Haaga-Helia
University of Applied Sciences

Utilizing Case Company's Sustainable Practices to Improve its Online Content

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Bachelor's Thesis
Degree Programme in
International Business
2021

Haaga-Helia
University of Applied Sciences

Abstract

30 April 2021

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Degree programme
International Business

Report/thesis title	**Number of pages and attachment pages**
Utilizing Case Company's Sustainable Practices to Improve Its Online Content	56 + 15

Nowadays, It is more cruical than never before to conduct the business sustainably and circularily, and to integrate the sustainability throughout the whole supply chains. There are various ways for creating sustainable fashion. Sustainability of the fashion brands improves their branding and competitiveness. Not only the environmental; but also the social and economical sustainability dimensions should be considered. The communication of fashion brands' sustainability should be clear and transparent in order to spread the awareness, because consumers are important part of the sustainable supply chains integration.

This research aimed to utilize the sustainable practices implemented within the Finnish fashion brand to improve its sustainability communication and to boost its attractiveness. The content analysis was used to analyse its current sustainability communication. To answer the questions of which fashion brand's sustainable practices are the most important for conscious consumers; and how their online communication should look like, secondary data were reviewed and the empirical research was conducted: quantitative survey collected 170 responses.

Based on the survey results, the clothing's sustainability was an important factor for consumers. When deciding between similar products, the brand's sustainability was important for the significant percentage of respondents. Social sustainability was more important for consumers than the environmental one. Two thrids of respondents preferred the local brand to a foreign one. More than two thirds of sample favoured the sustainable materials instead of raw materials to some extent. The most important life-extending practices were the product- and timeless-design; followed by the repairing options. Possibilities for returning used clothing for a sustainable disposal or donation were more important than for the recycling. The most important operations to be green for consumers were packaging, manufacturing, suppliers and retailing. Social practices of human-rights were more important than the working-environment related practices.

Google, Instagram and in-store shopping were the most used platforms for searching new sustainable brands. The channels checked first when consumers find a new brand they like, were brand's website, Google and Instagram. The most desired sustainability-related content to be seen online were brand's sustainable materials; social sustainability; and sustainable manufacturing. Other type of demanded content to be used by the brand online, are the customers' reviews; behind the scenes; and general educational content.

These and other sustainable aspects should be communicated clearly and transparently on Company's website; all social media platforms; and in person. Consumers should be well-targetted with the appropriate content messages based on their sustainability interests. Brand should highlight its products' attributes; all its sustainable practices and emphasize their positive impact. Engaging, fresh and bolt communication is crucial. Communication should combine the social, emotional and environmental values.

Keywords
sustainababilty in the fashion industry, sustainability communication, conscious consumers, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, circular business models

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1 Introduction

This is a research type of bachelor´s thesis for Degree Programe in International Business in the major specialization of Supply Chain Management at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the main points that are crucial to understand regarding this thesis topic to the reader, and to explain the purpose and importance of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Companies and organizations are nowadays shifting towards circular economy business approach more than never before. This transition to resource efficient operating is usually accompanied by specific benefits that come as a result of such change. (OECD 2019, 19.) Circular business models can help close material loops, and therefore minimize the waste already generated or to prevent its generation at all (Kiørboe, Sramkova & Krarup 2015, 6).

Sustainable segmentation is addressed by many empirical studies. When creating sustainability types, the treatment of the ecological, social and economic dimensions of sustainability is very important. However, only strength of consciousness is considered in these sustainable segmentation typologies, lacking the existence of different patterns among sustainable consumption behavior types. (Balderjahn, Peyer, Seegebarth, Wiedmann & Weber 2018.)

Case Company operates already sustainably, by application of sustainable product design and implementation of green supply chain processes such as reusing, repairing and remanufacturing. Even though the sustainability itself of the brand is presented, there is not enough emphasis nor visibility of various sustainable practices implemented within the company in its online content, which could be very important for various conscious buyers.

Which sustainable practices of clothing brand are the most important for conscious consumers? How can circularity of the company be utilized to improve the brand´s online communication tailored to conscious buyers? What should the sustainable slow fashion brand put the emphasis on, if wanting to increase the visibility of its sustainable actions? Is it possible to attract consumers based on their sustainability preference?

These questions are important to find the answers to in order to increase the visibility of sustainable operations which are implemented throughout the supply chain of the business. For me as the young sustainability enthusiast and junior business professional

to be, it was important to acquire new knowledge and understanding of various circular business models implemented throughout the fashion industry. It was important to me to undersrand and find out what role does sustainable visibility play to the business and its customers.

1.2 Research Question

This thesis aimed to help to improve online communication and tailor the targeting practices of the Case Company by pinpointing out its variety of sustainable processes. The outcome of the thesis was to fully understand by the company itself and all its stakeholders, which concepts of circular economy business models are implemented within the company´s processes and practices and how they are communicated. More importantly, the aim was also to help the company to understand what is the most important for conscious consumers and what are they interested to see in the sustainable communication. Overall, the outcome is to recommend the company how could be the company´s sustainable concepts utilized to improve its online image, online content and sustainability communication towards the consumers.

The research question (RQ) was
How can Case Company utilize its sustainable practices to develop its sustainability oriented online content to keep current B2C customers and to attract new ones?

The research question was divided into investigative questions (IQ):

IQ 1. How are the sustainable practices currently implemented in the Case Company based on circular economy business models?

> **IQ 1.1** How well are they presented on Case Company´s website and social media channels?

IQ 2. Which sustainable processes / practices in the fashion industry are the most important for conscious consumers?

IQ 3: How the sustainability of the company should be communicated to have the biggest possible reach?

Table 1 presents the overlay matrix including the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, and research methods as well as result chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative Question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results
IQ 1. How are the sustainable practices currently implemented in Case Company based on circular economy business models?	Circular Economy; Circular Economy Business Models; Sustainable Supply Chain Management	Secondary descriptive analysis; Desktop research – literature review	Sustainable practices implemented within company analysed based on circular business models
IQ 1.1. How well are they presented on Case Company´s website and social media sites?	Sustainability in the Fashion Industry; Sustainability Communication	Qualitative content analysis	Analysis of current online communication published by the company
IQ 2. Which sustainable processes / practices in the fashion industry are the most important for conscious consumers?	Sustainable Consumption; Circular business models	Survey of conscious consumers in Finland: descriptive statistical analysis	Results of conscious consumers attitudes, perceptions, preferences, importance of visibility of sustainable content
IQ 3. What aspects should be emphasized in the sustainability communication?	Sustainability in the Fahsion Industry; Online Content	Qualitative content analysis based on IQ2 results; Secondary data: qualitative content analysis; Competitors Benchmarking	What type of sustanability communication / type of content is the most important / valuable for consumers to see; what and where should be communicated

1.3 Demarcation

It was important to demarcate the thesis topic in order to stick up to it while conducting research and to focus only on the relevant, core issues. The author has decided to use several demarcation criteria, listed down bellow.

Direction of communication was Business-to-Consumers (B2C), geographical focus was on international European online presence with the main focus on Finland. Phenomenal aspect were soft data. Best practices have been researched. From the point of stakeholders, B2C, potential customers and management has been considered. Regarding the timeline, the focus was placed on present and future activities.

The research question was demarcated using several criteria: the research was conducted for the case company. Utilizing the company´s practices specified the period of a timeline as present time. “Developing“ means the best practices are researched, focused on the future timeline. The word ‘’online’’ signified the focus of online communica-

tion. B2C specified the B2C clients. Lastly, attracting new clients specified the time period of a timeline as future.

1.4 International Aspect

The topic fulfills GLOBBA´s requirements of international aspect because of the following reasons: the case company is Finnish and the author of this thesis is an international student. Some operations within the company are conducted internationally which will be analysed. Perceptions of conscious consumers were analyzed among Finnish and international consumers; and lastly - Improvement of Case Company´s online content can boost its international presence.

1.5 Benefits

This sub-chapter explains what are the benefits of this research for the commissioning company, its Business-to-Business (B2B) clients, end consumers, and the thesis author.

Based on the analysis of current sustainable practices and their communication the author aimed to improve the full understanding of the company itself and its employees of circular economy business models implemented. Nonetheless, the current sustainability communication has been analyzed and the potentional developments have been suggested. This can be widely utilized by marketing specialists for development of various companies´ online presence, focusing on their unique standpoint and targeting practices of different types of conscious consumers.

From the viewpoint of B2B clients, the clear understanding and communication of company´s sustainable practices might make the business more attractive and trustworthy. Emphasizing the sustainable practices implemented could be utilized for finding new customers and partners based on the shared core values. Clear communication of company´s circular operations might attract new sponsors as well. Nevertheless, it may also contribute to the overall visibility of sustainability importance and implementation within fashion industry.

Conscious end consumers want nowadays fully understand how the processes run within the company, and want to see broadly how the company emphasizes the uniqueness and importance of sustainability aspects. Clear marketing and online content relevant for various target groups can result in better trust with the clients, raise their interest of the company, and influence their future buying decisions, and most importantly - to improve the word of mouth.

There are more points of view how does the author benefit from this project. First of all, analysis of circular opersations is the area the author is interested in and wants to expand the knowledge related to circular economy further. Secondly, marketing aspect of this project might provide the practical overview of conscious consumers´ behaviour and pinpoint the importance of the right strategies used for boosting the communication of the online business. Lastly, conducting research for the case company can give the author a good working experience.

1.6 Key Concepts

Circular Business Model is a business model that is suited for the Circular Economy by embracing elements that narrow, reduce and close the resources loops, in order to decrease the overall input and its value, and to minimize the overall waste. (Bockew, Pauw, Bakker & Grinten 2016.)

Green / Conscious consumer is someone whose behaviour pattern is environmentally friendly and who purchases green alternatives over the standard products. Conscious consumers are more internally-controlled as it is in their belief that each individual play a role in an effective environmental protection. (Boztepe 2012, 7.)

Brand image is the sum of all impressions that consumers receive from various sources. All these impressions create a “personality” which may be seen differently by each consumer group. It is the sum of consumers´ cognitive and emotional perceptions along with a physical product. (Herzog 1963, 76-86.)

Content marketing is a management process which involves identification, analysis and satisfaction of customers´ demand through implementation of digital content distributed via online channels, with the aim to gain profit. Marketing research and consumer behaviour are closely related, as they collect information about customers to utilize them throughout the content marketing. (Rowley 2008, 518-519.)

1.7 Commissioning Company

Case Company wanted to remain anonymous. It was founded a few years ago in northern Finland. It is a limited liability company. The company operates in the fashion industry and its main activity is manufacturing and sales of wearing apparel. Case Company’s turnover was almost 120 thousand euros in 2019. Its net sales increased by 36% in 2019 in comparison to 2018. (Finder 2020.)

Case Company designs slow fashion apparel in accordance with the sustainable principles such as ethical production, usage of sustainable materials, and implementation of circular processes. The company is in the matter of fact very sustainable and wants to increase the visibility of it on the online platforms to increase its sales. The author and the company's representative together concluded that having in place a well-targeted and relevant online communication is crucial for this to happen.

This is not the case when company wants to become falsely attractive via green-washing content in order to gain new consumers. It is rather the case when the company wants to utilize the sustainable processes that are already implemented in order to become more competitive, attractive and convenient. The brand wants to communicate its sustainability better to the conscious consumers that are interested in the sustainable processes of the slow fashion brand.

2 Circularity, Sustainability in the Fashion Industry and Sustainable Consumption

This chapter covers the theoretical framework of this research. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and explain to the reader which concepts, models and theories were fundamental to understand for conducting the successful research. The aim is also to show how these components inter-relate to each other.

The theoretical framework consists of 4 main components: Circular Economy, Sustainable Supply Chain Management, Sustainable Consumption and Online Content. Each one of them is later divided into several sub-chapters, relevant for the thesis and cruical for the reader's understanding. Circular Economy and Sustainable Supply Chain Management parts will be covered the most broadly.The third and fourth subchapter – Sustainable Consumption and Online Content will be covered only briefly. Figure 1 illustrates the sub-chapters of the theoretical framework and their inter-relation.

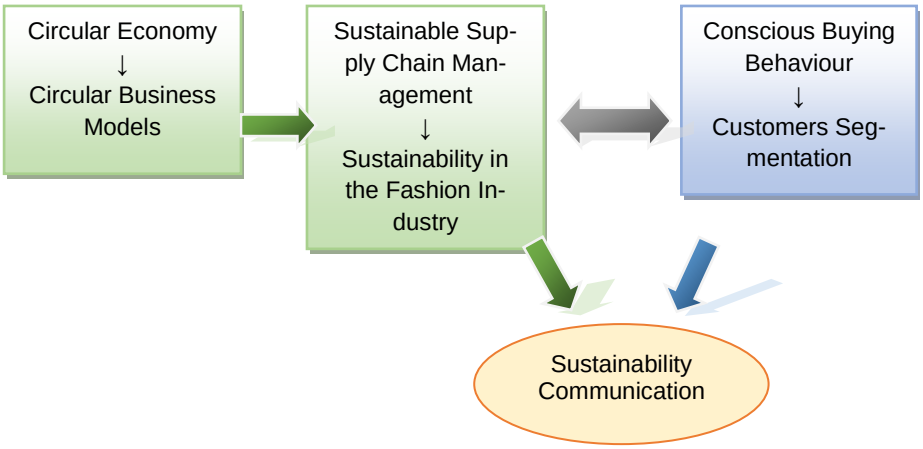

Figure 1. Visualization of Theoretical Framework: Brand´s Sustainability and Conscious Consumers Segmentation

2.1 Circular Business Solutions for Fashion Industry

This sub-chapter covers the circular economy theory, and introduces various circular business models that are applicable in the fashion industry. Only the ones that are relevant for this research are covered and explained into detail.

2.1.1 Circular Economy

Linear Economy (LE) approach is often referred to as "take, make and dispose". Overexploitation of resources in LE is damaging to the environment and societies. (Silänpää & Ncibi 2019, 1.) LE is often resulting in waste generation of many valuable materials as

well (Burgon & Wentworth 2018, 70). Many wake-up callers tried to influence decision-makers to change this attitude since 1960's, by pin-pointing out the bad impact of various industrial and agricultural activities of this linear approach. These activities were mainly related to soil, availibility of resources and air and water contamination. (Silänpää & Ncibi 2019, 2.)

In comparison to LE, Circular Economy (CE) deals with the imminment sustainability problems. CE has appeared as a viable economic concept over last couple of decades, and it is growing rapidly since 2000's. (Silänpää & Ncibi 2019, 1.) This concept stands for closing or slowing material loops instead of prevailing their linearity, to rather preserve all parts while maximizing their input. The sustainable concept of this approach is appealing through substituting harming primary production for environmentally frendlier secondary production. (Zink & Geyer 2017.)

CE focuses on increasing the lifespam of all inputs at their most value, by implementation of processes such as renewing, recovering, reusing and remanufacturing (Burgon & Wentworth 2018, 70). Circularity can be achieved either via regeneration of biological systems or restoration of technological ones (Burgon & Wentworth 2018, 71).

CE concept can be grouped into economic, environmental and social dimensions, therefore its definitions differentiate based on various perceptions of scientists, professionals and institutions. Here is the definition by Kirschher, Reike and Hekkert (2017, 229) based on the analysis of 114 definitions of CE that provided the first quantitative evidence of various definitions of CE:

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

Although CE is desirable, there is a question how it can be achievable. Product design is one of the most important steps towards CE. Majority of environmental impact of the product can be determined at a design stage. There is also a correlation between sustainable design and products' longevity; consumption of resources and externalities. (Burgon & Wentworth 2018, 72.)

2.1.2 Introduction to Circular Economy Business Models

Business model reflects the organization‘s interrelated decisions and processes, which shape how the value is created and delivered within the organization. In accordance to CE business, innovation should take place beyond processes, products, and services. Innovation should involve the resource management while considering sustainability, within central value proposition of an organization. (Charter & McLanaghan 2018, 90.)

There have been discussions on a rise in recent years about green business models, sustainable business models and CE business models. However, the academic approaches vary in terminology, resulting that the similar business models are named differently. (Charter & McLanaghan 2018, 89.)

Figure 2 displays all processes of the product’s lifecycle and its service systems that are in accordance to the CE.

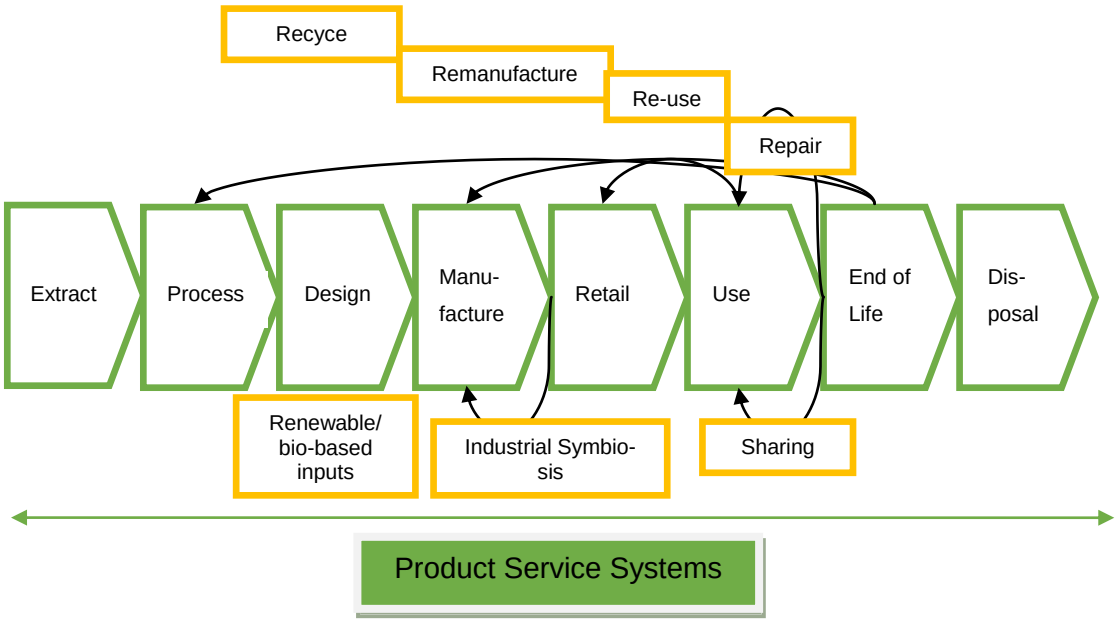

Figure 2. The impact of circular business models on linear economy (adapted from OECD 2019)

In the following subchapters the author will cover a few CE business models, only the ones that are relevant for this research. CE business models are chosen based on their environmental factor. Social and economical factors of CE will not be covered in this chapter.

2.1.3 Circular Supply Business Model

Circular supply business model replaces the traditional material inputs with bio-based, renewable or recovered materials. By making strategic choices at the beginning of the product design, firms can dramatically reduce their environmental footprint emanating from their supply chains. At the same time, materials used as an input do not end up as waste.

This model can be seen as a form of resource recovery, where the recovery of materials is considered at an early life stage of product´s lifecycle. This model is often referred to as "cradle to cradle" design, where materials at the end of product's lifecycle become inputs for manufacturing new products, instead of becoming waste. From the point of resource efficiency, this model serves to close the material loops. (OECD 2019, 26-27.)

2.1.4 Product Life Extension Models

These models focus on extention of the products' lifecycle. Their aim is to decrease the inputs of new extracted materials, and to slow down the material loops. There are 3 sub-types involved. The first one is the classic long life model, where the lifecycle of a product is extended by its design and higher durability, resulting in higher quality of a product, therefore higher price as well. (OECD 2019, 29.) Products may also be designed as modular to extend their lifecycle, meaning that some parts of them can be easily upgraded or replaced, without repairing or reconditioning the whole item (Charter & McLanaghan 2018, 96).

Second sub-type are reusing and repairing models, that secure longer service life of a product (OECD 2019, 29). Direct reuse means utilizing products that are still usable and have not reached the end of their lifecycle, by redistributing them to new owners. It is usually carried out by a 3rd party, not the original manufacturer. (Lacy & Rutqvist 2015, 69.) Maintenance and repair fall under this category as well. These stand for fixing or replacing unfunctional components of products to reach their full life expentancy. Maintenance and repair activities are faciliated by both, the manufacturer and a 3rd party. All of these reusing and repairing activities allow the circulation of used and repaired products in the economy, which would have otherweise been thrown away. (OECD 2019, 30.)

Third category is refurbishment, recondition and remanufacturing as a restoration of a used product (OECD 2019, 29). Refurbishment is focused on the aesthetical improvement of a degraded product, resulting in its like-new appereance. However, there is a limited improvement of its functionality. Similarily, recondition means adjusting components of

a product to make it work again, but not neccessary to its original stage. (Spelman & Sheerman 2014, 18.) On the other hand, remanufacturing involves series of steps at the end of products' lifecycle with the aim to return like-new, or even better performing products, with a matching warranty (Spelman & Sheerman 2014, 16).

2.1.5 Sharing Platform Models

These models involve using consumers' assets, through lending or pooling. These can be used for products that are not as efficiently used as they could be. Sharing models have 2 sub-categories, co-owners and co-accessors. While owners have under-utilized assets, individuals are seeking to use them for a lower price. There is a temporary transfer of product ownership instead of the permanent one. In these models, the usage of under-utilized physical assets is involved, not the services. (OECD 2019, 32.)

Co-ownership sub-type involves the lending of physical assets. These products are not used to their full life service, and are usually durable and easy to transport. The consumers don't buy the product but rather borrow it, while a lender provides a durable product suitable for intensive usage. (Demailly & Novel 2014, 20.) On the other hand, co-access variant means approving the access of other people to the part of the activity which is occuring anyway. It has a positive environmental impact if users do not use shared facility to use more. (Demailly & Novel 2014, 21.)

2.1.6 Resource Recovery Business Models

Resource recovery model implies to production of secondary materials out of waste materials, to close the material loops. 3 main activities are involved: collection of waste produced by households and organizations, sorting of waste streams into basic units, and producing raw materials from sorted waste materials - known as secondary production. These raw materials are then sold to manufacturers.

There is a difference between downcycling, upcycling and industrial symbiosis. Downcycling like recycling, refers to creation of raw materials from waste, where recovered materials have subordinate quality, therefore they can only be used in a limited amount of applications. On the other side, upcycling is transformation of waste into relatively high quality materials. (OECD 2019, 28.) Industrial symbiosis occurs when by-products of one firm are used as inputs in another firm. Emphasis is on industrial and commercial waste streams. (Achterberg, Hinfelaar & Bocken 2016, 3.)

Part of resource recovery model is also the incentivized return, known as extended producer responsibility, where consumers can return the product to the producer that is either used or unwanted. Items might be later repaired, remanufactured, refurbished or recycled. (Charter & McLanaghan 2018, 98.)

2.2 Sustainable Supply Chain Management

This sub-chapter covers the theory of sustainable supply chain management into detail. Reverse logistics, green SCM and sustainable SCM models will be explained and compared to each-other. Additionally, sustainability in the fashion industry will be discussed as well.

2.2.1 Introduction to Sustainable Supply Chain Management

In the Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM), supply chains (SC) are managed with the incorporated sustainability objectives. These objectives are determined by the organization, customers, suppliers and external stakeholders. They involve environmental, economic and social dimensions - also known as Tripple Bottom Line (TBL). All 3 dimensions should be reached by all SC members to make the SC fully sustainable. (Fritz 2019, 2.) Figure 3 illustrates the paths towards SSCM.

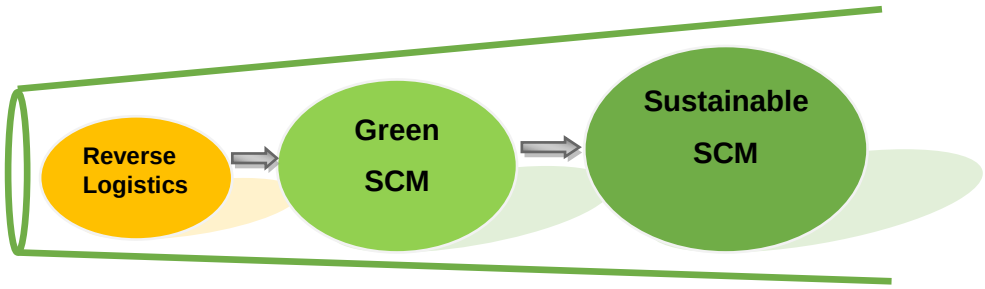

Figure 3. Paths towards sustainable supply chain management (adapted from Fritz 2019, 4)

2.2.2 Reverse Logistics

There are many various sub-topics underneath of SSCM, but one of the most important and well-known, the predecessor of Green SCM - is the Reverse Logistics (RL) (Fritz 2019, 3). Reverse logistics is the management of reversed SCs flows, that involves return of used products to the manufacturer and their efficient disposal or recovery. It helps to lower the inventory, transportation, and waste disposal costs, while strenghtens customers' loyalty. (Kannan, Murugesan, Senthil & Noorul Haq 2009, 163-165.)

In order to manage the reverse flows efficiently, to collect and to manage generated waste, there should be a collection process developed that involves a development of adequate logistis and infrastructure. Reverse SCM requires collaboration between all parties involved: consumers/customers, manufacturers, other stakeholders, and in some cases also a government. (Bouzon, Govindan & Rodriguez 2018, 315-316.)

2.2.3 Green Supply Chain Management

Green Supply Chain Management (GSCM) is interpreted as part of SSCM. However, these 2 often overlap and there is often no clear differentiation. It can be considered as reverse logistics with additional applied initiatives to reduce, control and to run the business in the environmental friendly manner, excluding the part of social sustainability. Besides of reverse logistics, GSCM incorporates all SC´s functions considering their environmental aspect. These are illustrated in Figure 4. (Fritz 2019, 5-7.)

There are 3 main processes that must be taken into consideration when integrating GSCM. Firstly, green criteria should be adapted by the organization by revision of its activities from the design stage to manufacturing, warehousing, transportation, and purchasing (Schöggl, Baumgartner & Hofer 2017, 1602-1604). Secondly, suppliers should be selected by pre-determined environmental criteria that are in accordance to businesses' policies and standards (Rao 2002, 632-634). Lastly, also customers should be actively involved in the process of making the SCs greener, by management of the products' impact at their end of life stage. To improve consumers' practices, information about the environmental management should be continuously and transparently shared. (Gonzales-Benito 2008, 7017-7019.)

Moreover, the collaboration between all stakeholders including governmental and non-governmental organizations and local communities is crucial to improve greener performance of SCs (Fritz 2019, 5-6).

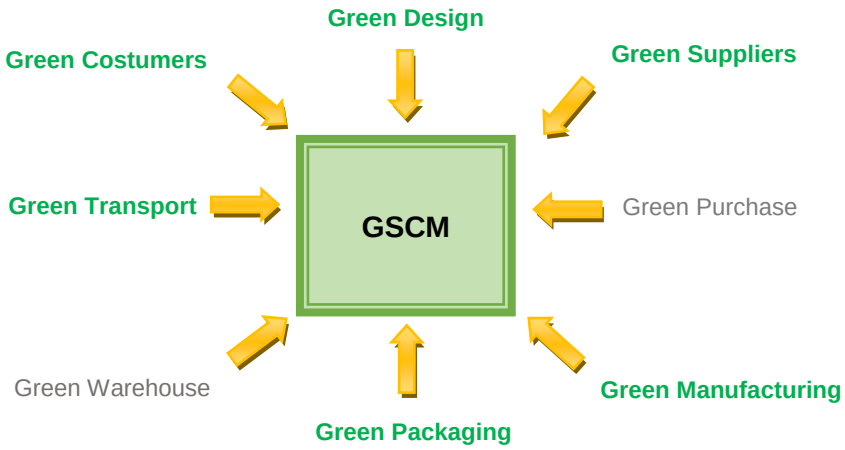

Figure 4. Aspects of green supply chain management. (adapted from Fritz 2019, 5)

The green aspects of Figure 4 highlighted in green colour are the ones, which are the most relevant for the Case Company and play an important role in conducting this research. In the eco-material production, incorporating usage of organic fabrics is environmental friendlier (De Brito, Carbone & Blanquart 2008, 541-543). Other sustainable alternative according to Anson (2012, 4-5), is using reused and recycled old materials as material inputs; or adopting biological textile production - for example in the cotton production (De Brito & al. 2008, 541-543). Sustainable manufacturing is not only related to the environmental issues anymore, but involves the social sustainability as well (Dickson 1999, 44-45). Regarding green distribution, SCs should take into consideration their CO2 emissions as carbon footprint, that is significantly lower when sourcing locally (Choi 2013, 43-44). Green retailing incorporates user experience and creation of value, while focusing on ethical consumers and their interests (Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, 1879-1880). The clear and transparent communication about products' sustainability and their SCs operations play an important role in customers' loyalty and sustainability awareness (Joergens 2006, 369-370).

2.2.4 Sustainable Supply Chain Management

SSCM refers to integrating GSCM practices together with the social dimension of the sustainability, which is often undermined. In practice, sustainable practices are often restricted to the green practices only. (Yawar and Seuring 2017, 621-622.) SSCM can be understood as the incorporated process along all SCs, with the integrated internal, suppliers', customers', and community's sustainability of SCs (Wong, Wong & Boon 2015, 43-44). SSCM has became crucial with the growing SC risks of global trade, from the financial, social and ecological perspective (Teuscher, Grüninger & Ferdinand 2006, 1-3).

Social sustainability can be assessed with the help of GRI guideliness on the level of occupational health and safety, labor management, diversity, equality, education, non-discrimination, human rights and freedom of association. UNGC guideliness include also labour issues such as child and forced labour, and human rights at workplace. (Global Compact Network Canada 2019.) Social responsibility is epmhasized alxso in the ISO26000 tool (ISO 2010).

For sustainable SC management, it is cruical for sustainability to be integrated throughout the whole SC at various strategic levels, as Figure 5 displays. This incorporation is not hierarchiral, as it can be applied at different stages simultaneously and in different order. (Firtz 2019, 8.)

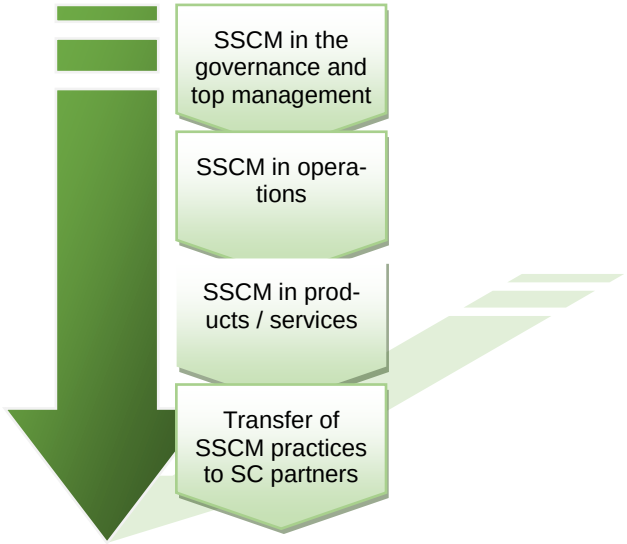

Figure 5. Integrating sustainable supply chain management at all strategic levels. (adapted from Fritz 2019,8)

2.2.5 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

Variety of fashion textiles production origins together with the multiple definitions of sustainable practices in the fashion sector are providing plenty of variables for creating a sustainable fashion in the mass market nowadays. Sustainable oriented fashion brands are mainly considering the “true cost“ factor of social and environmental dimension of sustainability; usage of less harmfull and quality raw materials; and disposal or renewal of material waste. (Gwilt & Rissanen 2011, 31.)

Sustainable fashion SCs improve brand’s image and the competiteveness by promoting its responsibility towards the society and environment (Yang, Lin, Chan & Sheu 2010, 218). Sustainable fashion supply chains involve usage of ecological materials, sustainable

manufacturing, green distribution and retailing, and consider conscious consumers (Shen, Zheng, Chow & Chow 2014, 971-973).

The market is dominated by small to medium sized entreprises that have limited capital for technological investments and development of business processes (Gwilt & Rissanen 2011, 31). Despite of this, there is a polarization in the fashion industry, that provides the opportunity for alternative sector to emerge to create the value to users by circular models implementation (Pearce & Young 2007). As the mater of this, sustainable practices are gaining more attention among conscious consumers, for example the practice as Finn pointed out “make local-sell local“ or the practice that Fraser pointed out “deconstruct-reconstruct“ (Gwilt & Rissanen 2011, 31.) Desings that are supported by craft skills and hand-made aspects, and products made by smaller local companies are celebrated and worn as a political symbol standing against the fast fashion in the developed world (Gwilt & Rissanen 2011, 31).

2.3 Sustainable Consumption

This sub-chapters consists of the theoretical coverage of conscious consumers’ behaviour and sustainable consumers’ segmentation. Both of these aspects are important to understand in order to have better overview regarding the structure and results of the empirical research.

2.3.1 Conscious Consumers’ Behaviour

In the last couple of decades, the environmental issues have been seeking growing attention that reflected the concern and awareness of public, resulting in the change of customer behaviour regarding greener products. Green or conscious consumer behaviour is the behaviour that considers environmental impact of manufacturing and consumption of products. Many western companies and their marketers’ practices have been affected by such change, due to change in behavioural patterns towards the preference of environmental friendlier products. (Akehurst, Afonso & Martins Gonçalves 2012, 974-976.)

Environmental consciousness can be defined as the extent to which an organization’s products have been produced within environmental friendly manner, while their negative impacts on the environment have been minimized. Knowledge of consumers regarding greener products affects their concern by growing involvement towards green products. (Fraj & Martinez 2006a, 140-141.)

In conscious buying behaviour the decision making process is influenced by factors such as lifestyle, peer influence, knowledge about sustainable products and environmental impact of such purchase. Both internal and external factors play a role in purchasing decision. The environmental consciousness in the buying behaviour is impacted by person's behaviour pattern, attitudes and cognitive components. (Balderjahn 1988, 52-54.) The factors impacting directly green purchasing decision are illustrated in Figure 6.

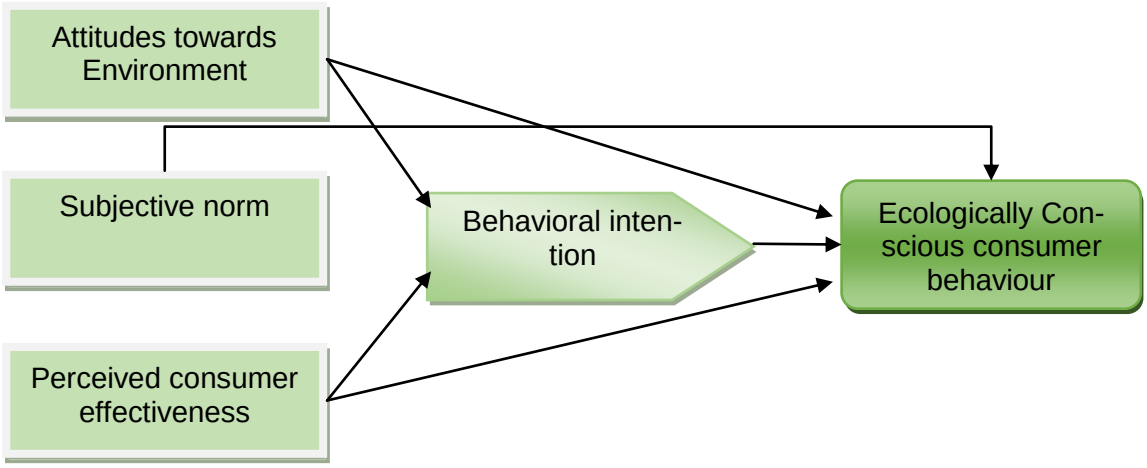

Figure 6. Factors affecting green consumer behaviour. (adapted from Taufique & Vaithianathan 2018, 48)

Role of companies' green branding and positioning has been discussed among researchers as well. According to Hartmann, Ibanez and Sainz (2005, 20), the emotional and functional attributes should be combined in the branding of green products. Based on Pickett-Baker's and Ozaki's research (2008, 292-293), there is a correlation between consumers' belief in better performance of green products and their positive attitudes towards environmental friendly products. However, even though there was a willingness of consumers to purchase greener alternatives, there was a lack of awareness about their green attributes. It was caused due to lack of promotion and communication regarding the green products' impact on the environment from the companies' side.

2.3.2 Sustainable Consumers' Segmentation

Sustainable consumption involves several types of consumers and variety of behavioural standards. Therefore, the companies should not only consider conscious buyers as all-or nothing, but rather focus on the factors such as values, expectations and attitudes of conscious consumers. (Balderjahn, Peyer, Seegebarth, Wiedmann & Weber 2018, 83.)

In the last 2 decades, many empirical studies' objective was to identify sustainable consumers' segments. As report by Balderjahn & al. 2018 suggests, these studies differentiate in many aspects: context of consumption (eg. various product category); sustainability

dimension (eg. study by Dickson 2011 focused on “ethical consumption“; Verain, Sijtsema, & Antonides 2016 examining “healthy lifestyle“); the dimensionality (eg. only one or more dimensions of sustainable consumption); central sustainability angle (eg. green consumption); segmentation variables (eg. values, attitudes, expectations); profiling variables (eg. socioeconomic attributes); segmentation structure (eg. low to high or multifaced consciousness); and segments’ correlation to the actual conscious consumption (eg. study by Grimmer, Kilburn & Miles 2016; Verain & al. 2016).

Even though sustainable segmentation was researched by many empirical studies with the same objective, considering different segmentation variables, regarding all 3 aspects of sustainability; there is considered only one sided view of sustainability at most studies, often focusing only on 1 dimension of sustainability - mostly environmental dimension of sustainability (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics, & Bohlen 2003, 465-466).

Hence, many typologies are acknowledging only different level of intensity of consciousness, neglecting the existence of various modes of sustainable behaviour and the multifaced sustainable consumption phenomenon. Nothwistanding, the economic segment was often oversought in recent studies, considering only above mentioned, environmental aspect of sustainability as ”green” or ”non-green” consumer behaviour. (Balderjahn & al. 2018, 83-85.) Only a few studies cover broader perspective of sustainable consumption (eg. Simpson & Radford 2014; Poortinga & Darnton 2016), studying two or all three dimensions of sustainability conscious behaviour and its multifaced phenonemon.

2.4 Online Content

This sub-chapter discusses the importance and various types of online content.

2.4.1 Content Marketing

Understanding consumers’ behaviour has been challenged by the change, as consumers began rejecting the traditional marketing tactics of inbound marketing strategies, because of their nature and interrupting practices. That is why a content marketing has became an efficient strategy over the last couple of years, engaging consumers that are interested to receive a guidance and detailed information about the comapnies’ products/services, before committing to a purchase. (Murthy 2011, 31.)

Content marketing is marketing of products/services that focuses rather on delivering value to the consumers – helping them in some matter, instead of promoting the prod-

ucts/services just with the aim to sell (Gattis 2014, 52). The purpose of the compelling content is to teach, inform, interact, and to provide the help and support through every step of the buying process, with the aim to persuade consumers to choose your solutions over the ones of competitors (Murthy 2011, 31).

2.4.2 Online Communication

As Digital Market Grorup (2021) suggests, the best quality online content is original, actionable, accurate, informative and interesting. Based on Mccoy's (2018) article about secrets of high-performing online content, not only relevant keywords, irresistible and helpful headlines, writing flow, illustrations, call-to actions are very important for catching consumers' attention, but most importantly the value creation and the right communication considering individual needs and attributes of customers are crucial aspects of businesses' content strategies.

According to Digital Marketing Institute (2018), there are 7 popular types of online content: blogs, listickles, e-books, infographics, videos, how-to guides, and case studies. Additionally, according to Gotter (2017), there is a long-form content and templates & checklist downloads. All these and many others play an important role in the fashion industry, contributing to consumers' awareness of sustainability related issues, of businesses' operations, values and actions.

3 Secondary Studies Reviewed: Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

In this chapter the author will review a few studies' results that have been conducted by other authors. The sustainability communication and its consumers' perception will be discussed. Only the relevant reports have been chosen to review that provide additional relevant data to support this research, helping to answer the research question of this research.

3.1 Design Strategies in Sustainable Production & Consumption in Finland

This study was published in 2011, and analyzed Finnish market. The study researched the current knowledge of sustainability in clothing production and consumption. (Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, 1876.)

The same online questionnaire has been distributed via 2 different collection methods. The first one was a random sample and collected 137 responds, representing equally both genders, and quite equally different age categories from 18 to 64 years. 2nd questionnaire was distributed via snowballsampling method and collected 204 responds, out of which more than 70% were from women, and almost 80% of the respondents were people aged 18-35 years. (Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, 1877.) The most relevant results from the questionnaires will be presented and explained.

Regarding the sustainability importance for respondends, the conclusion was that younger consumers were more interested in the environmental and ethical factors in the clothing industry; and men were less worried about sustainability than women. Nonetheless, the interest was not only to acquire more information about the environmental impact within the industry, but about the ethical issues as well. The table from the study, concluding 1st questionnaire's responds is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Consumers' environmental concern according age and gender. Percentage refers to the statements of „totally or somewhat agree". (Adapted version from Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, 1879)

1st Questionnaire	Age < 35 (%)	Age >46 (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
„The 'Made in Finland' aspect in textiles and garments is important to me"	39	60	60	48
„It is important to me that textile production has a small environmental impact"	71	65	70	68
„I want to know about the production and environmental impact of the garments I am purchasing"	61	44	57	38
„I am worried about the ethicality of textile and clothing production"	64	45	64	40
„I am worried about the environmental impact of textile and clothing production"	71	55	77	50

When asked the consumers to choose what phases of the life-cycle of a product they are the most environmentally-concerned about, the location of the manufacturing and product processing were the biggest worries for 1st respondends group, while the lifetime of the product and cultivation of fiber were the issues for 2nd group (younger female standpoint). (Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, 1879.) The biggest percentual value of 5 answers are presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Product lifecycle phases that worry consumers. Percentage refers to the statements of „totally or somewhat agree". (Adapted version from Niinimäki & Hassi 2011, 1879)

Questionnaire 1	%	Questionnaire 2	%
Location of Manufacturing	53	Lifetime of the product	76
Product Processing	45	Cultivation of fiber	50
Lifetime of a product	33	Proudct processing	47
Transportation	32	Location of manufacturing	46
Cultivation of fiber	24	Fiber processing	35

3.2 Perception of Sustainable Consumption Alternatives in Finland

This study was published in 2015. It studied consumers' perceptions on clothing Product Service Systems (PSS) in Finland. The study conducted focus-group interviews, paralelly with private survey study, involving Finnish female fashion-oriented consumers. (Armstrong, Niinimäki, Kujala, Karell & Lang 2015, 30.) 52 participants were involved, aged 24-66 years old, categorized to 8 focus groups into which they were divided based on the similar characteristics. 8 scenarios were illustrated and consumers had to respond providing their personal perspective. (Armstrong & al., 33.) The scenarios are described in the Table 4.

Table 4. Scenarios used for focus group interviews (adapted version from Armstrong & al. 2015, 34)

	PSS	Description	Narrative
1	PO	Repair & Redesign	After purchasing high-quality item at boutique, the customer is offered maintenance service for a small fee (repair/alternating) up to 5 years; another option is to re-design the garment
2	PO	Take back	Used clothing can be returned to the store that can recycle or redesign it for resale; for the coupon for a new purchase in return
3	PO	Customized, Participatory design	Not finalized items for sale, instead their parts offered in the store: sleeves, pant legs, textile swatches and more. 2 services are offered: build the item from the selected components or create brand new garment with the help of in-house designer

4	PO	Make it yourself	Category of products offering the possibility to order a fashion kit containing all necessary components to create own design
5	PO	Consultancy	Consultancy services offered by the store (in-store or online), regarding the styling / restyling of items already owned or utilizing them to the best usage; advising about new purchases
6	UO	Renting	Renting clothing via shared platform, for given amount of items for the given period of time. Possibility to use an online store, or seasonal rental if agreed.
7	UO	Clothing Swaps	Clothes swap events, whose tickets include refreshments, beverages, live music, etc. Possibility to swap clothing that are in a good condition.
PO = product oriented; UO = user oriented			

Figure 7 shows the results of the focus-group interviews that are divided based on the age. The consumers were supposed to evaluate how much they would be interested in offered services on the likeable scale. As the conclusion, participants would be the most interested in offered services of “take back”, “consultancy” and “clothing swap”. (Armstrong & al., 33.)

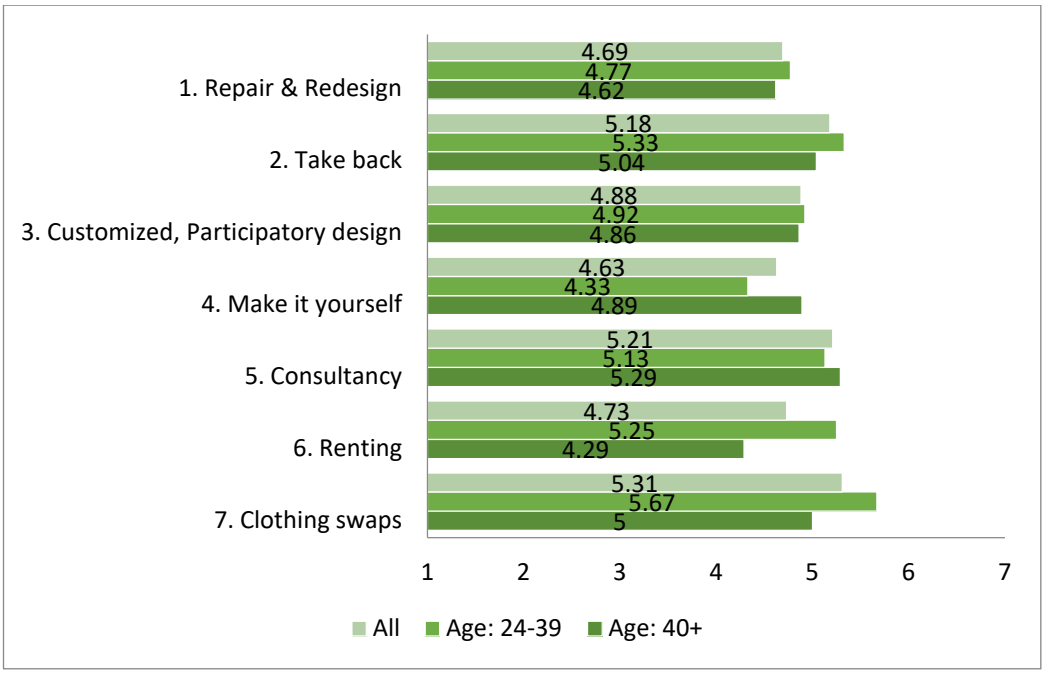

Figure 7. Consumers’ interest in scenarios on 7-point scale: 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree (adapted version from Armstrong & al. 2015, 35)

3.3 Finnish Circular Fashion Communication and Consumers' Attitudes

This study was conducted in Finland in 2017. It analyzed consumers' perceptions of circular garments and communication of remanufacturing process as the tool to encourage consumers for green purchase. 4 data collection methods were applied, incorporated various sutainable topics. (Vehmas, Raudaskoski, Heikkilä, Harlin & Mensonen 2018, 286.) These were the following:

1. Interviews of 5 Finnish consumers, to get the generall overview of consumers' perception on sustainability in the fashion industry. 2. Innovation platform Owela where discussion gathered 50 Finnish participants, the topics discussed involved motivation to recycling and sustainability communication. 3. Internal workshop where results from Owela were explored further with 5-10 project partners. 4. External workshop, involving 18 external stakeholders: communications and textile professionals. The aim was to create materials for demand for sustainable clothing via the right marketing. (Vehmas & al. 2018, 291-292.)

Some of the results of perceptions on circular clothing were the following: participants were more familiar with reuse and return of clothes than usage of circular clothing. Despite of it, they found closed-loop concept cool and sensible to contribute to it. However, when discussing circular clothing, some concerns arised such as aspects of quality, comfort and style. Consumers expect at least the equal quality of circular materials as the garments made out of raw materials. Some of the concerns involved the questions about material's stretch, stay of colours or products' care instructions. Regarding the style, interviewees expressed they feel there is lack of stylish circular clothing. Circular designs should look equal to the traditional clothing. Some worrries were also expressed towards comfort, discussing the unknown feeling of materials on the skin, its softness and breathability.

Additionally, most Owela respondents and interviewees were attentive about clothing return, and showed higher interest in taking care of the items in the end of their lifecyle, rather than in the beginning of it. Their motivation to do so is increased by easy and accesible return process. (Vehmas & al. 2018, 292-293.)

Results of the sustainability communication were the following: participants expressed the sustainable brands could communicate much more about their environmental and ethical operations. There is a need to explain how the circular processes create closed loop and to be transparent about the whole production process. The type of current communication is too generic and containts too much guilt-framed messages, focused on „save the world"

content. Some participants would prefer neutral, fact-based messaged and other seeked for humorous, fresh and surprising marketing. Sustainability communication and branding should be bold, visible and mindset-changing.

The consumers also pointed out that communication of products' services should be more highlighted, as these are the most interesting for the audience. Services such as style counceling, repair, take back, DIY workshops and other. Another aspect that should be emphasized in the communication is the local production/dissolution and higher quality of products, that could even be marketed as luxury products in the future. The cruical is the combination of emotional and factual information. (Vehmas & al. 2018, 293-295.)

Important aspect was also engagement through storytelling, which was also emphasized by communications professionals. Incorporating circular garments as personal to the consumers, to explain what is really happening to the used clothes would help to connect on the personal level with the audience. For example a story of clothes donation or return for remanufacturing should be supported by words such as „reborn" or „reincarnation" of old garment. (Vehmas & al. 2018, 293-294.)

Sustainability communication should be also incorporated into in-store personnel's communication. The opinion was shared that organization of public events would boost the brands' credibility, because face-to-face communication is the most effective. Overall, the value creation should focus on service thinking and product value during the use phase, connecting emotional, social, and environmental values. (Vehmas & al. 2018, 294-295.)

3.4 Sustainability Communication as Motivator to Act "Green"

This research was conducted in 2019 and studied green advertising communication and its capitalization based on pro-environmental values. The author studied possible mitigation of the "green gap", that occurred between consumers' environmental attitudes and their actual buying behaviour. (Chwialkowska 2019, 74.)

The study was conducted as quantitative content analysis, looking at online sustainability communication and its behaviour responses correspondence. It was distributed via various sustainabilility-oriented Facebook pages. The final sample involved 1579 informants that have been providing examples of various sustainable content they encountered on Facebook and evaluating their behavioural reaction to it. 47% were women and 53% men. (Chwialkowska 2019, 77.)

Descriptive content analysis results reported that 26% consumers responded positively to primed behaviours (bought the product thanks to the communicated type of content), while 74% did not. Content that resulted in purchasing behaviour in the 26% of overall respondends, will be ordered from the best to the worst performance.

Content had better performance among categories of: 1. Internal locus activation (messages that invoke confident feeling and remind the customers their behaviour makes difference); 2. Effectiveness claims (messages representing products' features and functionality); 3. Environmental gain-framed messages (positively framed messages focused on the benefits of sustainable purchase); 4. Environmental loss-framed messages (negatively framed messages focused on the consenquence of not taking any action); and 5. Discount appeal. All results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Content characteristics resulting in purchasing decision (adapted version from Chwialowska 2019, 79)

Content Characteristics	N	Purchased (%)
Internal locus activation	902	82[a]
Effectiveness claims	1302	71
Environmental gain-framed	994	70
Environmental loss-framed	729	59
Discount appeal	1005	54
Peer pressure	333	33
Health appeal	115	23
Norm activation	106	21
Status appeal	78	15
Value for money	73	13
***Total number of reports*[1]**	***1579***	***26*[b]**

[a]Understand as 82% of posts that resulted in purchase behaviour contained internal locus activation content
[b]26% of all posts analyzed resulted in purchase
[1]The sum is not 100% as some posts incorporated more content strategies

4 Research Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methods chosen for this research project, and to explain their justification. Firstly, the author will cover the research approach and research design. Secondly, the population and sampling will be described. These will be followed by the introduction of the data collection methods and instruments. Nevertheless, the data analysis methods will be covered as well.

The author has conducted the applied research, what means that the case company can utilize the results in its decision-making and development processes. The type of this research is mostly empirical, partly supplemented by the desktop research. This research is descriptive – focus is on the description of the characteristics of the population sample. Lastly, the research is cross-sectional, where data collection and analysis happens during the specific point in time. (SanMiguel 2019, 59.)

4.1 Research Design

Research method approach is quantitative. To answer the research question, the focus was placed on analyzing consumers' perceptions, preferences and interests throughout the likert scale. Quantitative research's objective is to gather and analyze the data to define / examine the relationships. The major characteristics of quantitative research are description of problem through the need for the resolving the problem; determining research question; creating specific and measurable investigative questions; data collection from larger sample size via instruments gathering current answers; following by the investigating trends / construing results; and summarizing the report. (Creswell 2012.)

Figure 8 illustrates the overall research desig displaying the research phases separately, including the details of each phase: data source, data collection methods, data analysis methods and relationship of each phase to the investigative question.

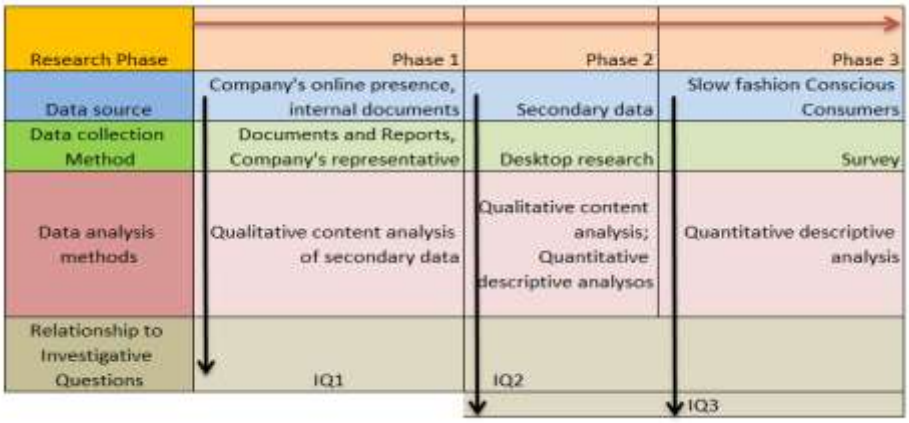

Figure 8. Research design

4.2 Population and Sampling

The author has applied non-probability sampling methods for the survey sampling, consisting mainly of the judgment (or purposive) sampling method, supported by the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling refers to selection of participants based on their availibity and willingness to be involved (Baratt 2009). On the other hand, the judgment method relies on the researcher's judgement of who to involve to participate (Easton & McColl 2021).

The purpose was to choose the representative sample that suits the research's needs, mainly aimed at ethical consumers; conscious consumers; slow fashion enthusiasts; consumers interested in the sustainable processes and/or environmental friendliness of the clothing brand; consumers living sustainable/zero waste lifestyle; and other similar groups of consumers relevant for this research.

As the company mainly operates in Finland, the author aimed to get the responses from respondents living / used to live in Finland. The author adressed the respondents via her personal connections and their help; and published the survey on various social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Linkedin. The case company also published the survey on its Instagram and Facebook. As the result, 170 responds were collected.

4.3 Data Collection

For the answering 1st investigative question, analysis of current stage of the case company's sustainability implementation and communication, primary data have been collected. Case Company's representative was interviewed using semi-structured, individual, phone-call interview; to obtain the information about the company's operations. Additionally, data were collected via desktop research.

To answer 2nd and 3rd investigative question, the survey was designed. It was distributed and conducted electronically, via electronic survey tool provided by Haaga-Helia UAS - Webropol. The data collection was open for 1 month-long period, from mid-March until the mid-April 2021. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the preferences and importances of sustainabilty related practices implemented in the fashion brand, largerly focused on the supply chain operations. The design of data collection Instruments was the following: the survey consisted of 21 questions which were divided into 6 themes. They are presented and chronollogically illustrated in the end of this report, as the attachment 1. The relationship of the survey's theme and corresponding IQ is displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Relationship between survey's theme and investigative questions

Theme	Survey Questions	Relationship to IQ
1. Consumers' Attitudes towards Sustainability in the Fashion Industry	1-4	IQ2
2. Importance of Sustainable Clothing's Attributes	5-7	IQ2; IQ3
3. Importance of sustainable services offered by the Fashion Brand	8-10	IQ2; IQ3
4. Importance of Fashion Brand's Sustainable Practices implemented	11-12	IQ2
5. Importance of Sustainable Fashion Brand's Visibility and Communication	13-16	IQ3
6. Demographics	17-21	IQ2; IQ3

In order to acquire even more information for the analysis, the desktop research method was incorporated. The secondary data relevant for this research were collected and studied, such as studies, analyses and reports. These were already reviewed in chapter 3.

4.4 Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data such as online content / online communication are analyzed using content analysis method. This method is used for analyzing qualitative content such as text and media, for determining themes and and concepts (Columbia University 2019).

Data analysis method used for analysing quantitative data gathered via survey is descriptive analysis. Collected data are summarized using medians, percentages, frequencies and ranges (Bhatia 2019).

5 Data and Results

This chapter covers case company's sustainability implementation and communication; and all survey questions with their responds gathered via empirical research. All data are presented and analyzed. The chapter follows zipper-report structure, meaning that relevant data will be discussed and the investigative question will be answered as soon as it becomes possible.

5.1 Case Company's Sustainability Implementation and Communication

This sub-chapter disucsses the current sustainability implementation within the case company: its practices and operations; and their online communication. Company's sustainable practices are mainly communicated via its website, supplemented by the communication through social media channels that are Instagram, Facebook and Linkedin.

5.1.1 Case Company's Ethical Production and Usage of Sustainable Materials

Communication of ethical production is based on the slow fashion values design, consisting of ethically-made clothing, materially-based design and responsible close-by production. Clothing is produced in small series in Estonia, and some pieces are made from reused fabrics by local seamstresses in Helsinki. Only high quality materials are used. Company's goal is to produce long-lasting designs, while taking care of the environment and people involved.

There is a big focus on the sustainable materials communication on the website. Company claims to use variety of sustainable, organic, re-usable or recycled materials for production, considering the whole LCA when selecting them. This proves that the company operates in accordance with the circular supply business model. Fabrics are sourced only from trusted, sustainability-oriented suppliers. The fabrics used are: organic cotton; Refibra tencel; lyocell; viscose and Econyl: regenerated nylon and recycled polyester. Additionally, reused, recycled and regenerated fabrics are used, also with textile industry leftovers.

The certifications for all new textiles are GOTS for organic cotton and Oekotex-100 for viscose, recycled nylon and recycled polyester. The company explains what GOTS-certified fabrics are: this certification ensures the organic textiles, with environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing. The social criteria follow the International Labour Organizaiton's conventions.

5.1.2 Case Company's Circularity

The company communicates its circularity mainly via the website. It supports the circularity of the clothing. Based on its website, the customers can return the clothes for the recycling: for either second-hand selling, upcycling or textile recycling, depending on the condition of the clothes. Nonetheless, the brand offers the reward for recycling of 20% discount for a new piece.

The brand encourages its customers on the website to follow the sustainable practices of 5R: Repair, Reuse, Resell, Redesign and Recycle. It offers lifetime warranty for some parts of clothing, and repair of teared products for a small cost. The brand recommends to sell the used clothes via some parties, and encourage the customers to donate clothing, or to return the washed clothes in a good condition either to the headquarters or to the Recci shops / collection boxes. Recci then either resells them in Recci shops or sort the materials of damaged clothes and forwards them for recycling. All mentioned practices explain how the company operates according the resourse recovery circular business model.

The new practice was recently featured - the possibility to rent the brand's clothes via some 3rd parties clothing rentals, focusing mainly on the Finnish designs. This option correspondents to the sharing platforms circular business model.

As stated before, a design is material-based and the brand tries to increase the amount of recycled / industry leftover materials for the production all the time. Additionally, brand produces collections with timeless, long-lasting design that is never out of fashion and complements the existing collections. Nevertheless, there is an order-based production in place. The brand also focuses on reusing the cutting waste. Its future goal is to reduce the cutting waste to maximum and implement zero-waste design. These activities follow the product life extension circular business model.

5.2 Sustainable Practices Implemented within the Case Company whose Communication could be Improved

This sub-chapter will discuss the sustainable practices implemented within the company that are either not emphasized enough, communicated clearly, or not communicated at all by the brand via its online channels.

5.2.1 Circular ways to deal with used clothing

As explained in the previous sub-chapter, the brand encourages its customers to follow the circular disposal of used products based on 5R – part of which is “Redesign”. It also mentions the “upcycling” possibility for used clothes. However, when interviewing the brand’s representative, the conclusion was that the company currently does not offer any refurbishment or adjustment possibilities of degraded products, because of lack of resources for integrating this service. Therefore, this matter could be communicated in other way, to prevent the misconception of this service.

As stated before, the brand offers 20% discount for new piece of clothing when the customers recycle them. However, this information is not emphasized enough, and is not explained how the process actually works in reality. When interviewing representative of the company, it was explained as following: customers can either deliver the items directly to the headquarters of the brand, but this option is not yet commonly used; or to return the clothing to Recci containers which are placed around Finland.

However, because the company does not know what happens with the pieces of its clothes when returned to Recci, the consumers should notify the brand about this return if they want to receive 20% discount for next purchase that can be granted after the notification. This aspect should be explained clearly when communicated, to stregthen the competetive advantage of the brand for implementation of this service, and to avoid any missconception of the current or future customers. The possibility to return used clothing for second-hand selling / donating or sustainable disposal should be actively communicated on all social media channels as well.

Regarding the shared platforms for lending clothes, the service is not clearly communicated nor explained, considering the fact this option is not yet commonly used among consumers. As the author found out, the brand uses 3rd party companies for the clothing rental, which buy its products and then offer them for lending. Lending works on monthly fee basis. Considering the quite unique position of the brand and its higher prices of products, this service should be more communicated to reach the wider audience of sustainable

consumers that are interested in the sustainable fashion but can not afford to buy pieces of clothing for higher price.

5.2.2 Green Suppliers, Transportation and Packaging

Even though the brand states that all suppliers are trusted and are oriented towards sustainability, it does not state if it has any pre-selected criteria for choosing the suppliers, or if it verifies the suppliers' sustainability practices. Based on the interview conducted with the brand's sustainability representative, the choice of suppliers is mainly based on own research, reviews and trust, as the brand is quite small and does not have much resources to use for this matter. The selection criterion is that suppliers use ecological materials, and it is benefitial if they have the official certifications. The sewing companies located in Estonia are not yet currently certified, but are visited in person regulary. In this case, the suppliers verification and sustainability could be communicated through storytelling and personal point of view, not just the theoretical one.

Surprisingly, there is no mentioning of green transportation in brand's sustainability communication. This is definitely the aspect that should be communicated to some extent, considering how much discussed is the topic of sustainable transportation nowadays among conscious consumers. As the author found out from the company's representative, the brand tries to consider the green transportation, but it is challenging for a small company. It uses trucks instead of planes for foreign suppliers. The distribution within Finland is either conducted via Posti Green, involving the distribution to consumers and retailers; is possible via DHL Climate neutral for additional charge; and in the future via GLS that currently works on implementing its sustainability. The transportation is conducted via recycled boxes from Estonia to the company.

Nonetheless, the brand does not involve the communication of green packaging either. Considering the fact that packaging is often wasteful, non-disposable and not environmentally friendly, this sustainability aspect should be incorporated into the sustainability communication. Brand considers the green packaging and tries to always look for new sustainable options. The brand representative stated in the individual interview that the packaging is reduced, plastics and bio-degradable plastics is avoided in all packaging. Instead, the cardboard boxes are used, with the combination of special thick paper inside the boxes instead of plastics. The company uses recycled paper supplied by Finnish suppliers.

5.2.3 Reporting of the Environmental Impact

Company's reporting of LCA of the products, processes and overall supply chains is not yet implemented but is planned as goal to the future. As the company expressed, it does not have any tool for evaluating CO2 emissions of products and processes yet in place. It plans to create the sustainability report every year, including the overall environmental impact of SCs. Last year the report of CO2 impact of cotton pieces has been created, however, it has not been published yet. The operations are carried out as sustainable as possible considering the size of the company, involving only the sustainable and environmentally friendly materials.

Creation of the sustainability report is definitely a good idea considering the nature of this business. Nowadays, conscious consumers not only want to know and see that the brand is sustainable, but they often require to know how exactly, to see the transparent communication of the company and to support all statements by proves. The overall LCA and CO2 impact reporting could make the brand more trustworthy and reliable among competition. If the sustainability report creation should be inspired by the relevant Finnish competitors that have their reports already published, the areas of reporting could be related, but are not limited to the areas of: design, production, materials, suppliers, products, packaging, logistics, care & repair, product service systems, carbon footprint, pricing, longevity, and social influence.

5.2.4 Green Retailers and Green Consumers

The brand has its own store in northern Finland, and resells its products via retailers around Finland and abroad. However, the information about the green retailers and their sustainability / values is also missing in the online communication. As expressed in the individual interview, the brand tries to consider green retailers that focus on user experience and value creation, ethical consumers and their interests. In Finland, the company has its own store and it resells its products via smaller retailers around Finland that are focused on Finnish design and sustainable clothing. Therefore, this aspect should be also incorporated into sustainability communication of the brand.

The situation with the green consumers is similar. Even though there have been some activities in place to spread the awareness of sustainability among green consumers, there is no mentioning of it on the website. The brand had worked with charities and donated part of its profits from sales, and cooperated with the work life foundation. It plans to have bigger reach in the future, for example to collaborate with schools and local communities.

5.2.5 Social Sustainability

The social sustainability is very important nowadays, especially in the fashion industry. The brand states that it is ethical and involves the sustainable processes that consider people, but it does not say anything more beyond it. There is no information about social sustainability in the manufacturing and other processes that impact people to some extent. The detailed information about working environment- and human rights – related practices would be beneficial to share. As the author found out, the company looks at the standards of social sustainability at fabric producers. Some of its suppliers that the brand has been cooperated since the beginning of its business, have incorporated the sustainability certifications involving the social aspect.

5.3 Survey Results: Consumers' Perception of Clothing Brand's Sustainability Implementation

This subchapter will cover the relevant survey questions that aim to answer IQ2: which sustainable processes / practices in the fashion industry are the most important for conscious consumers. The author will present the most important results collected from the empirical research. The results will be justified and illustrated.

5.3.1 Demographics

Demographics included factors of the age, gender, nationality and occupation. The sample consisted of 170 consumers, out of which 72% were females and 28% were males. 72% consumers are under/or the age of 30, while 28% is older than 30. Finnish consumers represent 56% while the foreigners living / used to live in Finland represent 40%. Out of the overall sample, almost 2/3rds are working to some extend, 28% is student, and 10% is unemployed or other. The detailed demographics is displayed in the Table 7.

Table 7. Survey respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic consumer characteristics		Sample	
		n=170	100%
Age	18-21	10	6%
	22-25	70	41%
	26-30	43	25%
	31-36	30	18%
	37-45	11	6%
	46+	6	4%
Gender	Male	47	28%
	Female	122	72%
	Prefer not to say	1	.6%
Nationality	Finnish	96	56%

	Other EU	39	23%
	Non-EU	29	17%
	Unknown	6	4%
Occupation	Student	47	28%
	Student + Employee	47	28%
	Full time employee	49	29%
	Self-employed	10	6%
	Unemployed	8	5%
	Other	9	5%

The responds of the consumers that marked they do not consider the product's or brand's sustainability at all, have not been excluded even though the aim of this research was primarily focused on the perceptions of consumers interested in the sustainability. The reason for that is that even these consumers have filled-out the whole survey and expressed their relevant opinions, which in some aspects have involved the positive attitudes towards sustainability.

5.3.2 Introduction to the Consumers' Perception of the Sustainability Attributes

The first theme involved 4 questions focused on the consumers' attitudes towards sustainability. 2 separate questions were asked on the importance of the sustainability when purchasing clothing: importance of the sustainability of the product; and importance of the overall sustainability of the company when deciding between similar products. The importance of the sustainability of the product is the most or equally important factor along with other factors for 44% respondents, while it is less important, least important factor, or not considered at all for 56%.

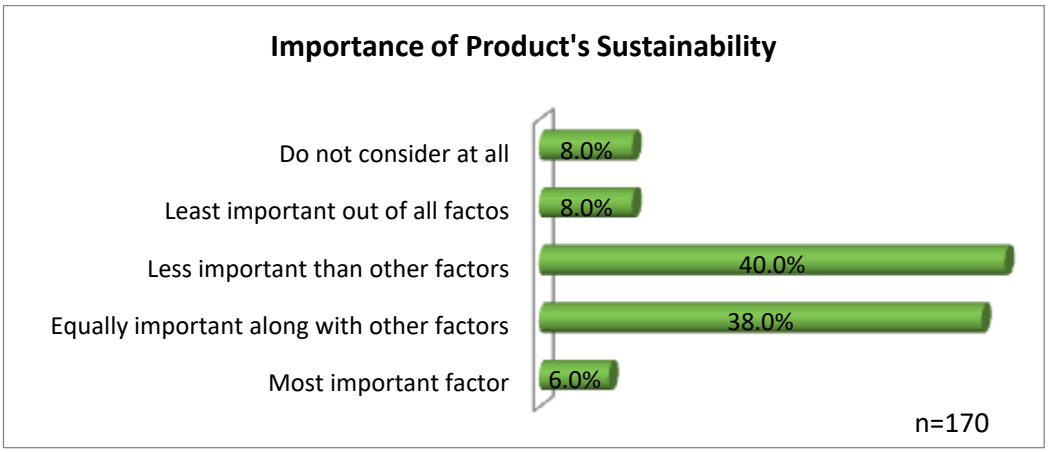

Figure 9. Importance of product's sustainability when purchasing clothing

2nd survey question investigated the importance of brand's sustainability. The percentage of consumers that find the sustainability of the brand either the least important out of all factors or does not consider this aspect at all, is only 17%. Out of remaining 83%, 44% of respondents try to purchase the clothing only from the sustainable brands: once the brand

is sustainable, 31% respondents make the decisions based on other factors, while 13% expressed that the more the brand is sustainable, the more they prefer its product. 39% consumers consider the sustainabiltiy of the brand, but it does not play such an important factor when purchasing clothing. The author concludes that importance of the sustainability of the brand seems more important for higher % of respondents than the importance of the sustainability of the product displayed in the previous figure.

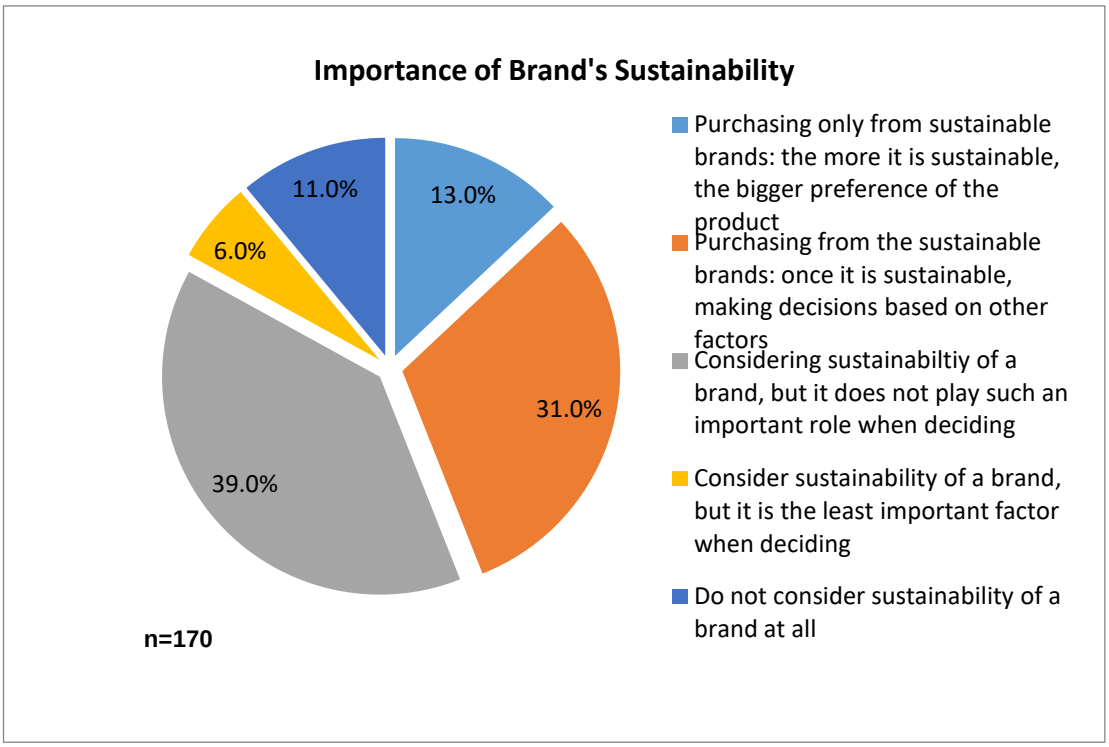

Figure 10. Importance of company's sustainability when deciding between similar products

Following 2 questions focused on the perception of importance of environmental sustainability and social sustainability incorporated within the clothing brand. Environmental sustainability of the brand was very important or important for 59% respondents, while the social sustainability is very important or important for significantly higher percentage of respondents, over 80%. Based on the Figure 11 we can see that the social sustainability is more important for more consumers than the environmental sustainability when evaluating the brand's sustainability.

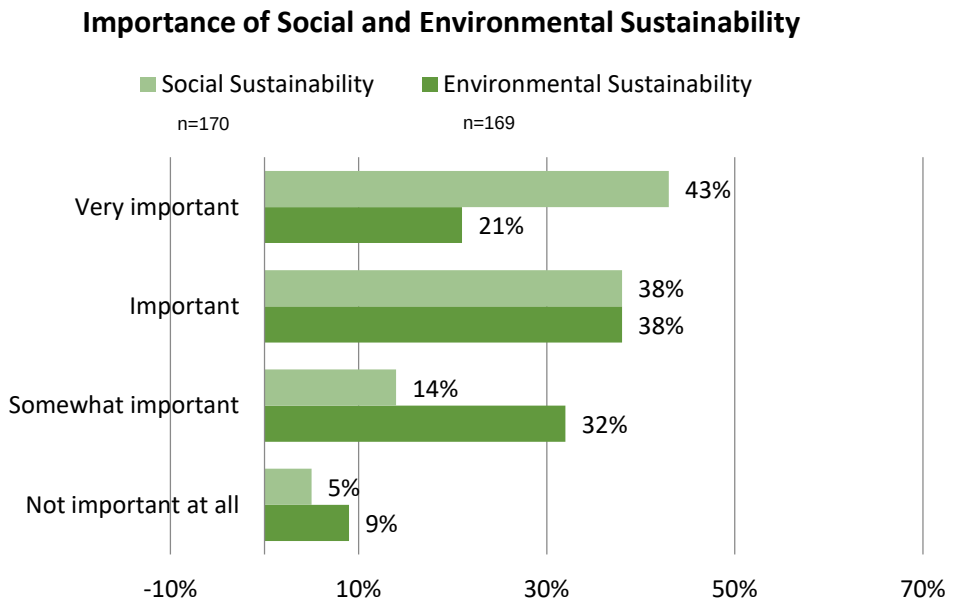

Figure 11. Comparison of the importance of environmental and social sustainability implemented within clothing brand

5.3.3 Importance of Sustainable Clothing's Attributes

This subchapter covers 2nd theme of the survey design, discussing the importance of the sustainable clothing's attributes. The consumers have been asked to what extent they do prefer the local brand to a foreign one**.** The preference rate of „prefer a lot", „prefer" or „somewhat prefer" is significatly high, responding to 2/3rds of respondents. When comparing the younger and older respondents, younger ones „prefer a lot" or „prefer" the local brand much more than the older ones, while surprisingly almost 1/3 of respondents aged 31+ years old do not consider this factor.

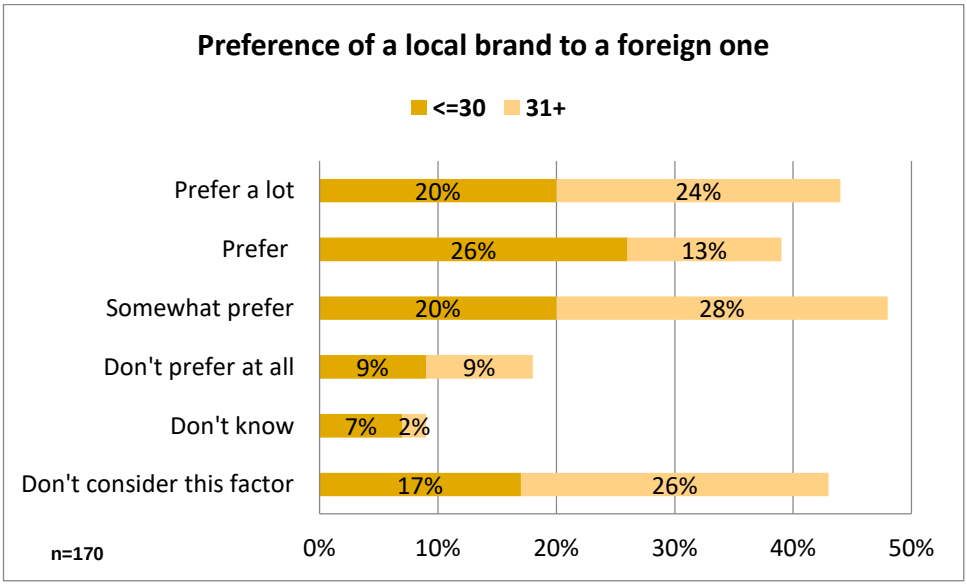

Figure 12. Preferance of the local clothing brand to a foreign one. Comparison between the age groups

The next question focused on the preference of the clothing made out of the sustainable materials instead of traditional raw materials. The materials to rate were bio-based materials (biological or natural materials; are renewable); organic materials (materials produced or involving the production without the chemicals); recycled materials (materials that would be otherweise thrown away, but instead they are turned into new ones); and reused materials (created from the „waste“ of another product). The responds are illustrated in the Figure 13.

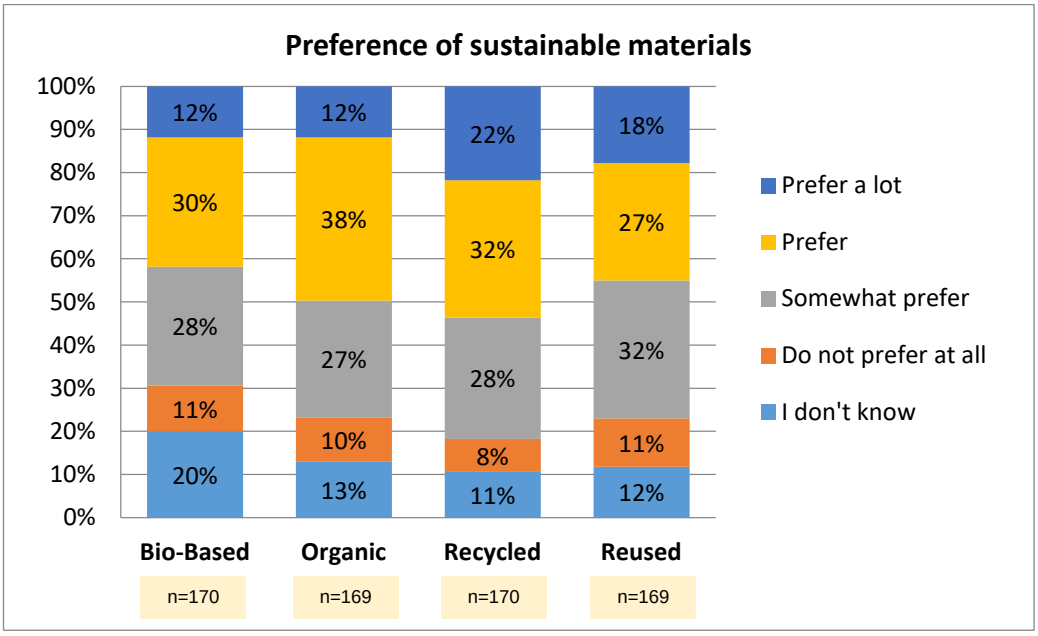

Figure 13. Preference of clothing made out of sustainable materials instead of traditional raw materials

Results of responds “prefer” and “prefer a lot” are illustrated in the Table 8 and are as following: the most preffered is the clothing made out of recycled materials with over 1/2 of respondents, following closely by organic materials with 50%. Reused materials are preffered by 45% respondents while bio-based only by 42%. There is the same order of preference in both age-groups: consumers bellow and above the age of 30. The only bigger difference is that even though bio-based materials are the least preffered option, over 50% of people aged 31+ responded they prefer / prefer them a lot, while only 38% of younger ones marked the same statements.

Table 8. The most preferred sustainable materials. Percentage refers to the statements of „prefer“ and „prefer a lot“

Preferred sustainable materials	
Recycled	54%
Organic	50%
Reused	45%
Bio-based	42%

The next question focused on the importance of life-extending practices incorporated within the clothing brand. Practices to be rated were the following: product design (design that guarantees longer life of the product; higher quality products often for higher price); timeless design (design of clothing that is never out of fashion); reusing options (when used products can be used in different, new way); repairing options (maintenance for used/broken products – functionality improvement); and recondition options for used products (aesthetical = visual improvement). All answers are illustrated in the Figure 14.

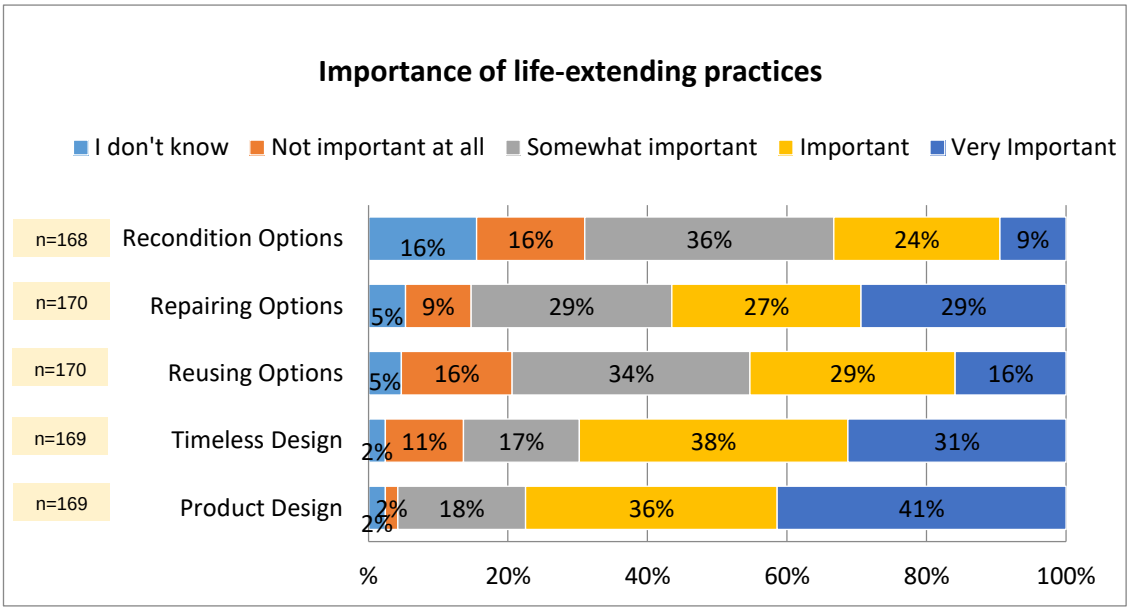

Figure 14. Importance of products' life-extending practices offered by a brand

The statements of „important" and „very important" were dominated by: the most preferred practice of product design with almost 80% of respondents; following by the timeless design with 70%, and repairing options that were marked by over 50% of respondents. The same 3 categories dominated in both age groups, consumers bellow and above the age of 30. However, in the group of consumers aged 31+, the overall percentage of importance is higher than in the younger group. When comparing genders, the most important aspects of product and timeless design remained, while 3rd place obtained repairing options among female respondents and reusing options among male ones.

Table 9. The most important life-extending practices: comparison between the gender groups. Percentages refer to the statements of „important" and „very important"

Order	Male		Female	
1	Product design	74%	Product design	79%
2	Timeless design	64%	Timeless design	72%
3	Reusing options	45%	Repairing options	46%

5.3.4 Importance of Sustainable Services offered by the Clothing Brand

The 3rd theme of the survey focused on the importance of sustainable services offered by the clothing brand. The 8th survey question investigated how important for consumers are the practices offered regarding dealing with used clothing. The consumers were asked to rate the possibility offered by a clothing brand to return used clothing for recycling (for some benefit in return); possibility of returning used clothing for second-hand selling or donating; and possibility to return used / broken clothing for the sustainable disposal. The answers of "important" and "very important" are illustrated in Figure 15.

Surpisingly, the importance of possibility to return clothing for sustainable disposal is dominating with almost 2/3rds of respondents, closely followed by the possibility of return for second-hand selling / donating. These possibilities seem more important for consumers than the return for recycling in some benefit in return. When comparing the age groups of respondends aged bellow and above 30 years old, there is the same order of importance in both groups.

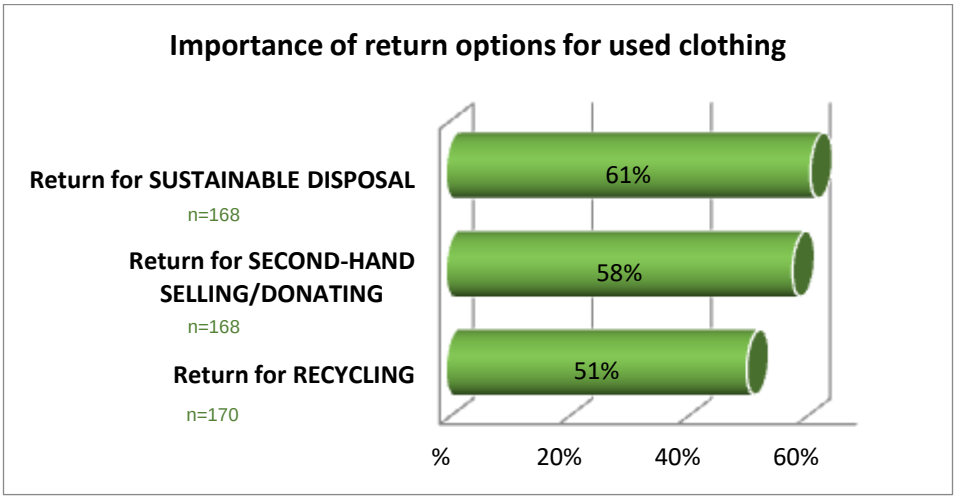

Figure 15. Importance of return possibilities for used clothing offered by a clothing brand. Percentages refer to the statements of "important" and "very important"

Possibility of clothing rental was other sustainable service investigated. Firstly, the consumers were asked if they have considered the possibility of borrowing clothing via sharing platforms. Overall, consumers stating they do use the clothing sharing service; will maybe consider using the service; or have considered using it and might use it at some point, together count to almost 50% of respondents. Only 10% of respondents have considered this service but decided not to use it, while 44% respondents have not yet considered clothing sharing service at all. These percentages signify that there is the interest towards this service, and younger consumers seem more aware of this option.

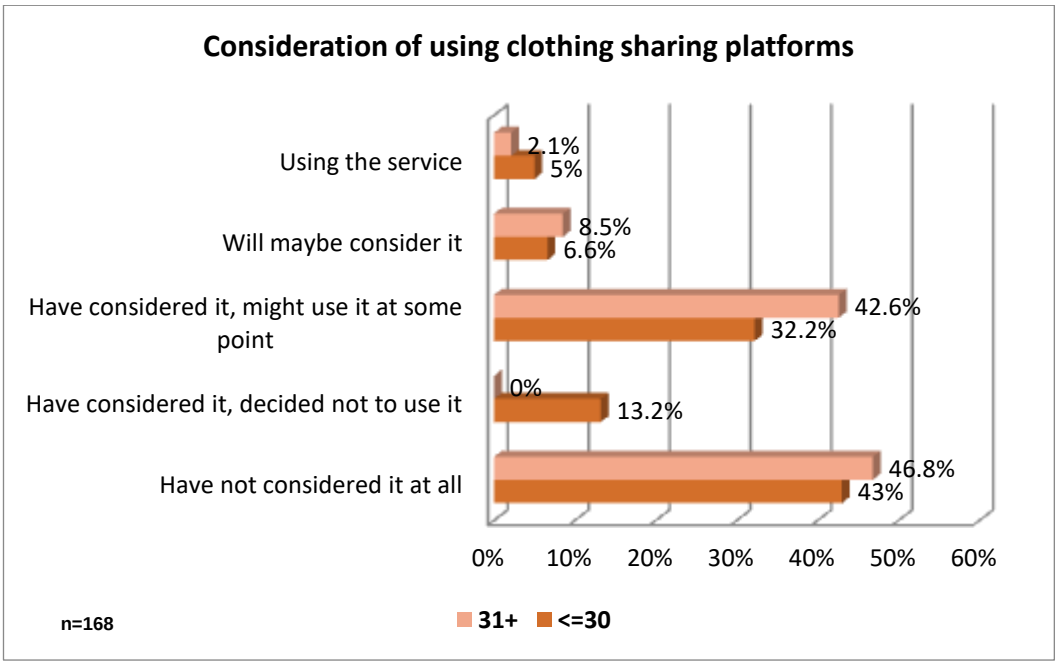

Figure 16. Consideration of possibility to borrow clothing via sharing platforms: comparison between the age groups

The categories of consumers that have considered the sharing service to some extent, were then asked how important it is for them that the brand they like offers lending possibility of its items via sharing platforms. For only 17% of respondents this aspect is not important at all, while for the remaining percentage it is important to some extent. The results are presented in Figure 17.

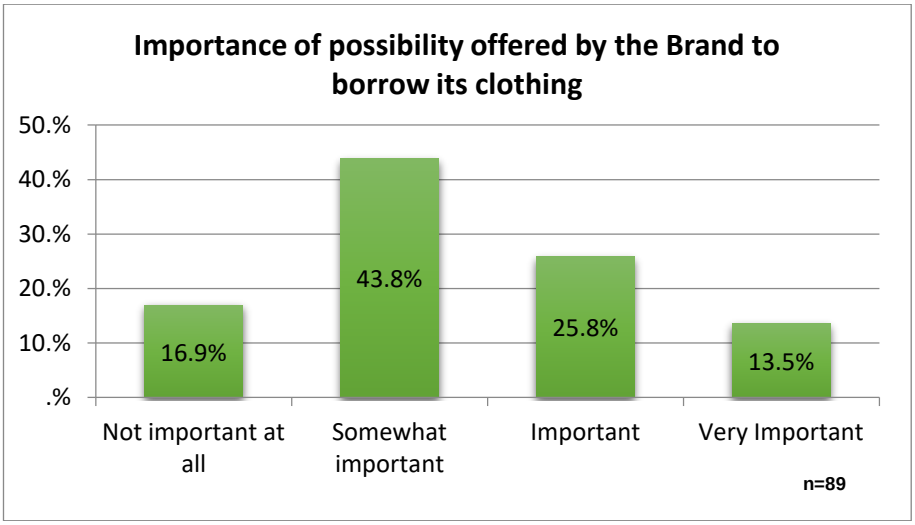

Figure 17. Importance of the possibility offered by the brand to borrow its clothing via sharing platforms. Percentages refer to the consumers that have considered this service to some extent

5.3.5 Importance of Sustainable Operations Implemented withing Clothing Brand

4th theme incorporated into survey investigated consumers' perception of the sustainable operations implemented within the fashion brands. The consumers were supposed to rate how important it is for them that the following operations are green (environmentally friendly): manufacturing; suppliers; packaging; transportation; retailing; local production and reverse logistics. The statements of „important" and „very important" represented the highest percentage of over 70% respondents in the category of green packaging. 2nd most important was green manufacturing with almost 70%. These statements scored the lowest percentage among the category of reversed logistics.

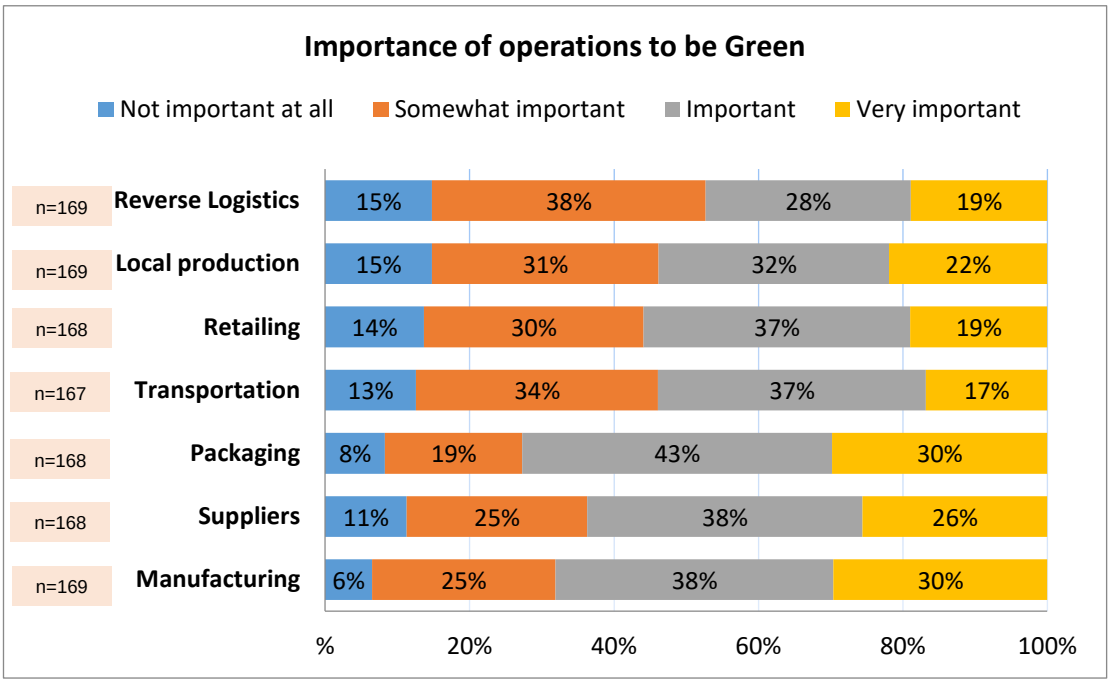

Figure 18. Importance of green practices implementation within clothing brand

When comparing results by the age groups, where 1 group of consumers is bellow/or 30 and 2nd is above 31 years old, 4 out of 5 most important aspects to be green have the same order in both groups. However, among the consumer group aged 31+ the importance is percentually higher in each category than in the younger group. When comparing gender groups of males and females, the same 3 categories occur as the most important among both genders: packaging, manufacturing, and suppliers.

Table 10. 5 most important green operations for the consumers: comparison between the age groups. Percentages refer to the statements of "important" and "very important"

Age	<=30		31+	
1.	Packaging	70%	Packaging	78%
2.	Manufacturing	66%	Manufacturing	75%
3.	Suppliers	61%	Suppliers	72%
4.	Retailing	54%	Transportation	67%
5.	Local production	50%	Local production	50%

Continuing with the sustainable practices incorporated into clothing brand's operations, consumers were asked to rate the importance of social sustainability implementation: sustainability of a working environment (practices such as fair labour, occupational health and safety, human rights at workplace, etc.); and human rights (practices such as equality, non-discrimination, diversity, etc.). When comparing these 2 social sustainability factors to each other, the aspect of „human rights" practices has higher importance than the „working environment" one. When age groups were compared, the respondents aged 31+ have placed the same importance on both aspects, while the younger respondents placed higher importance on the aspect of human rights.

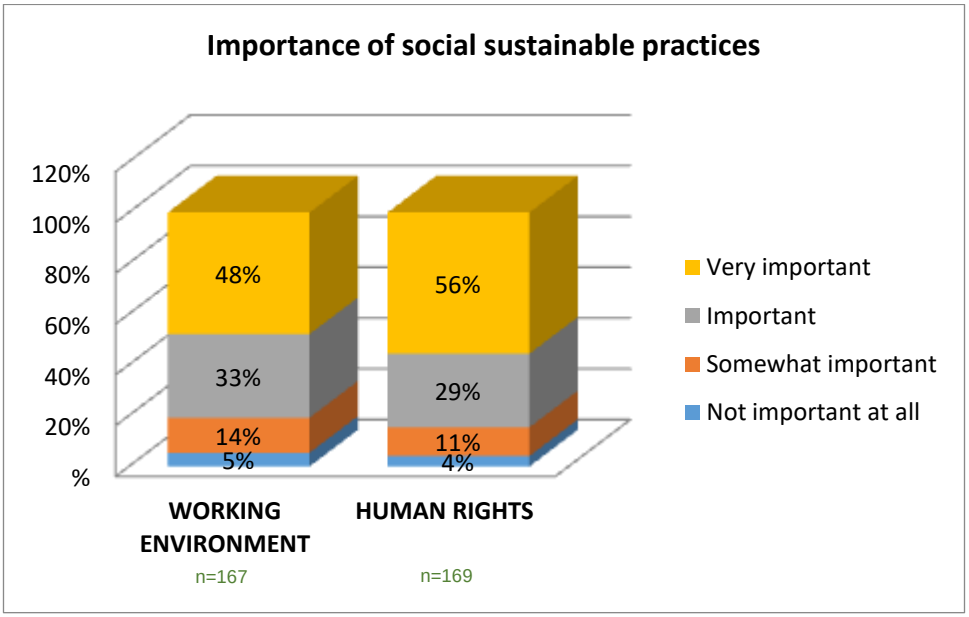

Figure 19. Importance of social sustainable practices implemented within the clothing brand

When comparing genders, both gender groups find the sustainable social aspect of human rights more important than the working environment. However, percentually less male than female respondents find both social sustainability aspects „important" or „very important".

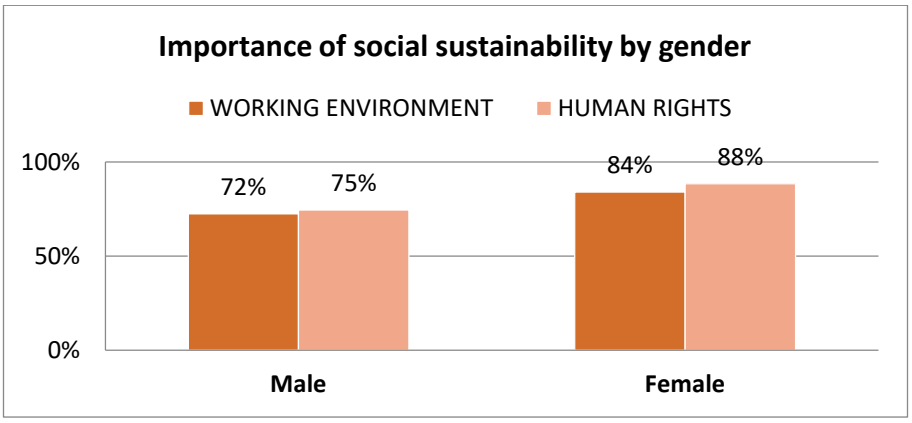

Figure 20. Importance of social sustainable aspects: comparison between the genders. Percentages refer to the statements of „important“ and „very important“

5.4 Survey Results: Consumers' Perception of Clothing Brand's Sustainability Communication

This sub-chapter will discuss the survey responds of relevant survey questions related to the sustainability communication of the clothing brand. The aim of this sub-chapter is to provide the anwer to IQ3: how the sustainability of the company should be communicated to have the biggest possible reach. The most important results from the conducted empirical research are presented.

5.4.1 Importance of the Sustainable Brand's online Communication

The last survey theme to be covered is the clothing brand's visibility and communication of its sustainability. This theme involved 4 questions.

Firstly, the respondents were asked how they proceed when they search for a new sustainable clothing brand. The consumers were asked to choose up to 3 most important options for them. Google is highly dominating, with over half of the respondents. Following by the Instagram with the response rate of over 40%. In-store shoping and referral have also high percentage, both reaching up to 40% of overall responds. Surprisingly, over 1/5 of consumers don't search for new sustainable fashion brands.

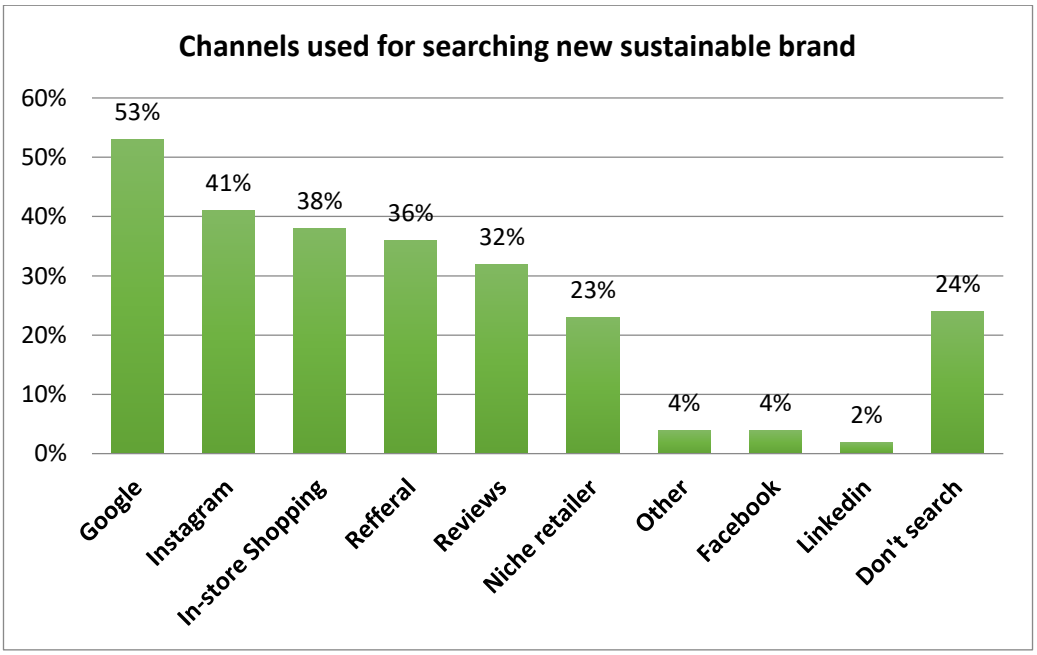

Figure 21. Channels consumers use to find a new sustainable clothing brand

When comparing genders, the answer of „don't search for the sustainable brand" had very close percentage rate among both groups. It was excluded and the 5 highest response rates are displayed in Table 11. Google is dominating in both gender groups.

Table 11. Top 5 channels used for searching new sustainable clothing brand: Comparison between the genders

Male		Female	
1. Google	55%	1. Google	52%
2. In-store Shopping	43%	2. Instagram	47%
3. Refferal	32%	3. Refferal	38%
4. Reviews	28%	4. In-store Shopping	37%
5. Niche Retailers	23%	5. Reviews	34%

Respondents were then asked what channels of the brand they check first, when they find new sustainable clothing brand they like. They were asked to mark up to 3 most important options. With the significantly high percentage rate, the option of "brand's website" is dominating with 85% of respondents. Followed by Googling the brand – 65%, and Instagram with 60% rate. The other significant number of almost 50% of respondents is checking the reviews of costumers.

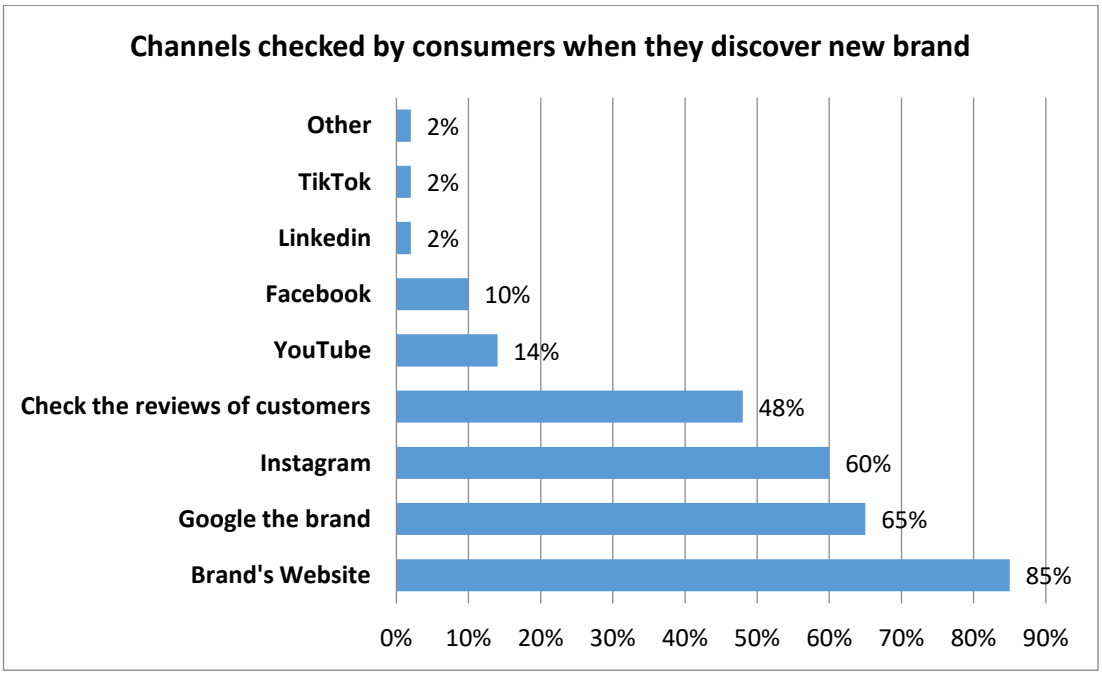

Figure 22. Channels that are checked as first when consumers find a new sustainable clothing brand

When comparing results by age groups, 1st and 2nd most rated responses were the same among both groups, consumers bellow and above the age of 30. These responses among younger group were followed by Instagram, while in the older group the 3rd place obtained the customers' reviews.

Table 12. Top 5 channels to be checked first when new sustainable clothing brand is found: comparison between the age groups

Aged <=30		Aged 31+	
Brand's Website	81%	Brand's Website	97%
Google the brand	71%	Google the brand	50%
Instagram	68%	Customers' reviews	47%

5.4.2 Brand's Sustainability Communication: Desired type of Content to be shared

The consumers were asked what type of content they would like to see regarding sustainability implementation of the clothing brand shared on its website and social media channels. They were asked to choose at least 2 options. The aim of this question was not to study only the desired content to be seen on the brand's website, but also on the social media channels. The importance of Instagram was reported in the previous sub-chapter, among both age groups.

Sustainable materials dominated with the response rate of 3/4th of respondents, followed by the social sustainability aspect with 65% rate. More than half of the respondents would like to see content related to the sustainable manufacturing, and almost half of the respondents are interested to see the options for used products (recycling; sustainable disposal; return for donation, etc.) and sustainable packaging. More than 1/3rd of respondents would like to see content regarding sustainable suppliers, and 1/4th is interested in green transportation-related content.

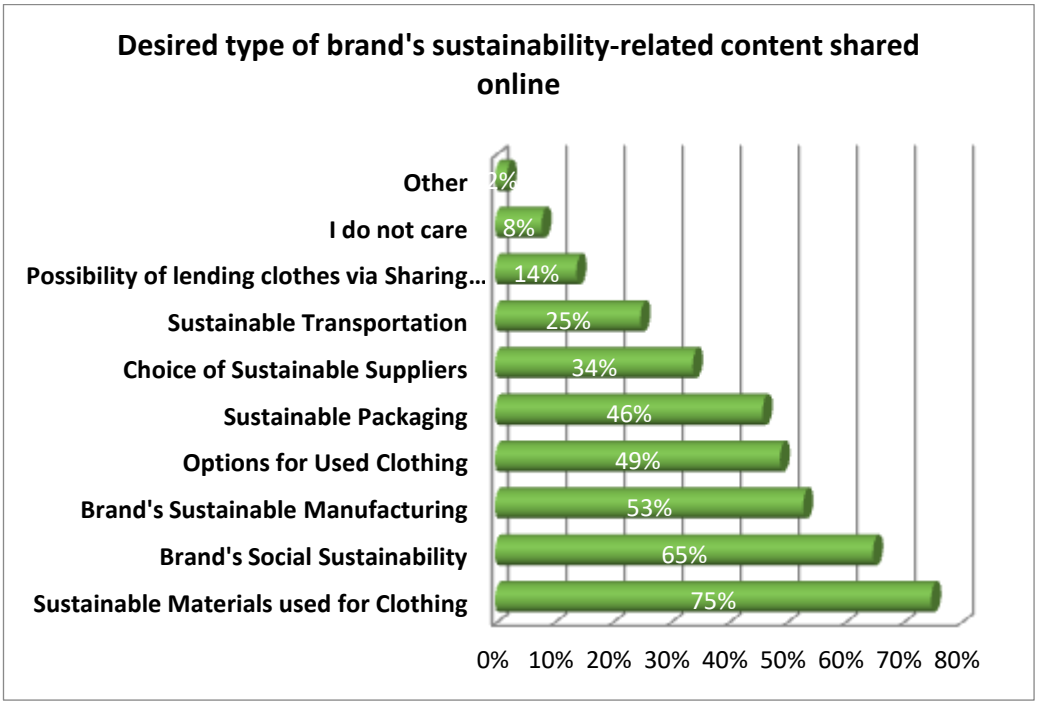

Figure 23. Desired type of brand's sustainability type of content shared by the sustainable clothing brand online

When comparing gender groups, the most desired content regarding brand's sustainability were the sustainable materials, placed on the first place among both genders. Social sustainability is on the 2nd place among female respondents, while on the 3rd place among male ones. Manufacturing is on the 2nd place among female respondents, while on the 4th one among female ones. However, even though the order of the most important green aspects slightly differentiates, the overall importance of the most dominating aspects remain similar among both genders.

Table 13. Desired type of brand's sustainability type of content shared online, top 5 responses: comparison between the genders

Male			Female	
1. Sustainable Materials	66%		1. Sustainable Materials	79%
2. Sustainable Manufacturing	47%		2. Social Sustainability	74%
3. Social Sustainability	40%		3. Options for used clothing	55%
4. Sustainable Packaging	38%		4. Sustainable Manufacturing	54%
5. Sustainable Suppliers	32%		5. Sustainable Packaging	48%

Moving to the last survey question to be covered. Consumers were asked what type of communication they would like to see used by the clothing brand on its website and social media channels. They were again, asked to choose at least 2 most important options. Answers of customers' reviews and company's behind the scenes dominated with over 2/3rds of respondents, followed by the general educational sustainability-oriented content marked by almost 50% of respondents.

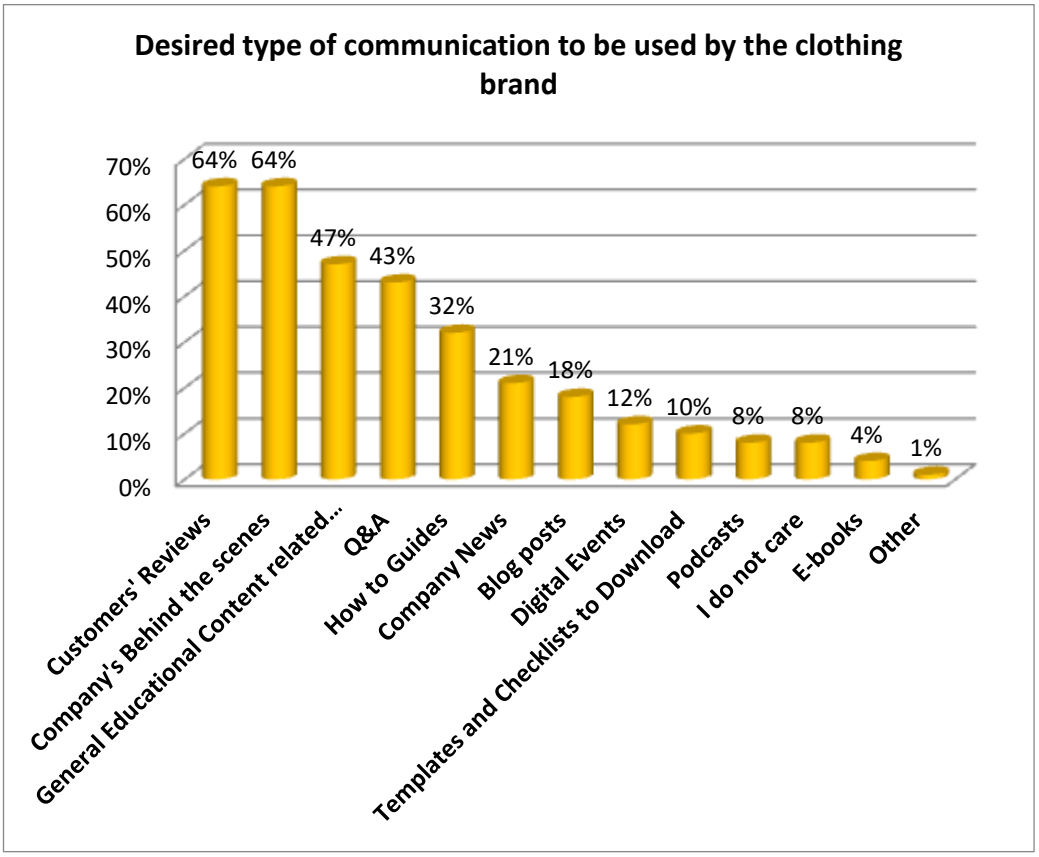

Figure 24. Desired type of communication to be used online by a sustainable clothing brand

6 Conclusion

This research aimed to help to utilize the Case Company's sustainable practices to develop its sustainability oriented online communication. This chapter will conclude the key findings; provide the recommendations; cover the reliability, validity and relevance of this research; suggest the further research; and finally, discuss the author's reflection on learning.

6.1 Key Findings

This sub-chapter presents the research's key findings for each investigative question and their inter-relation to the existing theory.

6.1.1 Case Company's Sustainability Implementation and Communication

Based on the circular economy business models, the case company operates in accordance with the circular supply model, product life-extension model, resource recovery model and sharing platform model. Company's sustainable practices are mainly communicated via its website, through pages of ethical production, sustainable materials and brand's circularity.

Sustainable practices implemented within case company whose communication could be developed to some extent, are the following: circular possibilties to deal with used clothing; green manufacturing; green suppliers; green transportation and packaging; environmental impact reporting / own sustainability report; green retailers; green consumers; and social sustainability. The detailed aspects that should be emphasized are presented in the following sub-chapters.

6.1.2 Importance of the Sustainability Implementation of a Clothing Brand

The reviewed secondary data have found out that younger consumers were more interested in the environmental and ethical aspects of fashion brands‘ operations than the older consumers; and men were less worried about the sustainability factor than women. This research has found out, that consumers aged 31+ are generally more interested in the environmental and ethical operations of the clothing brand than younger consumer group. However, it has confirmed that overall, men are less worried about sustainability matters than women are.

Reviewed secondary study reported that important aspects for Finnish consumers were local production; environmentally friendly production; willingness to know about the envi-

ronmental friendly production and sustainability impact of the textiles; and the ethicality of textiles. This study has confirmed that sustainability of the clothing brand is important for the consumers – reporting that sustainability of the brand when deciding between similar products played a very important role for over 40% of respondents. Additionally, this research discovered that social sustainability was more important for higher percentage of respondents than the environmental sustainability.

Importance of the sustainability impact of textiles was also confirmed by this research. More precisely, over 50% of respondents preferred or preferred a lot the clothing made out of recycled or organic materials instead of clothing made out of traditional raw materials, followed by the preference of reused and bio-based materials. Two thirds of sample preferred the local brands to the foreign ones to some extent – supporting the results of the reviewed study. Surprisingly, this factor was more important for the younger respondents than the consumers aged 31+.

Reviewed secondary study reported that the most important lifecycle phases of clothing for the consumers were location of manufacturing; product processing; lifetime of the product; and transportation. This finding was partially confirmed as this research found out that the most important operations to be green for respondents, were the green packaging and green manufacturing, followed by the green suppliers, green retailing and green transportation. The factors to be rated differentiated in the reviewed study and this research. But the significant importance of the green manufacturing, lifetime of the produt and transporation remains, and is supplemented by the importance of green packaging, suppliers and retailing.

Regarding the clothing service systems, reviewed studies reported that Finnish consumers were the most interested in the return service; consultancy; and clothing swaps, followed by the customized / participatory design and the repair / redesign services. The services of consultancy, clothing swaps, and customized design were not investigated in this research. However, importance of the possibilties for return was investigated in this research. The return service was important or very important on average for almost 60% of respondents. The return possibilities for sustainable disposal or second-hand selling / donation were more important than the return possibility for recycling. Additionally, when investigating the importance of implemented life-extending practices in this research, the most important for the respondents were the product design and timeless design, followed by the repairing options. Overall, importance of the return and repair services were confirmed by both, the reviewed study and this research. Importance of sustainable services

was supplemented by other aspects, as previously mentioned – the consultancy, clothing swaps, customized design, product design and timeless design.

Reviewed study has reported that consumers were more familiar with reuse and return practices than using the clothing made out of the circular materials. They were more willing to take care of the clothing in the end of its lifecycle; than to worry about the beginning stage of it. Some consumers' worries arised regarding circular materials, such as their quality; comfort; style; and materials' attributes.

Additionally, this research has found out that more than 45% of respondents have considered to some extent the usage of clothing sharing platforms. For more than 80% out of these respondents it was important to some extent that the clothing brand they like offers clothing-sharing possibilities for its products.

Nevertheless, this research has discovered that regarding the importance of social sustainabiltiy implementation, the category of human rights was more imporant for the conscious consumers - considering practices such as equality, non-discrimination, diversity; than the working-environment related social sustanability aspects.

6.1.3 Effective Sustainability Communication of a Clothing Brand

Based on the reviewed study investigating green communication as motivator to act green, sustainability content that resulted in the actual purchasing behaviour counted to 26% out of the overall sample. The best performing types of content were internal locus activation messages (reminding the behaviour of costumers make difference); effectiveness claims; environmental gain-framed messages (highlighting the benefits of sustainable purchase); and the environmental loss-framed messages (highlighting negative consenquencess of not taking any action).

The reviewed study reported that respondents expressed the companies should communicate much more about their environmental and ethical operations, and that the whole production process should be transparent and explained to the audience. Sustainability communication should be fact-based, fresh, bold, and encouraging. Products' service systems should be more communicated and emphasized, together with the highlighted products' positive attributes. Engaging communication is crucial in this sector, for example through the storytelling. Face-to face communication has the biggest reach. Overall, the clothing's sustainability communication should combine the social, emotional and environmental values.

These wishes of conscious consumers were confirmed by this research, as the most desired content regarding brand's sustainability implementation to be seen online, were the sustainable materials for 3/4rds of the respondents and social sustainability implementation for almost 2/3rds of respondents. Other important aspects marked by around half of the sample size were the sustainable manufacturing, options for used clothing, and sustainable packaging.

Additionally, this research concluded that the most desired type of content to be shared online by the clothing brand, were the customers' reviews and behind the scenes - marked by almost 2/3rds of respondents. These content types were followed by the general educational sustainability-related content and Q&A, that were desired by around 45% of respondents. Almost 1/3 of respondents would like to see „how-to guides" while only 1/5th of respondents was interested in blog posts and company news.

Nevertheless, this research found out that the most used channels among respondents for searching new sustainable clothing brand were Google for over half of the respondents and Instagram for over 40%, followed by the in-store shopping and refferals reaching up to almost 40% of respondents. The channels that consumers check as first when they find a new clothing brand they like, were the brand's website for 85%, and Googling the brand for almost 2/3rds of respondents. These options were followed by the Instagram and customers' reviews.

6.2 Recommendations

The brand communicates its sustainability into detail mainly via its website and blog. Its content on Instagram and Facebook focuses mainly on the products, lacking the informative and engaging communication regarding the brand's sustainability implementation. It is not enough to mention that the brand is sustainable but not showing nor explaining how, rather only forwarding visitors to brand's website of circularity. The content should catch the visitors' attention immediately, without the need for visitors to search for answers - which could result in loosing their interest. The following recommendations apply not only to the communication on the website, but to the consistent communication on social media platforms as well.

Based on the survey results, the most important sustainable aspects of a clothing brand for conscious consumers are: locality of a brand; social and environmental sustainability implementation; green processes: mainly packaging, manufacturing, choice of suppliers and transportation; circular materials used: mainly recycled and organic materials; life-extending practices: mainly product design, timeless design, returning and repairing op-

tions offered by the brand; return possibilities: mainly return for sustainable disposal and for donation; and the possibility of rental via clothing sharing platforms. All of these factors should be therefore covered and emphasized in the online communication. These practices should not only be mentioned, but rather be communicated transparently, clearly, explanatory, and to be easily understood by the audience - how the overall closed-loop system implementation actually works. Out of all mentioned aspects, the most desired content to be seen online were sustainable materials, social sutainability, sustainable manufacturing, options for used clothing and sustainable packaging. These should be therefore the most often shared and emphasized.

Regarding the type of content, not only sustainability implementation was important, but desired content to be shared by the brand were also customers' reviews; company's behind the scenes; Q&A; and general educational sustainability-related content.

Additionally, based on the review of secondary study, consumers were more willing to take care of the clothing in the end of its lifecycle; than to worry about the beginning stage of it. The ways to deal with the used clothing should be therefore more emphasized, visible, accessible and easy to understand. The clothing care instructions should be also communicated transparently. Some consumers' worries arised regarding circular materials such as their quality; comfort; style; and materials' attributes. These aspects should be therefore communicated clearly and consistently, to avoid any unnecessary worries of potentional consumers and to reassure them.

When wanting to impress potentional customers, the overall content should be balanced, valuable, and evoke the interest and willingness to find out more information and to engage voluntarily. This could be triggered by sharing the valuable and engaging information clearly via bolt and fresh communication. Communication should be personal, encouraging, and evoke the positive feelings instead of guilt and „save the world" messages. Instagram plays the cruical role based on the research' results, together with the customers' reviews incorporated into online communication.

The „highlights" on Instagram could be widely utilized to communicate all previously covered sustainable factors for new visitors, with the clear and self-explanatory covers. Instagram highlights used among competitors covered for example the categories of: our team; about us; store; design; transparency; materials; lifecycles; take-back service; care services; reviews; and fashion revolution. The captions could involve more information and be more personal to engage with the audience. The storytelling could be widely utilized. The hashtags could be more tailored to the specific target group, by using hashtags with less

amount of posts. It is cruical not only to post the content consistently, but to be naturally engaging with other brands, consumers, and community.

Not all links of social media accounts of the brand are imported into its Facebook and website. All social media channels used by the company should be visible and accessible everywhere. Additionally, the brand is not at all active on Linkedin, which is very widely used platform in Finland. The author recommends to focus on this platform more, because it could help with bigger reach. Social platforms TikTok or/and Pinterest could also be widely utilized - for that to happen the point of view of young generation would be beneficial.

As the author's recommendation, all these aspects should be taken into consideration when developing online marketing strategy, to increase the sustainability awareness and brand's competitive advantage. Consumers play an important part in making the whole SCs sustainable. The Instagram platform and SEO could have been widely utilized in this mater, while Facebook does not seem to play an important role anymore. The overall sustainability practices should be presented consistently and transparently, with the regard to the consumers' will to know more about circularity of the brand and its closed loops implementation, and their will to be engaged on the personal level. The overall content should be fresh, bold, engaging, educating, valuable and up-to date with the consumers' interests and needs. Messages including internal locus activation, effectiveness claims, environmental gain-framed messages and the environmental loss-framed messages should be incorporated as well.

6.3 Reliability, Validity and Relevance

The author has been seriously taking into consideration the reliability and validity of this research throughout its whole process. The writer believes in a good reliability of this research, implicating that if the same methods under the same circumstances were used, the same results would be concluded. (Middleton 2019). The sample size was quite big considering the overall context of this project, which supports its reliability as well. The circumstances were kept consistent to ensure the same environment for the respondents.

Validity refers to the results produced, that answer the characteristics of the target population. (Middleton 2019). The data measurement methods were designed carefully to reach the highest possible validity. The appropriate sampling methods were used that were clearly demarcating the target population being researched.

The author found the applied methodology effective and helpful for answering the research problem. The limitation of this research was the sample selection and sample size, time constrain and relative lack of previous studies on this topic.

Overall, the author considers the relevance of this research as high. The main reason is that the research was designed to get the results that are truly helpful to answer the research question. Both, the desktop and quantitative data collected for the research related closely to the research question. The quality and the level of data were suitable to the aim of the research.

6.4 Further Research

Suggestion for further research would be to conduct the focus-group interviews and qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis of current brand's content conducted by conscious consumers would provide their thoughts, feelings and perceptions for a given content and type of communication.

Focus group interviewes could provide the detailed and personal overview of what consumers pay attention to regarding brand's sustainability communication, what motivates them and what discourages them. Respondents would discuss with each other freely while following the semi-structured interview design. The group could consist of a few current customers and few conscious buyers not yet being brand's customers.

6.5 Reflection on Learning

The author of this research has benefited professionally and personally a lot from conducting this research. The knowledge regarding research conduction in general was acquired and applied; the detailed theory regarding investigating the sustainability matter was searched, filtered, studied and analyzed; the empirical research was designed and distributed; the survey results were concluded, analyzed, and visualized; and lastly, the overall report was written, logically structured, and research was concluded. All these steps have helped the author to develop the critical skills, communication skills, time-management, analytical and reporting skills.

Research being commissioned has motivated the author to conduct it well, and the information, feedbacks and ideas provided by the case company's representatives have helped in the research conduction and the author's overall understanding of a sustainable business.

This research has been closely related to the auhor's specialization of supply chain management, with the focus on the circular business and its operations, green supply chain processes and sustainability awareness. These were supplemented by the marketing aspects of investigating online content and customers' behaviour. All these stages could help the author in the future with her study and career plans to some extend.

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Survey Divided into Themes

Theme	Number	Question	Sub-question
Consumers' Attitudes towards Sustainability in the Fashion Industry	1.	When purchasing clothes, are you considering the sustainability of the PRODUCT ? (its environmental friendliness - eg. materials used, how it was manufactured, recyclability, possibilities to deal with it after usage, etc.)	
	2.	When deciding between similar products, do you consider the overall sustainability of the COMPANY? (all its activities - green suppliers, manufacturing, distribution, packaging, labour, etc.)	
	3.	How important for you is the ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY of a Clothing Brand (its environmental impact of all its processes)	
	4.	How important for you is the SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY of a Clothing Brand? (practices such as safety at workplace, fair labour, human rights, non-discrimination, etc.)	
Importance of Sustainable Clothing's Attributes	5.	When buying clothing, how much do you prefer a Local brand to a foreign one?	
	6.	Do you prefer the clothing made out of the following sustainable materials instead of traditional raw materials?	○ BIO-BASED MATERIALS ○ ORGANIC MATERIALS ○ RECYCLED MATERIALS ○ REUSED MATERIALS
	7.	From your perspective, how important are the following practices that create longer life of Clothing?	○ PRODUCT DESIGN ○ TIMELESS DESIGN ○ REUSING OPTIONS ○ REPAIRING OPTIONS ○ RECONDITION OPTIONS
Importance of sustainable services offered by the Fashion Brand	8.	How important are for you the following aspects for used clothes, provided by the company that produced it?	○ RETURN for RECYCLING ○ RETURN for SECOND-HAND SELLING / DONATING ○ RETURN for SUSTAINABLE DISPOSAL
	9.	Have you ever considered the possibility of borrowing clothing via Sharing Platforms?	○ **10.** : If you have considered Sharing Platforms, how important is it for you that the Brand you like offers lending possibilities via them?
Importance of	11.	How important is it for you, that the following practices of a Clothing Brand are GREEN	○ MANUFACTURING ○ SUPPLIERS

Fashion Brand's Sustainable Practices implemented		(environmentally friendly) ?	○ PACKAGING ○ TRANSPORTATION ○ RETAILING ○ LOCAL production; Local suppliers ○ REVERSE LOGISTICS
	12.	How important are the Social Sustainable practices of a Fashion Brand for you?	○ WORKING ENVIRONMENT ○ HUMAN RIGHTS
Importance of Sustainable Fashion Brand's Visibility and Communication	**13.**	When you search for a new sustainable Clothing brand, how do you proceed? Which steps do you take? (Please choose up to 3 most important ones)	
	14.	Imagine you already found a new sustainable Clothing brand you might like. Which channels do you check first? (Please choose up to 3 most important ones)	
	15.	What type of Information shared by a sustainable clothing brand would you like to see on its Website and Social Media Channels? (Please choose at least 2)	
	16.	What type of Content shared by a sustainable clothing brand would you like to see on its Website and Social Media Channels? (Please choose at least 2)	
Demographics	**17.**	How old are you?	
	18.	What is your gender?	
	19.	Which country are you from?	
	20.	Where do you currently live? (For period 1+ year)	
	21.	What is your occupation?	

Attachment 2. Survey Design

Importance of the Sustainability Communication of the Slow Fashion Brand

❓ What is SUSTAINABILITY

→ Sustainability means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It stands for making only such use of natural, renewable resources that people can continue to rely on their yields in the long term. In addition to natural resources, we also need social and economic resources.

1. When purchasing clothes, are you considering the sustainability of the PRODUCT ? (its environmental friendliness - eg. materials used, how it was manufactured, recyclability, possibilities to deal with it after usage, etc.)

- ◯ Yes, sustainability is the most important factor when deciding
- ◯ Yes, sustainability is equally important along with other factors (price, quality, brand, etc.)
- ◯ Yes I consider it, but it is less important than other factors (price, quality, brand, etc.)
- ◯ It is the least important factor when making decisions
- ◯ I do not consider sustainability of a product at all

2. When deciding between similar products, do you consider the overall sustainability of the COMPANY? (all its activities - green suppliers, manufacturing, distribution, packaging, labour, etc.)

- ◯ I try to buy clothes only from the sustainable brands: the more sustainable brand, the more I prefer a product
- ◯ I try to buy clothes from the sustainable brands: once it is sustainable, I make decisions based on other factors
- ◯ I consider sustainabiltiy of a brand, but it does not play such an important role when deciding
- ◯ I consider sustainability of a brand, but it is the least important factor when deciding
- ◯ I do not consider sustainability of a brand at all

3. How important for you is the ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY of a Clohing Brand (its environmental impact of all its processes)

- ◯ Not important at all
- ◯ Somewhat important
- ◯ Important
- ◯ Very important

4. How important for you is the SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY of a Clothing Brand? (practices such as safety at workplace, fair labour, human rights, non-discrimination, etc.)

- ◯ Not important at all
- ◯ Somewhat important
- ◯ Important
- ◯ Very important

5. When buying clothing, how much do you prefer a Local brand to a foreign one?

- ◯ I don't know
- ◯ Do not prefer at all
- ◯ Somewhat prefer
- ◯ Prefer
- ◯ Prefer a lot
- ◯ I don't consider this factor

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6. Do you prefer the clothing made out of the following sustainable materials instead of traditional raw materials? ↓

	I don't know	Do not prefer at all	Somewhat prefer	Prefer	Prefer a lot
📌📌 BIO-BASED MATERIALS (biological or natural materials; are renewable)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 ORGANIC MATERIALS (produced or involving production without the use of chemicals)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 RECYCLED MATERIALS (materials that would be thrown away; turned into new ones)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 REUSED MATERIALS (created from the "waste" of another product)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

7. From your perspective, how important are the following practices that create longer life of Clothing? ↓

	I don't know	Not important at all	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
📌📌 PRODUCT DESIGN (higher quality→guarantees longer life; often for higher price)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 TIMELESS DESIGN (clothing that is never out of fashion)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 REUSING OPTIONS (used products can be used in different → new way)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 REPAIRING OPTIONS (Maintenance) for used / broken product (repair what is broken → funcionality improvement)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
📌📌 RECONDITION OPTIONS for used product (aesthetical = visual improvement)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

8. How important are for you the following aspects for used clothes, provided by the company that produced it? ↓

	I don't know	Not important at all	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
📌📌 RETURN of used product FOR RECYCLING - for some benefit in return	○	○	○	○	○
📌📌 RETURN of used products FOR SECOND-HAND SELLING / DONATING	○	○	○	○	○
📌📌 RETURN of Broken / Unusable clothing FOR SUSTAINABLE DISPOSAL (responsible dealing with waste)	○	○	○	○	○

9. Have you ever considered the possibility of borrowing clothing via Sharing Platforms?

	Not at all	I have considered it, but decided not to use it	I have considered it, and might use it at some point	I will maybe consider it	I am using it
Accessibility of product via Shared Platform (Instead of buying, you can borrow them on time basis)	○	○	○	○	○

10. If you have considered Sharing Platforms, how important is it for you that the Brand you like offers lending possibilities via them?

- ○ Not important at all
- ○ Somewhat important
- ○ Important
- ○ Very Important

11. How important is it for you, that the following practices of a Clothing Brand are GREEN (environmentally friendly) ? ↓

	Not important at all	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
📌📌 MANUFACTURING (environmental friendly pratices involved in the process)	○	○	○	○
📌📌 SUPPLIERS (choice of the sustainable suppliers that supply materials)	○	○	○	○
📌📌 PACKAGING (environmental friendliness of product's package: materials used, recyclability, etc.)	○	○	○	○
📌📌 TRANSPORTATION (modes of transportation used for delivery; their environmental impact)	○	○	○	○
📌📌 RETAILING (where the products are sold; if retailers involve ethical aspect and value creation towards sustainability)	○	○	○	○
📌📌 LOCAL production; Local suppliers	○	○	○	○
📌📌 REVERSE LOGISTICS (if the company manages reversed flows→return of used products to the manufacturer; their efficient disposal; recovery of products, etc.)	○	○	○	○

12. How important are the Social Sustainable practices of a Fashion Brand for you? ↓

	Not important at all	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
📌📌 WORKING ENVIRONMENT(practices such as Fair labour, Occupational Health and Safety, Human rights at workplace, etc.)	○	○	○	○
📌📌 HUMAN RIGHTS (practices such as Equality, Non-Discrimination, Diversity, etc.)	○	○	○	○

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13. When you search for a new sustainable Clothing brand, how do you proceed? Which steps do you take? (Please choose up to 3 most important ones)

- [ ] In-store Shopping
- [ ] Niche Retailers (focused on specialized segment; offering particular kind of products/service)
- [ ] Referral
- [ ] Google
- [ ] Reviews
- [ ] Facebook
- [ ] Instagram
- [ ] Linkedin
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I do not search for sustainable clothing brand

14. Imagine you already found a new sustainable Clothing brand you might like. Which channels do you check first? (Please choose up to 3 most important ones)

- [ ] Brand's Website
- [ ] Facebook
- [ ] Instagram
- [ ] Linkedin
- [ ] Twitter
- [ ] YouTube
- [ ] TikTok
- [ ] Google the brand
- [ ] Check the reviews of customers
- [ ] Other

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15. What type of Information shared by a sustainable clothing brand would you like to see on its Website and Social Media Channels? (Please choose at least 2)

- [ ] Sustainable Materials used for Clothing
- [ ] Brand's Sustainable Manufacturing
- [ ] Brand's choice of Sustainable Suppliers
- [ ] Sustainable Transportation
- [ ] Sustainable Packaging
- [ ] Options for Used products (Recycling, Reconditioning, Donating, Disposal of a product, etc.)
- [ ] Possibility of lending clothes via Sharing Platform
- [ ] Brand's Social Sustainability (Fair labour, Human rights, Equality, Non-discrimination, etc.)
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I do not care

16. What type of Content shared by a sustainable clothing brand would you like to see on its Website and Social Media Channels? (Please choose at least 2)

- [ ] How to Guides
- [ ] E-books
- [ ] Templates and Checklists to Download
- [ ] General Educational Content related to Sustainability / Environmentally friendly activities
- [ ] Customers' Reviews
- [ ] Company's Behind the scenes
- [ ] Company News
- [ ] Blog posts
- [ ] Q&A
- [ ] Digital Events
- [ ] Podcasts
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I do not care

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17. How old are you?

Select

18. What is your gender?

Select

19. Which country are you from?

20. Where do you currently live? (For period 1+ year)

21. What is your occupation?

Select

Previous Submit