LAB University of Applied Sciences

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY FOR A MEDIUM – SIZED SUSTAINABLE FASHION BRAND

Case: Népra Oy

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Abstract

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Abstract

The primary goal of the thesis was to propose a customer-driven digital marketing strategy for a sustainable Finnish fashion brand – Népra. Through the combined knowledge from the literature review and empirical research, the authors were attempting to close the gap between consumer perspectives toward sustainable fashion and the way fashion brand talking about their sustainable operations.

Both theoretical and empirical studies are included in this thesis. The theoretical part concentrates on literature review about green marketing, greenwash marketing, challenges and impact of large corporation in comparison with small and medium sized fashion brands in sustainability. Secondary data sources from books, articles, and other online sources were used in this thesis.

Primary data was collected from in-depth interviews and survey, which makes up the empirical part of the thesis. The thesis applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The quantitative survey was executed and delivered on Google Forms platform, including three sections and 24 questions in total (Appendix 1). The qualitative research comprises of three in-depth interviews with targeted customers of Népra (Appendix 2). The collected results show that price and quality are the top two factors influencing consumer behavior. Customers nowadays are also concerned about animal welfare and child labor usage of fashion brands.

Considering Népra's current situation as a direct-to-consumer online brand, the authors agree that online shopping experience is the most important matter, starting with the website. Search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing, social media marketing and influencer marketing are the areas that Népra should really focus on. YouTube and Instagram should be the main channels of interacting with customers, and TikTok is an emerging and potential channel that is also worth considering.

Keywords

Sustainable fashion, Green marketing, Greenwash marketing, Consumer behavior, Digital marketing, Social media marketing, Influencer marketing

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Thesis Background

The fashion industry is among the top influential yet polluted industries in the world. Its complex supply chain usually involves raw materials production, textile and clothing manufacture, retail, shipping, usage, recycle, and disposal of the garment. Along with the tremendous growth of fast fashion brands, issues related to sustainability and environment are of the top priority right now with approximately 75% of consumers around the globe talking about sustainability, especially in fashion (Segran 2019). They are demanding and expecting more transparency and actions from corporations towards this matter. Therefore, a new business model or a more appropriate way to approach fashion is a must for brands to survive in this field.

Nowadays, “green and ethical” marketing or advertising is being employed by fashion brands to promote “conscious” practice of fashion to their customers, such as H&M’s Conscious clothing line which claims to only use organic cotton and recycled polyester; Puma’s biodegradable InCycle collection; or Zara’s eco-efficient stores (The Fashion Law 2016). Although it is a good sign that brands already started to tackle global warming problems, the dark side is, not all the labels who market themselves as sustainable are actually making sustainable products. This leads to the term “greenwashing” marketing, which is going to be investigated further in this thesis.

The motivation behind this topic comes from the authors’ interest in fashion and knowledge in digital marketing. In spite of being fashion lovers, the authors are also aware of its impact on the environment. Therefore, being responsible and conscious consumers is their vision and they are trying to commit to it on a daily basis. In the recent two years, the authors have expanded their knowledge about fashion and seen many marketing campaigns related to sustainable clothing lines. Some of their friends and family members were actually influenced by those campaigns. Thus, a study about consumer’s perspective and behavior toward sustainable fashion as well as how the brands communicate their sustainability products and values with their customers through digital channels is essential.

1.2 Thesis Objectives and Research Questions

The primary goal of this thesis is to examine a customer-driven both traditional and digital marketing strategy for Népra Oy, which is a sustainable activewear Finnish brand. As a research-based thesis, this thesis also aims to provide extensive insights on how various

factors of a clothing brand motivate target consumers to purchase the product. Digital marketing activities as well as implementation parts toward the target audience will be also discussed and eventually draw a conclusion on which aspects of the “green and ethical marketing” should be emphasized in the marketing plan. The research questions and investigating questions are aiming to provide the information related to:

- Customer’s perspective, behavior, thinking, and choice toward sustainable fashion
- Challenges and impact of big corporations versus small and medium sized brands in sustainable fashion
- Practical suggestions written based on the survey conducted from potential consumers of Népra
- Recommendations to improve the efficiency of digital marketing in order to gain more interest from target audiences of Népra

Therefore, the central research question is: How Népra can take the advantage of their sustainability background and improve their digital marketing strategy in order to win over customers as well as increase their loyalty.

1.3 Research Methodology and Data Collection

In general, the thesis is classified as applied research, while the inductive research approach, quantitative and qualitative data collection method are utilized in this study (Figure 1).

Applied research or action research’s purpose is to address specific problems and valuable on practical levels. Besides, inductive approach or inductive reasoning commences with the observations and collected data to identify the patterns and build the theory along with the research process. Therefore, hypotheses are unnecessary at the beginning of the research and the researcher has more spaces in navigating the research process and results. Nevertheless, using existing theory to formulate the research question is still acceptable in inductive approach. (Research Methodology 2020.) The thesis aims to find answers for the questions of what and how, thus, the mentioned methods above are appropriate.

Qualitative and quantitative data collection method are applied in the study with the aim of gaining rich insights and evaluating larger-scale data about customer behavior and understanding regarding sustainable fashion. The theoretical part is based on secondary data, including academic books, published articles, company reports and news from internet.

The empirical part of the research is based on primary source from interview and questionnaire's results of target customers of the case company. The data from the small survey is collected anonymously and the identity of people participating in the interview can be hidden, upon request.

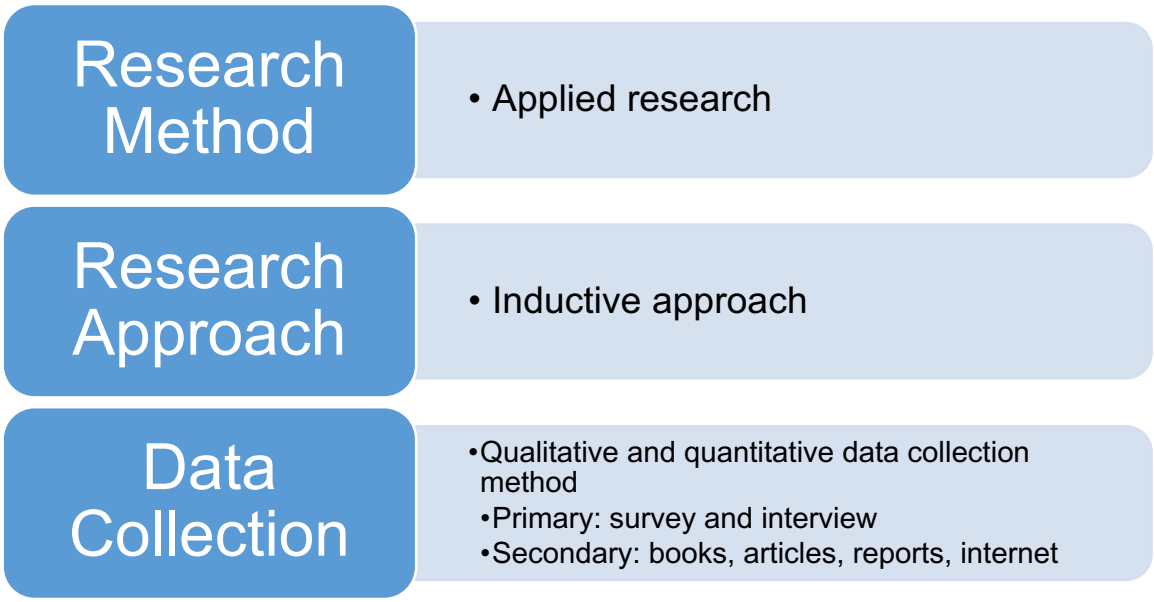

Figure 1 Research methodology

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The thesis only focuses on providing strategies for Népra in Finland and European market. Other studies can investigate customers in other regions, for example Asia where the main source of textile supplied for several giant corporations around the world is placed.

The first potential limitation is time and resources, which means the thesis is conducted under time constraints with limited data sources. The additional limitation is the reach of audience in order to collect data, which is due to the limited network of authors.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis combines seven chapter in total, an introduction, theoretical framework, desktop research, literature review, empirical research, conclusion, and summary (Table 1). The first chapter provides an overview about the thesis topic, research questions, thesis objectives as well as the limitations and research method applied in the thesis. The next chapter presents literature review on green marketing, greenwash marketing, its characteristics and applications nowadays. Chapter 3 gives overall understanding of how giant corporations and small to medium-sized brands are making fashion more environment-friendly. The next section gives a thorough picture of the case company and their needs.

Chapter 5 is empirical research demonstrating the process of research design, data collection and analysis. Chapter 6 provides research results, pragmatic recommendations for commissioner and assesses the validity and reliability of the thesis. The final chapter once again summarizes the whole study.

Table 1 Thesis structure

Chapter	Name	Description
Chapter 1	Introduction	Overview about the thesis topic, goals, research method, and limitations
Chapter 2	Green marketing and greenwash marketing	An academic study of two terms green marketing and greenwash marketing
Chapter 3	Large corporations and small and medium-sized brands in sustainable fashion	Secondary research to gain better understanding of the obstacles which both large companies and small to medium-sized brands are facing in sustainable fashion production
Chapter 4	Népra Oy case study	Details about commissioner's products, business practices, customers, markets and competitors
Chapter 5	Empirical research and data analysis	A combination of interview and questionnaire to collect data about target customers, research key findings and recommendations
Chapter 6	Conclusion	Evaluation of the whole study
Chapter 7	Summary	A summary of the thesis

2 GREEN MARKETING AND GREENWASH MARKETING

2.1 Green Marketing

This chapter will clarify and provide a clear definition of the important concept of green marketing so that readers can become acquainted and understand them further in the next parts of the thesis. The concept of green consumers, green buying behavior, business opportunities, and challenges will be also discussed in more detail.

Back in the 1960s, having an environmentally conscious lifestyle was considered to be a very fringe phenomenon. However, the scenario has changed a lot that green has become mainstream as people are taking sustainability-related issues seriously and demanding more practical actions from government as well as businesses in fighting for their future. (Ottman 2011, 1-3.) Therefore, green marketing has quickly become the core value of most organizations. The term and idea of “Green Marketing” were initially generated from several factors such as population growth, climate change, threatening the future of human being, natural resource scarcity evolve (Yakup &. Sevil 2011, 1808-1814).

2.1.1 Definition of Green Marketing

To get a better understand of the term “Green Marketing”, we will look at the simple version of two individual words “Green” and “Marketing”. Green is associated with growth, freshness, nature, safety, and environment, which is used to describe something that brings positive impact to human being and surrounding. Green energy, for example, refers to renewables, such as wind power. (Color Matters 2020.) Marketing consists of several activities that business undertakes to offer a right product or service to customers at the right time or to build relationship with customers. Marketing department in a company usually engages in different steps of business process, including packaging, sales, advertising, recycling, and actual product or service creation. (Twin 2020.)

Once combining two words together, green marketing stands for promoting the products or services based on its environmental factors or awareness. Another way of thinking is business making and offering goods that have positive or at least do not cause any harms to the environment and planet. (Ward 2020.)

There are numerous things included in green marketing, such as making environmentally friendly label, utilizing packaging materials that can be easily recycled, implementing sustainable business practices or putting effort on making green advertising and commercial that reflect green benefits of such products or companies (Kenton 2019 a). However, sometimes companies are spending huge budget on promoting their image to enhance

reputation in consumers' mindset instead of taking actual actions to protect the planet. This action is considered as greenwash marketing, which will be explained later on in this study.

This promotional method may be costly, but the rate of success is higher due to increasing demand of consumers. For example, products made domestically in Finland tend to be more expensive than those produced overseas by using cheap labor, but they have a significantly lower carbon footprint thanks to short distance between factory and store (O'Brien 2014). In addition, products labeled and made locally receive support from consumers and communities who believe in the environmental benefits that greatly outweigh the price difference (Atkinson 2014).

2.1.2 Green Consumer

It is important to understand green customer concept before getting into the green marketing activities. Ottman (1993) and Peattie (2001) divide green customer needs into four groups, including knowledge and information, lifestyle choice, desire to be meaningful, and desire to manage. These needs are defined according to what the market is able to offer them. Figure 2 includes motivational needs at various hierarchical levels in a pyramid to understand how consumers are influenced in their choices to achieve their needs. They can be defined as physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and on top of the pyramid is self-actualization.

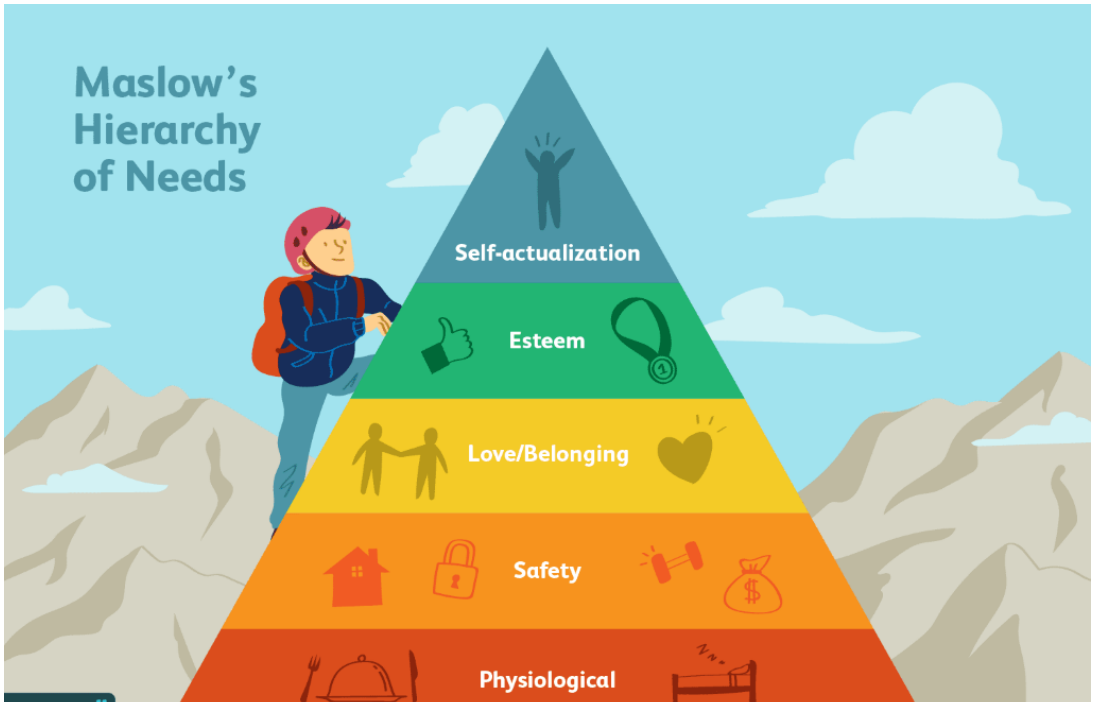

Figure 2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cherry 2019)

The structure of Maslow is often shown in a pyramid. The most basic needs are made up of the lowest levels of the scale, while the complex demands are at the top of the pyramid. This pyramid can be used to explain the green customer needs, therefore suggesting that, green consumers buy environmentally friendly products in order to contribute their impact to a safer and better planet, while improving their health. This meets the bottom standard of the pyramid which is physiological and safety needs. At other stages, other green consumers satisfy their needs for love and belonging by restoring it to the world, thereby establishing belonging to a culture that loves the environment. This results in high-esteem and self-actualization.

Based on this hypothesis, according to research conducted by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) in choosing the right green marketing strategy, the findings suggest that green customers who decide to buy green goods are not having great interests on the quality of the product as long as the product brings positive impact on the self-interest of consumers and also promotes its environmental benefits. It is also said that green buyers are more likely to overlook the expense as long as their comfort is supported by the product aids. (Michaud &. Llerena 2011.) The key findings here indicate contradictory view, so it can be interesting to learn more about trends that effect the decision-making of consumers to buy green products.

Consumers, though, say that they worry about rising seas, melting ice, declining air quality, shrinking animal habitats, and global warming, when it comes to actually buying green products, words and deeds usually part ways. In specific categories, products with sustainable benefits witness growing twice compared to the conventional counterparts. Nevertheless, according to Harvard Business Review, 26% out of 65% of people in one recent survey, who show their concern and interest in sustainable brands, actually do so. (White, Hardisty &. Habib 2019.)

There is no globally official definition of a green customer or lifestyle. However, the segmentation model in Figure 3 is a great tool for businesses to understand the ethical and sustainable consumers. There are three main factors, including engagement, functional benefits and emotional benefits of products, which are used to divide consumers into six types. Accordingly, the first two categories, with low engagement and functional benefits seeking, are unwilling (10%) and rejecters (18%). The unwilling type consists of those who are aware of climate change and related environmental issues but not ready to act. The rejecters ignore both the issue and action. For these kinds of customers, it is advised that companies should respect their point of view and take no extra effort as well as cost to persuade them. The next two groups are those who show high engagement and interest

while looking for functional benefits of goods. They are the confused type (25%) and the campaigners (18%). The confused consumers are fully aware of climate change but need encouragement and motivation to really take action. On the other hand, the campaigners still need to see the real advantages of sustainable products to trust and consume. Businesses should focus on providing fact-based information with clear and simple communication style about rational benefits of products in solving sustainable issues. The last two types are followers (8%) and optimists (21%), with high engagement and emotional benefits seeking. The optimists are highly committed and want to feel good using sustainable products or services, whereas the followers just want to update with the trends. (WBCSD 2008, 18.)

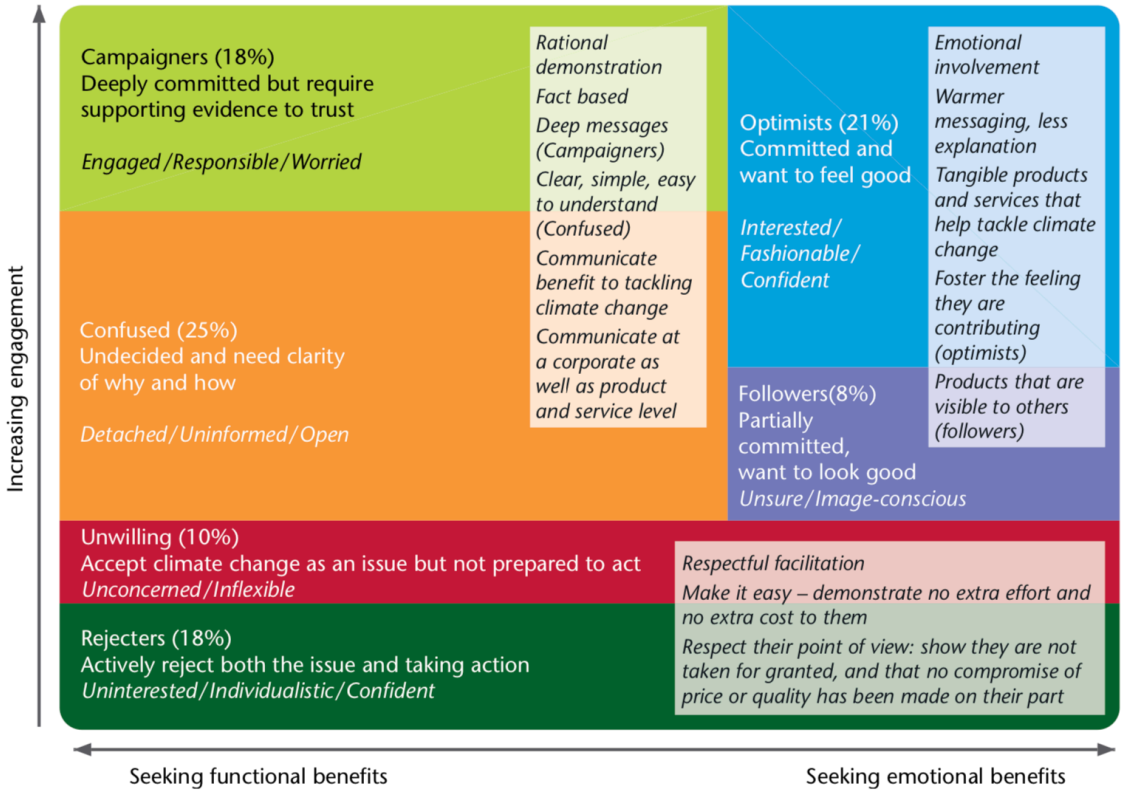

Figure 3 US and UK consumer segmentations (WBSCD 2008, 18)

2.2 Characteristics of Green Marketing

Green marketing is not just about making brand look good nor advertising of environmentally friendly products or services. This includes improvements to the business' image and the production process. Green marketing is also about using different marketing perspectives, given the global environmental destruction implications that we have. It is about the capacity of a firm to meet desires of the consumers with minimum environmental harm. (Fonseca 2015.)

According to Learning Hub G2, brands are doing green marketing should shift their mission and goals from revenue-driven to environment-conscious and have the least impact on the environment as possible. Those goals of green marketing can be seen as following: (Vos 2019)

- Implementing sustainable business practices
- Demonstrating social responsibility
- Reducing expenses (packaging, transportation, energy, water usage, etc.)
- Illustrating how safe and mindful products or service are

Regarding Ottman (2011, 93), as can be seen in Figure 4, conventional marketing concept is about meeting the needs of consumers with best prices and ensuring the product or service is publicized. In contrast, green marketing is much more complex than just satisfying customer. It offers products or services that go hand in hand with quality, performance, reasonable price and maximizing convenience with minimal environmental impact and consequences on the planet. While creating the brand identity at the same period, consumers play an active role towards it and partially take in its operations and gain sustainable benefits. Essentially, becoming conscious of their buying habits has a significant influence on the environment.

Issues	Conventional marketing	Green marketing
Consumers	Consumers with lifestyles	Human beings with lives
Products	Cradle-to-grave One-size-fit-all products	Cradle-to-cradle Flexible Services
Marketing and Communication	Selling oriented End benefits	Education Values
Corporate	Reactive Independent departmentalized Short term oriented Profit maximizing	Pro-active Interdependent Co-operative Holistic Long term oriented Double bottom line

Figure 4 Differences between conventional and green marketing (Ottman 2011, 98)

There are seven ecological communication effectiveness approaches and they underline creativity and sustainability (Ottman 2011, 99-101).

- Recognition of the principles of customers and partners on their social and environmental issues
- Offering products to satisfy customer regarding quality, price, performance, etc. Also, minimizing impact on environment as much as possible
- Offering products that support consumers in a way that they realize their decisions have an effect on current and future generations
- Assuring firm practices are legitimate
- Exploring competitive advantages by taking up new product development approaches
- Commitment to tackle environmental issues
- Never give up. Encourage sustainable activity and influence buying patterns that are environmentally friendly

2.3 Definition of Greenwash Marketing

As the green wave of sustainable development and production has swept around the world, consumers, especially in the young generations, are increasingly interested in consciously environmental lifestyle and consumption with less plastic and no more single-use products. Therefore, demand for environmentally low-impact products is raising higher, leading to brands falling over themselves to deliver it. Consequently, companies are spending huge resources, efforts and investment in demonstrating how environmentally friendly they are. They massively promote their eco-friendly goods and in some ways, they mislead their communications since their actual business operation cannot live up to the promotionally eco standard. As a result, this action is defined as greenwash marketing.

Greenwash is the fraud of the company in providing misleading information regarding environmental responsibility and ecological benefit of the products, services or the company image itself. Usually, greenwash marketing happens due to the exaggeration of companies about their environmental claims. This term is developed based on the popular term “whitewashing”, which indicates the practice of covering up unethical activities through misleading information. (Kenton 2020.) Greenwashing can be done intentionally or unintentionally, therefore, it is critical to develop a practice or guideline of a proper green marketing campaign in order to avoid falling in the trap of greenwash and damaging corporate reputation.

As the greenwash term is related to two main factors, including environment and communications, four types of greenwashing can be illustrated through the matrix below (Figure 5).

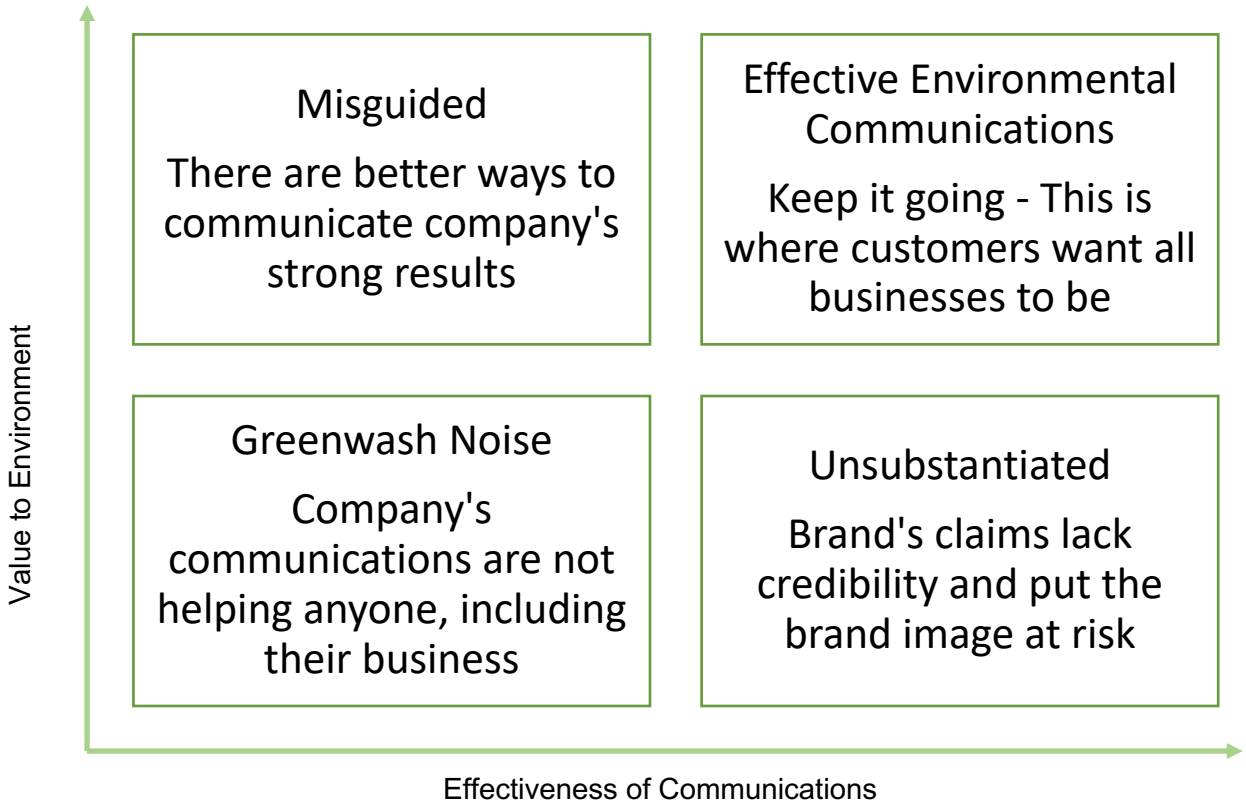

Figure 5 Types of Greenwash (BSR &. Futerra 2009, 4)

Misguided Greenwash

This group includes companies with huge strategic focus and efforts on the improvement of ecological performance of products and services as well as manufacturing processes, however, their marketing department fails to convey the environmental message effectively, leading to losing their market share and potential customers. By improving marketing strategy, they can easily leverage image and move to the “Effective Environmental Communications” type. (BSR &. Futerra 2009, 4-5.)

Unsubstantiated Greenwash

The companies who are putting less efforts into actually sustainable initiatives than its marketing, PR and communications belong to “Unsubstantiated” quadrant. This group is the main barrier in moving toward a more sustainable economy and society. Since sooner or later their fraud will be exposed to the public, their mistakes can affect the whole industry by making customers more skeptical of environmental initiatives and promotional campaigns. (BSR &. Futerra 2009, 4-5.)

Greenwash Noise

As consumers are being more sensitive and knowledgeable about greenwash, those messages like “We are green and organic” without truthful and credible data are unable to convince them. Those businesses need to seriously work on their sustainable strategy again to improve both marketing and operational practices. Only by doing this, they can leverage their reputation and move to the “Effective Environmental Communications” group. (BSR &. Futerra 2009, 4-5.)

Effective Environmental Communications

These businesses not only care about ecological system but also put huge efforts into creating and developing products and operations to be more environmentally friendly. Additionally, they are able to clearly convey messages and show their impacts to the public. Those are the role model that every business should look up to. (BSR &. Futerra 2009, 4-5.)

2.4 Characteristics of Greenwash Marketing

In the era of raising concern about ethical issues, in order to protect brand image, sales, partnerships and customers while properly shouting about business sustainability credentials, a greenwash checklist or characteristics list is essential for everyone.

Futerra has published ten signs of greenwash in the “UK Guide to Greenwash” as following Table 2:

Table 2 Ten signs of greenwash (BSR &. Futerra 2009, 7)

Signs	Examples
Fluffy language	Terms like eco-friendly are widely used in companies’ packaging, website, social media channels, brochure, etc. without stating clearly its meaning
Green products made by dirty company	Companies claim that their products are green but still pollutes rivers and treat their employees poorly
Suggestive pictures	Companies are using inappropriate green images such as flowers blooming from exhaust pipes

Irrelevant claims	One tiny green attribute is not enough to claim the whole brand image as green and cover up other ugly mistakes
Top in class	In spite of being slightly greener than the rest, the fact that the rest are pretty terrible is still unacceptable
Just not credible	Companies are trying to make a dangerous product like cigarettes as green as possible
Jargon	Companies are using information or sophisticated words that only scientists could understand
Imaginary third party	Companies are using a made-up third-party endorsement
No proof	Companies are unable to provide evidence for their claims
Out-right lying	Companies are using fabricated data

Besides, TerraChoice, an environmental marketing firm has come up with “The Six Sins of Greenwashing” after investigating more than 1000 retail products.

- Hidden tradeoff: some companies claim their products is green based on only a single environmental attribute without concerning other more crucial eco-friendly factors such as energy, water, global warming impacts, etc.;
- No proof: the environmental claim is not supported by accessible data backup or a reliable third-party certification at the point of purchase or at the products’ website;
- Vagueness: the claim is too broad or unclear that misleads the intended customers. Terms such as chemical-free, non-toxic, all natural and green are meaningless without elaboration;
- Irrelevance: the claim that distracts consumers by emphasizing on real yet unimportant information;

- Two evils: when the green claim is placed on the product category which is of questionable environmental and health-related issues such as organic cigarettes, green insecticides and herbicides;
- Fibbing: the environmental claims are simply false, for instance, the claimed "certified organic" shampoos without accessibly valid certification, or the dishwasher detergent is contained in a plastic packaging with the claim "100% recycled paper packaging"; (NPR 2007.)

2.5 Greenwash Marketing and Green Purchasing Intentions

"Green consumption" or "Green purchasing intentions" is among the most important topics in today's society due to increasing worry about global warming issue. Consumers are more aware and considerate of their lifestyle and consumption, hence, are more willing to purchase greener products. Nevertheless, more firms are trying to commit greenwash and capitalizing off this topic in order to enhance brand reputation and increase customer loyalty. Consequently, once the real image is revealed, it significantly damages companies when consumers' skepticism towards the green claims increases. To be specific, greenwash negatively affects three main critical factors, including brand image, customer loyalty and their purchasing intention.

Brand image plays a crucial role in the marketing context, especially in the category where differences between competing products and services are little. Green brand image is set of factors and perceptions of a firm in the consumer's mind that is connected to environmental concerns. Greenwash could confuse customers, thus, ruin green brand image of companies. (Chen, Lee, Lin & Lai 2016, 119-121.)

Customer loyalty refers to consumer's faithfulness and devotion for a product, brand, or service by rebuying or referring product, brand, or service to his/her friends. Green loyalty could be defined as the repurchasing intentions associated with sustainable commitment. Greenwash could be harmful to customer loyalty about environmental consideration if they cannot verify the green promotions' trustworthiness. (Chen et al. 2016, 119-121.)

Green purchasing intention is the likelihood of a consumer to buy a specific product, brand or service as a result of his/her sustainable consumption's demand. Greenwash, with the false green claims delivering to the market, would not only harm the company itself but also influence other truly green claims and firms. As a result, customer's attitude toward green initiatives would decrease and they are more doubtful and unwilling to make purchase. To be worse, greenwash could lead to a negative word-of-mouth about environmental messages. (Chen et al. 2016, 119-121.)

Therefore, the firms are strongly advised to avoid greenwash at any cost and be more transparent as well as honest about their green practices. Once the firm puts their focuses on the sustainable initiatives as the top priority and then effectively communicates their efforts with customers, they may gain trust from their end users again. (Chen et al. 2016, 119-121.)

3 LARGE CORPORATIONS VS SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED BRANDS SUSTAINABLE FASHION

The millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, and gen Z generation, born between 1997 and 2012, will take up the largest demography in the world, which means they have the purchasing power influencing business operation and decision. Even though they want to focus on the generally global sustainability, the price sensitivity, especially when it comes to fashion is a huge challenge for all the clothing makers since fast fashion with cheap clothes has been around for a long time. In addition, there are a variety of obstacles that companies with different sizes are facing in approaching and implementing sustainable practices.

3.1 Challenges and Impact of Large Corporations

Fashion and apparel industry are a complicated system, in which one interfaces with the others such as media industry, retail industry and textile industry. The textile industry links to chemical fiber, chemical and agriculture industries. When considering five main stages in the fashion life cycle, every single phase has extremely negative impact on the environment if the sustainable practices are not seriously executed (Figure 6). (Savonia UAS 2020.)

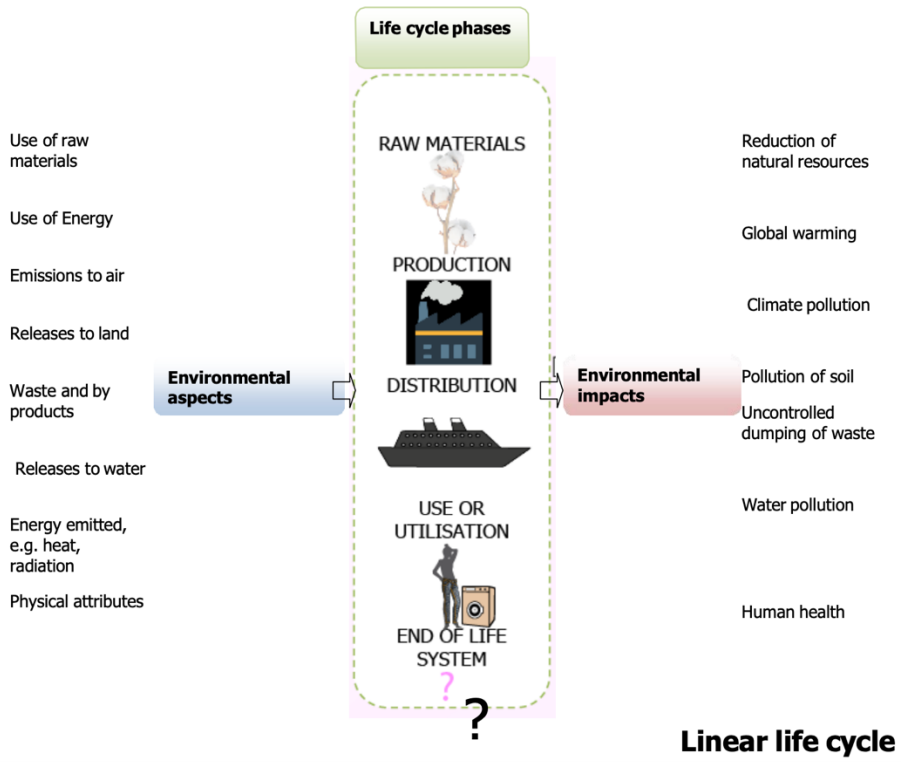

Figure 6 Linear life cycle (Savonia UAS 2020)

3.1.1 Challenges

Large companies, especially fast fashion brands usually face lots of difficulties in implementing sustainable strategies, mainly due to their complex supply chain and economical pressure from shareholders and investors. Thus, they take longer to upgrade business models, change their resources' suppliers and accomplish the sustainable goals. (Segran 2019.)

Fast fashion relies on outsourcing and subcontracting

Even though fast fashion retailers are increasingly taking initiatives to adopt the sustainability mindset and practice, the globally fast production network and supply chain are at the heart of the fast retailing business model. Most of the big names like H&M, Gap, Mango and Zara have their headquarters in developed countries to take care of market research, design, marketing, sales and finance, whereas their production facilities are placed in developing countries by external suppliers known as Tier 1 companies. These Tier 1 companies work with several manufactures that have no legal and authorized connection to the original fast fashion brands. Hence, the poor infrastructure, harassment, dangerous working conditions and underpaid salary for factory workers in the bottom tiers of the production network are big challenges that negatively affect the reputation of fashion brands due to the disconnect between the raw materials and the finished products. Moreover, there are various unauthorized and unregistered subcontractors operating in developing countries and even the paper documents are easily made up or manipulated there. (Stafford 2018.) The weak labour unions and violent workers protests are barriers in implementing immediately fair labor conditions and wages. A report from Labour Behind the Label showed that not any brands out of 32 leading clothing labels could prove that their workers in Asia, Africa, Central America and Eastern Europe are earning enough for their livings. (Biondi 2019.)

The McKinsey's 2019 report shows that responsible sourcing at scale has become the top priority for fashion companies as more consumers question the origin of raw materials used for clothing production. Hence, supply chain traceability and digitization of sourcing processes which means incorporating technology into tracing the product's life cycle are the top-ranked factor for action. (Berg, Hedrich, Ibanez, Kappelmark &. Magnus 2019.)

Cultivation of more sustainable materials

2,700 litres of water is needed only to make a single T-shirt, according to the WWF, hence, other environmentally friendly materials like organic cotton, which can be produced with 91 per cent less water compared to conventional cotton as well as without fertilizers

and pesticides, are better alternatives now (Chan 2019). Despite most large corporations understand the importance of sustainable raw materials, working down the whole supply chain to adopt more eco-friendly fabrics is difficult and costly, expectedly adding 5-10% more to the base price of final product. Additionally, the raw materials production is the least visible process, located at the bottom of the supply chain and involved with a range of different fields like agriculture and chemical industries. (Purt 2011.)

3.1.2 Impact

The lack of factory ownership and limited influence on supply chain are among the challenges, however, the giant corporations have advantage from their big names and great financial resources to put pressure on those suppliers and to force them change the situation inside the factories. The multinational companies even have enough scale to lobby governments for better regulation implementation. (Biondi 2018.)

Although large corporations usually face more difficulties and criticism from public, it is undeniable that they could generate more positive impact on the society and environment as well as propel the entire fashion industry forward thanks to its big scale and resources to invest in cutting-edge technology and infrastructure such as fabric or sneaker recycling. For instance, the H&M Foundation is dedicating its resources in recycling fabric at a large scale, while Nike is inventing a new kind of leather from the cutting room floor that is expected to be more sustainable than traditional leather. (Segran 2019.) 3D design, 3D sampling and 3D prototyping can help significantly reduce waste. And big fashion brands could implement these technologies almost immediately. (Biondi 2018.)

Taking Everlane and Adidas as examples, both brands are committed to removing virgin plastic from supply chain. Everlane, with an annual revenue of 100 million dollars, promised to achieve this goal by 2021, whereas Adidas – a 21-billion-dollar company – has set the same target until 2024 and just eradicate virgin plastic from shoes and clothes because of its larger supply chain. However, 311 million out of 403 million pairs of shoes could be made every year from recycled plastic by Adidas, which creates greater impact in general. (Segran 2019.)

3.2 Challenges and Impact of Small and Medium Sized Brands

Several corporations are integrating “triple bottom line” strategies in their activities– taking community, earth, and revenue into consideration. John Elkington, the creator of a UK company named Sustainability, first invented the term “the triple bottom line” as a definition in 1994 (Elkington 1994). The framework involves a way of taking account of the

cultural, environmental and social effect factors. John Elkington describes the idea of “Triple Bottom Line” or “Triple P (People, Planet, Profit)” as sustainability relates to the balance or harmony across economic, social and environmental sustainability (Elkington 1997).

This relationship can be visually described as the collision of three circles below (Figure 7). So only when all three elements are taken into account (the middle is the intersection of all elements), the sustainability can be achieved.

Figure 7 Triple Bottom Line concept (Dalibozhko & Krakovetskaya 2018, 3)

Discussions regarding sustainability have dominated research in recent years, both big fashion players, and small business owners starting to explore the going-green challenges and consider sustainability as the core of their businesses and services. However, small and medium-sized brands usually have smaller impacts and bigger numerous challenges when it comes to building a sustainable fashion brand.

3.2.1 Challenges

Cost of production

Small and medium-sized sustainable brands usually offer iconic items and long-lasting value. Large companies, on the other hand, utilize cheap labor, thus benefitting mainly from developing economies. The mass-produced products are measured accurately in every possible way; a highly computerized program optimizes the layout on the materials, and the production circle is carefully observed. Every inch of wasted fabric multiplies by thousands and millions. The supply chain responsiveness of large-sized companies is the main factor why it has outperformed other departments and specialty stores (Karr 2009). It also addresses why SMEs – made with better quality products and fabrics manufactured locally or fairly – cannot cope with manufacturing costs. Doeringer and Crean (2006) comment that producing time of large companies is significantly shorter than SMEs. Small and medium-sized brands are usually investing even more effort and time in their work and face higher overheads and variable costs. Therefore, this leads to the topics: Can SMEs not only be consumer-friendly but also economically viable? Can they fulfill environmental-conscious consumer demands? Environmentally conscious brands have been passionate about the results of their outputs. Although large companies transform the laborer who mass-produces goods into a virtual blind eye, SMEs reflects on the individual employees. Noticeably, fashion companies in both large and small-sized have a spirit for what they are doing. (Watson 2013.)

Response to Trends

For many years, it has been always easier for big fashion companies to define the market over time. Buyers go to retail stores and decide what to buy based on their interests and what is available, as opposed to what might better represent their tastes and inclinations. Large companies can follow the market's trends very closely, which enables them to track shopper preferences quickly and to respond promptly to the demand. They focus on producing more styles instead of more quantities per style. Fashion lovers are easily seduced by a cheap edition of the new trends shown at the most popular fashion shows or weeks all around the globe. On the other hand, you may view SMEs as "a stigma given to a retailer". The negative in this argument is based on the fact that fashion has to remain trendy to be accepted as attractive in today's world. The point is based on the argument that SMEs cannot, nor are they willing to, pursue constantly evolving fashion trends, whereas large companies always do. These retailers' main operation method is non-stop changing in styles and trends of their collections. It has been proved through many studies that buyers who love local and sustainable brands, purchase less in quantity but more in

quality. Nevertheless, unlike in large and fast fashion companies, small and medium-sized companies have very little capacity to monitor their consumers' tastes and act quickly to meet the demand, influencing the success of SMEs. (Pookulangara & Sphephard 2013, 200-206.) Reaching a balance between production costs, design and product desirability requires constant compromise, especially when customers are still highly sensitive with price (Biondi 2019).

3.2.2 Impact

The apparel business has catastrophic environmental effects. It is currently the world's second-largest polluter, only behind the oil and gas sector. And the risk to the atmosphere is growing as the industry expends as long as consumers stop consuming fast fashion from unsustainable large fashion producers. (Cosmopolitan 2019.)

One must understand small and medium-sized brands that are constantly creating meaningful impact whether by recycling or sustainable design. These fashion labels, in certain respects, make our planet a better place. (Sachs 2019.)

For instance, Azur World, a local brand in France is making its best avoiding mass-production and improving existing raw materials by using only high-quality natural antique patterns woven in France. Normally, fabrics and buttons are hand-colored by hand without using chemicals or heavy metal. Besides, their buttons are made by 100% cotton and natural corozo. Azur World is aiming for a stronger understanding of the environmental implications of the apparel sector and consumerism. Azur World founders are expecting to see a return to local creation, craftsmanship and that would be a no longer luxury. They believe in the uniqueness and meaning of things that have a story. (Mundigo-Moore 2019.)

In the fashion industry, building sustainable brands and making positive impact on the environment are difficult missions for SMEs. Fortunately, while pursuing this goal, small and medium-sized brands also receive good effects from it. For example, Roop was founded by Natasha Fernades in Manchester. The brand offers one-of-a-kind pieces. According to Natasha, sustainability is her brand's core business. She uses leftover stocks of recycled fabrics for the body of the bags. She is using and utilizing what is already in stock, aiming to reduce wastes as much as possible. Being sustainable gives Natasha more rooms for creativity. Since the materials used to make the products are odd, Natasha tries to utilize as many as possible so as not to waste any of the fabric because she never has too much of it. Via Roop, Natasha encourages people to stop buying cheap and environmental-harmful products. She suggests consumers passing their fashion items to someone else in need of those instead of throwing it to the trash bin. (Mundigo-Moore 2019.)

4 NEPRA OY CASE STUDY

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine case company's background and current marketing strategy. Combining with results from survey and individual interviews, the authors will give recommendations on the marketing strategy in order to help leverage brand image, increase customer engagement, loyalty and sales.

4.1 Background

Background

Népra was founded by Essi Enqvistin and Anna-Maria Niutasen in 2015 in Lahti, Finland. The company aims to promote sustainability and high-quality activewear in the fashion industry, not only pushing the concept of circular economy but also safety and sustainability for both consumers and the environment. (Népra 2019 a.) After an interview with one of the founders, it is clear that the company is now moving it market to EU-wide and shifting its focus on wider customer segmentation through digital marketing.

Vision

Népra is a small sportswear company located in Lahti, Finland, offering holistic, minimalist and sustainable made sportswear. Regarding holistic, Népra has the vision of making clothes to suit most kinds of activities. The company expects its customers to feel comfy and enjoyable while training in Népra's activewear. In terms of minimalist, influenced by the simple yet beautiful Finnish design, Népra's team is proud to mention that their products can be worn regardless of seasons and time after time. Last but not least, all Népra products are designed in Finland and ethically made in Estonia with high-quality fabrics imported from northern Italy. The company has put effort to keep the logistic network as short as possible since day one with an aim to reduce carbon footprints and emissions to save the environment. (Népra 2020 a.)

In addition to activewear, the products offered by the company also include lazy wear such as sweater, hoodie, knit, socks, jacket, and gym bag. Népra business model is based on the company' values as they mentioned, "we consider all the costs, not just the price on the rack". Népra is committed to sustainability thinking and is able to say no with choices that cause negative results to the environment. (Népra 2020 a.)

Responsible Values

Népra has chosen sustainability thinking towards its products and its future for both the company and its buyers. The company has promised to consider all the costs, not just the

price on the rack. The team has successfully minimized its impacts on the environment while offering reasonable price together with high quality and ethical production. Product's lifecycle has also been carefully considered and keeps an important role in achieving high quality thanks to the material choices. Népra has promised to be transparent throughout the whole production process and always ready to share its information. The founders believe transparency is the key and one of the effective ways to gain trust from customers. (Népra 2020 a.)

Sustainable Chain

As mentioned earlier, Népra believes that transparency is the key, but it is not that simple as it says. Many brands have put lots of money into marketing and have started to "brainwash" their customers by using impressive green commercial video or using famous public figures and influencers to manipulate customer's buying decisions. The real question here is: how many of them are putting efforts into saving the environment? Are they trying to greenwash us? The fast fashion corporations have been creating tons of green-washing campaigns to promote false information and fool customers. A brand based on mass production ought not to call themselves green at all. (Cate 2019.)

Some of H&M sustainability campaigns are considered as greenwashing marketing, for example, "bring in your old clothes and get 15% off for next purchase". Due to the complicated process of sorting old clothes into separate fibers and categories, only 1% of clothes can be recycled and the rest goes to the landfills or is sent to developing countries. The main purpose behind those campaigns is to motivate customers to spend more money on new clothes while convincing them that they are doing good by bringing old clothes to the shops for recycling. (Cate 2019.)

Népra, on the other hand, suggests that instead of checking only the material, one should also take a look into the whole supply chain. If a company wants to call themselves sustainable, they need to make sure all 11 steps below are ethical and transparent.

Figure 8 Népra's Sustainable Supply Chain (Népra 2020 a)

Népra has published this chain on their website since the company was established (Figure 8). The main idea beneath is to give consumers an overall picture about how Népra's products are made. (Népra 2020 a.)

4.2 Situation Analysis Of Social Media Marketing

Népra is now focusing on social media marketing with an e-commerce website as the main touchpoint of sales. The website of company is https://www.wearnepra.com. On the website, in addition to sell products, their blog is considered as a channel to deliver company's values, messages and content to their customers. Averagely, two blog posts are launched each month. According to the statistics collected on 1st August 2020, their Instagram account as in Image 1 (6250 follower) and Facebook page (2272 followers) are another important marketing channels. The content on these two channels are similar. The engagement rate of Népra's Instagram account is 2.20% (Social Stats 2020). Twitter as in Image 2 (317 followers and 1696 tweets) and Pinterest (82 followers and around 1300 monthly unique viewers) are also utilized by the brand, however, with less focus (Népra 2020 b & f).

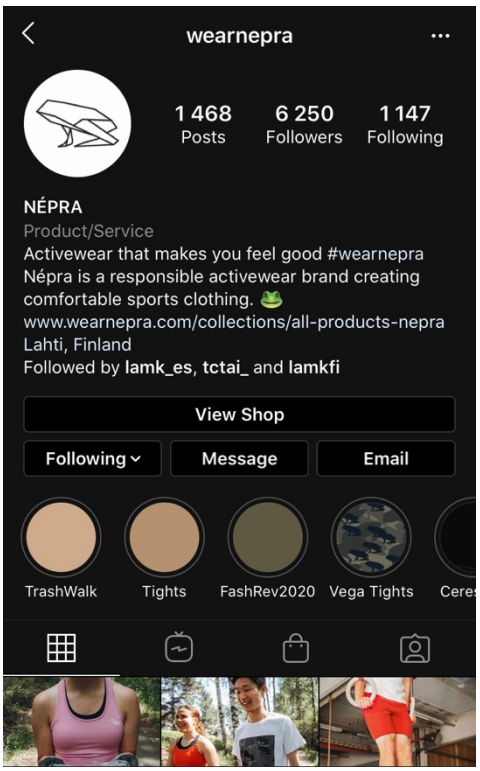

Image 1 Népra Instagram account (Népra 2020 c)

Image 2 Népra Twitter account (Népra 2020 b)

Regarding content strategy, the brand focuses on conveying their messages to audiences about slow fashion and slow lifestyle through articles on website. The main topics include guideline on how to take care of clothes, how to be more sustainable by changing consumption and shopping habits, ethical manufacturing process as well as information about climate change, microplastic in the relation to sportswear. (Népra 2020 e.) Black Friday, originally from the US, refers to the day after Thanksgiving when brands offer massive discounts to attract customers (Kenton 2019 b). However, Népra takes the opposite approach on this day by closing their online store in order to support global climate action (Népra 2019 b).

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

The empirical research part includes three main sections with the purpose of addressing the research methodologies which are quantitative and qualitative research. The result of empirical research provides valuable information, combined with theoretical analysis for the specification of final recommendations to the commissioner.

The chosen research methods were carefully chosen based on the topic, the research question and research objectives of the thesis.

- Research question: How can Népra take the advantage of their sustainability background and improve their digital marketing strategy in order to win over customers as well as increase their loyalty?
- Research objectives:
    - Customers' perspective, behavior and choice toward sustainable fashion
    - Challenges and impact of big corporations versus small and medium sized brands in sustainable fashion
    - Practical suggestions written based on the survey conducted from potential consumers of Népra
    - Recommendations to improve the efficiency of digital marketing in order to gain more interest from target audiences of Népra

5.1 Data Collection

Practical information regarding customer motivations and expectations are of great value in order to answer the research question. For this reason, the authors initially suggested conducting street interview in Helsinki center with the aim of showcasing the facts behind fast fashion and how fast fashion brands are manipulating customers through greenwashing campaigns as well as promoting Népra's products to more people. The photos and videos from the street interview would be utilized for thesis presentation later. However, due to the corona virus pandemic, the street interview was replaced by online survey and in-depth interviews.

5.1.1 Survey Design

The advantage of online survey is easy in access and spread, thus, making it a great choice to conduct quantitative research. The structure of the survey consists of three parts, in which the first section's purpose is to gather information about demographics.

Questions from 1 to 5 with multiple choice options collect basic information regarding generation (Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X, Baby Boomer), gender, occupation, monthly net income range and frequency of clothes shopping.

Before asking respondents about their shopping behavior, Question 6 was introduced to check their awareness and understanding regarding greenwash marketing. The survey participants were asked to rate their knowledge on the scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "not at all" and 5 meaning "very much". There is a brief explanation of greenwash marketing before this question. Similarly, Question 7 asked respondents to evaluate their ethical shopping and consumption by themselves.

The next section attempts to compare the significance of several elements that affect purchasing decision of consumers, on the scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "not at all important" and 5 indicating "very important". There are nine factors in total, namely brands using child labor, high quality of products, environmentally friendly materials, animal welfare, price, brand reputation, sustainable certificates from third parties, information about sustainable practices provided on the company's website, and green image of products/ brands on social media/ physical store/ website.

The same structure of question is applied to the next part of the survey. However, the aim of this section is to evaluate users' level of concern with the certain factors that constraint them from shopping ethically. These are high price of sustainable clothes, lack of trust in sustainable claims from the brand, lack of awareness of sustainability, boring design of sustainable clothes, and lack of physical stores.

The next question addresses consumer's motivation behind their shopping practice. There are five multiple choices for them to choose, including "I want to look good in front of others", "I want to live sustainably", "I do not want to be outdated", "I am very price conscious", and "I love giving my clothes another life". Understanding the sensitivity of price in fashion, the authors decided to ask respondents one question about their willingness of spending on sustainable activewear. The survey ends with the last open-ended question where survey participants can share their concerns and opinions. English is the main language used in this survey (Appendix 1).

The platform Google Forms was utilized to design and send out the survey, thanks to its user-friendly experience and analytics tool which is helpful in generating overall picture of the survey results. The survey was sent out to authors' friends, a Facebook group of Vietnamese students in Finland, and students of LAB University of Applied Sciences via email. Within two weeks, the authors collected 116 responses (all questions were required).

5.1.2 Interview Questions

After the survey, the authors carried out two more face-to-face and online in-depth interviews with the special focus on activewear consumption and purchasing. Additionally, a survey with the same questions was sent to one more person. With the purpose of gaining rich and deeper insight, the authors contacted their friends who are the potential customers of the commissioner. The criteria to choose interviewees include age, income, training habits and frequency of using sportwear clothes. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes and was conducted in English.

Question 1 refers to the interviewee's annual spending on activewear, followed by two questions regarding how long an item lasts before he/ she throws it away and what the interviewee does with old workout clothes. Question 4 explores customers' favorite sportswear brands and the reasons behind their choice. Questions 5 examine interviewee's level of concern on various elements of sportswear, including price, texture, form/shape, diverse colors/ patterns, and brand name. The last question discovers customers' sources of fashion and shopping inspiration. The questions are found in Appendix 2.

5.2 Data Analysis

Based on the questionnaire results, the authors used Excel and Pivot Table function to conduct data analysis. The authors then created a visual presentation of patterns from the data analysis process through charts.

Figure 9 below demonstrates demographics of survey respondents, based on age/generation. Among 116 participants, there are 63% of them belonging to Gen Z who are aged between 5 and 25 years old. Millennial, including those who were born between 1980 and 1994, accounts for 32% of the survey respondents. Gen X and Baby Boomer are 41 years old and older, taking up only 5%.

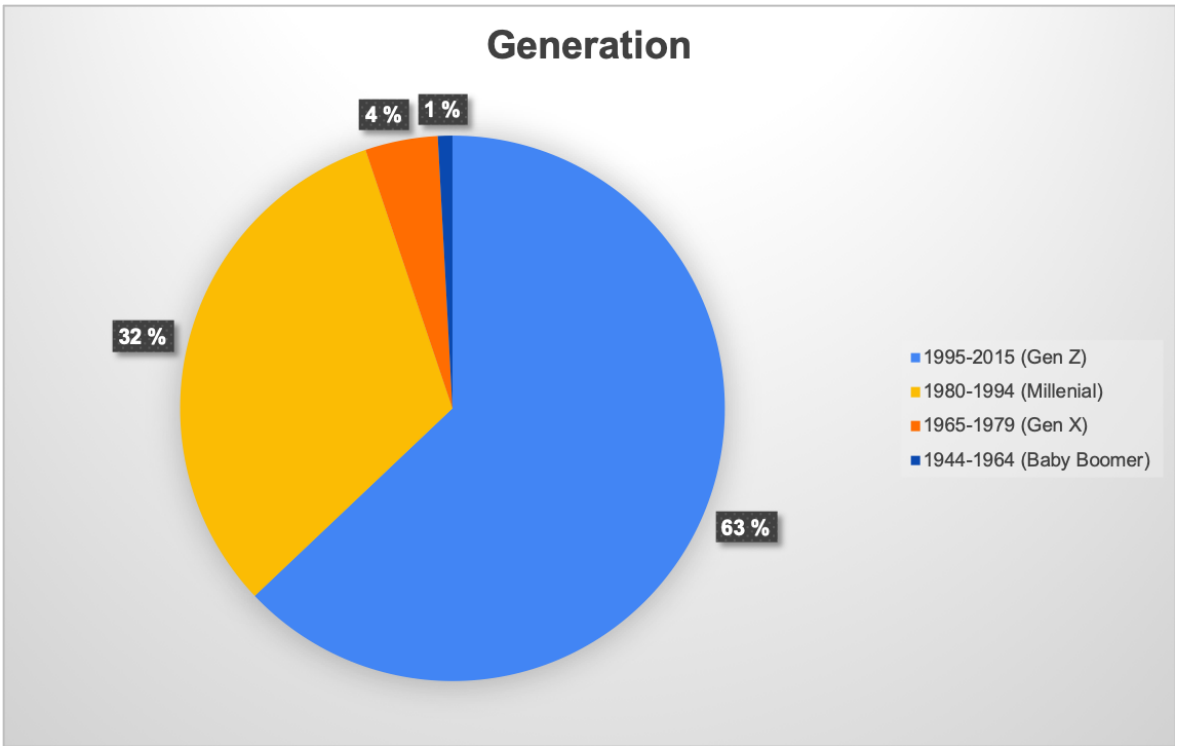

Figure 9 Survey participants by generation

When being asked about gender (Figure 10), 69% of participants are female, while 26% of them are male and only 5% do not want to answer this question

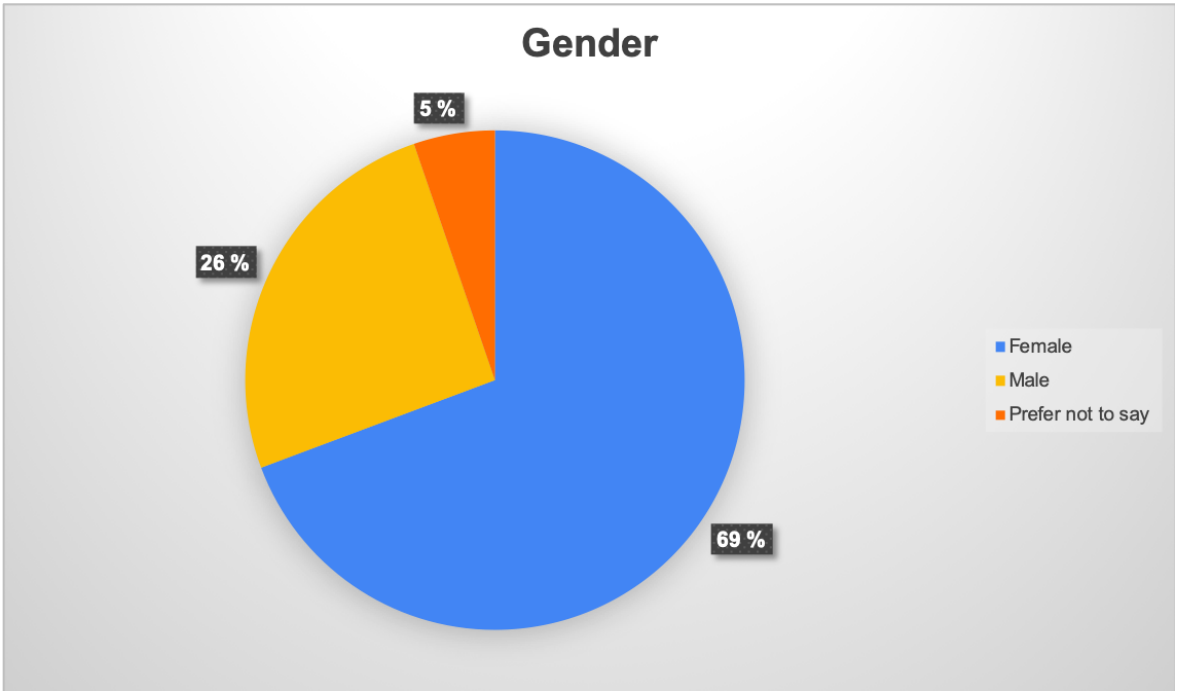

Figure 10 Survey participants by gender

Regarding profession (Figure 11), most of the participants are still students (some of them are working part-time), taking up 64%, whereas 30% are full-time employees. The rest 6% include freelancer, self-employed and unemployed people.

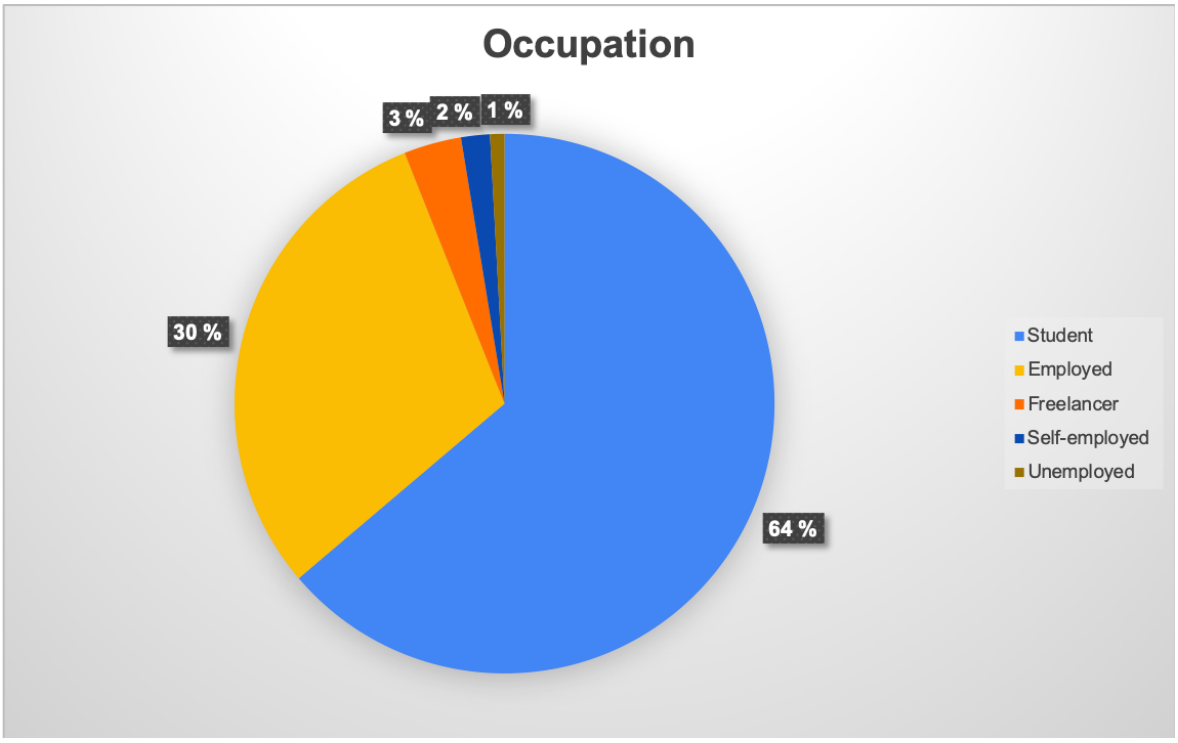

Figure 11 Survey participants by occupation

According to the findings in Figure 12 about monthly income, there are up to 46% of respondents earning less than 1000€, while 14% of them do not have income, which can be understood as students without part-time job and unemployed persons. However, students still get monthly expense sources from parents. The percentage of those with income range between 1000€ and 2000€ is 22%, whereas only 12% of participants earn around 2000€ and 3000€. The rest 6% includes those with income range more than 3000€ and persons who do not want to answer this question.

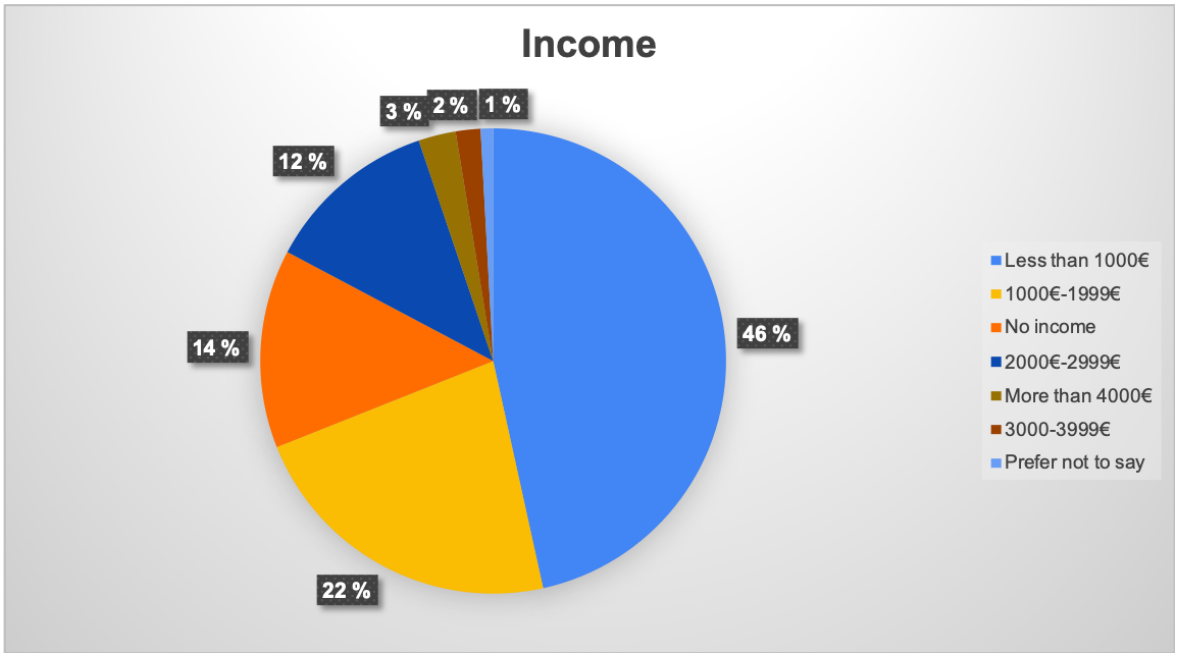

Figure 12 Survey participants by income

The next chart (Figure 13) illustrates shopping frequency of respondents. The majority of them, 47% usually purchase new clothes one to three times each month. 37% of participants choose Other option, which consists of various answers such as once per two months, once to three times per three to six months, and once per season. However, there are also people who choose to pursue minimal lifestyle thus, fashion shopping is not their first priority as they only buy when they actually need. There are also those who purchase new clothes two to three times per year or three to six times per year.

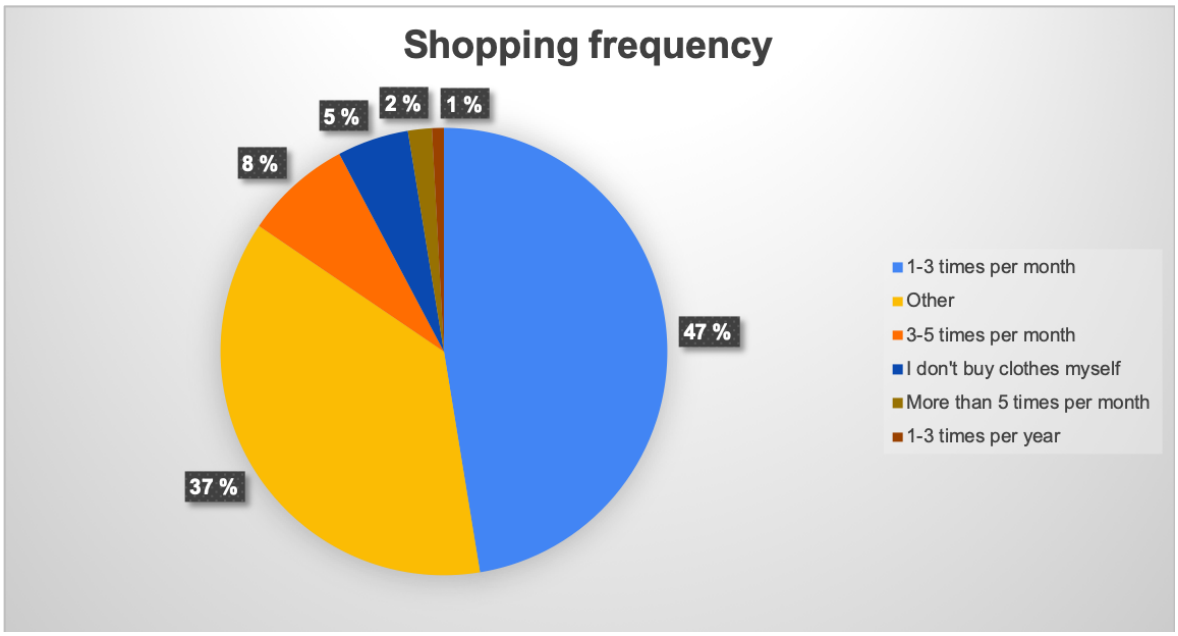

Figure 13 Shopping frequency

Greenwash marketing is among the topics covered in this thesis, hence, the authors decided to study customers' awareness and knowledge about this area. However, it is interesting to know that majority of them, up to 40.5% have never heard about greenwash marketing which they may encounter a lot in their lives with fast fashion brands. 25.9% of participants have certain knowledge and 7.8% clearly understand greenwash marketing. Nevertheless, the authors realize that there should have been a situation question to check if the customers are able to spot greenwashing campaigns or to know how to find reliable information sources online (Figure 14).

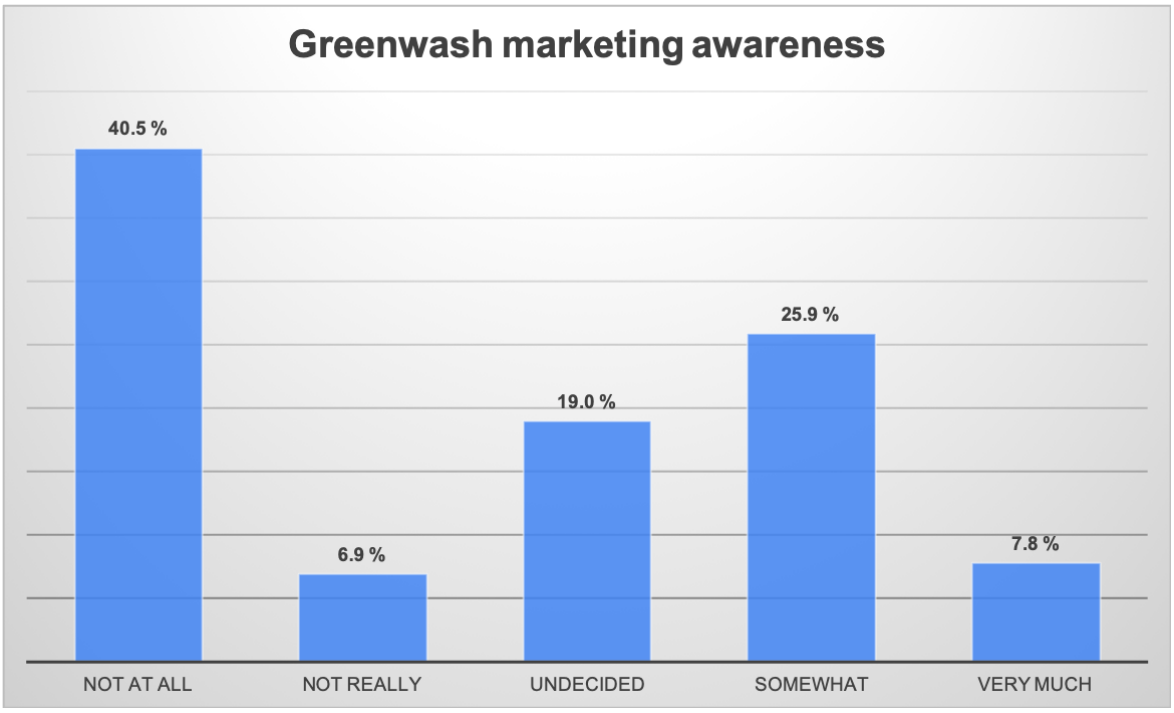

Figure 14 Greenwash marketing awareness of participants

Environmentally conscious lifestyle has become a trend in recent years and ethical shopping is a part of it. When being asked to rate themselves about their ethical purchasing, nearly 41.4% of respondents have neutral choice, which means they are relatively aware of sustainable consumption but at some points their actions are different from what they know and want to pursue. However, averagely a quarter of participants consider themselves as relatively ethical shoppers and 9.5% are highly committed to sustainable shopping (Figure 15).

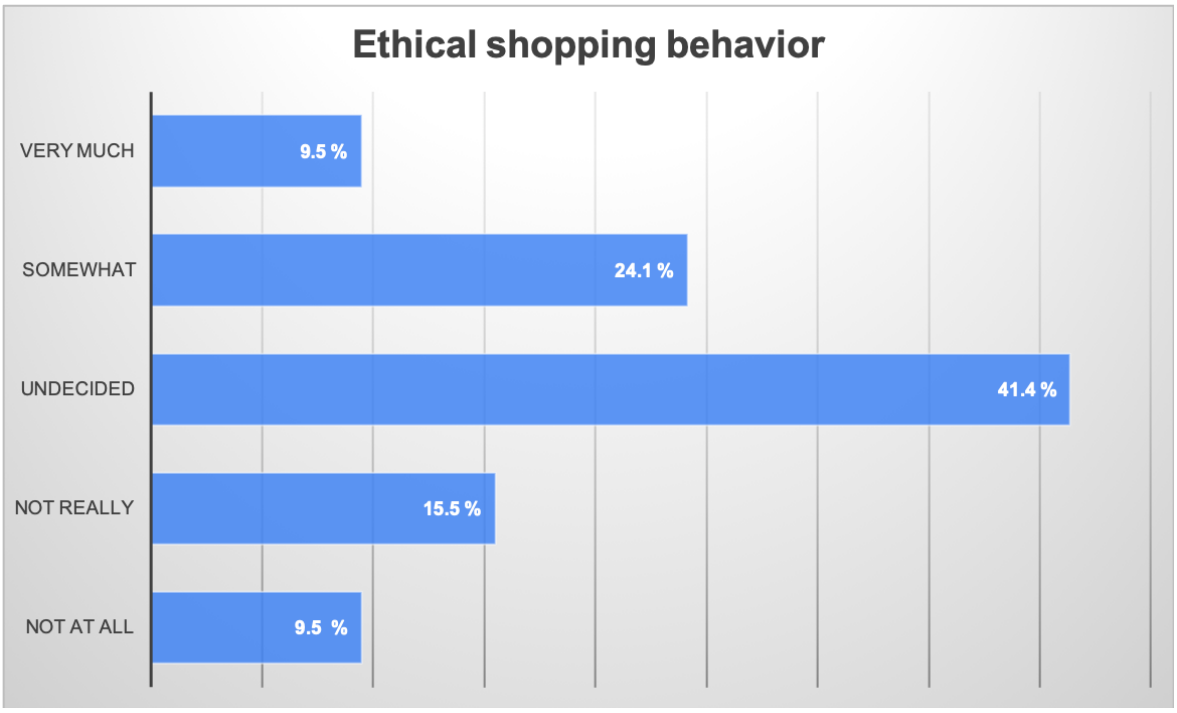

Figure 15 Ethical shopping rating

The bar chart (Figure 16) presents the significance of several factors that influence fashion shopping behavior of customers. The participants were asked to rate those elements on the scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating not at all important and 5 indicating very important. 44% consider price is the most crucial factor when it comes to buying clothes. A large majority 34.5% ranks quality of products as the next most important feature. The percentages of animal welfare and child labor are quite evenly distributed among important, fairly important, and every important. Brand association and environmentally friendly materials are moderately vital with respectively 58.7% and 59.5% of people rating them from fairly to very important. Green image of brand, sustainable information on company's website and certificates from third party are the least crucial elements to customers.

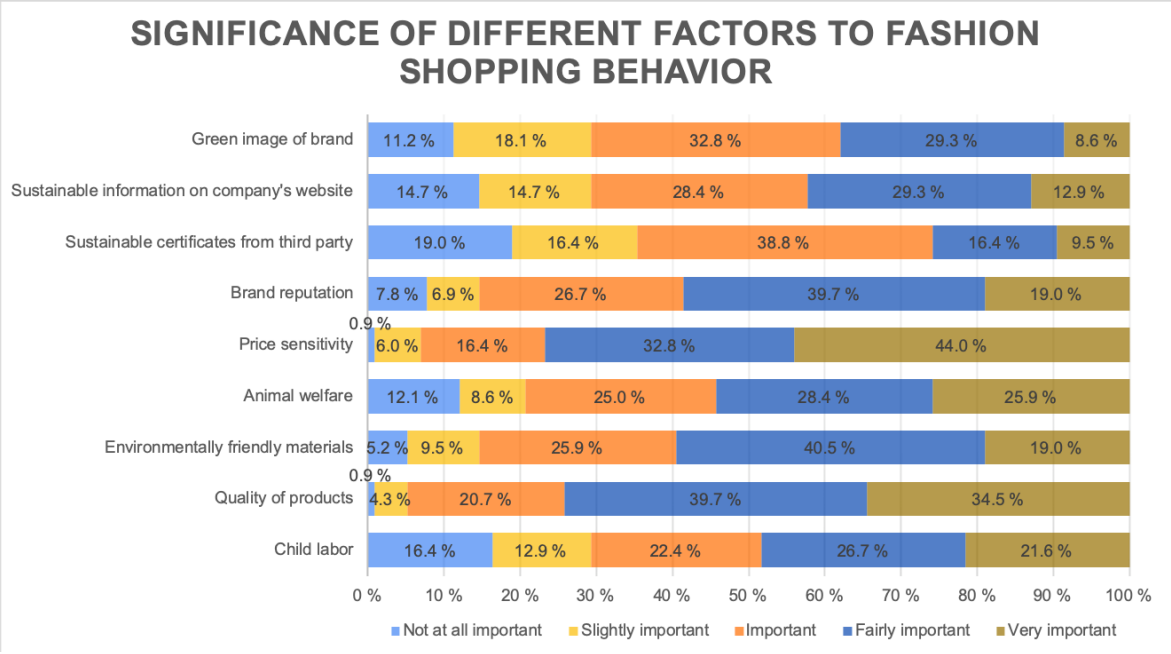

Figure 16 Significance of different factors to fashion shopping behavior

Section three in the survey includes questions regarding the factors that prevent customers from shopping ethically and the results are illustrated in the bar chart below (Figure 17). It is understandable that price is the most vital aspect yet a challenge for both consumers and fashion makers. 43.1% of participants rate price tag as fairly important and 27.6% consider it very important, followed by boring design and lack of trust in sustainable claims of fashion brands with respectively 24.1% and 19 % said they are among the crucial constraints making them less interested in sustainable fashion. Lack of physical stores is also a challenge for most of the sustainable fashion brands as they pursue a direct and online approach to customers. Although e-commerce has dramatically developed in recent years, consumers usually combine different channels to purchase products. They may prefer to check products online and buy at the shop or vice versa, which requires the brands to diversify their distribution and communication platforms. 59.5% of respondents rate its importance from fairly to very level. Finally, lack of knowledge about sustainable fashion is the least influential factor here with only 7.8% thinking of it as very important.

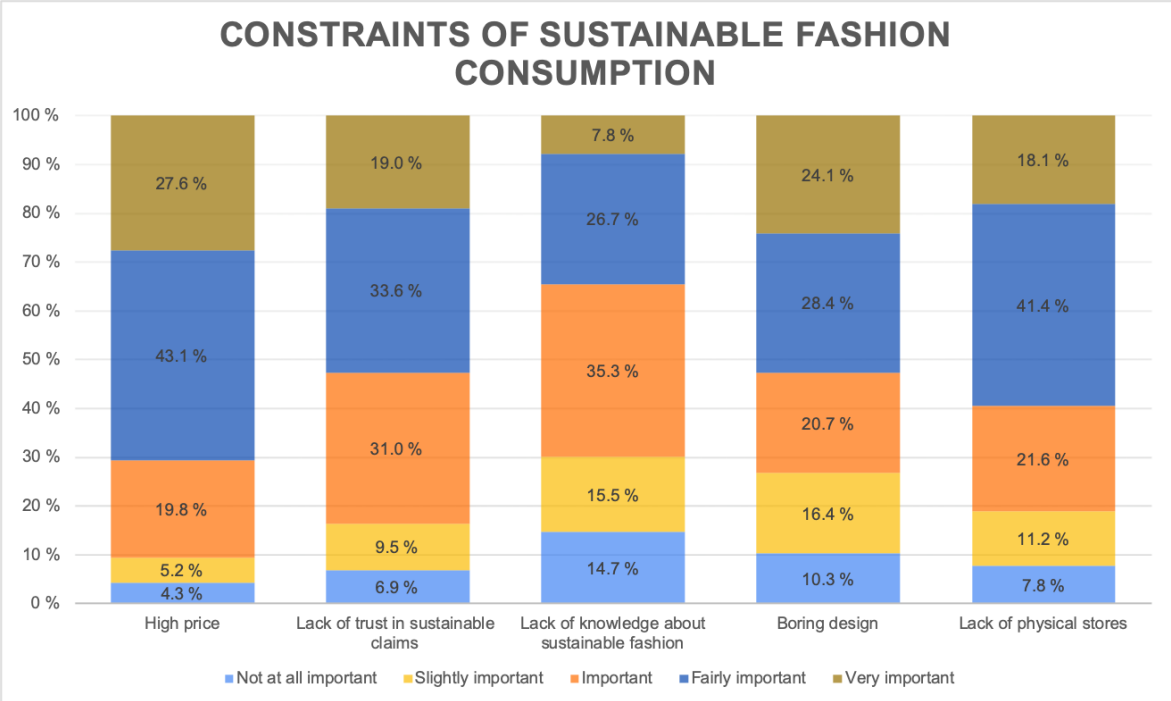

Figure 17 Constraints of sustainable fashion consumption

When asking respondents about their motivation behind shopping behavior, most of them (69%) said that they would love to look good in front of other. The next two options that were voted the most are “I want to live sustainably” and “I am very price conscious”, with the respective percentage of 57.8% and 56.9%. Considering the situation question, asking participants how much they would pay for a yoga pants made by a sustainable fashion brand, 67.2% of them choose 30€-50€ and only 15.5% are willing to pay 50€-70€.

The authors decided to conduct three more in-depth interviews with special concentration on activewear to investigate consumer behavior further. The results from interviews can be seen from Table 3 below.

Table 3 In-depth interviews

	A	B	C
Background	24-year-old Vietnamese girl, 8-hour office worker, currently living in Finland. She works out four to five times a week. She has been training for three years.	26-year-old Finnish girl, student with a job. She works out almost every day, sometimes twice a day. Her exercises include running, gym, CrossFit	Vietnamese girl, currently living in Finland. A personal trainer.

	Her focus now is building and maintaining muscles.	workouts, and walking. Cycling is her new workout.	
Annual spending on activewear	She usually buys gym clothes once or twice a year, depending on available products each season. She spends around 300€ a year for activewear.	She spends around 600€ a year on activewear, including two to three pairs of sneakers, five to ten pairs of leggings, two yoga pants, sport bras and sport gears.	500€ a year
How long an activewear item lasts	She bought her very first gym clothes 3 years ago and keeps it until now because they are still in good condition, although the shape is not perfect anymore.	6 months	2 years
What to do with old gym clothes	She usually brings old clothes to H&M for recycling. H&M has a recycling campaign to get few discounts for the next purchase. However, discount is not her original motivation. She feels better doing it rather than throwing old clothes to trash bins.	If there is only a small hole on a pant/legging, she would sew it first. Otherwise she prefers burning her old clothes at cottage house or throw them into trash bins. When interviewers mentioned H&M recycling campaign, she said she would like to bring old clothes to H&M stores and get 15% discount if she knew.	She would sell it, recycle, otherwise throw it away.

Favorite activewear brands	Gymshark because of its diverse designs, comfy and good texture. However, few of yoga pants from Gymshark are see-through and she does not like it.	Népra because of minimal style. She also likes Nike (items with minimal design and not too big logo) and Under Armour. She prefers dark color yoga pants and ballet-style tops.	Gymshark because of durable quality, fashionable design and great colorway. She also likes Nike for its good materials and design as well as great fit. She feels comfortable wearing Nike's products to work out. She shops from Adidas occasionally because of its design over functionality and fit.
Price (1-5 scale, with 1: not at all important and 5: very important)	5: Very important. She usually shops during sales season like summer or Black Friday.	2: Slightly important. She chooses clothes mainly based on its quality. She rarely waits until sale season to shop since she thinks discounted items are not of the best quality.	3: Important
Texture	5: Very important	5: Very important	5: Very important
Form/ Shape	5: Very important. She feels confident wearing clothes that look good on her body.	5: Very important	5: Very important
Diverse colors/ patterns	4: Fairly important	5: Very important	5: Very important
Brand association	5: Very important	4: Fairly important	2: Slightly important

Sustainable image of brand	3: Important	3-4: Important to fairly important	No information
Inspiration sources	YouTube is the main channel to watch training instruction videos, seek inspiration and reviews of products. She also follows fitness YouTubers and is influenced by them on her activewear shopping.	Instagram is the main channel to check new brands and seek inspiration. She also follows fitness influencers and is influenced by them on her shopping, especially when she sees a perfect girl with perfect body wearing nice clothes. TikTok is a new channel she has started using recently.	Instagram, YouTube, influencers and friends.
Additional information	She checks out retailers such as Intersport, Stadium, and XXL sometimes but has never purchased anything from them. She rates herself 3 as an ethical shopper.	She checks Stadium's own products at stores first before deciding to buy. She rates herself 4 as an ethical shopper. She chooses clothes of good quality that can last longer.	She has a petite body. Hence, she usually has issue with the length and size of clothes. Fit is her first priority and she is willing to buy from a brand if she finds influencers with similar body shape looking good in it. Durability is the second since the clothes lose original shape quite fast.

5.3 Key Findings

The initial research question defined in the beginning of the thesis is: How Népra can take the advantage of their sustainability background and improve their digital marketing strategy in order to win over customers as well as increase their loyalty? To answer this broad question, the authors came up with sub-questions which are also research objectives:

- Customers' perspective, behavior and choice toward sustainable fashion
- Challenges and impact of big corporations versus small and medium sized brands in sustainable fashion
- Practical suggestions written based on the survey conducted from potential consumers of Népra
- Recommendations to improve the efficiency of digital marketing in order to gain more interest from target audiences of Népra

This part focuses on giving thorough answers for these questions.

First of all, regarding consumers' perception and behavior when it comes to sustainable fashion, the results from survey and interviews pointed out that although sustainability has become an emerging megatrend in recent years and users are aware of this issue to some extent, most of them hesitate to pursue ethical shopping practices due to a variety of reasons. Price is the biggest constraint, followed by boring design of sustainable fashion, lack of trust in sustainable claims of brands as well as lack of physical stores to shop. However, quality is the second most crucial factor affecting consumer shopping behavior, after price, which is easily understandable. Shoppers nowadays care more about animal welfare and child labor usage than green image of brand or sustainable certificates and information on company website. Speaking of greenwash marketing, the majority of shoppers stated that they have never heard about this term, in spite of being encountered to it daily.

Secondly, both big companies and small fashion brands are facing certain issues in implementing sustainable operation and production. Giant corporations, with complicated supply chain and reliance on outsourcing production, usually need more time to adjust and upgrade their business model to achieve the similarly sustainable goals, compared to small and medium-sized companies. On the other hand, small brands, in spite of taking more control over its locally and fairly production, often struggle with high manufacturing

costs, thus, their price tag is also higher. While small-sized businesses are willing and actively seeking for eco-friendly materials, big companies consider it as high cost and challenge, possibly leading to raising the final price of products. Additionally, big and small fashion companies hold different opinions in responding to fashion trends. When it comes to impact, large corporations could generate more positive influence on a bigger scale thanks to its capacity, whereas small and medium brands are usually pioneers, without compromising, in constantly cultivating meaningful projects of sustainable design or recycling.

Finally, during thesis research and writing process, the authors realized the suggestions based solely on the empirical part's results and theoretical part are too generic and do not bring much values to the current context of the case company. Hence, the recommendations part below are written based on the authors' observation, experience and knowledge in digital marketing to provide Népra a more comprehensive and appropriate strategy for their business, starting from improving online shopping experience and social media marketing activities.

5.4 Recommendations

In this part, specific recommendations will be given on different practical arrangements regarding digital marketing activities of the case company. There are two priorities that Népra should start to consider. Firstly, re-building brand on all social media channels. Secondly, if possible, take advantage of user-generated content and micro-influencer marketing strategy. This section includes six small parts, namely website experience and SEO, email marketing, content strategy, marketing tactics, influencer marketing, and social media channels.

5.4.1 Shopping Experience and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Website experience

Online shopping traffic has increased over the last few years and there is no doubt that it will take over brick and mortar store visits soon (Enge 2019). Taking the current coronavirus pandemic as an example, several physical stores worldwide have obliged to close, leading to the huge decreases in sales. In spite of receiving financial support from the government, some retailers have filed for bankruptcy. (Hirsch 2020.). Also because of the lockdown policy, consumers are buying online more than before. Although e-commerce is still a mall piece of the pie in the fashion and textile industry, it is expected to grow and will become the future of shopping (Adrian 2020).

Népra does not have any physical store, therefore, paying more attention and resources to improve its website is a must in search for gaining more customers. For this reason, the authors suggest Népra's website needs evaluating. In other words, a successful online brand ought not to ignore its online shopping experience.

Company's website acts as an entrance, a road into a world of shopping. The website should be clear, attractive and different form its competitors to make customers stay longer. A poor-designed website can be a knife to kill any business instead of bringing revenues or boost sales (Harrison 2018).

Népra has primarily developed its website with minimalistic and elegant style. Let's break it down to understand what the company has done right and what Népra could have done better. Népra's website has to perfectly perform two tasks:

- Make consumers to enter the website and convert into sales
- Give consumers a clear image of what they are going to buy

The authors attempted to use heatmaps analysis in this section. Unfortunately, both authors could not access to the back end of Népra's web store to find out whether the company's site is optimized, to see where people spend time the most as well as what they are doing when they enter the website. Heatmaps were created to record users' behavior on a website, such as clicks, scroll length, or mouse hovering, analyze call-to-action (CTA) button and furthermore (Hall 2020). The company is suggested to use heatmaps tool such as Hotjar, Crazzyegg or Mouseflow and the basic one, Google Analytics. Pictures below are examples of how heatmaps look like.

In the first image (Image 3), for the first few seconds after entering the website, users' attention will be focused on the area of the title where the female model and her left hand with a watch on it are placed. The heat map indicates that the majority of our attention will be assigned around the colored area as we spend time looking at this homepage (Image 4). This is an excellent illustration of what a home page should do. (Suby 2017.)

Image 3 Daniel Wellington heatmaps (Suby 2017)

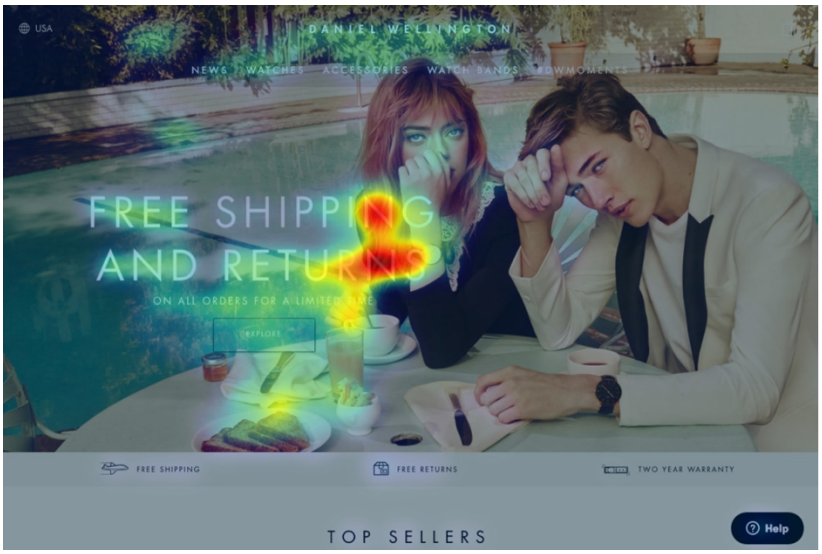

Image 4 Daniel Wellington heatmaps (Suby 2017)

How does it look like in Népra’s home page?

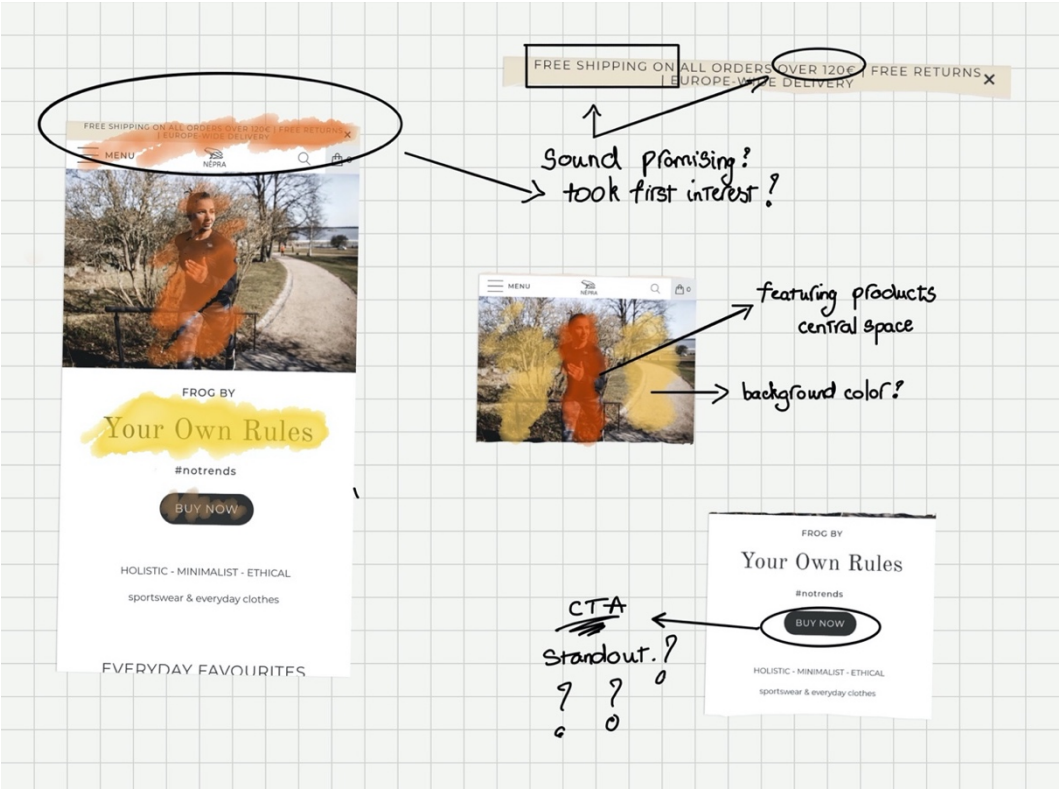

Figure 18 Népra's home page breakdown (images collected from Népra's website)

The authors agreed the homepage of Népra does not capture strong attention towards the call to action button "BUY NOW" due to various reasons (Figure 18).

Firstly, the free shipping bar placed on top of the website with highlighted background takes huge attention from the users after they enter the site. Although free shipping motivates consumers to purchase, it does not always match and apply for all customers who visit your website (Smith 2017). Especially, when the qualification for free shipping is too high that might do the opposite effect and prevent the buyers from buying anything. Free shipping is everywhere on the internet, and it seems like everyone has free shipping no matter big or small brands. Regarding psychology, free shipping for orders over 120€ is not a promising deal from consumer's perspective, while many other websites offer free shipping for all orders regardless of the amount of purchase. Therefore, it is not worth sacrificing the first impression of visitors for an offer that does seem to convert many sales.

Second, Népra's home page is designed with poor color contrasts on the header image. The product itself does not stand out from the background, visitors would probably look at the trees and road instead of the model and her sportswear.

Last but not least, first-time visitors or someone who has never heard of the company's story will be confused and will not understand the meaning of the slogan "Frog By Your

Own Rules" and the hashtag "#notrends", which are placed on top of the CTA button. Instead, a promotional text or "free shipping and free return" text here with a small print "for orders over 120€" would be a more decent strategy to deliver a valuable message to Népra's customers. The CTA button should be bigger and clearer. Népra can consider using hover effect or animation/ stop motion videos for header image. The free shipping bar on top of the home page should be added a hyperlink connecting to the shopping page of the website. Additionally, Népra should add Facebook, Twitter, Instagram icon with hyperlink to the brand's social media channels on top or at the end of the homepage. Cross-marketing is really useful in generating traffic to social media accounts and vice versa.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of optimizing the website in order to rank higher and get more organic traffic to the site from search engines such as Google or Bing (Moz 2020).

The online web shop is a main touchpoint between the brand and consumers where sales and orders primarily happen, especially for an online direct-to-consumer brand like Népra. Therefore, investment of time and effort in SEO is essential in order to help the site rank higher for certain keywords which match both consumer's demand and what the brand is able to provide.

Figure 19 below shows the overview of Népra's domain website. There are 396 organic keywords that the brand is trying to rank for in Google search engine. However, the domain score is 35/100, which is a relatively low score. The organic monthly traffic has increased in recent months. The authors noticed the brand has been more active on social media with several campaigns like giveaway and challenge as well as paid advertising. This probably helped driving more traffic to website.

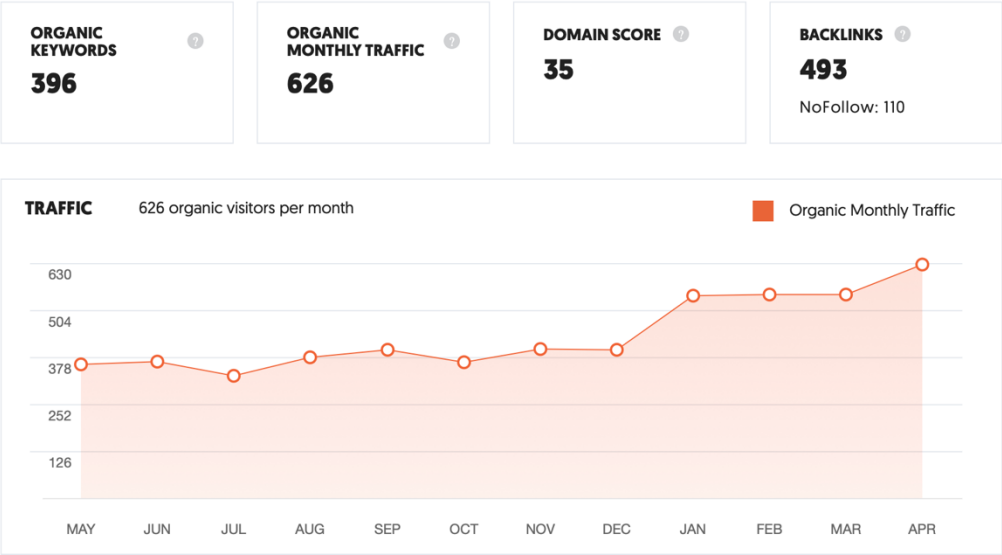

Figure 19 Domain overview (Ubersuggest 2020)

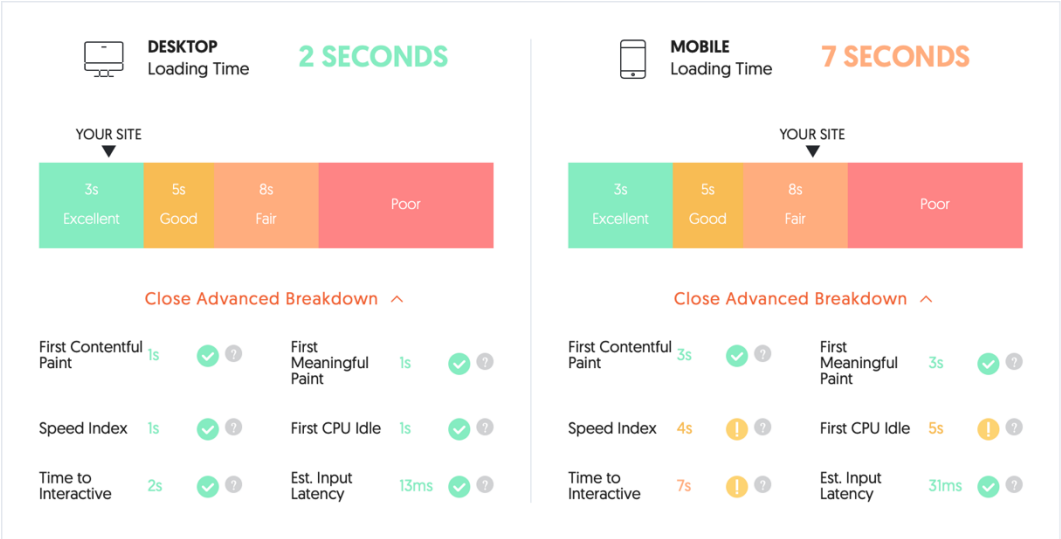

Figure 20 Népra's website page speed (Ubersuggest 2020)

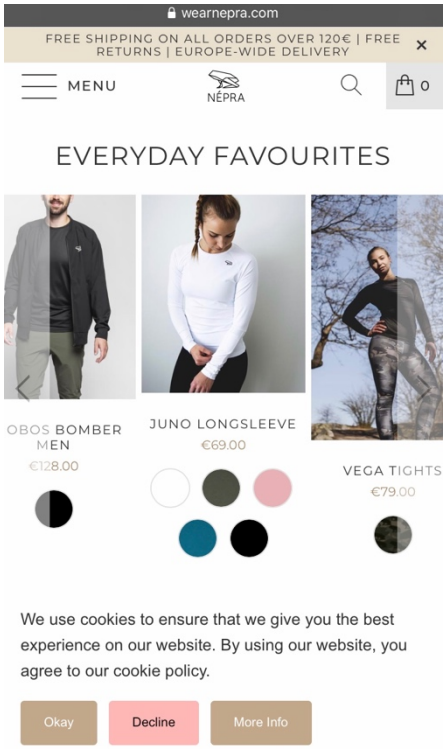

Image 5 Népra's mobile version website (Népra 2020 a)

Regarding page speed, it can be seen from Figure 20 that the brand's website is having problem with mobile version. It takes up to 7 seconds for the page to be fully interactive. Since 2015, website's mobile optimization has become a factor of Google search ranking (Cockburn 2015). Therefore, having mobile version of website is a must for any companies. Népra's website is designed and optimized by Shopify for the smaller screens like mobile and tablet to accommodate user experience via mobile. Their website works and looks good when viewed on desktop, nevertheless, the design of the mobile version needs some adjustments in the products display section (Image 5).

SEO ISSUES ANALYZED	DIFFICULTY	SEO IMPACT
3 pages have a low word count What is this and how do I fix it?	MODERATE	HIGH
2 pages with duplicate <title> tags What is this and how do I fix it?	MODERATE	HIGH
3 pages with no meta description What is this and how do I fix it?	MODERATE	MEDIUM
54 pages with URLs that are too long What is this and how do I fix it?	EASY	MEDIUM
55 pages with a poorly formatted URL for SEO What is this and how do I fix it?	EASY	MEDIUM
11 pages with a <title> tag that is too long What is this and how do I fix it?	EASY	MEDIUM
22 pages with a <title> tag that is too short What is this and how do I fix it?	EASY	MEDIUM
1 issues with a SSL certificate that is about to expire What is this and how do I fix it?	EASY	LOW

Figure 21 Népra's website SEO issues (Ubersuggest 2020)

The critical SEO problems include low word count, issues with <title> tags, meta description and URLs. These problems are relatively easy to solve and could bring big impact to the ranking of the site once they get fixed (Figure 21).

Pop-up store

Results from the survey show that lack of physical store is among the big challenges for brand to reach more customers and gain trust as well as build genuine relationship with them faster. Many consumers are still confused with the concept of sustainable fashion and greenwash marketing. They may not understand why they have to pay higher price for the same kind of products. They want to touch and feel the difference of the products, compared to other brands before making purchase. Therefore, the authors recommend opening pop-up store in the city center area for few days, for instance. This strategy could be really helpful when Népra wants to approach a new market such as Germany or UK, which are two potential markets for expansion of the brand. Before putting more marketing efforts into new markets, the company can go there, interact with consumers, listen to their feedback and thoughts about the products, brand or even marketing message. By doing this, Népra can mitigate risks and prepare better for the official launch.

5.4.2 Email Marketing

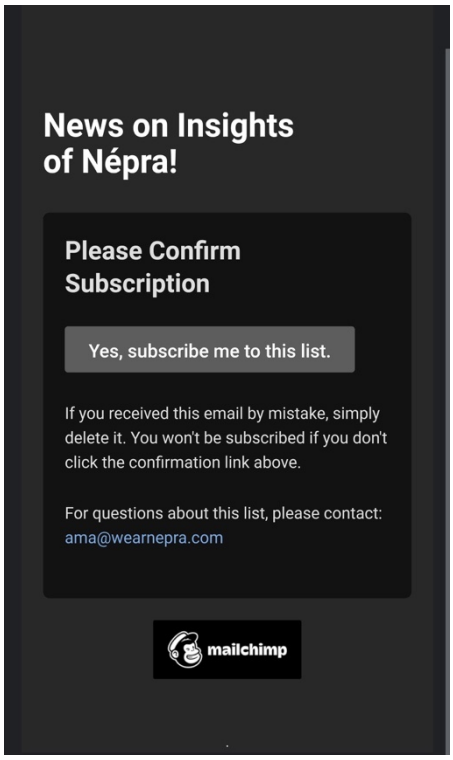

Image 6 Mailchimp confirmation email

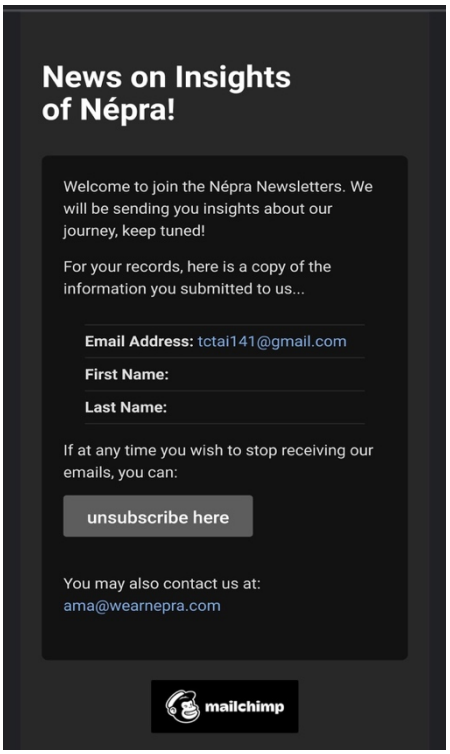

Image 7 Népra subscription confirmation email

Email marketing is an important channel in the inbound marketing strategy of a company. Email marketing is all about being human and helpful. The subscription process of Népra goes smoothly, nevertheless, the content of the email should be revised. The authors suggest modifying the subject line, design and content of the email in order to create a high-performing email, which encourages receivers to open the email and click to CTA button in the email (Image 6). The subject line should be short, sweet and personalized, include around 45-51 characters. One good point of Népra is that they use a personal email address ama@wearnepra.com to send email, which brings a human feeling, compared to generic email, for example info@wearnepra.com. Népra can add preview text to each email to increase the opening rate. However, the content of the email should be adjusted. Each email sent should be treated as a real conversation between brand and customers. They should know what they can expect from the next emails of brand or how often they can receive email from Népra. Finally, the content of the email should guide receivers to take a desired action. In this case, it could be “visit our store”, “shop now”, “follow us on social media”, along with that, Népra should add hyperlink of their social media accounts to the email. Image 7, which is the confirmation email sent by Népra, the “unsubscribe

here" button is remarkably visible and in bold that could eventually put an end to the entire subscription just after few seconds. Email marketing is about bringing conversions to the brand, not reminding users to unsubscribe from the company email list (Shetron 2016). Therefore, it should be added at the bottom line of the email with smaller size and insignificant color. In general, the company should clearly define goals of its email marketing, revise the buyer journey and buyer persona to understand how it contributes to the brand's ultimate marketing strategy.

5.4.3 Content Strategy

Content strategy refers to the planning, management, creation and delivery of content which contributes to conveying brand message to consumers, bringing them values as well as building a strong relationship with them (McGill 2020). Népra's current content strategy mainly focuses on sustainable practices and product's features of the brand. However, the authors recognize that community building and customer engagement are of the core elements which would help increase customer loyalty to the brand. Since Népra's main values are #slowliving #sustainability #minimalism, the authors suggest building a community of consumers who are following and pursuing an environmentally conscious lifestyle. The brand can create and feature more content around the topics like mediation, fitness and wellbeing (including yoga or workout at home/gym), fitness gears, healthy diet meals plan/recipes, growing in-house plants, takeovers by influencers and even skincare routine by collaborating with eco-friendly skincare brands (Image 8).

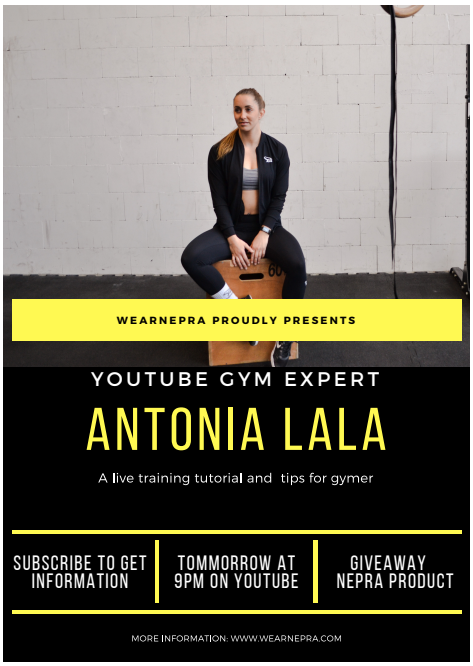

Image 8 Making tailored content to attract customers

User-generated content (UGC) is one of the potential tactics that Népra should be using. Simply put, UGC is unpaid posts and topics that are published by contributors (Galleros 2020). In other words, unpaid contributors are fans who promote brand without being asked or paid to do so. Although Népra has the capacity to utilize UGC but it seems like the brand have not utilized it to the fullest yet. To understand why UGC content is important, let's have a look at Daniel Wellington and the hashtag #DWMoments.

Let's have a look at Daniel Wellington and the hashtag #DWMoments (Image 9).

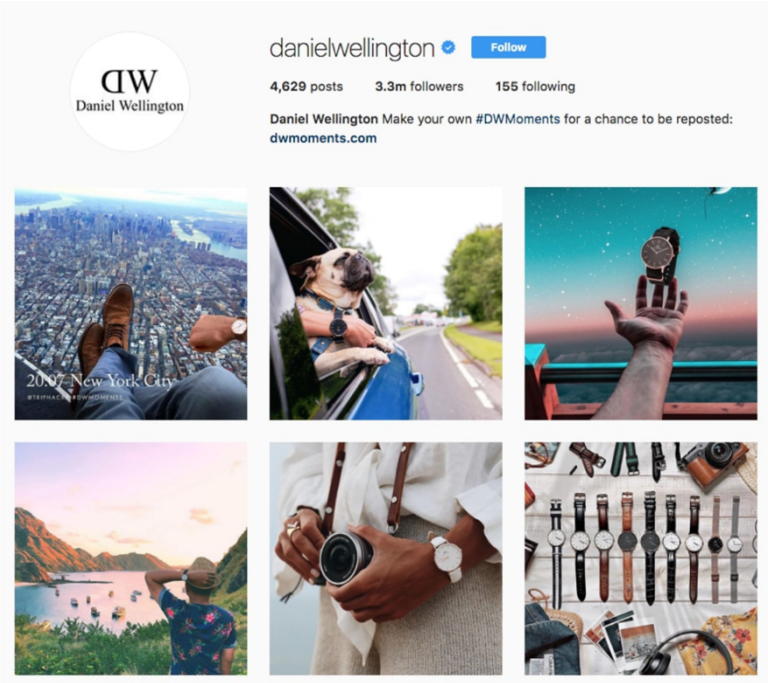

Image 9 Daniel Welling Instagram (Wellington 2020)

Daniel Welling has utilized the benefits of UGC and successfully boosted interaction with its fans world-wide. The brand understood most of its social media fans are good at photography and editing picture. Therefore, the brand has built the hashtag #DWMoments and #DWPickoftheDay. One best picture from fans who used mentioned hashtags will be chosen every day and repost on the main page. This is called "win-win" marketing situation when a picture from fans is reposted because it provides free publicity for DW on influencers' platform as well as free publicity for fans of DW's platform. At the end of the day, who does not like free promotion?

5.4.4 Social Media Marketing

There are many types of content marketing in today's digital landscape, including blog posts, podcasts, eBooks, infographics, stop motion videos, long videos, short videos, social media posts etc., depending on specific platform. After the in-depth interviews with

potential target customers of the commissioner, the authors agree that website, Instagram and YouTube are the key channels Népra should pay more attention to. Besides, TikTok is a new and potential channel that Népra can consider adding to its social media marketing strategy.

Instagram

Instagram should act as a gateway to increase brand awareness, drive traffic to website, generate new leads, increase brand engagement, build community around the brand by interacting with consumers, and listen to conversations about the brand. In fact, Instagram has a variety of features the brand can utilize to tell stories in a visual and creative way. Those features include Instagram post, stories, IGTV, live, shoppable tags, etc. Currently, Népra is focusing only on Instagram posts featuring images of models wearing products and Instagram stories resharing customers' content tagging the brand on Instagram. The authors suggest Népra to diversify their content on Instagram, blend in between posts about products and company with lifestyle and sometimes funny posts, utilize IGTV, stickers, challenge, countdown, poll, quiz and question features of Instagram stories. Also, the brand can use other ways to deliver their content, such as stop motion videos, infographics, and short videos as mentioned above. Experiment with several kinds of content is a great way to see how consumers react and how the engagement level changes so that Népra can adjust social media marketing strategy accordingly.

Following the UGC tactic as mentioned above, Népra's Instagram channel also has a tremendous number of fans and more 1000 posts generated by the hashtag #wearnepra (Image 10). How could Népra have not started to collaborate with its fans to build a collaborative and stunning platform? The step-by-step process of setting up a UGC strategy will be explained in more detail below.

- Step 1: Identify the chosen hashtag

  Stick to those hashtags help both Népra and its fans gather all contents in one place, therefore, easier to find when needed.

- Step 2: Set the prize

  For example, chosen picture will be posted and the owner will be featured on Népra's main account. In addition, 10% discount for next purchase at wearnepra.com.

- Step 3: Set duration

Népra will pick the best picture on daily/weekly basis from the posts with two hashtags #wearnepra and #neprainfluencers

- Step 4: Set up the agreement

  Informing the picture owner about all copyright and legal matters if needed.

- Step 5: Finalization

At this stage, the chosen content can be uploaded to Népra's account. Furthermore, a link to the products sale page and the call-to-action button (learn more, shop now, contact us, etc.) can be added to the posts. Also, the photographer must is tagged under the post.

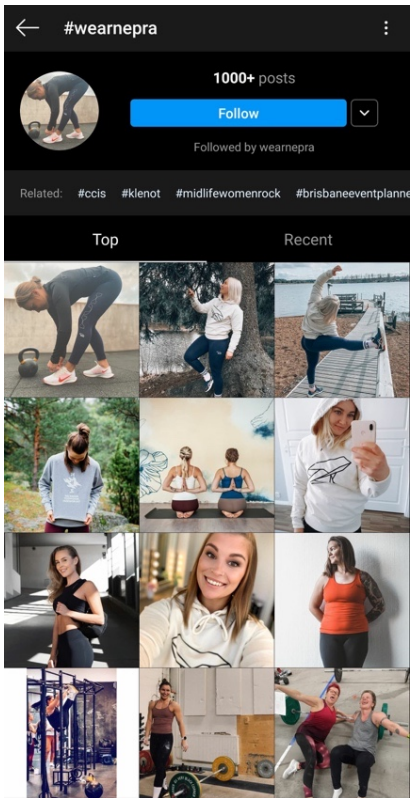

Image 10 #wearnepra Instagram posts (Népra 2020 d)

YouTube

When it comes to digital marketing and ecommerce, video is a rising star, which is easy to share across different platforms and also an easy-to-digest content that customers are really interested in. For that reason, brands should incorporate video into their content strategy in order to stay relevant and competitive. Taking Népra situation into consideration, the authors agree that the brand does not have to invest all of their time and effort into creating new videos every week like a professional influencer. Instead, the frequency could be one video a month or every two months. Népra can make products launching

videos, a series about fitness, sustainable living or healthy diet, collaborating with influencers, experts in the fields or even featuring their customers who are into those areas. The videos' length can be two to three minutes. Later on, the videos can be slightly modified to suit other platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and website. By diversifying content types and distributing them over various channels, not only does customer engagement increase, but the brand can also create a consistent experience throughout all the touchpoints with consumers.

The UGC strategy mentioned in Instagram strategy can also be applied for YouTube platform. Simply running campaigns aimed at getting followers to share their videos, pictures, or content, for instance, "Workout with the Frog" or "Frog Your Own Style" campaign encourages fans to record a workout video using Népra products and post with hashtag #wearnepra, #neprainfluencers for a chance to be featured (Image 11 and Image 12).

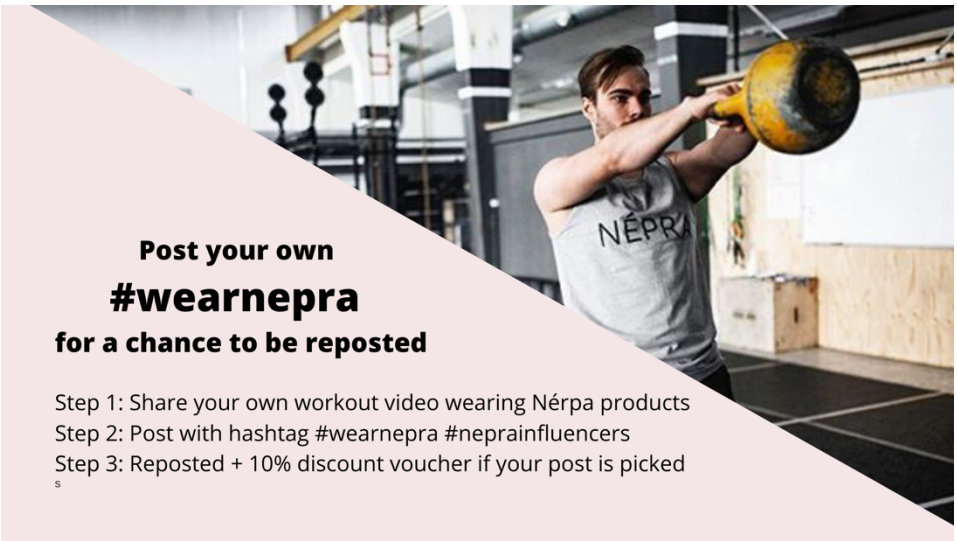

Image 11 UGC strategy for YouTube

Image 12 Influencer marketing for YouTube

TikTok

Given the current Instagram algorithm, it is increasingly harder to compete with other profiles and show up on followers' newsfeed as well as gaining new followers. TikTok, one of the world's fastest growing social media platforms, has hit 800 million monthly active users since Octorber 2019 and become the third-most downloaded app worldwide. TikTok allows users to create maximum one-minute-length videos, however short videos around 8 to 15 seconds work best on this platform. Even though Gen Z is currently dominating the platform, Millennials has started to jump onto this app to entertain, especially during the pandemic period. TikTok is available in 155 countries, with 56% of users are male and 50% of audiences under 34 years old. TikTok's algorithm is not like any other social media platforms, which the profile should have a certain number of followers to hit few thousands or millions of views. On TikTok, the numbers of views, likes and comments depend on the quality of video itself and one viral video can help boost the followers and authority of the account quickly. (Bump 2020.)

There are many rooms for business to grow on this channel at the moment as TikTok is still growing and not many brands are here yet. Although the buying consumers of Népra are millennials, the authors believe that the brand should also spend time in increasing awareness and building relationship with Gen Z who will soon become prospects and customers of Népra in the future. One of the interesting facts about this generation is that they significantly care and demand sustainability from the brands, which makes them great targets for Népra (Petro 2020). However, TikTok is a place for entertainment, thus, the content approach should be different from Instagram or YouTube contents. The videos on TikTok should be funny, on trend but still professional in a way that does not make brand look cheap.

Regarding strategies for Népra to build brand and engage with customers on TikTok, the authors suggest few ideas below.

- Incorporating brand and products in the existing trending hashtag challenges, trending songs
- Working with influencers to create videos
- Focusing on the niches that suit the brand. Népra's niches include sustainable fashion, activewear, fitness, slow living, etc.
- In-feed advertising
- Featuring user-generated videos on TikTok brand account

- Cross-promoting TikTok on other social media channels and vice versa
- Tutorial videos about fashion, fitness tips or healthy diet recipes, which deliver value to consumers, also work well on TikTok

5.4.5 Influencer Marketing

Even though influencer marketing strategy is not a new approach in fashion industry, it has become increasingly popular in recent years. The world is more and more technologically advanced, influencer marketing has found its way to become the main-stream tactic for many businesses regardless of scale. Népra is a sustainable sportwear brand that is constantly searching for ways to reach more potential buyers and increase market shares. Influencer marketing should be implemented as part of a cohesive digital marketing plan to increase brand reputation and sales of Népra. Furthermore, the power of influencer marketing ought not to be ignored since the majority of opinions from the survey indicated that influencers are main source where audiences get inspired with the new clothes.

What is influencer marketing?

Influencer marketing is any activities related to building relationship between a business and customers through an influencer(s). A business collaborates with an influential person to advertise a product, service or anything as agreed. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020.) The products or services can be promoted through many social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Not like celebrity endorsement, influencers must be trusted persons in niche communities and retain loyal following. Moreover, influencers usually express their own knowledge about the products or services they are promoting.

There are many kinds and sizes of influencers. Therefore, this had been discussed and agreed by the authors that micro-influencer is a perfect match for Népra. Building a micro-influencer team will be an X factor for Népra's online presence in order to build authenticity and a community around its brand.

What is micro-influencer?

People who has more than 10,000+ followers and less than 100,000+ followers are named micro-influencer. They have built engaged and passionate communities around niche topics. (Söber 2019.)

It would be amazing to have Taylor Swift or Justin Bieber or any mega-influencers (1M+ followers) to promote Népra products. But there is one matter to take into account that a mega-influencer can command $100,000 for a post on Instagram or YouTube (Lieber

2018). Therefore, the most suitable and obvious choice for Népra would be micro-influencers. With a proper strategy, a team of micro-influencers can bring even the highest benefits than any other types of influencers.

Benefits of micro-influencers

1. Higher engagement rates

The bigger the numbers of follower, the smaller the rate of likes and comments on a post. It has been proven in a recent report by Markerly (Figure 22).

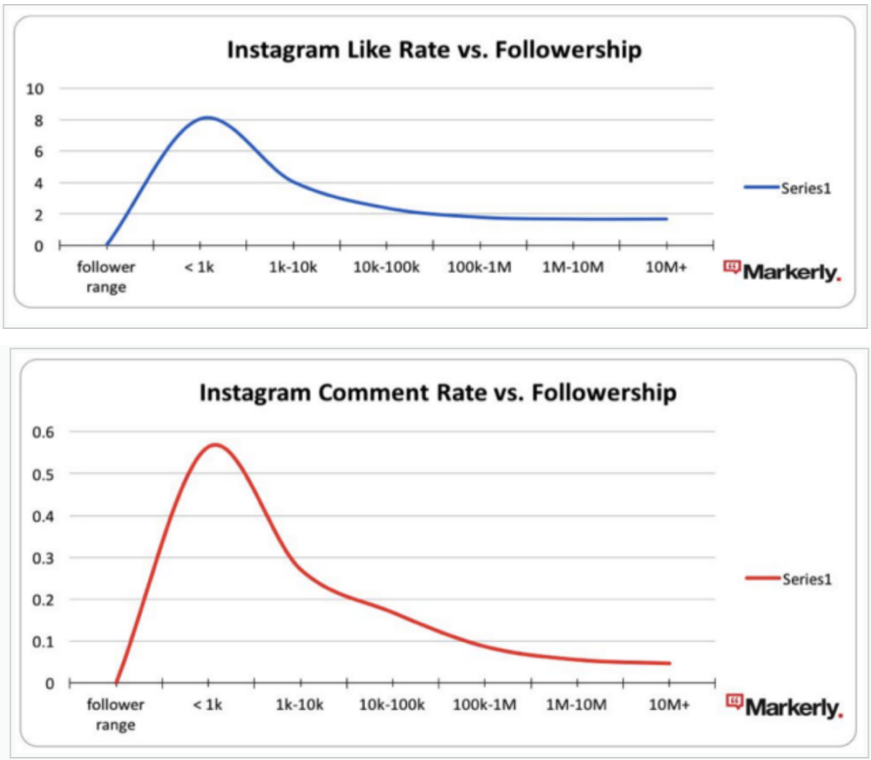

Figure 22 Like and comment rate versus followership (Markerly 2020)

Markerly believed influencers in the 10k-100k follower range has the best blend of engagement and broad reach (Markerly 2020).

2. Affordable

Micro-influencer is more affordable for small businesses. In 2020, a micro-influencer can be compensated with a complimentary product or cost averagely 10$ per 1000 followers to make a sponsored post (Webfx 2020).

The affordable price of micro-influencers means that Népra is able to build a team and utilize this team to reach more potential customers world-wide.

3. Authenticity

Micro-influencers' followers are recognized as relatable and seen as regular people, as "one of us" (Söber 2019). Micro-influencers have higher engagement rate because they have built a strong relationship with their audiences by interacting more often with their communities and investing time, ideas to keep their viewers satisfied. Accordingly, trust between a micro-influencer and his/her fans is much tier. This level of trust is the most important factor for Népra to consider while choosing and building a micro-influencers army.

How to build a micro-influencer team effectively?

Brands like Daniel Wellington and MVMT have become the global brands and built a strong level of trust with their consumers by leveraging micro-influencer marketing strategy. Many small and medium sized companies have successfully put their images in front of millions of eyeballs without spending a fortune on big celebrities. While reading case studies and recommendations, both authors have come up with the step-to-step process of setting up a campaign for Népra and will explain in more detail below.

- Step 1: Identify objective and goals

  Different objectives require different marketing plans and different types of influencers. Nevertheless, as for the purpose of growing brand and driving more sales, the most appropriate objective is conversion.

- Step 2: Decide the core hashtags to use

  Using consistently the same group of core hashtags is crucial in delivering a consistent presence of brand to audiences.

- Step 3: Choose the appropriate micro-influencer profiles

  There are many criteria for choosing suitable influencers for the campaign. Below are the suggestions:

  - Location: Finland, European-based
  - Age: can be flexible but recommending millennials
  - Gender: all
  - Influencer interests background: sustainable clothes, sportswear, gym experts, travel bloggers, fashion bloggers, sport instructors, etc.
  - Price: product as compensation or 10$/1000 followers/post

Alternatively, buying service from influencer marketing agency could be an option for Népra in terms of saving time and effort. Some agencies to consider such as monochrome.fi, influencermarketinghub.com, brandbassador.com.

- Step 4: Decide the budget

  The company should carefully consider and measuring the budget to maximize the effectiveness of the campaign.

- Step 5: Discussing and planning with the influencers

  Choosing which contents and messages will be delivered to the audiences, needs to be carefully considered. Deciding which hashtags to use must be included in the post and how the company will be mentioned.

- Step 6: Finalization and measurement of KPIs

  Setting up metrics and key performance indicators to measure the success of the campaign will give the company the flexibility to adjust anything if needed.

Overall, an effective digital marketing strategy is vital for an online and direct-to-consumer brand like Népra. There are various digital marketing channels and tactics that can be applied to increase brand presence, sales, and profitability. Nevertheless, given the context of Népra, the authors suggest the brand should focus resources on growing the above-mentioned channels and practices to generate better conversion and improve brand awareness as well as customer loyalty.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The idea of the thesis is to propose the digital marketing strategy for the case company, whose target markets include Finland and other European countries by concentrating on developing social media presence to match the potential buyers' profile. Due to the corona virus situation and social distance rule enforced by the government, street interviews and face-to-face meetings with potential customers of the case company was not conducted.

This research was based on qualitative and quantitative research methods, survey and interview. The three call interviews were held later after survey part to obtain more insights and statistics from the case company's potential shoppers. The surveys and interviews were evaluated mainly on buyers and interviewees who live in Finland as the current market of the case company is Finnish. However, the authors realized the connection between income of survey participants and their shopping behavior toward sustainable fashion. Most of the survey respondents were students with low income, thus, could not afford high price of sustainable fashion. Eventually, it affected the final results of the survey.

The literature review and collected data from survey have looked into the dissimilar sides of the questions in depth, categorically Generation Z and Millennial, sportswear purchase behaviors, and its relationship to sustainability, reasons that motivate Generation Z and Millennial to shop sustainable sportswear as well as potential shoppers' preferences in social media and digital marketing.

The limitations of this thesis point towards new areas to be covered in the future. Online shopping and sustainable fashion worldwide will continue to evolve. Online shopping behaviors and the sustainability of fashion industry research should strive to lead this change. The following are some scopes for future explore:

- Pop-up store: what are they and why they work for online boutique
- Consumer behavior in the European Union (EU)
- How can sustainability be used as a marketing tool

In closing, all research questions were covered and answered in this report. This study achieved its goal mentioned in the introduction. The given findings are examined with truthful participants' responses to the interview questions, as great potential consumers for the case company.

6.2 Reliability and Validity of Study

It is the utmost importance to evaluate the level of reliability and validity of this thesis since the underlying premise that the report would certainly accomplish the same out-comes providing that it is supervised a second time with the same sample. Reliability was explained by Burns, Bush &. Veeck (2016, 215) as the level in which under the identical circumstances, an interviewee is almost certain to provide the same or particularly similar responses to an identical question. As mentioned before, due to the limitation of this report regarding the time frame and resources, it is not feasible to conduct the research for a second time. For that reason, the reliability of this thesis is not considered high.

The validity on the other hand is defined as the accuracy of measurements and to extent the outcomes answer the research question (Burns et al. 2016, 215). The below questions are used to test the validity of a study (Saunders, Lewis &. Thornhill 2016, 202):

- Do the measures being used in the research to assess the phenomenon actually measure what are intended to – are they appropriate for their intended purpose?
- Are the interpretation of the findings and the partnership being progressed accurately?
- What do the research results indicate: does the claim about how generalizable they are stand up?

To keep the validity of the research outcomes, the online method was used for the survey where participants were free to choose when, where, and how to take part in the survey. This also banish risks of participant error and bias. As an example, the level of honesty of interviewees is considered high when they could participate in a survey on their own device in their free time compared to public evaluation. Regarding the survey questions, leading or biased question was avoided at all cost by the researchers. The accuracy of the results was kept as high as possible while the researchers were analyzing the results of the study. The results were carried out as most accurately as possible in hope that they could lead to valuable results for the future strategies of the case company. The authors believe the study generates valuable meanings and findings.

7 SUMMARY

The research purpose is to propose digital marketing strategies for Népra Oy – a sustainable sportwear Finnish brand based in Lahti, Finland by utilizing its sustainable background to win over customers and increase their loyalty. The research aimed to figure out the perspective, behavior and choice of target customers toward sustainable fashion. Then combined with digital marketing knowledge and experience of the authors, a comprehensive digital marketing action steps were recommended.

The thesis applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data was collected from primary resources, including survey and interview, and secondary resources such as books, articles, reports, and from internet.

After introduction part, Chapter 2 introduces theoretical knowledge regarding green marketing and greenwash marketing, its definition, characteristics as well as influence on consumers nowadays.

Chapter 3 continues the theoretical research with the discussion around challenges and impact of large corporations versus small and medium sized brands in sustainable fashion.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the case company by introducing Népra's background and analyzing its current context.

Chapter 5 is empirical research, demonstrating data collection process from designing survey and interview questions to data analysis. After that, the authors answer research questions before coming to recommendations part regarding actionable and specific digital marketing activities that the case company should implement. Those recommendations include:

- Online shopping experience
- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Email marketing
- Content marketing
- Social media marketing
- Influencer marketing

Chapter 6 provides an objective assessment of the whole research with limitations and suggestions for further studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Questionnaires from the survey in English

Consumer Shopping Behavior Survey

Section 1

1. When were you born?
    a. 1995 - 2015 (Gen Z)
    b. 1980 – 1994 (Millennial)
    c. 1965 – 1979 (Gen X)
    d. 1994 – 1964 (Baby Boomer)
2. What is your gender identity?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Prefer not to say
3. How often do you buy new clothes?
    a. 1 - 3 times per month
    b. 3 – 5 times per month
    c. More than 5 times per month
    d. I don’t buy clothes myself
4. What is your profession?
    a. Student
    b. Employed
    c. Self-employed
    d. Retired
    e. Freelancers
    f. Unemployed
5. How much do you earn monthly (net income)?

a. Less than 1000€

b. 1000€ - 1999€

c. 2000€ - 2999€

d. 3000€ - 3999€

e. More than 4000€

f. I don't have any income

Section 2

6. On scale 1 to 5 (1: not at all; 5: very much), how much do you know about green-wash marketing?

7. On scale 1 to 5 (1: not at all; 5: very much), how ethical are you as a shopper?

Section 3 How much do you care about the following factors when shopping clothes? On scale 1 to 5 (1: not at all important; 5: very important)

8. Brands using child labor

9. Prefer high quality products

10. Environmentally friendly materials

11. Animal welfare

12. Price matters

13. Brand reputation

14. Sustainable certificates from third party

15. Sustainable information on company's website

16. Green image of products/brands on social media/store/website

Section 4 What constraints you from shopping ethically? On scale 1 to 5 (1: not at all important; 5: very important)

17. High price of sustainable clothes

18. Lack of trust in brand claiming to be sustainable

19. Lack of awareness of sustainability

20. Boring design of sustainable clothes

21. Not easy to shop (lack of physical stores)

22. Choose what are important to you, as much as you want

    a. I want to look good in front of others

    b. I want to live sustainably

    c. I don’t want to be outdated

    d. I am very price conscious

    e. I love giving my clothes another life

23. Take an example, you are visiting a small local brand making sustainable active-wear. You want to buy a yoga/gym pants. How much would you be willing to pay?

    a. 30€ - 50€

    b. 50€ - 70€

    c. 70€ - 90€

    d. 90€ - 110€

    e. More than 110€

    f. Depends (please specify)

24. Do you have anything in your mind that you want to share with us? Or anything that we should have included in our survey?

Appendix 2 List of Interview Questions

1. How much do you spend on activewear every month/year? (please specify your time frame in the answer, ex: 30eur/month or 100eur/year)
2. How long does an activewear item last before you throw it away?
3. What do you do with your old workout clothes?
4. Which brands do you usually buy workout clothes? Please specify reasons why you choose that brand
5. How do you evaluate the below factors when shopping activewear clothes? On scale 1 to 5 (1: not at all important; 5: very important)
    a. Price
    b. Texture
    c. Form/ shape when you wear it
    d. Diverse colors/ patterns
    e. Brand name
    f. Sustainable image of brand
6. Any other factors that influence your shopping decisions?
7. Where do you find inspiration for activewear shopping?
    a. Influencer you follow
    b. Instagram
    c. Pinterest
    d. YouTube
    e. I just go check out physical stores
    f. Online web shops
    g. Friends
8. Do you have other opinions in mind that you want to share?