The main feedback is that retailers would like to receive more information on Haglöfs production process and workers' conditions. Another point mentioned by the respondents was that they would like to hear more about the changes Haglöfs plans to make to have a more sustainable production and distribution system.
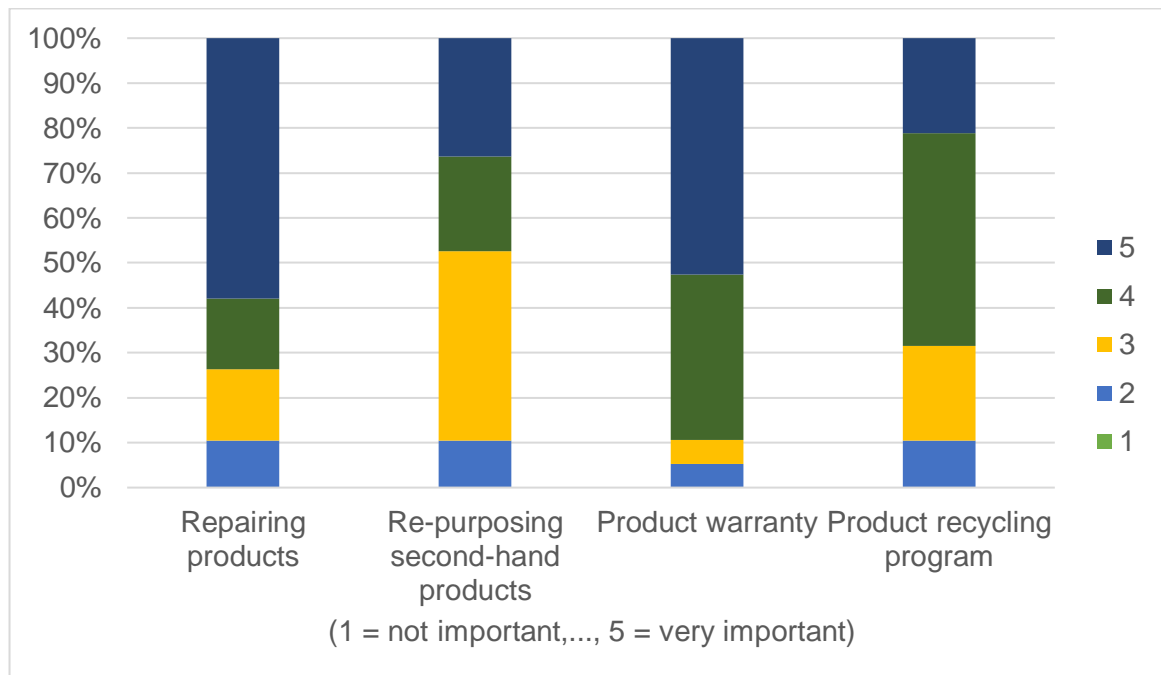

Figure 19. Importance of having specific sustainability services (n=19)

The respondents were asked to rate how important it is for them and their consumers to have Haglöfs provide specific sustainability-related services and product designs (Figure 19). When asked about services, product warranty was ranked the highest with an average rating of 4.37. Around 89% of respondents rated product warranty with a four or higher. However, re-purposing second-hand products were considered less important, with around 53% of participants rating it with a three or lower. Re-purposing second-hand products received an average rating of 3.63. The repairing of products was considered second most important with an average rating of 4.21, while a product recycling program came in third place with an average of 3.79.
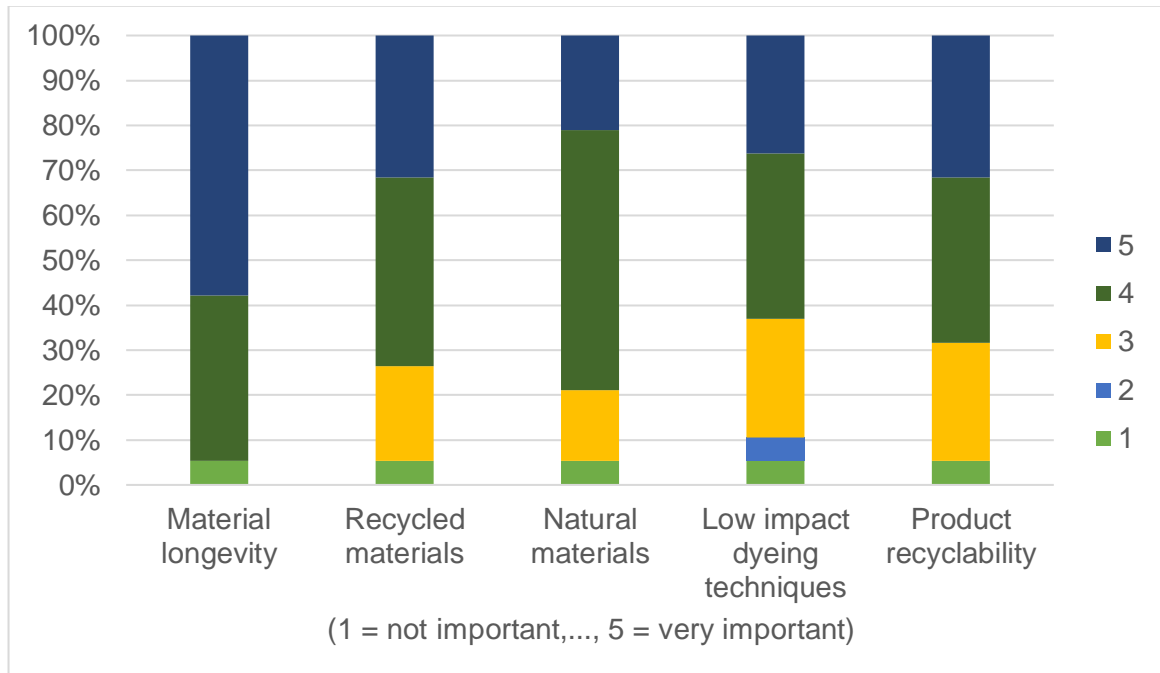
Figure 20. Importance of having specific sustainability design features (n=19)

When the survey respondents were asked about what aspects of product design were important for them and their consumers for Haglöfs to provide, material longevity was rated the highest with an average rating of 4.42. As shown in Figure 20, almost 60% of respondents rated material longevity as 5. Out of all the sustainability design options, low-impact dyeing was considered less important than the other options since it had an average rating of 3.74. Around 37% of respondents rated low impact dyeing with a three or less. Recycled materials were placed second in importance and averaged a rating of 3.95. Both natural materials and product recyclability averaged the same rating of 3.89.

4.4   Retailer Materiality Matrix

Annually Haglöfs releases a report that aims to provide transparency on their company operations. This report reviews Haglöfs' goals, challenges, and efforts regarding sustainability. Some goals that the report reviews are encouraging responsible consumption, decent working conditions, and actions towards climate change. In their research, Haglöfs asks their stakeholders to rank 14 topics developed from the United Nation's sustainability development goals. Haglöfs defines its stakeholders as its employees, owners, customers, retailers, and suppliers. By discovering what topics are of high importance for their stakeholders, Haglöfs can focus on key topics and exert adequate resources to create long-term impact. (Haglöfs 2021b.)
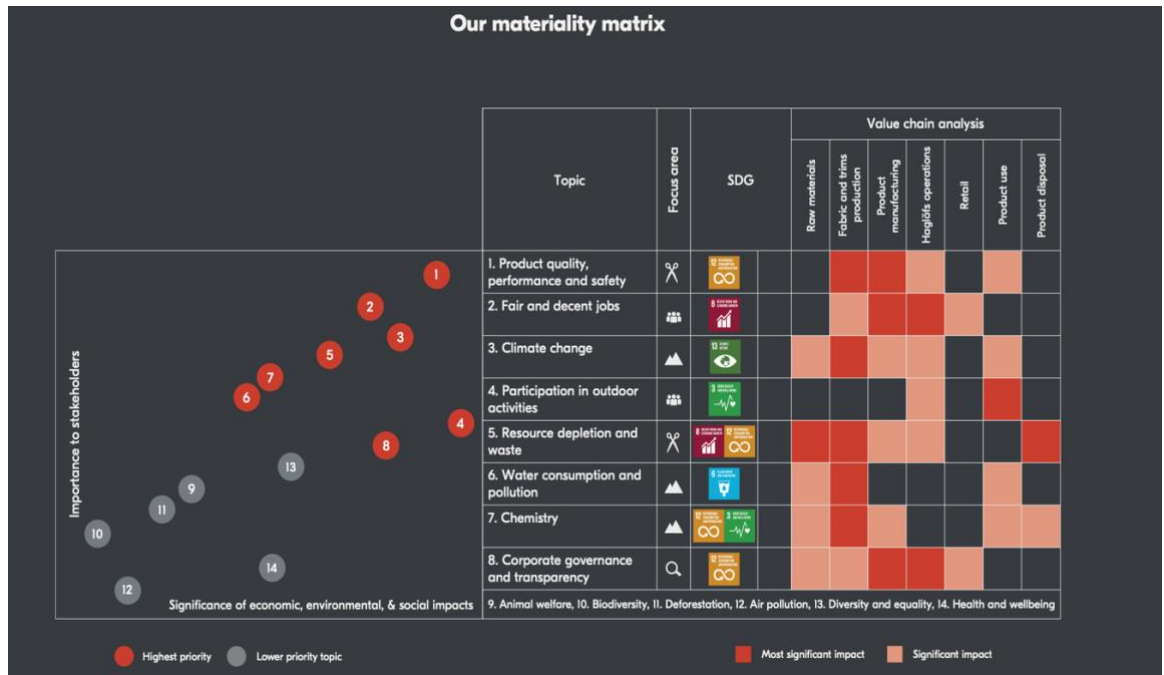
Figure 21. Haglöfs' 2020 Materiality Matrix (retrieved from Haglöfs 2021b)

Haglöfs' 2020 materiality matrix determined that product quality, performance, and safety were the highest priority for their stakeholders, along with fair and decent jobs, climate change, and participation in outdoor activities. On the other hand, topics such as deforestation, air pollution, and diversity and equality were ranked the lowest, with health and wellbeing last in the rankings. (Haglöfs 2021b.)

To determine what sustainability issues are important for the retailers in 2022, they were asked to rank the same 14 topics provided in Haglöfs 2020 materiality matrix (Haglöfs 2021b). The retailers were asked to consider their company's values and consumers when deciding their rankings. The rank of importance was determined by having the retailers rank each topic in the order of lowest to highest. The ranking of 1 meant the most important issue; meanwhile, 14 meant the least important issue. The ranks were determined through the average answer produced, meaning that the lower the mean was, the more important the issue was for the retailers and their consumers.

Table 4. Retailer Materiality Matrix

Issue	Rank	Mean
Product quality, performance, and safety	1	3.47
Climate Change	2	4.53
Health and wellbeing	3	5.47
Fair and decent jobs	4	6.11
Water consumption and pollution	5	6.16

Resource depletion and waste	6	7
Diversity and equality	7	8.16
Air pollution	8	8.42
Animal welfare	8	8.42
Participation in outdoor activities	10	8.74
Deforestation	11	9
Biodiversity	12	9.53
Corporate governance and transparency	12	9.53
Chemistry	14	10.47

As displayed in Table 7, product quality was considered the most important issue for retailers, along with performance and safety, climate change, and health and wellbeing coming in second and third place. In contrast, biodiversity, corporate governance and transparency, and chemistry were considered the least important. However, air pollution and animal welfare issues received the same average, along with biodiversity and corporate governance and transparency.

Table 5. The difference in Ranking between Retailers and Stakeholders

Issue	Retailer Ranking	Stakeholder Ranking
Product quality, performance, and safety	1	1
Climate Change	2	3
Health and wellbeing	3	14
Fair and decent jobs	4	2
Water consumption and pollution	5	6
Resource depletion and waste	6	5
Diversity and equality	7	13
Air pollution	8	12
Animal welfare	8	9
Participation in outdoor activities	10	4
Deforestation	11	11
Biodiversity	12	10
Corporate governance and transparency	12	8
Chemistry	14	7

When comparing the rankings of the retailers to Haglöfs 2020 stakeholder rankings, product quality, performance, and safety were ranked number one in both matrices, as shown in Table 8. In the stakeholder matrix, the topic of health and wellbeing was ranked last; however, retailers ranked the issue in second place. Issues like climate change, fair and decent jobs, and water consumption and pollution maintained their rankings in the top

six. On the other hand, issues such as participation in outdoor activities, corporate governance and transparency, and chemistry were ranked lower by five to six places than the stakeholder matrix.

5 Discussion

This chapter will conclude the thesis by reviewing the research results while answering the research and investigative questions. This chapter will provide recommendations for the commissioning company based on the results collected in subchapter 5.2. This chapter will also provide suggestions for further research on the topic and review the researcher reflections on their learning and share their general thoughts on the research process.

5.1 Key Findings

Haglöfs already actively communicates about their sustainability on their commination channels; however, they would like to improve their communication through their retailers to reach more of their consumers. The study's primary research question was to discover how Haglöfs could increase the relevancy of their sustainability communication strategy for their stakeholders and retailers. The study focused on obtaining insight from retailers; therefore, the investigative questions focused on determining the importance of sustainability and the kind of content retailers use in their sustainability communications. The retailers were also asked about the importance of sustainability issues to help determine what issues Haglöfs should address communicate that could interest their retailers. Considering that this study reached only 19 retailers, there is a possibility that this view does not correctly reflect all Haglöfs stakeholders; however, considering that sustainability communications are an ever-growing topic, the results of this study can still provide valuable insights. This section will discuss each IQ to answer the research question.

To further incorporate Haglöfs retailers within their sustainability communication strategy, it is crucial to understand retailers' interest in the issue. If retailers and their consumers did not value sustainability, it would not be practical for Haglöfs to invest resources towards communicating through their retailers. Therefore, the first part of the research was dedicated to justifying the development and execution of sustainability communication activations through retailers.

Based on the terms of Landor Associates, Newsweek, and Penn Schoen Berland (Grubor & Milovanov 2017, 80-81), the retailers were asked whether they view Haglöfs as an Unseen Hero, Winner, Passive, and Free Passer. Considering that around 90% viewed Haglöfs as an Unseen Hero, it implies that Haglöfs has room to enhance their communication. As mentioned in subchapter 2.3.1, an unseen hero is a company that values sustainability and works towards it; however, the public is not aware of their efforts.

When retailers were asked to rate the importance of sustainability for their company and consumers, they overall provided a higher rating of importance for their company compared to their consumers. The lower importance rating for consumers is interesting because it implies that consumers are either unaware or indifferent to the issue. This could be interesting to investigate further; however, it verifies the need for additional sustainability communication to ensure that all market groups have the same understanding of sustainability.

To analyze different market groups, the researcher further investigated the relationship between sustainability importance ratings to the countries of the retailers. When compared, certain countries had significantly lower ratings compared to others. For example, Danish retailers rated the importance of sustainability lower for both their company and consumers, suggesting that they are generally less interested in sustainability and its communication. On the other hand, Norway rated the level of importance for their company relatively higher than for their consumers, which could imply a disparity in the sustainability information that consumers and retailers consume.

Overall, retailers believe that Haglöfs could do more regarding their sustainability communications, and they would be interested in receiving more sustainability content. The research shows that they view sustainability as an important issue and would be interested in receiving more sustainability-related content regardless of consumers.

Retailers shared the types of activations that they use for sustainability communications. Compared to their in-store activations, they had more variety in how they chose to communicate through their online platforms. This suggests that Haglöfs could have more variety in communicating through their retailers' online platforms. The primary type of content that retailers seem interested in is brand and product-related information since they were rated slightly higher than corporate-related content. When asked to rate Haglöfs' sustainability content, it seems that Haglöfs meets its retailers' needs. Retailers were the most satisfied with Haglöfs product and brand-related material compared to their corporate-related information; however, considering average ratings were under four out of five, there is space improve.

Several options were presented to retailers to explore what kinds of sustainability services and designs Haglöfs should offer consumers. The top three options that retailers were interested in seeing were product repairing and product warranty services, while they were most interested in ensuring material longevity for the design aspect. Considering that

they rated these three options the highest in importance, it would be reasonable for Haglöfs to further work on communicating these more to the public.

To summarize the second investigative question, it was established that Haglöfs retailers are interested in receiving product and brand sustainability content. However, they believe that Haglöfs could do more to improve their communication on product and brand sustainability along with their corporate sustainability; however corporate sustainability was not as big of a priority. Retailers seemed interested in all Haglöfs sustainability developments; however, product repairing, product warranty, and material longevity were rated the highest.

The final investigative question aimed to compare Haglöfs stakeholders' and retailers' interests in sustainability issues. Through doing this, the researcher hoped to discover issues that were ranked highly by both the retailers and stakeholders because it provides a basis for what kind of topics Haglöfs should focus on when communicating through their retailers. Considering that clear topics were ranked highly on both matrices, Haglöfs could use this to help determine which issues they should also communicate through retailers. The top three issues that were ranked highly for both retailers and stakeholders were Product quality, performance, and safety, Climate Change, and Fair and decent jobs. Therefore, considering that these were of great concern on both matrices, it could be beneficial for Haglöfs to communicate these through their retailers.

5.2   Recommendations

This section answers the research question of this study using the key findings mentioned in the previous section and will provide recommendations for the commissioning company.

As established in the previous section 5.1, Haglöfs could do more for its sustainability communications. Out of all forms of sustainability content, the primary type that they would like to receive more is product and brand sustainability content. By focusing on developing Haglöfs' Product quality, performance, and safety, Haglöfs could provide more communication about their existing product repairing and product warranty services and material longevity which would elevate their product sustainability communications. Communication should be done to provide consumers with information effortlessly. Hence, regardless of how much consumers value sustainability, they still have the possibility of at least acknowledging the information. For example, Haglöfs has a restoration website called Haglöfs Restored for their second-hand products; however, they also provide care and repair guides for their products on the webpage (Haglöfs Restored

2022). Considering that Haglöfs already has created educational material, it would be easy to share this with their retailers and adjust the information to be shown in different formats. For example, they could provide links to their website pages and additional information on their product display page or even have pamphlets on product shelves or in product packaging. According to Haglöfs (2022) website, they provide a lifetime warranty for all their products. Since they have an established warranty, they communicate through the retailer various communication channels, such as mentioning it on the PDPs with the product's unique selling points (USPs) so that it could become common knowledge.

Overall, there is a clear need for more sustainability communications from Haglöfs. Despite already taking the measures to be a more sustainable brand and Haglöfs needs to do more to share their already existing sustainability material with their consumers and retailers. Considering that the Haglöfs website already has a lot of the information their retailers would be interested in, it would be an easy adjustment. Haglöfs should take advantage of its existing resources and actively discuss the sustainability information their consumers want to see with the retailers. By having their retailers more involved, Haglöfs can improve the likelihood of consumers being more aware of the company's sustainability efforts while also possibly educating new customers.

5.3 Further Research

Considering the limited number of respondents, it would be interesting to see this study be conducted on a larger scale. Even though the research received an adequate amount to answer the RQ and IQs, more responses would have allowed for in-depth analysis. Different dynamics could be studied by having more respondents, such as how attitudes vary on sustainability based on country or if activation methods vary based on country.

Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct more qualitative research. As mentioned in chapter 3, future research can use qualitative research to understand the issue better. Obtaining this form of information would provide a unique understanding of the retailers' views on sustainability communications and could provide a basis to investigate possible subtexts involving the topic. Qualitative research could allow respondents to provide different ideas and perspectives that the commissioning company has not considered in their sustainability communications.

5.4 Reflection on learning

Writing this thesis has been highly educational for the researcher. Due to the researcher's innate interest in sustainability, it was enjoyable to research the topic. In addition to being

a fun learning experience, the researcher improved their critical thinking, research, and academic writing skills.

The writing process was smooth due to the researcher's existing knowledge. The researchers' main obstacle was finding sources that discussed retailers as a communication channel. Despite this challenge, the researchers were able to discover new concepts that they could apply to the research topic.

The researcher discovered more about general sustainability and how sustainability impacts businesses and consumers through this research process. By learning about the different aspects of having a sustainable business, the researcher hopes to incorporate this knowledge into future work experiences and further explore this topic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Retailer Survey

Retailer Survey

(i) Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Dear Haglöfs retailer,

At Haglöfs, we aim to drive real change on key social and environmental issues to deliver mutual value for our consumers, the partners we work with, and the planet we live on. We want to step up, take responsibility, and accelerate action to ensure we positively impact society.

Besides communicating about our sustainability efforts via our own channels, we would like to explore the opportunities to communicate via our most important retailers as well. To do this as good as possible, we would love to understand how your company and your consumers value sustainability communication and we would like to understand how we could collaborate in the near future.

We really appreciate your input, and by filling in this questionnaire, you are entering the competition to win one of three Haglöfs' best-selling hiking jackets - L.I.M GTX Jacket. Winners will be contacted via email.

Privacy policy:
We have aligned with the LNU GDPR guidelines for handling personal information. Your name is kept anonymous as it adds no value to our study as well as protects your anonymity. Your working title and workplace will not be disclosed in this study.

1. Company Name: *

2. Position in Company: *

3. What country is your company based in: *

4. If you had to describe Haglöfs with one of these terms, which would it be? *

○ Unseen Hero – a brand that has sustainability high on the agenda and works hard to lower its environmental impact - but the public is not aware of it

○ Free Passer –a brand that does minimal work to lower its environmental impact - but the public still believes it has sustainability high on the agenda

○ Passive – a brand that does minimal work to lower its environmental impact – and the public is aware of it

○ Winner – a brand that has sustainability high on the agenda and works hard to lower its environmental impact - and the public is aware of it

5. How important is sustainability for your company and for your consumers? *

1 = not important 5 = very important

Company * [1] |■□□□□| 1 ───── 5

Consumers * [3] |■■■■■■■■■■■■□□□| 1 ───── 5

6. How important is it for your company to receive sustainability related information from Haglöfs? *

1 = not important 5 = very important

Product level [1] |■□□□□| 1 ───── 5

Brand level * [1] |■□□□□| 1 ───── 5

Corporate level * [1] |■□□□□| 1 ───── 5

(Next)

25% Completed (1 of 4)

Retailer Survey

7. Which communication channel does your company use to promote the brand's sustainability efforts to your consumers?

In-store activation

☐ Window activation

☐ Landing zone activation

☐ At and/ or around the product shelf

☐ None at the moment

☐ Other [   ]

Online

☐ Social media

☐ Homepage

☐ Brand pages

☐ Product detail pages (PDP)

☐ Search option for sustainable products

☐ Campaign pages

☐ None at the moment

☐ Other [   ]

8. How would you rate the sustainability related information communicated by Haglöfs?

1 = Below expectations   5 = Above expectations

Product level [1] 1 ————————————— 5

Brand level [1] 1 ————————————— 5

Corporate level 1 —— [2] ————————— 5
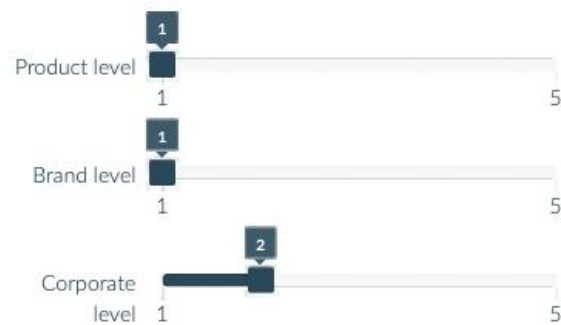
9. How would you improve our communication of our sustainability related information?

[   ]

(Previous) (Next)

eted (2 of 4)

Retailer Survey

10. The survey question consist of a list of topics that have been identified as important to Haglöfs either because we create an impact in that area or our business is impacted by it. We are gathering input from our retailers on how we should prioritize amongst these different important topics.

We understand that all of these topics are important; however, as a company, we cannot focus on all. Therefore we will use the data collected from this question to create a materiality matrix, and this will help us pinpoint critical topics to focus on and impact.

Please rank these topics in order of importance – the highest ranking topics should be those you think Haglöfs should spend more time and resources on than they do today, the lowest ranked should be those topics Haglöfs should spend less time and resources on than they do today.

1 = highest rank   14 = lowest rank

Topic	
Product quality, performance and safety	Select ▾
Fair and decent jobs	Select ▾
Climate change	Select ▾
Participation in outdoor activities	Select ▾
Resource depletion and waste	Select ▾
Water consumption and pollution	Select ▾
Chemistry	Select ▾
Corporate governance and transparency	Select ▾
Animal welfare	Select ▾
Biodiversity	Select ▾
Deforestation	Select ▾
Air pollution	Select ▾
Diversity and equality	Select ▾
Health and wellbeing	Select ▾

(Previous) (Next)

Retailer Survey

ⓘ Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

11. How important is it for your company and your consumers that Haglöfs offers and focuses on the following:

1= not important 5= very important

	1 ⓘ	2	3	4	5 ⓘ
Service					
Repairing products	○	○	○	○	○
Re-purposing second-hand products	○	○	○	○	○
Product warranty	○	○	○	○	○
Product recycle program	○	○	○	○	○
Design					
Material longevity	○	○	○	○	○
Recycled materials	○	○	○	○	○
Natural materials	○	○	○	○	○
Low impact dyeing techniques	○	○	○	○	○
Product recyclability	○	○	○	○	○

12. How likely are you to recommend Haglöfs to a friend or family member?

1

Not at all likely 1 ▮—————————— 10 Extremely likely

13. Please share your email with us if you wish to be included in the giveaway competition

(Previous) (Submit)