Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Tone of Voice

Developing brand tone of voice for a responsible clothing brand

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ABSTRACT

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Brand tone of voice describes the way brands communicate their message to stakeholders. It is used to convey the brand personality and evoke certain mood in people through deliberate choice of words. Establishing a consistent tone through various touchpoints is a complex process which requires understanding the brand core values and the customers thoroughly.

The thesis is done to research which tone profile is most effective for the case company VAIKO clothing for CSR communication. It aims to clearly define a tone profile that is most suitable for VAIKO. It also aims to provide possible other solutions to improve the effectiveness of brand communication.

The research is conducted using a qualitative research method in a form of semi-constructed interviews, with the goal of understanding the customers of VAIKO thoroughly. A sample of five customers was chosen on social media platform Instagram and contacted through direct messages. The sample was interviewed on telephone, enabling in-depth conversations. For the theoretical framework, sustainability, corporate social responsibility and branding are studied.

Based on the research findings, a tone profile that is casual, respectful and matter of fact is the most suitable for VAIKO. The research shows that the overall satisfaction with the brand and its communication is very good. Additional solutions to improve the effectiveness of brand communication are introduced.

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Key words: brand tone of voice, csr, communication, sustainability, responsibility, brand personality

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Fashion industry

The fashion industry is one of the largest industrial sectors. Therefore, a lot of resources are used in this industry which in turn results in a lot of environmental issues. When looking at the largest polluters, the fashion industry comes second after aviation, and is responsible for up to 10% of global pollution (Niinimäki, 2020). Energy consumption -wise, fashion industry consumes more than shipping and aviation combined. (Ro, 2020)

The fashion industry is a $2.4 trillion industry and employees roughly 60,000,000 people around the world. The stakeholders of the fashion industry have a crucial role in achieving the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations. (UnAlliance, 2020)

According to Niinimäki & al. (2020) fundamental changes have to be made to the fashion industry business model in order to improve the long-term sustainability of the fashion supply chain. The most urgent act is the transition away from fast fashion into a so-called slow-fashion. The transition is not only in the hands of corporations but several stakeholders such as consumers, who must make a change in their consumption habits for the better future of the environment (Niinimäki , 2020).

1.2   Thesis Background & Objectives

This is a bachelor's thesis for the degree program in international business in the major specialization of marketing. The thesis is a research-based thesis aiming to build a tone of voice profile for VAIKO clothing

This introductory chapter provides the reader with a thorough introduction to the thesis topic and objective. The chapter also includes definition of the key concepts of the thesis, the structure of the thesis report and a brief introduction of the case company VAIKO clothing.

1.3 Case Company

VAIKO clothing is a Finnish company that manufactures and sells responsibly made apparel. The company's headquarters and warehouse are located in Helsinki. The main product category is the merino wool products that VAIKO clothing is well known for. The company manufactures beanies, clothing, sunglasses, caps and other accessories. Products such as beanies and socks are made of organic merino wool and some of the clothing such as shirts are made of organic cotton. In addition to the online store, VAIKO clothing has a variety of retailers around Finland. The biggest retailer is Partíoaitta. The clothing line is mostly aimed towards adults, but the company also offers kid's clothing.

The organic merino wool used in VAIKO products is sourced from organic farms in Patagonia Argentina. The farmers take a preventative approach to disease; no harsh pesticides or antibiotics are necessary. It is ensured that the organic animals are fed on organic feed, they grace on organic land and are free to pursue their natural behavior with plenty of space outside. In order to prevent erosion and to maintain the natural diversity of the area, the sheep packs are kept in reasonable size.

There are three key points regarding organic wool which are: the organic wool processing is GOTS certified, organic wool is free from harmful chemicals, and the wool is grown on audited organic farms based on the SENASA protocol. Animal welfare is also important and all the sheep in Argentina are mulesing free. The shearers are also regularly re-trained by the organization PROLANA to ensure good care of the sheep during shearing.

The sheep have plenty of space for grazing and for each sheep there are 1.5 squares miles of space. The sheep management is done in such a way that prevents desertification and increases biodiversity. The company has taken environmental and social responsibility into account in their manufacturing process. The wool is processed on site in Patagonia giving locals jobs and cutting off carbon

emissions as the wool does not have to be sent all the way to China where major parts of the world's wool is being processed before it can be made into yarns.

The manufacturing process of a VAIKO beanie starts from the merino wool farms in Patagonia Argentina and the company uses only a small selection of licensed organic farms which operate under the GOTS certificate. After Argentina, the organic wool is sent to Austria, where it is turned into thread. The manufacturing and coloring of the thread is done under strict Bluesign and GOTS certificates.

Lastly the organic wool arrives in Finland where it is made into beanies, scarves and mittens by professionals. The wool products are for anyone whether one will use them in the city or in the wilderness. The value proposition is that the product will keep anyone warm without making compromises with quality, look or ecological and ethical production.

For the marketing of the products VAIKO uses the following channels: Instagram, Facebook, email newsletter, Pinterest.

In following chapters, the case company is referred to simply as VAIKO.

1.4   Research methodology

This research is done to a case company, focusing the research area to tone of voice and CSR communication. This thesis utilizes a multitude of research methodologies. The theoretical framework consists of sustainability, corporate social responsibility and branding.

The research and theoretical framework are further supported by variety of legitimate literature sources that provide online articles and books. Majority of the literature can be found at Andor online library portal.

The research was conducted as a qualitative research in the form of semiconstructed interviews, in order to understand the customer perceptions and attitudes first. The data gained from the interviews then could be used to create a suitable tone profile.

The data collected was analyzed using the framework provided in the thesis, with the main goal of building a suitable tone profile and to improve the effectiveness of CSR communication.

1.5 Thesis structure

In chapter 2 of the bachelor thesis, the theoretical framework is explained. The main focus is on corporate social responsibility and brand tone of voice. In addition, the reader will get a basic understanding of sustainability.

Chapter 3 will provide the reader with a detailed explanation on how the research was conducted. Firstly, the chapter explains the qualitative research method used, followed by sampling, the semiconstructed interviews and its contents, and lastly the contacting phase and timetable of the research.

Chapter 4 solely focuses on the analysis of the research. The data from the semi constructed interviews is analyzed in-depth, with the goal of understanding the customers of VAIKO better. The end goal is to improve tone of voice and brand communication efficiency based on the results of the analysis.

Chapter 5 consist of general observations of the research and provides the reader with a big picture of the research. In addition, limitations of the research are explained for transparency.

Chapter 6 presents solutions that answer to the research questions. More specifically, it explains what kind of tone is most suitable for communication and it provides concrete steps to improve the effectiveness of brand communication.

Chapter 7 concludes their research and thesis and it is the final chapter.

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Sustainability

Sustainability is a vast topic. In this thesis the focus is on United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals because of topicality in the current world economy.

The 17 sustainable development goals were adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015 with the purpose of steering the promotion of sustainable development in 2016-2030. The 17 goals are part of the 2030 agenda which aims at sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental areas. The goals are to be met by 2030.

The sustainable development goals were established through a lengthy negotiation process in the United Nations. As a result, there are now international and actionable plans for human development and climate questions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2020).

VAIKO manufactures sustainable clothing, thus it is important to understand the sustainable development goals also in the context of brand communication and how the goals influence communication.

2.2   Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Kotler & Lee (2005) define CSR as a commitment to improve community wellbeing through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources. The authors emphasize the word discretionary in the definition, because it is referring to voluntary commitment rather business activities mandated by law.

During the classical and neoclassical economics, rational decision making in free markets were concentrated solely on profits. As a result , corporate social responsibility developed to counteract this concept. Evidence of unethical business practices has set this narrow economic view under scrutiny. Consequently, this has shifted the mindset, and now organizations should also be accountable for

the social and environmental consequences of their activities (Mostovicz & al., 2009, as cited in Gottschalk, 2011, p.106).

All of those who have something to do with corporate practices and management will be required to take action because the frontiers of the corporate social responsibility continue to expand (Jayasuriya, 2006, as cited in Gottschalk, 2011, p.106).

The concept is introduced to the reader since VAIKO implements CSR in their business activities. As described earlier, it is a voluntary decision, whilst in this case, also a crucial part of VAIKO's core values.

2.2.1 Greenwashing

Greenwashing, also known as green sheen, is a type of deceptive marketing in which a company, product or a business activity is promoted falsely or more environmentally friendly than it is in reality. Originally, the word described the practice of over-selling the product's or service's green attributes. In today's society the range of unethical behavior is broad, and companies have been charged for a variety of unethical behaviors, such as deceptive marketing practices, untruthful environmental reports, and fraudulent environmental activism (Katherine M. Cruger, 2014).

Lyon and Maxwell (2011) define greenwashing as selective disclosure of positive information about a company's CSR performance, without full disclosure of negative information, in order to create a better corporate image (Frances Bowen 2014, p. 22).

The challenge VAIKO is facing is that, in general, all companies' CSR communication activities have increased in the fashion industry in the last years, and consequently, it is harder than ever for consumers to figure out which company it's legitimately communicating the truth. This challenges all the fashion companies that are legitimately responsible.

2.3 Brand

Before defining the term brand voice and tone, the word brand itself should be defined first.

A brand is a product or service that has a distinctive and enduring personality, based on which it is distinguished by and marketed. The brand carries with it a set of unique promises, such as emotional connection with its customers or technical performance. The promises can also be any beliefs or ideas that the makers of the brand attempt to convince the target customers to associate with the brand through marketing and communication activities. Because of these unique promises, a branded service or product has a superior value over a non-branded competitor, thus making it easier for the company to set a premium price in the marketplace.

The process of branding combines both analytical and creative skills. In broad terms branding is all about impression management. This requires an understanding of what target customers need and want and choosing the most suitable way of presenting the case as to why a brand meets those needs and wants (Lerman, D, Morais, RJ, & Luna, D 2017, p. 2).

According to Wheeler (2018) brands have three primary functions which are navigation, reassurance and engagement. The amount of choices can be frustrating for consumers, so brands help consumers navigate in this area. Brands also reassure customers that they have made the right choice by communicating the intrinsic quality of the product or service. Brands want customers to identify with the brand and to achieve this, brands use distinctive visual imagery, language and associations (Wheeler, 2018)**.**

There are a variety of ways to manage brand impression such as verbal sound, scent, graphics and design. In this paper the focus is brand language, voice and tone particularly.

2.3.1 Brand communication

This chapter will introduce the reader to brand communication which a is a pre-requisite for understanding where and how tone of voice is used by brands.

Brand communication can be seen as a crucial part and tool of brand management. Brand communication is the sum of long-term actions that are taken to influence the stakeholders of the company and to strengthen the relationship with them. Through brand communication companies can inform their stakeholders about the brand, its core values, strengths, services and product offerings in a meaningful and focused way. Successful brand communication has several advantages such as creating impact, authority, differentiation, customer loyalty and market development (Bhasin, 2019).

There is a correlation between the value of the brand and the successfulness of its brand communication. Two factors indicate of successful brand communication: customer and employee satisfaction. In brand management, the focus should be on creating consistent brand experience at all brand touchpoints, which in turn will build valuable and much needed trust between the brand and its customers (BrandTrust, 2020).

2.3.2 Brand language and linguistics

Brand language refers to the vocabulary, and sometimes even visual imagery, a brand uses to define its purpose and brand tone of voice (Katai, 2019).

Brand language can also be seen as a marketing strategy that is used to help consumers identify and create connections between specific vocabulary and a certain product or service. By having a strong brand language and verbal identity, a company will create brand awareness and in addition, differentiate from competitors with similar product offering (On Demand CMO, 2013).

Due to the expansion of social media and online marketing, the use of brand language has a whole new market in today's brand communication. From a broad

perspective, brand language is present wherever written and spoken language is used. These instances can be external such as recruitment, corporate communications, investor relations, sales presentations, conference speeches or retail staff. Internally, brand language is delivered through internal presentations, staff conferences and intranet websites (Capps, 2016).

Capps (2016) says that the brand language is the foundation of the brand. The author suggests that positive words can become greatly associated with the brand and consequently the used words become assets of the company. This may lead to a point where competing brands might find these words difficult to use in their brand language.

Brand personality can be evoked through brand language in multiple ways. Di Somma (2015) suggests that the three most important factors are formality, dialect and rhythm.

Formality

The type of relationship a brand is looking to form with its customers is highly connected with the type of language used in communication. Upmarket brands often use structured, aspirational language which is based on sophisticated concepts. In contrast, global brands usually express their personality visually without words. Professional brands share a common attribute which is being mostly talkative. Lifestyle brands are often recognized by their casual and carefree language.

Dialects

Using a unique dialect allows a brand to stand out from the rest of the competitors in a specific industry. If a company chooses to use the language of the industry, it will most likely blend with the rest of the companies. The goal is to formulate an own brand language that is complemented by the visual brand identity.

Rhythm

The rhythm refers to the brand's speech pattern. It consists of certain speeds and particular ways that evoke the desired feeling and response in a brand's every interaction. Similarly, to formality, there are clear sectoral dialects and rhythms. Retail brands have adapted a way of speaking quickly in order to convey urgency and opportunity. The tone of voice used by lifestyle brands is relaxed and non-grammatical. Professional brands desire credibility, thus they use a measured, structured tone of voice and long sentences (Di Somma, 2015).

According to Carnevale, Luna and Lairmont (2018), the word choices brand managers make have an impact on getting customers attention and creating a memorable experience and therefore word choices should be made carefully. So-called high-frequency words have a tendency to be less memorable than low-frequency words. High-frequency words are words that are used frequently in everyday language, while low-frequency words are words that are known but not used very often in everyday life (Myers Levi, 1989, as cited in Lerman & al., 2018).

Brand linguistics is a term used to describe the combination of specific linguistic elements and modes of meaning in brand communication (Lerman & al. 2018, p. 17). Brand linguistics is comprised of three domains of studies that are psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and semiotics. Each of these branches have particular factors that impact language and therefore also brand communication.

In broad terms, **psycholinguistics** studies how the human mind processes languages. To be more specific, psycholinguistics is focused on the acquisition, storage, comprehension and production of language. In the world of branding, psycholinguistics gives insight on the following areas: brand name development, copy for ads, brochures and websites. Moreover, this domain sheds light on how brand category perceptions differ based on the words used to describe the categories. (Lerman & al. 2018, p. 17-18).

Sociolinguistics examines the connection between language and societal dynamics and interpersonal relationships. In contrast to psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics looks at the language outside the mind in communication with others, instead of inside the mind of a single person. In the brand language context, sociolinguistics gives insight on the impact of language styles and on the optimal way of using words and sentence constructions to communicate social relationships. Additionally, sociolinguistics aids understanding of how the chosen language in brand communications can cue a specific social identity and connect with an overall culture (Lerman & al. 2018, p. 17-18).

Semiotics studies the use of symbols and signs and how they are interpreted by human beings. Semiotics give insight on how language can be used and manipulated to communicate a plethora of brand meanings, how the language components are interpreted by consumers, and the meaning that consumers derive from those symbols. Understanding semiotics is important in a variety of areas of brand communication, such as advertising and packaging. Moreover, semiotics is increasingly used in consumer studies (Lerman & al. 2018, p. 17-19).

2.3.3 Brand Tone of Voice

The brand voice enables companies to express the personality, the values and attitudes through deliberate choice of words. The objective of brand voice is to communicate a consistent brand personality to target customers by using certain vocabulary throughout all touchpoints. While the tone of voice may change depending on the situation, the brand voice always remains consistent.

The brand voice is about what is being said and the tone of voice is about how the message is said. By utilizing different paces of the words, the rhythm and the order of the words, a brand is able to adjust the tone to various situations and contexts. The meaning is conveyed with the words, but the tone of voice conveys the brand personality and evokes a certain mood in people (Sienkiewich, 2020).

The Nielsen Norman group conducted a two-part experiment in 2016 that showed that different tones of voice on websites have a measurable impact on users'

perceptions of a brand's friendliness, trustworthiness, and desirability. The out-come of the study proved that the best performing tones are casual, conversational and enthusiastic. An additional finding was that users' impression of an organization's trustworthiness is often a strong sign of their willingness to recommend a specific brand. The study used two nearly identical websites where the only variable was the tone of voice used. According to the conclusion of the study, every company should consider testing their tone of voice similarly to any other piece of the user experience (Moran, 2016).

The study identified and utilized four core dimensions of tone of voice which were used to create comparable tone profiles for content. Each dimension is a three-point scale, with a neutral midpoint. The tone of voice can be expressed as a function of these four dimensions (Moran, 2016).

Funny	Neutral	Serious
Casual	Neutral	Formal
Irreverent	Neutral	Respectful
Enthusiastic	Neutral	Matter-of-fact

Table 1. Four dimensions of brand tone of voice (Adapted from Nielsen Norman Group 2016)

According to brand language experts, companies are in a risk of creating a dis-connect that could hit sales by using inconsistent tone of voice. This could be as simple as using a different tone of voice for advertising campaigns and call center calls. In order to stimulate long-term engagement, establishing a consistent way a brand sounds and interacts with its customers is key. Consumers will feel more at ease with the product or service when there is a consistent tone of voice throughout the company (Sebastian, 2020).

Customers are able to recognize a great tone of voice anywhere because it is so well defined. This is the fundamental aspect that builds trust between marketers and customers because people are aware of what to expect. Not only will a great

tone of voice help the company to be recognizable it will also make the communication more relevant and successful at the same time (Gianfagna, 2012).

2.3.4 Five dimensions of brand personality

The five dimensions of brand personality is a framework designed by a behavioural psychologist and Stanford professor Jennifer Aaker. This particular framework posits that there are five dimensions to one's personality, and each dimension contains a set of facets. Each facet again, contains a set of traits.

Each trait can be ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 to apply the framework to a specific brand. One is the least representative of the brand and five is the most. The five dimensions framework can be used to either define the current state of the brand or the future state of the brand (C.Sullivan 2019). This paper uses the framework to define the current state of the brand.
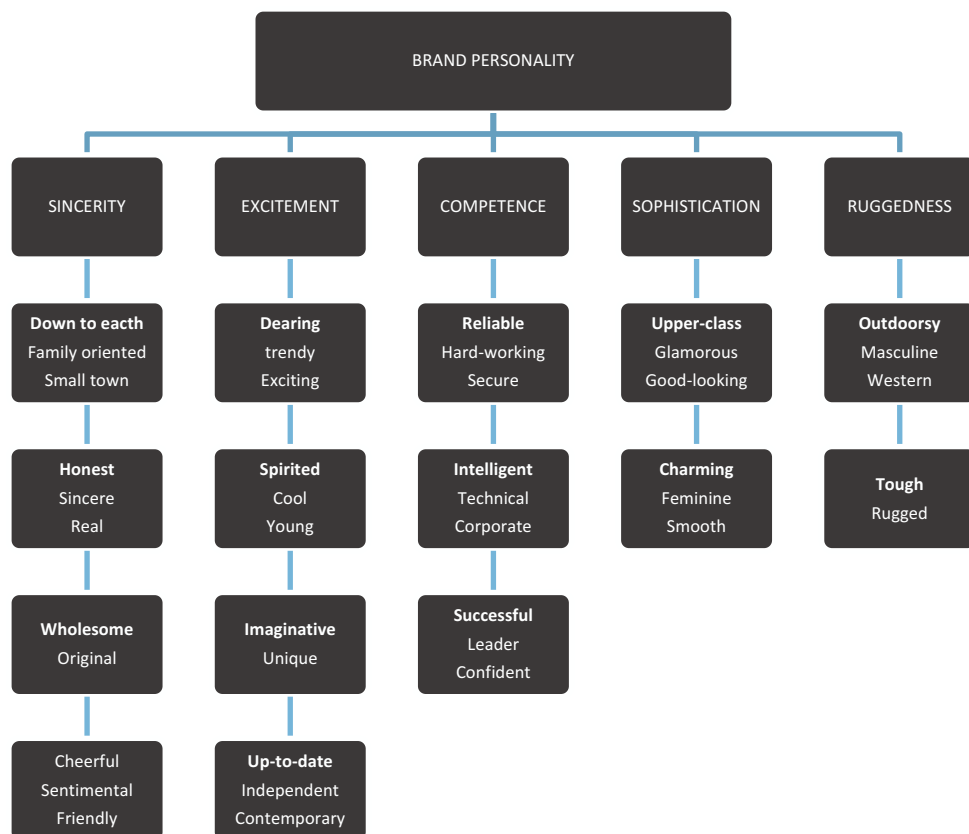

Table 2. The five dimensions of brand personality framework (Adapted from Medium, 2019)

3   RESEARCH

3.1   Qualitative research method

A qualitative semi-structured interview allows to explore some of the underlying motives of the customers directly. Moreover, it allows the interviewer to weigh up the credibility of the responses himself. A semi-structured interview is highly suitable when a researcher wants to allow the interviewee degree of freedom to explain their thoughts and to highlight certain areas of interest. In addition, it allows the interviewer to question certain responses in greater depth and guide the interview if needed (Humphrey, C. and Lee, B., 2004).

The research questions are as follows:

"How can VAIKO communicate CSR effectively?"

"What is the most suitable tone of voice for CSR communication?"

This particular research aims to understand how the customers of VAIKO currently perceive the brand. Furthermore, the purpose is to study if corporate responsibility comes sufficiently across in their brand communication with a suitable tone of voice. Originally the researcher considered conducting an email survey but given the complexity and vastness of the topic, a semi-structured interview was chosen instead.

The researcher specifically wanted to avoid too short and simple "yes" and "no" answers which was one of the reasons a semi-structured interview was chosen. The goal was to give the interviewees the freedom to explain their thoughts thoroughly.

3.1.1 Sampling

Because of the research method chosen and the timeline available, the sample size was kept rather small, in a total of five customers. The sample was chosen on Instagram from tagged posts (@vaikoclothing) with a random sampling method. Brand ambassadors were excluded from the sample in order to focus on regular customers that have bought the product themselves. In total 9 customers were contacted, which of 5 were then interviewed.

3.1.2 Interviews

The interviews consisted of 12 questions in total and additional supporting questions were presented if further information was needed. Questions 1-3 and 10-12 handle CSR in the fashion industry, brand communication and brand tone of voice. Because of the variation of substance knowledge between interviewees, the first questions were formulated to be broad, general and easy to understand. This allowed the interviews to start off successfully. The following questions build up on the previous questions, and they are more specific to the case company VAIKO.

Due to the corona pandemic and the second wave of the pandemic, the interviews were conducted on phone rather than in person in order to avoid unnecessary human contacts. In addition, the staff at VAIKO were highly occupied at the time by other tasks, so choosing a semi-structured interview instead of email survey allowed the researcher to proceed with the research and follow the project timeline. Before conducting the interviews, the interview guide was pilot tested with a few test interviewees. This ensured that the questions elicited the right kind of data in regard to the research questions and that no unnecessary questions were asked.

At the beginning, the researcher prepared the interview and briefed the customers of time commitment, confidentiality and other relevant aspects of the interview. The customers were informed of the recording of the interviews and who

will have access to the data. At the end of each interview some time was scheduled for possible questions from the customer. The interview guide and its 12 questions can be found in the Appendix 1. in entirety.

3.1.3 Contacting

The contacting started on 2nd of October 2020. The customers were contacted on social media platform Instagram through direct messages.

Contacting customers face-to-face in one of the retail stores such as Partioaitta would have been difficult in terms of timing and COVID-19 and therefore contacting customers on social media platform was chosen instead. Instagram was chosen because it was the main social media platform of VAIKO. The customers were contacted by using the researcher's personal account @teppotirkkonen.

The contacting consisted of one message, after which the researcher continued the discussion by scheduling a time, if the customer agreed to participate. Together with the customer, a time was scheduled for the interview that was most convenient for the customer. The main goal was to limit the amount of distractions and to have adequately time to conduct the interview. The interviews lasted usually for 20-45 minutes.

3.1.4 Research

The research started on the 2nd of October by contacting interviewees. In total 9 of customers were contacted. 2 of the contacted customers did not want to participate because they felt they could not contribute well enough because their knowledge on the topic was limited. 1 of the contacted customers did not respond at all. 1 of the contacted customers was a brand ambassador and thus the customer was excluded from the research. Contacting of customers ended on the 17th of October.

The first interview was conducted on the 7th of October, the second on the 8th of October, the third on the 12th of October, the fourth on the 15th of October, and the fifth on the 20th of October.

4 ANALYSIS

The purpose of the research is to examine how the customers of VAIKO currently perceive the brand and its communication on CSR topics. Furthermore, the research aims to find answers to how VAIKO can improve its brand communication and brand tone of voice, in regard to CSR topics.

In order to retain the anonymity of the interviewees, each customer has been given a letter from A to E, used when referred to. The interview notes can be found in Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

4.1 Customer interview results

In this chapter, the semi-constructed interviews are analysed in-depth, with the goal of understanding the current brand impression and what the most suitable tone of voice for VAIKO's customers is.

4.1.1 Importance of CSR

The research shows that all of the five interviewed customers perceive CSR and responsibility as very important. Each customer states that the importance of responsibility is growing for them.

Customer E and C only buy responsibly made clothing. These customers could be described as customers who actively seek information about responsible clothing brands and stay updated on the topic.

Customer B searches information actively as well but only on brands that have already caught this customer's attention. These are brands that the customer already likes personally and has established a personal connection with.

Customer A and C on the other hand are more passive in regard to searching information. These customers are less proactive, and they rely on receiving information from friends and other external social connections. They rely on easily

accessible information and they usually stumble upon it rather than actively search for it themselves.

4.1.2 Values

When dividing responsibility into environmental, social and financial responsibility, the research shows that the customers value environmental responsibility the most out of these three areas of responsibility. The second most emphasis was on the social responsibility, followed lastly by the financial responsibility, which was only mentioned once, by customer A. In addition, customer A brings up the importance of cultural responsibility as a fourth additional dimension of responsibility.

In the context of environmental responsibility, all five customers mention the importance of organic and recyclable materials. All five customers also refer to quality and durability of the product in a way or another. Among all customers, the durability and quality of VAIKO products, is one of the main reasons for purchasing and continuing to use the products.

Customer A, B and D describe the most directly, that the manufacturing process and source of the textiles is important for them when buying clothing. Moreover, customer D states that it is important to keep the carbon footprint as small as possible and not to use any harmful chemicals. Customer D emphasizes the importance of the well-being of animals.

In the context of social responsibility, customer A and C say that working conditions of employees is important for them. Customer A is the only who mentions minimum wages and refers to minimum wages in Finland as a topical example.

Lastly, financial responsibility is mentioned once by customer A. Customer A emphasizes the importance of paying taxes to Finland. This customer uses the mining industry in Finland as a bad example of financial responsibility.

4.1.3 Information sources

The research indicates that the majority of the customers receive responsibility information through Google and companies' websites. In regard to the effectiveness of communication, the finding could mean that SEO optimization plays an important role.

The second most common source is blogs and social media. For instance, customer D had originally found VAIKO through a blog post. Customer D finds a lot of good brands from influencers on social media.

The majority of the customers mention certificates. However, they are considered slightly problematic. The reason for this is that there are too many certificates used. This creates trust issues, and the customers seem to only trust the old and established certificates that are independent. Customer A for instance is aware that some of the certificates are available for a company by paying a specific lump sum. On the other hand, a good certificate can be an easy way for a "lazy" customer to measure any company's CSR performance.

4.1.4 Buying behaviour

In order to understand the customers and the brand better, the customers were interviewed about their buying behaviour. The results show that the main four reasons supporting the buying decision are:

1. Positive brand impression
2. CSR performance
3. Quality
4. External look of the products

The quality and the look of the products were brought up by customers repeatedly. More specifically, customer A liked the colours of the products compared to other brands. Customer D described the quality in more detail by telling that the

customer did not want to buy a new beanie every year. Customer D described that the price matched the quality.

Customer B and C say that the brand impression and brand story is compelling and cool in their opinion. In addition, customer C continues to use products because the brand is domestic. Customer E tells that the transparency of the company influenced the buying decision.

The majority of the customers add that the organic materials influences their buying decision greatly as well.

4.1.5 Brand's current state

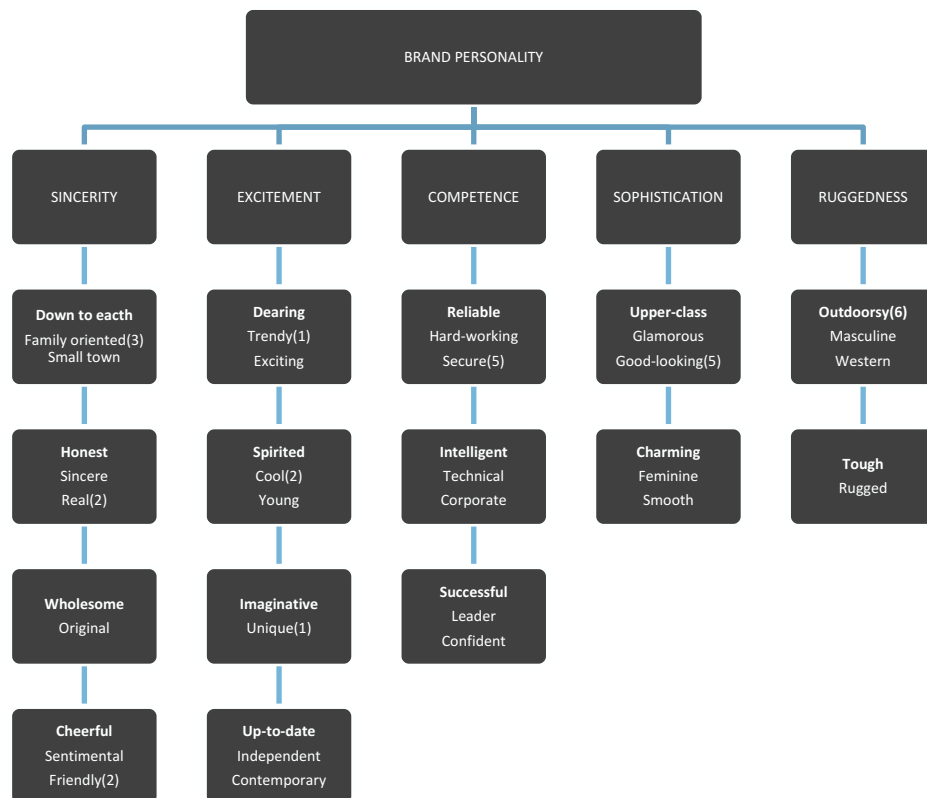| BRAND PERSONALITY				
SINCERITY	EXCITEMENT	COMPETENCE	SOPHISTICATION	RUGGEDNESS
Down to eacth Family oriented(3) Small town	**Dearing** Trendy(1) Exciting	**Reliable** Hard-working Secure(5)	**Upper-class** Glamorous Good-looking(5)	**Outdoorsy(6)** Masculine Western
Honest Sincere Real(2)	**Spirited** Cool(2) Young	**Intelligent** Technical Corporate	**Charming** Feminine Smooth	**Tough** Rugged
Wholesome Original	**Imaginative** Unique(1)	**Successful** Leader Confident		
Cheerful Sentimental Friendly(2)	**Up-to-date** Independent Contemporary			

Table 3. Brand personality defined by customer perceptions and attitudes

By using the five dimensions framework a current brand personality can be defined by customer perception and attitude. This is the current state of the brand that can be used as a guide when designing a future brand state. Every time a

trait was mentioned during an interview, it was marked in the framework shown at the beginning of this subchapter.

VAIKO is perceived as highly sincere brand. In the first dimension of sincerity, customers report perceiving VAIKO as family oriented, real and friendly. The most experienced trait under the honesty facet is realness.

Under the excitement dimension customers experience traits such as trendy, cool and unique in the brand. An example of the uniqueness is the colours that VAIKO uses in their products. Of all dimensions, the excitement is the least perceived dimension. However, it is very close with competence and sophistication.

In the competence dimension, customers repeatedly report how reliable and high-quality the products are. All of these answers can be coded under the reliable facet, possibly as the trait secure. This is the only trait customers perceive under the competence dimension.

Similarly, to competence, in the sophistication dimension customers repeatedly report perceiving one exact trait, which is good-looking. The customers perceive the products of VAIKO very good-looking and it is brought up in the interviews numerous times.

In the dimension of ruggedness, the customers perceive the brand very out-doorsy. However, one can speculate whether the traits masculine and western all the right words to describe VAIKO. Moreover, the customers perceive VAIKO as a very natural brand which could possibly be coded in the framework either as down to earth or outdoorsy. In this instance the researcher decided to code these answers in the ruggedness dimension.

As a summary, the customers of VAIKO experience the brand dimensions of sincerity, ruggedness, competence and sophistication the most.

The three most important brand traits experienced by the customers are secure, good-looking and outdoorsy.

4.1.6 Social media communication

The research shows that four customers out of five have seen communication on CSR topics on social media. Only one customer, customer E has not seen VAIKO communicate CSR on social media.

Customers a B, C & D have seen concrete posts about CSR on social media. Topics such as materials, working conditions and sources of the materials are mentioned by the customers as examples.

The general opinion is that VAIKO's CSR communication is good and there is sufficiently of it.

4.1.7 Evaluating CSR communication with customers

The customers use words such as transparency, clarity, concrete and big picture to describe what good CSR communication is for them.

The words transparency and concrete are mentioned by the majority of the customers. The answers might indicate that some consumers have a hard time understanding the topic.

Customer A describes that in good CSR communication the words are given a bigger context and content. The customer a prefers concrete actions and honesty.

Customer B continues similarly, and explains that great CSR communication is open, transparent and simple. Customer B also prefers concrete examples.

In addition to concrete communication, customer C values easily accessible information. Moreover, customer adds that the big picture is important. This means that any customer can quickly form an understanding without extensive research of where the materials come from and how the product is manufactured.

Customer D on the other hand prefers fact-based communication and a minimal style. In addition, customer D mentions that the visual look in communication is very important. For customer D, the visual aspect creates attention and is followed by interest. In a way, the visuality pulls the customer in. Customer D also mentions that the visuality communicates quality and responsibility.

Much like the other customers, customer E also prefers transparency, clarity and communication that is understandable. Customer E continues by saying that it is important to educate consumers about CSR. The educational part ensures that everybody understands what it means and consequently, the importance of it is understood as well.

4.1.8 Evaluating tone with customers

Customer A prefers a tone where the company does not place themselves above customers. In other words, the tone of voice should not be too authoritative or superior. Customer A continues that it is good when the company is aware of its limits on knowledge and the company asks for help from the customers. This is a form of interactivity between the company and customers. The customer uses words such as humane, interactive, imperfect and easy-to-approach to describe a good tone of voice.

Customer B dislikes a complicated tone of voice and prefers a more minimalistic approach. Customer B also mentions that an artificial tone that is pasted on top of communication is not preferred. Instead, the customer B prefers honest tone of voice and when companies explain the reasons behind actions.

Customer C likes a soft tone of voice with a community spirit. Customer see dislikes inequality and an inculpatory tone of voice.

Customer D also prefers a more kind and soft tone that is personal. The tone of voice should also be based on expertise and facts.

Similarly, to customer C, customer E dislikes a tone of voice that makes people guilty based on their choices and actions. Instead the customer prefers honest but thought-provoking tone of voice.

4.1.9 Competitors

At the very end of the interviews, the customers were also interviewed about other responsible companies. The goal is to also understand why the specific companies are regarded as responsible.

Following companies were mentioned, Patagonia, Joutsen, Haglöfs, Fjällräven, North Outdoor, Nepra, VARG clothing, Maloja, Pyhä, Ruka and Finlayson.

Customer A mentioned Patagonia, Haglöfs, Fjällräven and North outdoor. Customer A based this answer on raw materials, recycled materials, repairing old products and product research and development.

Customer B mentions Finlayson, because of the style of marketing the company uses and how the brand has changed in a positive way. Customer B adds that Finlayson is good at explaining the reasons behind actions and the company uses direct communication.

Customer C says that Pyhä and Ruka are responsible, because they are carbon neutral ski centers. In the context of clothing, customer C mentions Haglöfs, Patagonia, Maloja and VARG clothing. Customer C sees these as responsible, because they are European brands, with the exception of Patagonia.

Customer D sees Joutsen as a responsible brand, because of responsible production of down, domestic production and design.

Customer E says that Nepra is a responsible company because of the clear lifecycle of the products. Customer E also mentions Patagonia, similarly to many other customers.

5   DISCUSSION

5.1   General observations

Based on the conducted research one can say that the importance of responsibility is a growing part of the buying process and the most important values are the environmental values.

The research shows that generally speaking VAIKO's customers can be categorized as active, in the middle and passive when it comes to searching information about CSR. The research indicates that customers are more likely somewhere in the middle or a bit more passive.

The customers of VAIKO clearly base their buying decision on the look of the product, quality, positive brand impression and responsibility.

The brand personality perceived by customers is sincere, competent, sophisticated and rugged. Excitement is less experienced dimensions of the brand personality. However, customers repeatedly mention the natural trait which is not clearly defined in five dimensions brand personality framework.

The current communication of VAIKO is rather effective and only one customer reports not seeing any social media posts about CSR. In general customers use Patagonia as an overall benchmark example of successful CSR communication.

The research shows that certificates can provide help for customers that are looking for responsible products. However, there is a problem associated with them. Several customers experience that there are too many certificates in use and therefore trust issues are present.

In terms of good CSR communication, customers seek for clarity and easily accessible information about CSR in their own language. Concrete and honest communication is highly wanted and respected. A challenge with responsibility is that

there is a lack of substance knowledge among some people, and this might lead to not understanding the importance of responsibility.

The research indicates that the customers of VAIKO prefer a more feminine type tone of voice. This is not to be confused with the gender, but more so with the values among all customers, both men and women. Qualities and traits such as equality, honesty and kindness are preferred in brand tone of voice. The research also shows that using a collective voice is preferred. In addition, being concrete, direct and explaining the reason behind actions is preferred.

5.2   Limitations of the research

It can be argued that the research sample was fairly small. Using a larger sample would have been ideal, but due to restrictions and limitations in the project time-line, it was not possible. Conducting qualitative interviews and analysing them can be very time-consuming.

Finally, one other limiting factor in the research was the timing of the interviews. Luckily, the timing of the interview was less ideal only once. With this customer the interview had to be conducted while the customer was working. Consequently, this could have affected the depth of the conversation. One could speculate that this specific customer was not able to give the interview full attention.

6 SOLUTIONS

6.1 Tone profile

In the analysis chapter, the customers of VAIKO evaluated and described what a good tone of voice is like. Based on this data, a tone profile what's created for VAIKO. This is a tone profile based on the customer perceptions and attitudes and it should be used as a guide when building a new desired future tone of voice.

The answers from the customers were coded in the four dimensions framework and the research shows that a tone profile that is casual, respectful and matter of fact is the most suitable for the customers of VAIKO. The first dimension remains neutral.

Funny	Neutral	Serious
Casual	Neutral	Formal
Irreverent	Neutral	Respectful
Enthusiastic	Neutral	Matter of fact

Table 4. Tone profile defined by customer perceptions and attitudes

It is important to remember that a company's own interpretation of tone will most likely be slightly different from the customers' interpretation. The next step for VAIKO is to consider if the tone profile and brand personality defined by the customers matches the brand personality and tone VAIKO wants to convey. VAIKO should modify the strategy and content accordingly to their own goal. The pieces of content should be tested with users in the future to see whether they convey the desired tone and brand personality.

Once VAIKO has defined the target tone profile, they should refine their tone strategy by choosing target tone words that further describe the tone in detail. The goal is to create a do-list with the words that VAIKO wants their tone to fit, and also a do not -list with the words that VAIKO 's tone should not match, e.g.

"stylish but not fancy". The goal is to use words that describe how the organization feels about a topic.

6.2 Domesticity

The research shows that the customers appreciate easily accessible information. More specifically, the customers hope that they could read information about CSR in their own language. One concrete step to improve the accessibility of information, would be to translate the CSR text on the website of VAIKO. Currently the website provides two languages, English and Finnish, but a closer look at the information page reveals that it's only available in English.

By providing the information in Finnish also, it would reduce the effort required from the customers' side. Reading complicated responsibility text can be a lot of work even for those who speak English, but specifically for those who speak less or no English at all.

The research indicates that the customers appreciate domesticity quite a bit. Currently this aspect of VAIKO doesn't come across directly when landing on their Instagram page. A simple tweak in the Instagram biograph, could increase the awareness of domesticity among customers and followers.

If domesticity is seen as important, providing more information and content also in Finnish could be beneficial. The research shows that some of the customers might not know about the domesticity of the brand because of the lack of content in Finnish language.

An alternative way to communicate domesticity, could be through the personal brand of the co-founder. Customer A mentions that this is one of the ways the customer is aware of the domesticity of the brand.

6.3 Instagram

According to the research, the customers of VAIKO prefer interactive communication and a sense of community spirit. A concrete way to facilitate interactivity between the brand and the customers would be by using the Instagram questions in Stories. This would be a concrete way to let the customers and followers know that the company is open for any questions about CSR and responsibility. By using the Instagram questions, the questions and the answers would be available for everyone. This could be very beneficial for all parties and it would increase awareness about VAIKO's responsibility.

In terms of visual content, VAIKO could provide more content in form of videos, which would bring out the backstory behind the products possibly more than photographs. The research shows that some customers really appreciate the visuality of the product photos, but also hope to see more of the story behind the products.

6.4 Lifecycle

A concrete way to improve the effectiveness of the communication, would be by communicating more about the lifecycle of the products. The customers hope to see tips on how to improve the lifecycle of the products. Consequently, this will lead to less purchases, when the products will last longer through proper care. A concrete example of content would be for example an educational piece of content on how to wash the clothing in a proper manner.

VAIKO could also set up influencer meetings at the factory in order to create awareness about the manufacturing process in Finland. The research shows that some of the customers actually found the brand through other influencers so this could be an effective way to communicate about responsibility to the target audience. An alternative way would be to send photographers and videographers to the factory to create content of manufacturing of the products.

7   CONCLUSIONS

The overall satisfaction towards VAIKO's CSR communication is good. The customers have a positive perception of the brand and the products. The current challenges and areas for improvement are communicating domesticity, lack of knowledge about responsibility among some customers, certificates and the visibility and reach of content.

Quality, looks and brand impression were the top drivers for choosing VAIKO. The brand impression is sincere, rugged, competent and sophisticated. The customers described the brand as secure, good-looking and outdoorsy.

Solutions to improve the effectiveness of CSR communication is emphasizing lifecycle and domesticity, providing information in Finnish, tweaking content, updating Instagram profile and utilizing storytelling more.

In terms of CSR communication, the customers seek for concrete, understandable and visual communication. The information should be easily accessible and preferably in the customers' own language. The customers clearly expect actions to support the words.

The most suitable tone for customers is casual, respectful and matter of fact. The tone is not expected to be funny or serious, but neutral.

To further develop tone of voice, VAIKO has to define their own target tone profile and refine it by using target tone words. Furthermore, VAIKO has to test content with users whether it conveys the desired tone and brand personality.

In order to create a holistic and well-rounded tone, VAIKO has to match the desired tone with complementary visuals. Mood boards, colour palettes and content guidelines need to be developed to support the linguistic elements. Afterwards, the new tone has to be implemented at all customer touchpoints to ensure a coherent experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Semi Structured Interview Guide

- What does CSR of clothing companies mean to you?
- What kind of responsibility values are important to you?
- How do you receive information on companies' CSR performance?
- How did you end up choosing by VAIKO's products?
- What is your perception of VAIKO as a brand?
- How does the responsibility of VAIKO's products come across on social media?
- How does the domesticity of VAIKO 's products come across?
- How could VAIKO improve CSR communication on social media?
- How could VAIKO improve their products?
- What kind of CSR communication is good in your opinion? Why?
- What kind of tone of voice speaks to you?
- What other companies do you consider responsible? Why?

Appendix 2. Interview 1

- Generally speaking, ecological values mean a lot.
- When it comes to clothing, they mean less, because the person is not aware of the clothing industry as much.
- Complex relationship with CSR.
- From all the values, ecological values highly important.
- Additionally, the social responsibility is important.
- Factors such as who manufactures products.
- Social responsibility in Finland, minimum wages.
- Financial and economical responsibility, such as paying taxes to Finland. A bad example of this is the mining industry.
- The customer also mentions cultural responsibility. This can be seen as not stealing from other cultures and presenting it as own.
- The customer trusts companies' communication and own impression of the brand.
- The customer also trusts friends who are highly aware of sustainability and CSR.
- Mentions certificates. One way to measure a company's CSR and ecological performance. Suitable for a lazy person.
- Honesty is very important for any brand these days. The sanctions are high for doing wrong.
- CSR performance has to be transparent.
- The customer is aware that there are a lot of certificates. Some of these are available for the company by paying a specific lump sum.
- The customer trusts some of the old and established certificates that are independent.
- The customer describes good communication as something where the words are given context and content. Answers to what CSR communication really means in actual life.
- The customer likes concrete actions when a company concretizes what CSR is for them.

- The customer thinks that a good brand is something that a customer can identify with.
- The customer purchased the product based on how it looks.
- The customer really liked the colors compared to other products.
- The materials are high quality which also equals responsibility.
- No issues with the product whatsoever.
- The brand image is very identifiable.
- The brand image reminds of nature, camping, adventure and forest.
- These are all aspects that can be attached to the interviewed customer.
- Community spirit, feeling of belonging to something.
- The customer has seen concrete posts on CSR from the company.
- CSR is embedded in everything that a company does.
- Actions speak louder than words
- Patagonia, Haglöfs, Fjällräven, North Outdoor
- Raw materials, recycled materials, repairing old products, product research and development
- Domestic product. The customer is aware of this partly through the co-founder and her personal brand. Mentions her dog also.
- Improvements: Concretize. The lifecycle of the products. Washing and tips on how to improve the lifecycle of the products. Content on these topics.
- Will lead to less purchase, emphasis on quality and sustainability.
- Prefers a tone of voice when a company is not superior to its customers and followers.
- Tone of voice: Company is aware of its limits on knowledge and asks for help from customers and followers.
- Tone of voice: Humanity, interactive. Not trying to be perfect, easy to approach.

Appendix 3. Interview 2

- The importance of CSR is a growing part of the buying process.
- Aspects such as materials, sustainability, quality, certificates and sources are important.
- Certificates are challenging because there are so many of them, it's hard to define which one is the most valid.
- The customer searches information on brands that likes personally. Looks for online store, brand story, manufacturing process, core idea of the company.
- The customer got interested in the brand based on the quality and look of the product. Brand story was also compelling.
- The brand impression is outdoors, nomad, functionality, minimalism, humanity, approachable.
- CSR of the company has been brought up on social media, online and through word-of-mouth.
- Domesticity. The customer has known some aspects but on the other hand some things have surprised. For example that the beanies are made in Finland.
- Overall very happy with VAIKO's brand communication. Stylish and functional style.
- Suggestions are to use repetition and concrete examples.
- Positive feedback on products: well-made, quality is good, durable and long-lasting, visual.
- When the product is high-quality, the customer is willing to pay more because the product will last a long time.
- Good communication is open, transparent and simple, telling the things how they really are. Explaining things in concrete ways.
- Tone of voice: Minimalistic tone. The customer does not like complicated or a tone of voice that is pasted on top of communication.
- The customer likes when companies explain why they do what they do. Honest tone of voice.

- Finlayson. The customer likes the style of marketing and how the brand has changed in a positive way. Finlayson has explained why they have done specific things. Explaining the source of the products and using direct communication.

Appendix 4. Interview 3

- CSR means more and more nowadays. Aspects such quality and durability are important. The customer does not want to use fast fashion.
- Values such as domesticity, working conditions, recyclable materials are important.
- Lazy at searching information and likes to have the information easily accessible. The customer uses Google, websites and social media. Usually stumbles upon information.
- Brand impression is cool. The customer likes the look of the products and continues to use it because it's a domestic brand.
- The customer has researched the company. The customer is aware that the materials can be traced for example.
- The brand image is positive and a successful entity. Not too "hippie" brand image. Believable and credible. Not extreme. Trendy, outdoors.
- The customer is aware of CSR from social media posts. Ecological aspects. Product descriptions.
- CSR communication has been good. Not too much of it. Not too little either.
- Suggestions for improvement: Communicating about the entire lifecycle of the product.
- Too many certificates are used in general. Not valuable, not aware of all of them.
- The big picture is important.
- Positive feedback, the products are long-lasting.
- Improvements: Beanies have shrunk after washing. Socks have some lint in them after usage.
- Overall very happy with the quality.
- The customer prefers concrete communication. Nowadays companies talk and communicate a lot but do not act.
- The customer prefers easily accessible information.
- Soft tone of voice. Community aspect. Community spirit.
- The customer does not like inequality. Does not like inculpatory TOV.

- Pyhä, Ruka. Carbon neutral ski centers. VARG clothing, Haglöfs, Maloja, Patagonia.
- Prefers European & Finnish clothing.

Appendix 5. Interview 4

- CSR is increasingly important.
- The customer wants to be aware of the responsilibity of clothing.
- Manufacturing process and materials are important.
- Quality and durability.
- No fast-fashion.
- Working conditions of the employees.
- The customer is aware of the textiles and clothing industry through own occupation.
- Organic materials.
- Well-being of the animals.
- No harmful chemicals used.
- As small carbon footprint as possible.
- Durability of the product.
- The customer gets information from company websites and online.
- Follows the industry actively.
- Fact based information.
- The customer found VAIKO in a retail store in Oulu.
- The customer was impressed by the quality.
- The price matched the quality.
- The customer received more information from the employees at the retail store.
- Organic cotton and the source.
- The customer did not want to buy a new beanie every year.
- Brand impression is natural, calm, good vibes, clear.
- The customer has read about CSR on social media posts. The source of the wool.
- The working conditions.
- The balance is good in CSR communication. Not too much or too little. The visual and external look of the Instagram feed it's important. Attention and interest.

- The customer is not thoroughly aware of the domesticity of the products. The customer knew that the wooden labels are made in Finland.
- The customer suggests that the domesticity could be communicated more. The customer thinks that other people would appreciate it too.
- The customer refers clear communication that is fact based. No unnecessary stuff. The customer suggests that publishing followers' questions could be a good idea. Instagram question box. These would be available for everyone.
- Kind TOV that is personal. A TOV that is based on expertise and facts.
- Joutsen. Responsibly produced down, domestic production and design.

Appendix 6. Interview 5

- CSR of clothing companies means a lot. Growing constantly. The customer only buys secondhand clothing and responsibly made products.
- Ethics is the most important factor. The source of the textiles. Second important is the environment and the ecological factors. The customer prefers organic and recycled materials.
- The customer finds information by searching on Google. The customer reads webpages and blogs. The customer has found good brands from "Fashion Revolution".
- The customer came across VAIKO on Instagram and searched it on Google. I was impressed by transparency of the company such as where wool comes from. The customer also read about VAIKO on a blog.
- The brand impression is very Finnish and natural.
- The customer cannot recall any instances where CSR has been communicated on social media. The customer hopes to see more of that. Would like to see content from the factory and about the lifecycle of the product.
- VAIKO could write about domesticity and CSR on Instagram bio. The person also suggests that VAIKO could write some of their CSR communication in Finnish. The customer thinks that it's a lot of work to read everything in English, and even more for those who speak less English.
- The customer also suggests that people may not know about the domesticity because there is nothing in Finnish.
- Extremely happy with the products.
- The customer likes transparent communication that is clear and easy to understand. The customer prefers companies that explain what responsible clothing means.
- The customer thinks that it is useless to communicate about responsibility, if people don't understand what it actually means. At the same time the importance of it might not be understood.
- The customer does not like communication that makes people guilty based on their choices and actions. The customer prefers honest and thought-provoking communication.

- Other responsible companies: Nepra, clear lifecycle of the product. Patagonia.
- The customer finds brands from other influencers.
- Customer would like to see video material from the factory and from the manufacturing of the products.
- The customer really likes VAIKO's product photos but would like to see more video content. The customer would like to see the backstory behind the products.