



## **Sustainable Brands – Comprehension and Importance of Sustainability in TikTok**

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Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor's Thesis

2022

## Abstract

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**Degree**

Bachelor of Business Administration

**Report/thesis title**

Sustainable Brands – Comprehension and Importance of Sustainability in TikTok

**Number of pages and appendix pages**

53 + 8

The aim of this thesis is to study the TikTok platform and its suitability for educational contents about sustainability. This study builds an understanding of TikTok users' level of comprehension and attitudes regarding sustainability. TikTok users were studied globally to gain understanding of the comprehension and attitudes across country borders.

One part of being a sustainable company is to share understanding, thus educating customers. TikTok is a new growing platform with a distinguished algorithm that may create marketing professionals some new approaches to educational content. So, researching this topic can give more understanding and tools for marketing professionals to optimize their sustainability communication and thus increase customer loyalty.

The quantitative research was conducted through an online questionnaire with multiple choice and Likert Scale questions. Two hypotheses were set to gain a more in-depth understanding of the relationships between age and comprehension as well as comprehension and importance of sustainability. The study was limited to monthly TikTok users over 18 years of age who make their own purchase decisions.

The results show that the comprehension of the whole concept of sustainability is lacking, especially regarding economic sustainability. However, sustainability in full was found to have importance in the minds of the respondents, even though they did not understand all dimensions equally. TikTok was also seen as a good platform for educational content by the respondents.

TikTok has potential for educational sustainability communications but is limitedly used nowadays. The interest in sustainability is found and therefore creating content that give new perspectives to sustainability would be beneficial to the consumers.

**Keywords**

TikTok, branding strategies, sustainability, sustainability communication

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# 1 Introduction

This is a research type of a bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International business in the major specialization of customer relationship management and communication at the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of this chapter is to present the objective of the research and the research topic.

This chapter introduces a background for this thesis, including why this topic is beneficial to the researcher and marketing professionals, and how companies can benefit from the results of the study. Second, the overall research question, investigative questions, and methodology are defined. Third, the demarcation is presented and the topic to be studied is clarified. Fourth, the benefits of this research will be explained. Lastly, the key concepts of the thesis will be presented.

## 1.1 Background

The social media marketing field has faced changes during the last years. One reason for changing marketing norms and expectations of users is the rise of the new social media platform TikTok. (Montenegro 2021.) The platform seems to be less new to companies compared to consumers. There seems to be quite little research conducted regarding the TikTok platform. TikTok differs from other social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, with its short looping videos (maximum length of 3 minutes at the moment of the study) and robust algorithm. Thus, a similar marketing plan for TikTok as for Instagram does not work, which may be the reason for the lacking appearance of businesses. (Worb 2022.) TikTok is growing rapidly and hit the milestone of one billion monthly users on September 27th, 2021 (Tiktok for Business 2021a).

"As social media evolves, marketers must evolve or die" (Gil 2022, 221). As mentioned before, social media marketing has faced significant changes since TikTok started to spread worldwide. The two drivers that ensured TikTok's success are the length of the video and the algorithm that manages the distribution of those videos (Azhar 2021, 89). In January 2021, Tiktok was the 7<sup>th</sup> most used social network globally (Sehl 2021). Previous studies has shown that TikTok's algorithm has an effect on the users believes and behavioural changes when similar content has been show repeatedly (Wang 2022, 9). Therefore, optimizing the sustainability communication can give companies a competitive advantage and hopefully change the attitudes of TikTok users.

On its broad and layered concept, sustainability has risen its head for company branding purposes and seems to be commonly used, nevertheless often misunderstood, or strongly

limited in communication purposes. Anyways, sustainability is limitedly present in TikTok since many companies only focus on environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. This topic clarifies all dimensions of sustainability to help marketing professionals and any sustainable companies with effective sustainability branding and sustainability communication in the consumers' level of comprehension. Sustainability has been studied previously, but topics regarding sustainability in TikTok are lacking.

Braga and Martins (2020, 13) interviewed CEOs and noticed that only a third of the CEOs were sure that they were on the right path, were doing the right things, or could report the results of the actions about sustainability. This research is not only to help professionals understand consumers but also to understand the concepts relevant to branding sustainability in TikTok. In addition, this research helps companies create marketing strategies for TikTok and brand guidelines for sustainability branding, especially in TikTok, that give the most value to the consumers and help them with purchase decision. Empowering sustainable consumption helps us meet people's needs without compromising others' needs (Martin & Schouten 2012, 58-59). Sustainability was never built on a zero-growth ideology, so sustainability should not decrease or harm economic growth (Belz & Peattie 2012, 11). Understanding the broad concept of sustainability is essential to marketing professionals since many consumers are increasingly aware of greenwashing and other misleading marketing regarding sustainability. Therefore, a brand being a product of communication increases the importance of providing relevant information and transparency through communications to decrease the risk of reputational crisis.

Overall, social media marketing affects the quality of the relationship between customer and company, which has behavioral outcomes, such as loyalty and purchase intentions. Therefore, giving space to commercial content and content that builds a connectable and relatable brand is essential. (Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases 2021, 15.)

## **1.2 Research Question**

The aim of this thesis is to give insight into the comprehension of sustainability from the perspective of TikTok users and to understand how they understand the different dimensions of sustainability and what kind of importance those have in their lives. The knowledge can be then used to create more informative and relevant sustainability content for branding in TikTok. The international aspect of the thesis was covered by the quantitative survey questionnaire that studied TikTok users globally. TikTok is a global platform, in which videos reach users across borderlines.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis was:

*Is TikTok an effective channel to educate young adults about sustainability?*

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

IQ1. How widely do users understand the concept of sustainability?

IQ2. What is the importance of sustainability in TikTok?

IQ3. What kind of recommendations can be given based on the hypothesis testing?

Table 1 below presents the theoretical framework, research methods, and results chapters linked to each investigative question. This thesis implemented a quantitative research method in the form of an anonymous online survey distributed globally.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical framework	Research methods	Results (chapter)
IQ1. How widely do users understand the concept of sustainability?	2.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Development 2.1.1 Sustainable Development Goals 2.1.2 Corporate Responsibility 2.3 Sustainability Branding in TikTok	Quantitative survey	4.2
IQ2. What is the importance of sustainability in TikTok?	2.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Development 2.2.2 TikTok Algorithm 2.2.3. Brand Equity and Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Quantitative survey	4.3
IQ3. What kind of recommendations can be given based on the hypothesis testing?	2.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Development 2.2 Social Media Branding 2.4 Communities in Social Media 2.3 Sustainability branding in TikTok 2.4 Communities in Social Media	Quantitative survey	4.4

### 1.3 Demarcation

The study is demarcated to users over 18 years of age since most children are not making their own purchase decision due to the use of their parents' or caregivers' money. The age of majority, which means when a person is seen as an adult by a legal system in almost all OECD countries, is 18 years of age. (OECD 2016, 1-2.) The respondents are restricted by age in this study, and users under 18 are not studied since they are not yet legally adults. To get a clear picture of the phenomenon and how attitudes affect actions, two limiting questions are added to the survey:

1. Do you make your own purchase decisions on items such as food, clothing, services, etc.?
2. Do you use your parents or other care-givers money to purchase?

If the respondent answers "no" to the first question or "yes" to the second, they are led to the thank you page. This way, the researcher will get a clearer picture of the consumers' values and how they are linked to their actions. Younger TikTok users may still use their parents' money, or their parents influence their purchase decision, so the questions above are essential to be asked.

TikTok age demographics lean towards younger adults when looking at the users over 18 years of age. For example, 43,7% of TikTok's global audience using ads was from 18 to 24 years of age in 2021. 31,9% of the worldwide ad audience was 25 to 34. Thus, almost 75% of the global TikTok users over 18 years of age are from 18 to 34. (Datareportal 2022.) In the United States, the biggest age group of TikTok users are users between 10-19 years of age, but they most often do not make their purchase decisions, so they are demarcated out from this study (Statista 2022). Demarcating respondents by their nationality would not give us an accurate picture of the TikTok users that may be reached since videos are distributed globally and mostly reach people worldwide. Therefore, country-based demarcations are not used in the survey. Figure 1 below presents visually who was studied and what was studied. There are two primary areas covering the perspectives of the first two investigative questions stated before.



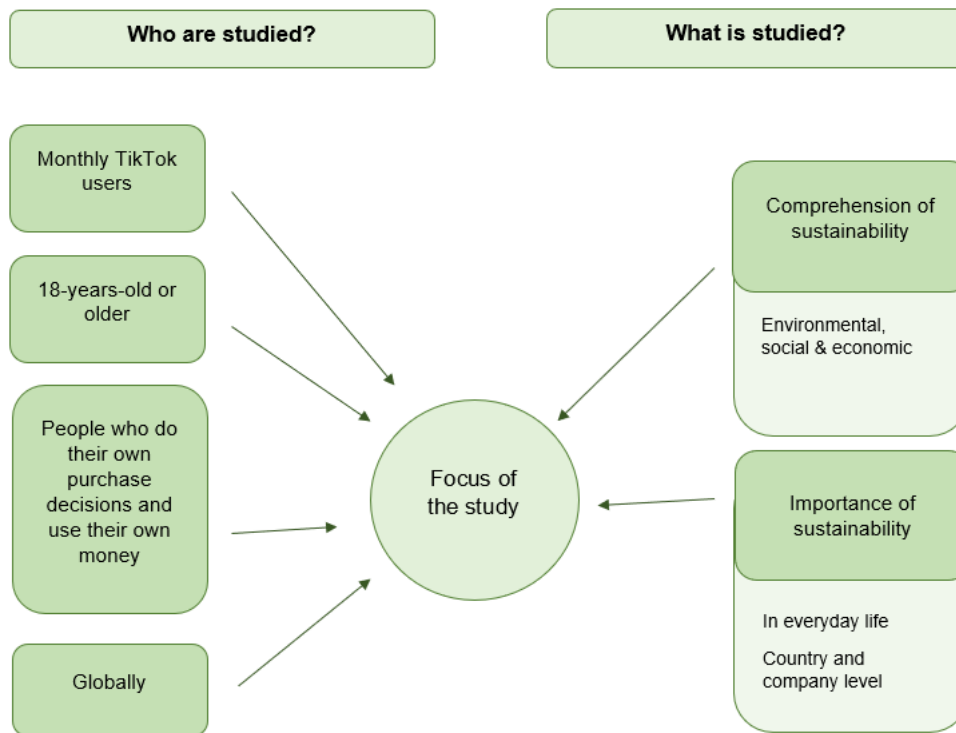


Figure 1. Visual presentation of the focus of the study

Even though direct demarcations based on the nationality of the user is not made, there are some countries where their government has been denied access to TikTok for their citizens due to censorship and security concerns. TikTok is banned in China, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but there is a way to go around it. If users use a VPN (a virtual private network), they can change their virtual location and access TikTok without restrictions. (Onyxia 2022.) Getting respondents from those specific countries may be hard or even impossible.

#### 1.4 Benefits

Since the researcher is not working for a commissioning company, there is no company that will automatically apply my findings to their operations. However, TikTok is a growing platform and still quite new to companies, therefore, this study will be beneficial to all marketing professionals to read. Also, professionals who do not use TikTok since the value perception may apply to users on other platforms. Companies buying marketing services from other companies, such as marketing agencies, will also benefit from this knowledge, thus they get more accurate content to their customers and can reach their expectations.

Also, consumers will benefit from getting understandable information based on their knowledge level when companies apply the findings of the research to their

communication operations. Consumers will have understandable information available, and they can compare companies easier themselves. Studies that help marketing personnel develop their marketing strategies can give a competitive advantage in the growing field of sustainable business. Also, the advantage can be gained by understanding users of the new platform that plays with the platform's own rules.

For my personal development, this thesis study will give me an increasing understanding of the rising platform as well as develop my project management skills. This topic helps me to grow in my full-time job as a marketing assistant. In addition, it will be a great addition to my CV for future master's degree studies in sustainable business.

### 1.5 Key Concepts

**Sustainability** was defined by the United Nations in 1987 as follows: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations 2021a).

**Sustainable development goals** are international goals that the United Nations has defined to help countries achieve a better future for all of us. The goals include 17 goals that address the global challenges from inequality to climate change. The goals consider the different starting points of different countries so that every country can improve. (United Nations 2021b.)

**The competitive advantage of sustainability** means the company benefits when operating sustainably. Business advantages can be received through, for example, the anticipation of regulatory changes, cost reduction, driving innovations, and new authentic market positions might be found through innovations. (Martin & Schouten 2012, 18.)

**Sustainability branding** is a part of the sustainability strategy that supports marketing operations and promotes the sustainability operations of the company (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou 2013, 9).

**Tiktok** is a social media platform created for the international market where users can watch and create short videos. It combines the essential functions of other social media platforms, and therefore it is not just an entertainment app but also social networking app. (Ma & Hu 2021, 383-384.)

**Social media consumer behavior** is a phenomenon that describes how consumers experience, influence and are influenced by social media environments. Their daily social media usage shapes their role as a consumer since information and experiences are shared online. (Stephen 2015, 2-3.)

## 2 Sustainability Branding in Social Media

In the previous chapter, the main objectives and background of the research were defined. In addition, the benefits and critical concepts of the research were determined. Now having the idea of the research goals and hoped outcomes, we can move forward to the theoretical framework of the thesis.

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the research is presented, and the concepts needed for understanding the phenomena regarding the topic are defined. First, an overview of the theoretical framework is explained. In chapter 2.1, the concept of sustainability and sustainable development are presented. In chapters 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, sustainable development goals and corporate responsibilities are introduced. Chapter 2.2 focuses on social media branding, including social media strategies, the TikTok algorithm and how it affects the strategy, and brand equity and competitive advantage in its subchapters. Chapter 2.3 introduces sustainable branding in TikTok and how companies brand themselves sustainable at the moment. Lastly, chapter 2.4 explains how social media communities affect to thoughts and dos of their members.

This structure will walk us through the multileveled phenomenon of sustainability branding in social media and help us understand how these theories affect each other. Figure 2 below visually presents the concepts of the theoretical framework and the relationships between those theories. Sustainability branding, in the middle, combines sustainability and branding theories. Below that is the influence of communities that has an interconnectional relationship with sustainable branding affecting one another. Green boxes include relevant sustainability and social media branding theories presented in the theoretical framework.

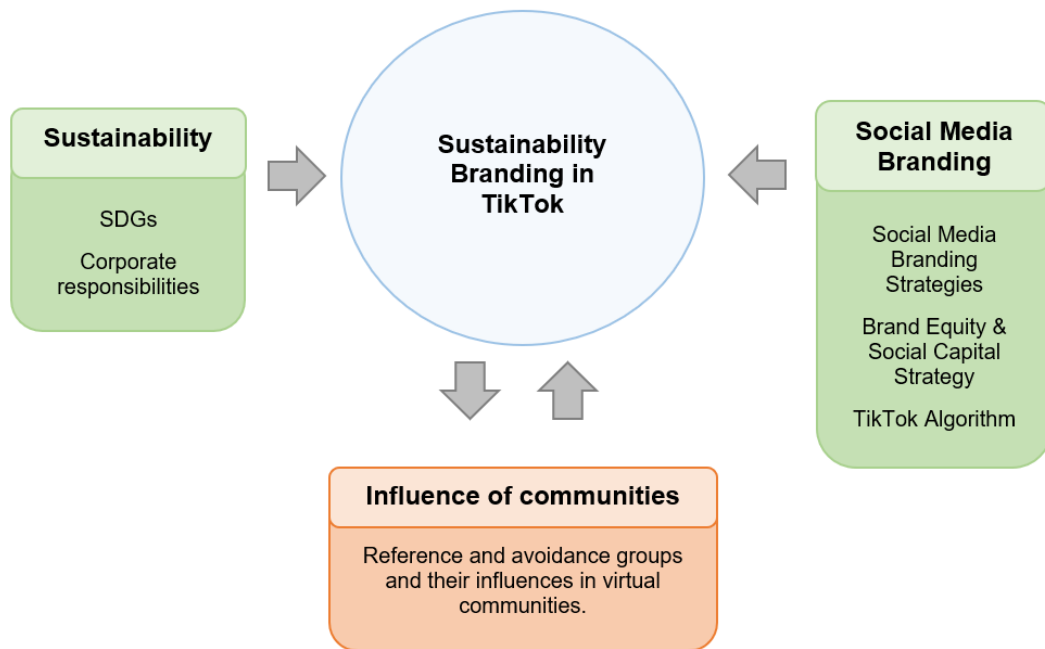


Figure 2. Visual presentation of the concepts of the theoretical framework and their interconnections

## 2.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Sustainability and sustainable development are wide and big concepts with many definitions. Therefore, it can be misunderstood or limitedly understood in many situations. To understand sustainability is good to look at its history. In the 1970s and 1980s, the word sustainability first appeared as an environmental, social, and economic ideal, and in the 1990s, it has already become recognized in political workery. However, the conceptual roots of sustainability are from at least the late seventeenth century. (Caradonna 2014, 1-2,6.) Communication about sustainability in the nowadays form is quite young, and therefore, there might be difficulties engaging it in the communication strategies effectively. Sustainability is also a wide concept, including many dimensions that do not have clear lines.

Sustainability can be divided into three main dimensions: environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Environmental sustainability creates value to the resources of the Earth and fights against pollution and harm to the natural environment. Social sustainability stands for a healthy and thriving human population, where all people are taken care of and have the possibilities to succeed. Lastly, economic sustainability focuses on the global economic system that provides welfare. We are dependent on a healthy economic system and can thrive if the global economic system thrives. (Martin &

Schouten 2012, 3-4.) Caradonna (2014, 5) presents the definition of sustainability as the fullest environmental, economic, social, and political ideal.

Figure 3 below presents the interconnectional relationships between the dimensions of sustainability. They are not separate dimensions that would only marginally interact, but they are layered and often has a clear cause-and-effect relationship. The environmental dimension is presented as the biggest dimension affected by social and economic dimensions and affects social and economic dimensions themselves. (Caradonna 2014, 9.)

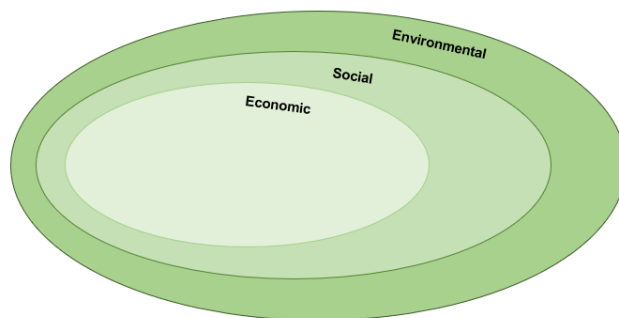


Figure 3. The interconnectional relationships of the dimensions of sustainability (Caradonna 2014, 9)

### 2.1.1 Sustainable Development Goals

We cannot talk about sustainability without talking about sustainable development and the sustainability goals of the United Nations (UN). UN has published the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with new sustainable development goals, including 17 global goals and 169 targets. All countries in a partnership with the UN have implemented the goals in their national actions. The goals consider all countries from developing to developed through their transformative nature, making the goals approachable and effective when all countries and stakeholders, from organizations to human beings, can put their effort into the goals. The goals are not only flexible regarding the possible use of national resources between countries but also transformable regarding national policies and priorities. (United Nations 2015, 1-3.) The goals are not divided into the three main dimensions (environmental, social, and economic) but are based on them. All 17 goals are listed in figure 4.



Figure 4 United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals (United Nations 2022)

United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are versatile, universal, and tackle sustainability from many perspectives. However, the main goal is to tackle social issues, especially poverty that is in the way of sustainable development. These goals were made to fulfill Millennium Development Goal's gaps, such as human rights and gender equality. (United Nations 2015, 1).

*Sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent. (United Nations 2015, 5.)*

SDGs may sound excellent and thorough, but they have also gained some criticism. Nature (2020) pointed out that the SDGs are "off track," especially environmental goals, and it is not even realistic for poorer countries to achieve the goals. Also, the primary purpose behind all the SDGs to tackle extreme poverty is believed to fail since around 430 million people are estimated to live in extreme poverty in 2030. However, Nature emphasized that SDGs are valuable and lead to notable change but only in research and higher education. The problem between SDGs and achieving the goals is that there are no consequences if one does not participate and try to accomplish these goals. (Nature 2020.) Eden and Wagstaff (2021, 50) also addressed the problematic nature of SDGs and

pointed out in their study how gender equality is a “wicked problem (systemic, ambiguous, complex, and conflictual)” and, therefore, a complex challenge to tackle through evidence-based policymaking.

### **2.1.2 Corporate Responsibilities**

Sustainability should not be acknowledged as a marketing effort at a corporate level. A sustainability strategy must be implemented throughout the company at every level. The most common strategy used to implement a thorough sustainability strategy is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which includes sustainability strategy and marketing aspects. (Belz & Peattie 2012, 32.)

The definition of CRS varies a little depending on who is defining it. For example, European Commission defines CSR as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society” and emphasizes the corporate’s responsibility to implement actions for more ethical operations. The Commission includes social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns in the scope of CSR. Those concerns are the ones that the European Commission wants to regulate and act as a supporting body to the corporations. (European Commission 2022.) United Nations Global Compact (2022) has created The Ten Principles that are pretty to CRS and focus on corporate responsibilities. The Ten Principles are divided into four categories: human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption. Following these principles help organizations to meet at the minimum the fundamental responsibilities of an organization. (United Nations Global Compact 2022.)

We should not forget that CSR is not only an external operation affecting external stakeholders, such as consumers or communities close to the manufacturing site, but also internal and includes employee rights, health and safety at work, and management of resources and environmental impacts. (Belz & Peattie 2012, 32-33.) CSR implementation can be divided into general, value chain, and competitive contexts. Responsive CSR transforms the company’s citizenship into a better way in the society it operates. Also, it helps to improve the value chain to the less harmful activities. These operations must respond to stakeholders’ pressure to act responsibly. Strategic CSR aims to enhance value chain activities to benefit society while strengthening strategy. In addition, it uses leverage to improve critical areas and operations to increase the company’s competitive advantage. (Belz & Peattie 2012, 34-35.)



## 2.2 Social Media Branding

Social media marketing and branding efforts are highly dependent on technologies that differ from traditional newspaper and television marketing and branding quite a lot. Technologies that enable social media platforms, and thus marketing on social media, are created to be “highly interactive platforms for co-creating, sharing, discussing, and modifying user-generated content.” That makes the whole marketing environment different from one-way communication channels where consumers do not have a straight possibility to interact with content, other consumers, or the company. (Quesenberry 2021, 11.)

Social media marketing allows small companies to compete with big companies' marketing that does not lack financial resources. This change in the marketing field allowed them to increase brand awareness through non-publisher-centric media. Studies have shown that social media marketing is effective, especially combined with in-store campaigns. Also, improvements in salesperson's communication and responsiveness have been found in a study. Success in social media requires two-way communication and interaction in the strategy - meaning mutual communication that leads to a positive brand appearance. (Quesenberry 2021, 20-23.) Constantinides (2014, 41) adds that marketers need to understand how technology changes the marketing environment and how social media is more like a toolbox than a singular tool.

Constantinides (2014, 45) has put together two main approaches from previous studies to use social media as a marketing tool. First, the passive approach refers to the consumer's voice. Thus the social media platform is used as an information and peer communication platform where the latest trends and recommendations are discussed. These platforms can be blogs, forums, or other content communities. The second approach is the active approach, which has been divided into four subcategories.

The subcategories of the active approaches are introduced next. The first subcategory uses social media as a public relations tool or a direct marketing tool. Building a brand and marketing directly to consumers is quite common on social media. Having a company blog or other forum such as YouTube, where two-way communication is provided, is also in common use. In addition, creating content that millions of people may see in the best case is such “free publicity” that companies want. The second way to use an active approach is to engage early adopters, especially those consumers that are influential in their peer group. Making sure that they know that you exist and sending them PR gifts is a low-cost effort but can make a massive difference in recognition. Thirdly, social media can

be used for personalizing. It can be, for example, personalized products or personalized customer online experiences. Customization strategy has increased customer loyalty and retention. Lastly, the active approach can be used by allowing customers to be part of the innovation process by reviewing the products and even creating advertising campaigns for the company. Also, providing a possibility to be part of the innovation process as a test group member gives the consumer an active role in product development. (Constantinides 2014, 45-50.)

TikTok fits both active and passive approaches by either providing a dynamic forum for consumers to review and give recommendations or just to be used to follow topical trends and discussions. Creating content for huge masses is what TikTok is made for, producing content that “goes viral.”

### **2.2.1 Social Media Branding Strategies**

Traditionally, brands have been used to separate one product from another one. However, in the modern world, the concept of the brand is seen much more complex than just distinguishing products. (Czarnecka, Dahl, Eagle, & Lloyd 2020, 144.) To develop a brand, one needs to think about the target markets, how to offer value, the goals of a company, and so on. Creating a sustainable brand thrive or die with the same ideas as any other company. A good product may not be enough but having a lovable brand and product that fulfills a need or want of a customer is what makes a sustainable company thrive. (Campher 2014, 23-24.)

The relationship between a product and brand is significant to sustainable brands, and the value of sustainability must be added to both the brand and the product itself. Using branding to promote a sustainable product helps a company “to create a unique sustainable brand value proposition and identity.” Identifying sustainable brands through ratings may not be as easy as it seems due to industry differences, process or product differences, shared value/responsibility, and standardization of ratings. These rating systems may give some companies good ratings on sustainability even though many could agree that a company has a vast human rights issue. (Campher 2014, 37-41.)

Brand should be strategically built on social media to create a cohesive image and manageable communication. Chen (2021) assembled five actionable strategies to build a brand on social media covering different levels of brand management. First, the basic level of branding is to cover up the basics of a brand, meaning that logos and visual guidelines are used and that you have a coherent look and feel of the brand. Also, being

consistent and posting regularly to strengthen the brand image is essential. (Chen 2021.) Jankowski (2015) also emphasizes the importance of the basic visual elements of the brand and its cohesive look and feel. Nevertheless, he points out that logo and visuals are not what a brand is. Still, it is more complex and also includes the emotional relationship between the company and a stakeholder (Jankowski 2015). Second, developing a visual brand image by writing down the typography and visual elements used to represent the brand visually. Also, photos and videos can be created to visually support the brand's aesthetics and personality. Third, marketing personas are created for marketers to target content more accurately. It is also important to remember that not all social media platforms have the same personas. Fourth, the tone of voice is created to support the personality built with visual elements. It can be started from a tiny detail like a choice of word or, at best, a personal style to write. Last, separate accounts can be created to localize the brand or create a different tone of voice for different products or product lines. Having more than one account for a company means more work, and usually therefore, only big companies have them. Still, smaller companies may also benefit from that if they want to extend their brand identity. Building a brand and strategically managing it can lead to better engagement and brand recognition. (Chen 2021.)

For a sustainable brand, the tone of voice seems to be emphasized in social media branding strategies. ListenFirst (2020) emphasizes openness regarding numbers, goals, and product-specific information about sustainability. Direct communication with stakeholders is emphasized on Facebook and Instagram to build a relationship with platform users and build loyalty. All in all, community building seems to be emphasized on all platforms. (Robles 2018.) Sustainable businesses should use TikTok similarly to build a brand and increase brand awareness. TikTok can be effectively used to lead the conversation and share understanding or educate your stakeholders. However, the educational content should be entertaining enough to keep users interested. TikTok is an entertainment-based platform that should not be forgotten. (Douglass 2021.)

### **2.2.2 TikTok Algorithm**

TikTok runs with an algorithm quite different from other social media platforms. Which is known due to social media platforms sharing their basic algorithm rules to calm skeptical people and be more open and trustworthy. However, TikTok is different based on its algorithm and its use. But the algorithm makes it a social media platform that democratizes its content which is not new but has not been done since YouTube's early days. (Friedman 2022.)

TikTok algorithm analyzes all videos by available video information and feedback (including hashtags, captions, likes, follows, shares, marked as favorite, and how long the video has been watched). Also, audience breakdown and account settings are used for segmentation. Age, gender, device information, location, and preferred language are gathered to improve the distribution of upcoming videos. (Ma & Hu 2021, 385; Newberry 2022.) Newberry (2022) also points out that negative interaction also affects; similar videos or accounts that have been hidden or marked as “not interested” or inappropriate will no longer be recommended to that person. Thus, users teach artificial intelligence to distribute the content more accurately to them and others while using TikTok. The algorithm also gathers information about the videos and compares them to reactions to determine what kind of content you want to see. Also, by showing similar content that has, for example, the same TikTok sound, filter, or effect, the algorithm can learn what kind of content and what kind of visuals or sounds you like and how much. (Ma & Hu 2021, 385.)

To conclude, TikTok gathers a lot of different kinds of information about the videos and your reactions to understand your interests and preferences, thus feeding you with a personalized, likable, and exciting content feed. We should not forget that TikTok content is also localized by the overall preferences of people who live in the same area. Therefore, people in Asia most likely see a different type of content than Europeans. Also, local TikTokers are shown to you more likely than someone across the world. (Ma & Hu 2021, 385.)

TikTok's distinguish algorithm means that marketing strategies must adapt to gain more views and engagement. Regarding branding strategies, there are some aspects that we should consider, especially as a new account. TikTok recommends trending topics, sounds, effects, hashtags, etcetera. Therefore, to get more views while building your TikTok account, it is essential to use those trends and stay alert to new trends. However, it is good to keep in mind that the brand's feel and look are still present in the videos to attract targeted users to follow you and comment or recommend your content to others. After all, in TikTok, all creators have the same possibility to thrive since the algorithm does not base the suggestions on the number of followers or previous viral videos. Every user, therefore, has as much a possibility to go viral. (Newberry 2022.)

### **2.2.3 Brand Equity and Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

Companies' interest in sustainability is not only for ethical reasons nowadays but also economical. Consumers' increasing interest and expectations about sustainability issues are pushing companies to pay more attention to the sustainability aspects of a company to

increase sales and satisfy customer needs and wants. (Martin & Schouten 2012, 15.) However, companies do not only look for economic capital but also social capital, and therefore taking part in dialogs and engaging with stakeholder groups is essential. Especially sustainable brands must have a transparent and open discussion with stakeholders to grow their social capital. Low social capital and patchy dialogs do not support a solid and trustworthy brand. (Champniss & Vilá 2011, xvi-xviii.)

To create that social equity, companies may use a *social capital strategy* to build their appearance in society. The social capital strategy considers both internal and external stakeholders, and growing social capital requires that both of these grow. Having a strong social capital level in external stakeholder groups cannot bury the problems with internal stakeholder groups. Brand equity and social capital strategy create an interconnectional relationship between human resource management, corporate communication, and marketing. Social capital strategy is a branding strategy that broadens and upgrades the “how” of the old branding strategy and marketing mix as known as 4Ps. Including 5Is in the marketing mix, we can build a balanced brand with long-term social capital. The 5Is help the brand managers to build and strengthen the brand effectively. The 5Is are interconnectedness, inclusiveness, interest, ignition, and imagination. (Champniss & Vilá 2011, 195-201.)

How can these be used strategically to strengthen the brand’s social capital?

*Interconnectedness* refers to the relationship between the brand and its competitors, how symbiotic the relationship is, and how the collaborative characteristics can lead to an even more valuable brand. Traditionally companies have tried to target the consumers as effectively as possible and have seen the value only in the product. Still, companies only have a limited ability to influence consumers. Eventually, it may not be that effective in the end. Interconnectedness creates more space for dialog, shared understanding, and trust, which on the other hand, creates growth in those companies’ social capital through open dialog and shared thinking. *Inclusiveness* in social capital strategy sees the value in the relationships and therefore pushes the brand to create relationships as broadly and as deeply as possible with different stakeholder groups. Marketers often focus on a few targeted profiles. Still, a brand with high social capital includes as many people as possible in their dialogs, not only people who are the most likely to purchase. The third I of the 5Is is the *ignition*, which refers to the brand’s spark to create more social capital. The more social capital, the more valuable the brand can be. Therefore, the company must be in the role that creates and nourishes social capital. One way to do that is to build trust because trust creates social capital, and social capital creates more ways to show the brand’s trustworthiness. Brands that use social capital strategy want to build long-term

*interest* in the society in contrast to momentary attention. To create frequent and long-term dialog, the brand cannot only have short momentary attention spikes in society. The long-term interest of consumers is needed to be an engaging and collaborative brand. Lastly, the *imagination* shows that the brand uses all possible skills and leverage that it has to build social capital. Imagination is the key to finding all possibilities to create new value. For social capital, a brand's imagination is used to create the best dialogs and shared thinking, the engagement that lasts in practice. (Champrniss & Vilá 2011, 201-218.)

To not forget the economic drives to sustainability, there are five economic reasons to focus on sustainability and gain a competitive advantage. First, it may help a company stay ahead of environmental regulations or sustainability regulations. New laws are applied slowly but steadily in the European Union, so European companies benefit from using those guidelines before the regulations require companies to change. That can also give more time to prepare for the change. Second, sustainable options create a cost advantage when operations are developed to be more efficient, and costs are lower when a company uses, for example, less energy or reduces waste. Third, developing a company's operations can lead to whole new innovations that create more profit for the company. Innovations can also be crucial in a competitive industry and help a company stay competitive in a challenging business environment. Fourth, sustainability can be a competitive advantage also from the employer branding point of view. Sustainable companies are often seen as creative, innovative, and productive work environments, which is why it attracts and retain talented applicants and employees. Lastly, sustainability can give a company a strong market position and differentiate it from its competitors. Creating a reputation that a company cares about people and the environment can increase customer loyalty and help expand to new customer segments. (Martin & Schouten 2012, 15-17.)

### **2.3 Sustainability Branding in TikTok**

To understand the current situation regarding sustainability branding in TikTok, the researcher has gathered some concrete examples. The researcher used the keywords 'sustainability', 'sustainable business,' 'social sustainability,' 'ethical business,' and 'economic sustainability' to search for TikTok videos and profiles on those topics. An overview was gotten, and by surprise, most of the top videos with those keywords were marketing tips and other educational videos about sustainability, not companies promoting their sustainability. The creators of those videos were not marketers giving advises how to communicate sustainability better, but marketers giving tips to be more sustainable as a company. The keyword 'sustainable business' gave some videos of sustainable

companies, and most of the company accounts were small businesses. However, most top videos about sustainability are creators reviewing or recommending sustainable products or alternative ways to be more sustainable.

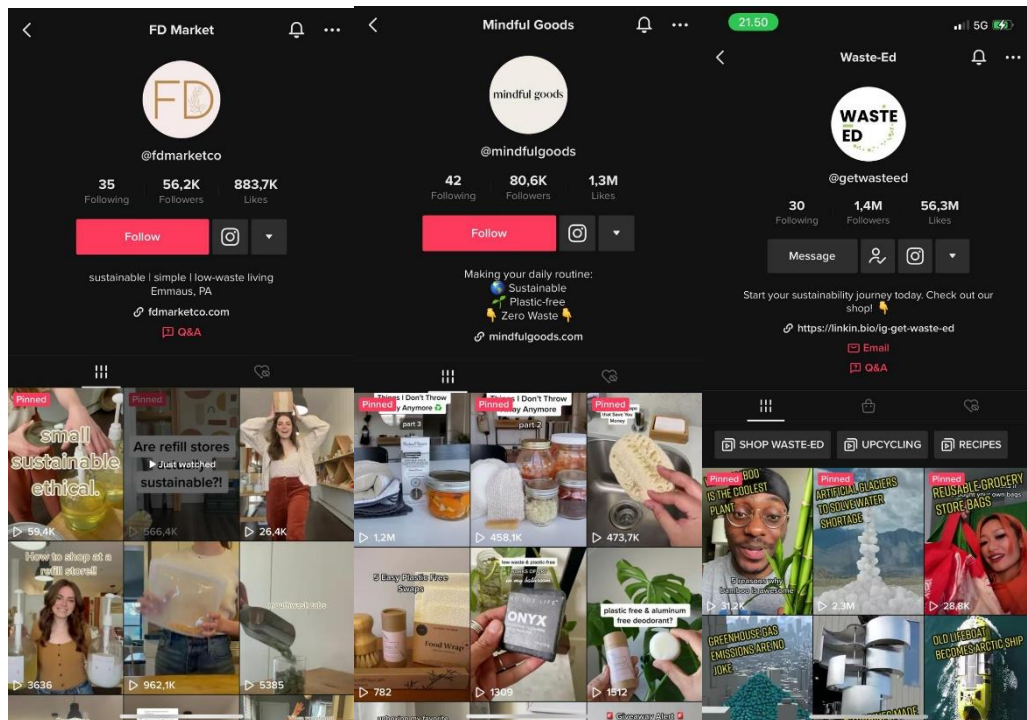


Figure 6. Three creators in TikTok that make content of sustainability

Accounts in figure 6 were found by using the keywords 'sustainable' and 'sustainable business.' In their descriptions, these accounts use words sustainable and other words connected to environmental sustainability, such as plastic-free, low waste, or zero waste. With the keyword 'social sustainability,' the researcher could not find any businesses communicating their actions regarding social sustainability. The keyword 'ethical business' brought up @getwasteed, which had used the word 'ethically' in the video (figure 7). This company represents sustainable technological innovations and products that help victims of climate change. They also sell some sustainable products in their online store.



Figure 7. The only video that was found by using a keyword “ethical business”

The researcher analyzed the sustainability branding in social media of these four companies’ accounts introduced based on the theory represented earlier. In table 2 below, the social media branding actions are marked by the letter X if they appear in the account and with a dash those actions that did not occur. This table does not include elements that boost the algorithm to share the videos or the profile but only those elements that build the brand image and reputation of the company.

Table 2. Analysis of sustainability branding in TikTok by four sustainable companies

<b>Sustainability branding action</b>	@fdmarketco	@mindfulgood	@getwasteed
Visual elements, typography, visual and audio coherence	X	X	X
Consistent and regular posting	X	X	X
Tone of voice	X	X	X
Targeted personas	X	X	X
Openness	X	-	X
Two-way communication	X	X	X
Shared understanding	X	-	X
Leading conversations	-	-	X



@fdmarketco has clearly stated the visual elements and typography used in the videos. Also, the voiceovers and overall visual look are coherent. Videos are posted regularly and follow a clear theme. The tone of voice is informative and friendly. The videos are targeted to people interested in ecological alternatives, zero waste lifestyle, and supporting small businesses since the videos' themes and educational content are tied around these topics. @fdmarketco shows openness in the videos by including information about business operative actions, such as how they store refill products, how products are shipped, and how they avoid waste. However, they do not share information about their supply chain and the sustainability of the supply chain in the videos. Some products and product information are presented in the videos. Stakeholders comment on their videos often, and some questions are answered in a video, which supports two-way communication. They lead conversations about sustainability in some of their videos by addressing some comments they have gotten from stakeholders regarding sustainability. In the videos, they admit that they are not perfect, argue their actions with numbers, and say that they can change actions if better options are available.

@mindfulgoods has coherent visual looks and voiceovers that the same person makes in all videos, and they use a similar tone of voice as @fdmarketco, educational and informative but friendly. However, the researcher found @mindfulgoods a little more pressuring or inculpatory since they have many videos where they use sentences like "things I don't throw away anymore" and then they share their zero waste products that they use, though they do not buy those products at all in the first place. These videos may even create an environment where using those "not sustainable products" products can make one feel 'ignorant.' They post videos regularly and have clear themes and personas that they are targeting. Their videos are primarily about eco-friendly and zero-waste lifestyles. In addition, they share some environmental sustainability tips and hacks in their videos. They do not share that much about their products that would expose their sustainability or operations. Stakeholders comment on their videos regularly, and they also answer some questions that were asked but do not address the criticism they have gotten about their videos. Therefore, shared understanding and leading conversations are lacking.

@getwasteed has coherent visual elements and typography and uses the same tone of voice in all videos. One person does not make all voiceovers, but the tone of voice still stays, which may show the level of brand guidelines that are thought and recognized. The tone of voice is informative, educational, and inspiring. They post videos regularly and have a clear theme and targeted personas. The videos cover topics from daily life eco-friendly alternatives to educational videos representing global innovations that fight

against climate change or help victims of climate change. They are open about their products and argue their products and prices. They share their understanding and educational stories about sustainability, such as growing your food. And thus, use shared understanding to grow the whole sustainable market. They also lead conversations about sustainability by sharing information that does not only help their company to sell ecological products but also creates an image of sustainable businesses and give space to new sustainable innovations. Some of their videos also cover social sustainability by presenting ethically produced goods. Their ethical content mostly covers topics, such as educational videos about innovations that help communities that suffer due to climate change.

Overall, environmental sustainability is much better represented than any other dimension of sustainability. Therefore, this research will give great knowledge of the level of understanding and importance of those other dimensions and how they can be used to build a fully covered sustainable image of a brand.

#### **2.4 Communities in Social Media**

Social media creates communities and supports people's identities and therefore customer behavior might be different in social media than in a physical store. Some people are more exposed to the influences of groups, but some groups have no power over our decision or thoughts, or we may even try to distinguish ourselves from some specific group, *avoidance group*. *Reference groups* that influence our decision-making can be meaningful to us, even though, we may not know these people personally. These people we know as social media influencers nowadays. (Solomon 2020, 410-412.)

Social media virtual brand communities create whole new possibilities for customer-to-customer activities. These communities are not local anymore but can have no limitation when it comes to possible members. All a community needs are a shared interest. However, those groups do not only collect together individual people, but there might also be companies, departments, and organizations that are included in the dialog. There are written rules and unspoken norms that the people of the community follow, there needs to be a decent number of members that are willing to create content and lead discussions to keep the community alive, and the members of that community need to feel connected and identify strongly to that community to stay connected. (Solomon 2020, 437-439.) If we think about how these virtual communities work and we think about the social capital strategy, discussed in chapter 2.2.3, that requires companies to have dialog and shared thinking with the society, this type of social community where people have a shared value

or shared interest might be one of the easiest places to start having discussions and bounce back-and-forth thought and knowledge.

It is not rare to hear “Welcome to CleanTok” or “Welcome to BookTok” in TikTok because there is a subculture and subcommunity for all possible interests and even to those interests you did not know you had. The algorithm recommending content that is interesting to one, leads to the same people seeing more and more similar content and content based on a subculture like cleaning or reading books. Being able to duet or stitch others’ videos, creators can interact with other content creators’ videos or parts of them on their own account and react to them in a video. This may increase the feeling of being part of the subcommunity in addition to commenting and liking videos.

### 3 Research Methods

In the previous chapter, we got a deep dive into the theoretical framework of this thesis, and concepts relevant to the topic were presented. Relevant theories about sustainability and branding were given and how they created the theory of sustainability branding. In addition, the appearance of sustainability branding in TikTok was presented, and the effect of communities on social media was explained. Since the theory of the phenomena to be studied is now presented, the methods for this research can now be defined.

This chapter presents the research methods used to conduct this thesis research. The chapter includes detailed information on the research steps; thus, it is possible to reproduce the study. First, the research design is presented, then the data collection methods, and lastly, the analyzing methods. Risks, validity, and reliability are discussed in their own subchapter at the end of this chapter.

#### 3.1 Research Design

This thesis research was an empirical monophasic study, in which TikTok users over 18 years of age were studied through a quantitative survey. In figure 5 below, the research design has been visualized, also the relationship between the data analysis methods and investigative questions are presented. Since the research had only one phase, all the investigative questions were taken into consideration in the survey. To gain understanding about connections between users' background and investigative questions 1 and 2, two hypotheses were set:

1. *Younger Tiktok users has more limited understanding of sustainability.*
2. *Tiktok users has value for all sustainability aspects without understanding the wide concept of sustainability.*

The correlations between two variables for the hypotheses were calculated in the analysis. Statistically significant results were interpreted in the results. Figure 8 visualizes the used research methods and connections between steps of the research.

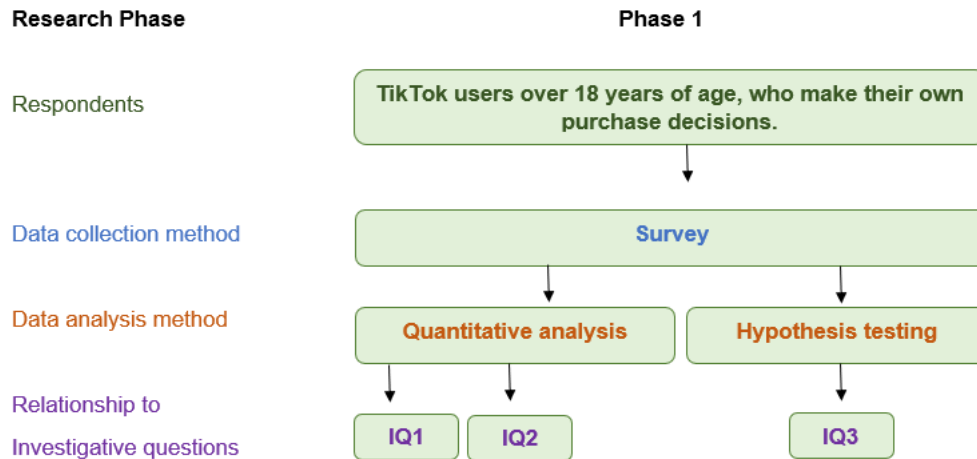


Figure 8. Visualization of research methods

### 3.2 Population

The research population was limited to monthly TikTok users over 18 years of age, who make their own purchase decision and do not use caregivers' money to purchase, which means that these TikTok users are independent adults who should not be influenced by authorities in their life when they make purchases. These adults lived globally around the world and had diverse social and economic backgrounds. Their nationality was asked in the demographic questions to see how diverse the population was.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

To get global insight into TikTok users, the researcher decided to conduct a quantitative survey (Appendix 1.) by Webropol for TikTok users over 18 years of age as a data collection method. The quantitative approach was used due to a generalization of the data to a more significant population, which quantitative researchers usually are interested in (Allen, Titsworth & Hunt 2009, 7). The quantitative survey is more efficient when analyzing tens or hundreds of responses. It also gave a better option to calculate correlations between different variables.

The survey included multiple-choice questions where respondents could choose one or more answers. In addition, there were three Likert Scale parts where respondents chose on a scale from 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) one answer based on their agreement or disagreement with the statements. Answer number 3 was "neutral" on all Likert Scale questions.

The data collection was done through the TikTok platform to reach the active users. The survey was linked to the researcher's personal Instagram account since links cannot be added to the TikTok profile. Therefore, all TikTok content published directed TikTok users to the researcher's Instagram account. Videos promoting the survey were posted every day for one week starting from Friday 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2022. In videos, TikTok users were asked to fill in the survey and share the video or the survey link to their friends or on their channel so that as many people as possible would fill in the survey. Instagram Reels was also used to create one similar type of video to Instagram as was made in TikTok. The survey link was sent to the researcher's contacts on WhatsApp and posted on Facebook and Instagram Story. In addition, the researcher shared the link on LinkedIn, Reddit, and two different Facebook Groups to maximize the distribution.

To tackle the risk of not getting enough qualifying answers, two respondents won a gift card worth 50€ to Netflix. Also, the nationality was not limited to tackling risk, which may have appeared since the researcher had no helping hand, such as companies distributing the survey link. Emails were collected at the end of the survey, and gift cards were sent to winners by email. The incentive also helped get people to answer the whole survey since the survey was quite long due to the broad topic. Unfortunately, after the first three hours researcher realized that the first demographic question regarding age missed one answer option, 18 years of age. However, that option was added there at the end of the list. Also, the researcher added a note to the text at the beginning regarding the option of 18 years of age being at the end of the age list.

Appendix 2 presents all used methods to collect data. Dates and times of when the links and posts were distributed were introduced in Appendix 2. This information can be compared to Appendix 3, which includes the number of respondents per day. The most efficient days of the data collection were the first day and the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, when the link was shared to Facebook groups, LinkedIn, and Reddit. TikTok did not seem to resonate as well as expected, probably due to a lack of easy access to the link.

### **3.4 Data Analysing Methods**

The research data were analyzed with data analyzing software IBM SPSS Statistics 27 and descriptive statistics were used to create tables and figures of the data. Tables were then cleaned, and figures created with Microsoft Excel.

All questions were analyzed by frequencies, including the number of responses and percentages. In addition, some background variables and Likert Scale questions were

used for hypothesis testing, where correlations were calculated to understand the connections between two different variables. The correlation between age and the comprehension of sustainability was calculated with Spearman Correlation coefficients and the correlation between the comprehension and the importance of sustainability. In which correlations, 0,3 or more were interpreted as statistically relevant correlations.

### **3.5 Risks and Risk Management**

The risk of canceling the thesis or confidentiality problems was minimal since the researcher worked independently and did not have a commissioning company. The lack of a relevant theory base could have been an issue since TikTok is a new platform, and sustainability has not been studied from this point of view. Therefore, writing the theoretical background took the researcher longer than expected, and the project's timeline needed to be rearranged.

However, the risk of not getting enough respondents was there, and a detailed survey distribution plan needed to be done. Also, analyzing and forecasting the situation during the data collection was required to realize which methods worked and which did not. The risk of not getting enough answers from different countries was tackled by using platforms where people communicate globally. These risks were solvable but needed to be anticipated and handled carefully. The analyzing methods for hypothesis testing were required to study by the researcher and taking a clinic session with the quantitative research methods teacher to analyze the data correctly. However, correlations were familiar to the researcher from previous studies, making searching for information easier.

### **3.6 Reliability, Validity and Relevance**

The research data is more reliable for younger age groups since most respondents were less than 30 years old. For older age groups, the research data may be biased or unreliable. The population is geographically mainly Finnish citizens making the results most relevant to Finnish citizens 18-30 years of age. The survey was shared heavily for the researchers' networks, which may skew the results. Some words and concepts used in the survey may have been unfamiliar to the respondents, such as steady economic growth, which may cause bias in the results. However, the questionnaire was tried to make include as little jargon as possible to maintain the risk. Table 4 presents the results of the Cronbach's Alpha test, which calculates the reliability of the survey. Cronbach's Alpha of 0.8 or higher indicates high reliability; however, a 0,7 or higher reliability coefficient indicates the accepted level of reliability. Thus, Cronbach's Alpha of 0.726 means that the reliability is not high but acceptable.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire (background questions excluded)

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.726	0.695	39

To ensure validity, the researcher decided to use quantitative methods. It can be spread wider than to people the researcher does not know exists. On the other hand, finding interviewees unrelated to the researcher may be more challenging. The quantitative approach also gives a possibility to create the big picture of the phenomena that still lack research. Unfortunately, the number of respondents ended up being smaller than expected, affecting the results' reliability and validity. The survey was conducted anonymously to ensure the validity of the responses and to complete the research ethically. Validity was also ensured by using different analyzing methods to find connections between responses to open more of the data collected. The research results and data are relevant, especially for younger Finnish adults in TikTok and their comprehension of sustainability and importance of sustainability in their lives.



## 4 Results

In the previous chapter, research methods were introduced in depth. First, the research design and hypotheses were presented. Second, population and data collection methods were presented in detail. Lastly, data analyzing methods, risks, and reliability of the study were discussed.

In this chapter, the survey data is discussed for the first time, and a clear picture of the results is drawn. This chapter opens the data with tables and figures to create clear frames of the survey data results. All the survey data was analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 software.

### 4.1 Background Variables

The survey link was shared for nine days to collect data through social media networks and the researcher's personal and social media networks. One hundred and twelve respondents were collected during those nine days, and most of them, 83%, were between 19 to 29 years of age, as the cumulative percent shows (table 4). Consequently, this research predominantly represented young adults, so the results are more reliable for TikTok users less than 30 years of age. More detailed table of frequencies can be found from the Appendix 4.

Table 4. Summary of the frequency table (Appendix 4) of the respondents' ages

How old are you?			
Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
19	7	6.3	6.3
20	9	8.0	14.3
21	6	5.4	19.6
22	12	10.7	30.4
23	10	8.9	39.3
24	13	11.6	50.9
25	17	15.2	66.1
26	2	1.8	67.9
27	8	7.1	75.0
28	5	4.5	79.5
29	4	3.6	83.0

Figure 9 shows the age distribution of respondents as quite broad, between 19 to 69 years of age. The biggest age group was 25 years of age, with 15.2% of all respondents. For respondents over 30 years of age, one age group was larger than others; the age group of 40, with 4,5% of all respondents, was the biggest group among the respondents

of 30-69 years of age. Previous studies have shown that most TikTok users are demographically lean toward younger users when comparing all age groups or age groups of 18 and older (Datareportal 2022). Thus, the population is somewhat similar to the general global TikTok population.

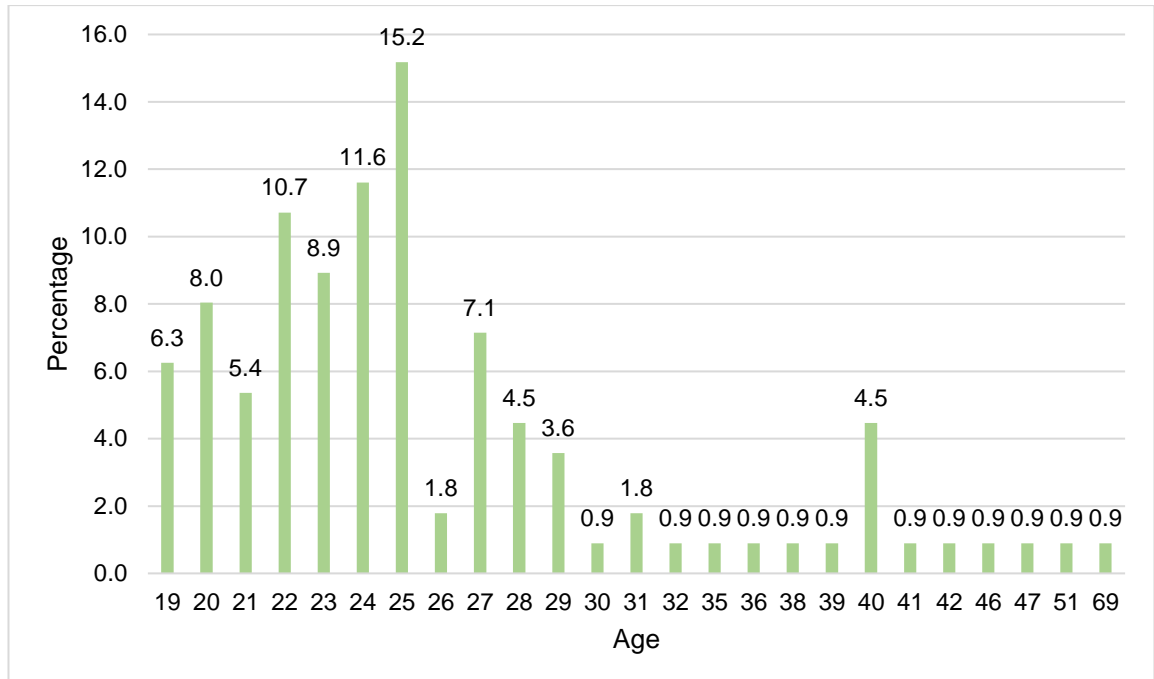


Figure 9. Age distribution of the respondents in percentages (n=112)

Figure 10 presents the distribution of nationalities in this research. A little over half of them, 53.6%, were Finnish, making the results more reliable for Finnish TikTok users. The nationalities of these respondents were from 28 different countries and all different continents, excluding Antarctica. Americans (8%), British (6.3%), and Chinese (4.5%) were the next three biggest nationality groups after Finland.

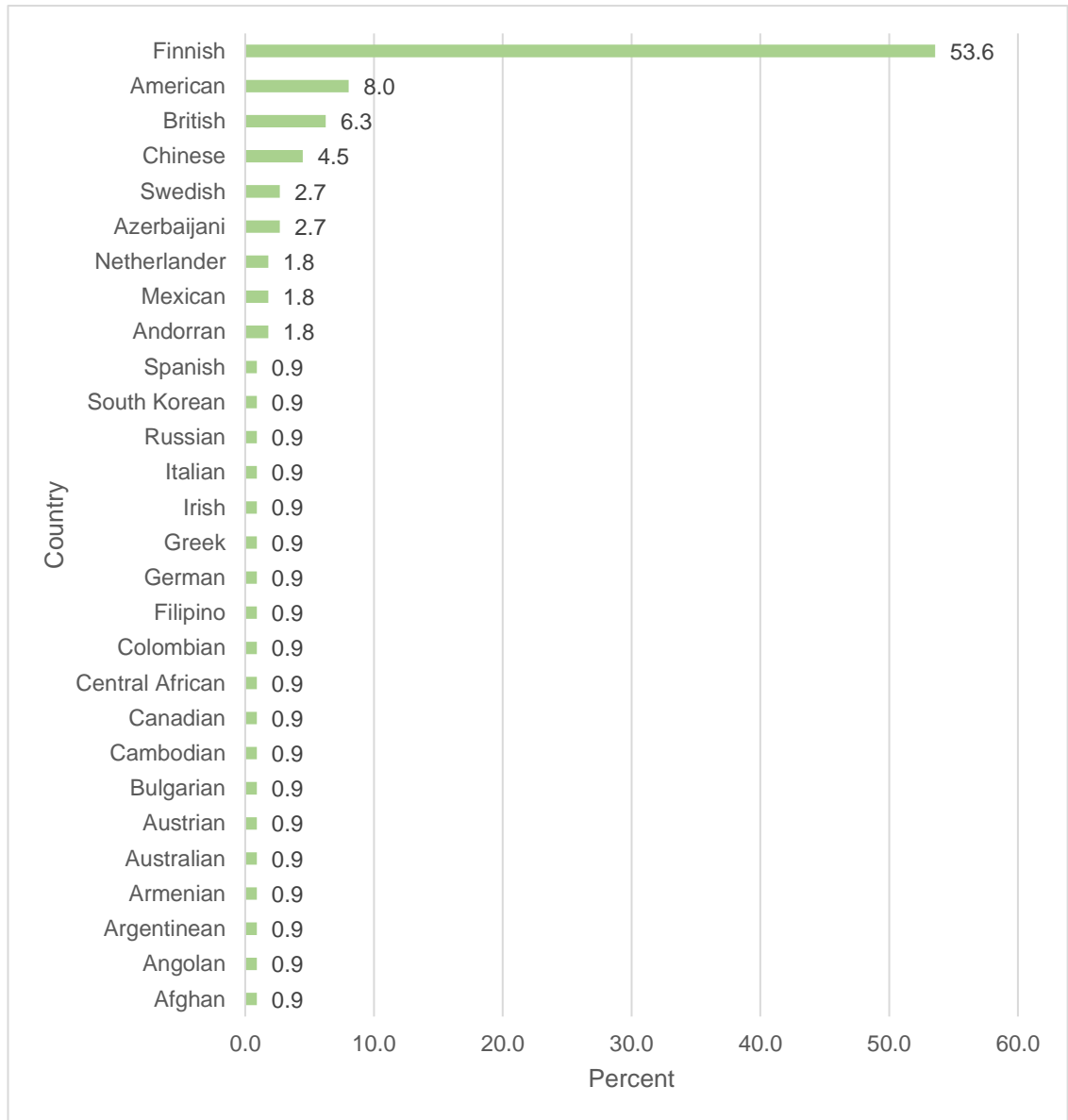


Figure 10. Distribution of nationalities within respondents (n=112)

Over half of the respondents use TikTok daily. 7% of the respondents use TikTok less than once a month and, therefore, were led to the thank you-page after background questions. Only 13% of the respondents that were not limited based on their usage of TikTok used TikTok less than once a week. 80% of the respondents used TikTok once a week or more. (Figure 11.) The respondents were active on TikTok meaning that most TikTok users use TikTok often.

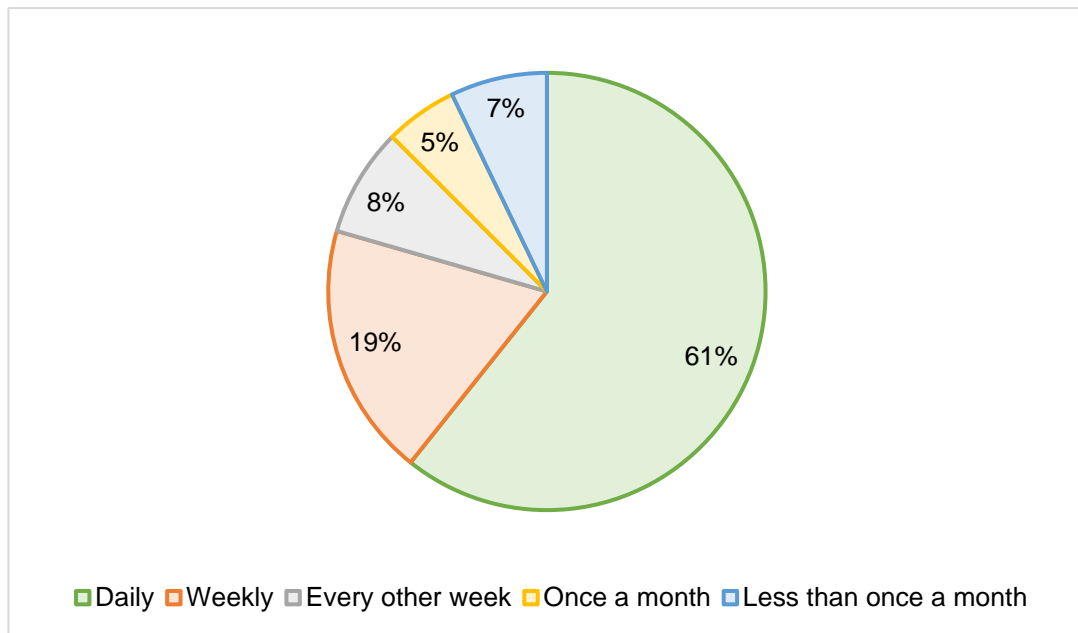


Figure 11. Respondents' usage of TikTok (n=112)

Figure 12 divides the respondents by the time they use TikTok at once. Most of the respondents, 43%, use TikTok for less than 30 minutes. However, 36% of the respondents use TikTok for around one hour at once. Only 10% use TikTok for more than two hours at once. However, these results need to be considered with some concern since the method of the time assessment is not known. Most respondents' may have just accessed by themselves a rough average of the time used.

When considering that TikTok has short videos, less than three minutes, usually even less than one minute, the number of videos that can be seen in 60 minutes means at least 20 three-minute videos in half an hour. If all videos are 15 seconds long, the user can see even 240 videos in an hour. Nevertheless, uninteresting videos may be skipped before the video ends. Therefore, the possibility of getting a lot of views appears. This may help small companies get more recognized on TikTok, especially if the same content creator's videos are shown more often to the TikTok user.

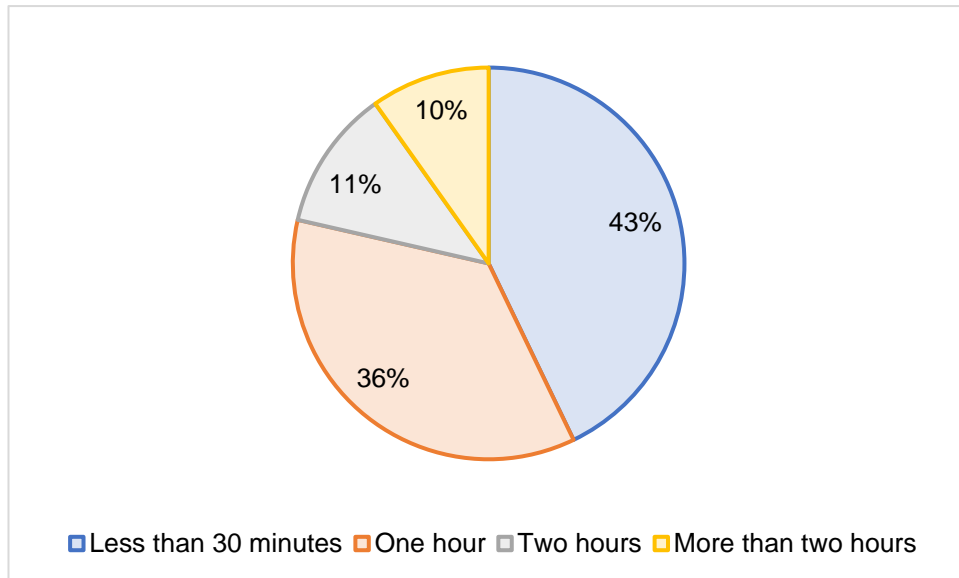


Figure 12. The average time the respondents use in TikTok at once (n=112)

Most of the respondents, 84%, make their own purchase decision on items such as food, clothing, and services. Only 16% of them do not make their own purchase decisions and therefore were limited out of the population and were led to the thank you -page. (figure 13.) The age limitation of 18 years of age, based on this data, was not enough since 16% of the respondents did not make their own purchase decisions. This question limited those respondents whose actions may still be tied to someone else's beliefs. This would have biased the further questions to be not based on the respondent's beliefs.

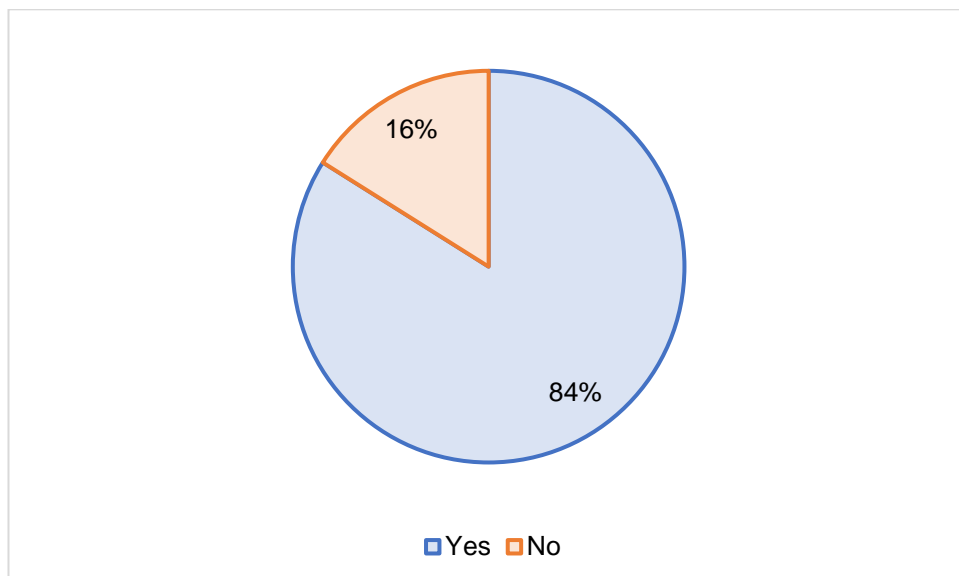


Figure 13. Deviation of respondents who make their own purchase decision (n=112)

Figure 14 presents the deviation of the respondents who use parents' or other caregivers' money. 82% do not use parents' or caregivers' money to purchase. 18% do use parents' or other caregivers' money, and therefore were limited from the population and led to the

thank you -page. This question was also relevant to be asked to limit the respondents whose purchase decisions may be affected by an authority. Some respondents did not use their own money to make their purchases, even though they were over 18 years of age.

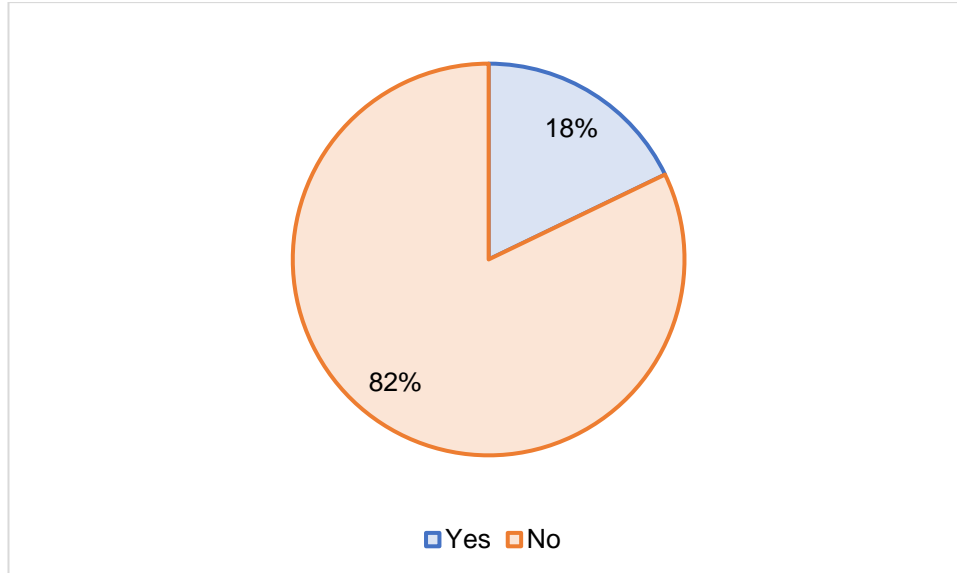


Figure 14. Deviation of the respondents who use parents or care-givers money to purchase (n=112)

#### 4.2 Respondents' Comprehension of Sustainability

Figure 15 presents the respondents' level of agreement with the statement in question. Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a scale from one to five, where one equals strongly disagree, and five equals strongly agree. A little over half of the respondents strongly agreed that sustainability means *life on earth is protected and that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing*. Mainly, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all the statements. A lower level of agreement seems to be with a statement *that institutions are strong and liable, countries live in peace and justice, innovative communities with good infrastructure, steady economic growth, and that salaries can cover costs of basic needs*. However, around two-thirds of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the aforementioned statements. Three statements were also strongly disagreed with, and those statements are *counties live in peace and justice, life on earth is protected, and that climate actions are made by countries, businesses, and consumers*. Statement *reduce inequalities*, was the only statement that was not disagreed with or strongly disagreed with.

These ten statements were based on United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals presented in figure 4 (United Nations 2022). Over 60% of all respondents found the

statements agreeable, which means that the respondents may have a pretty comprehensive understanding of sustainability. However, economic sustainability had the most disagreed or neutral responses in this group of statements, which was also the least covered topic in TikTok. Since there are few disagreements on the economic sustainability statements, the issue may be that the respondents do not understand the economic dimension that well and therefore answered the neutral answer as “I do not know”. On the other hand, social sustainability with statement *countries live in peace and justice* was the most disagreed, which may be due to a lack of understanding of the global aspect of sustainability and seen more as a company/consumer level issue. The knowledge of causation may be lacking in the sustainability topic.

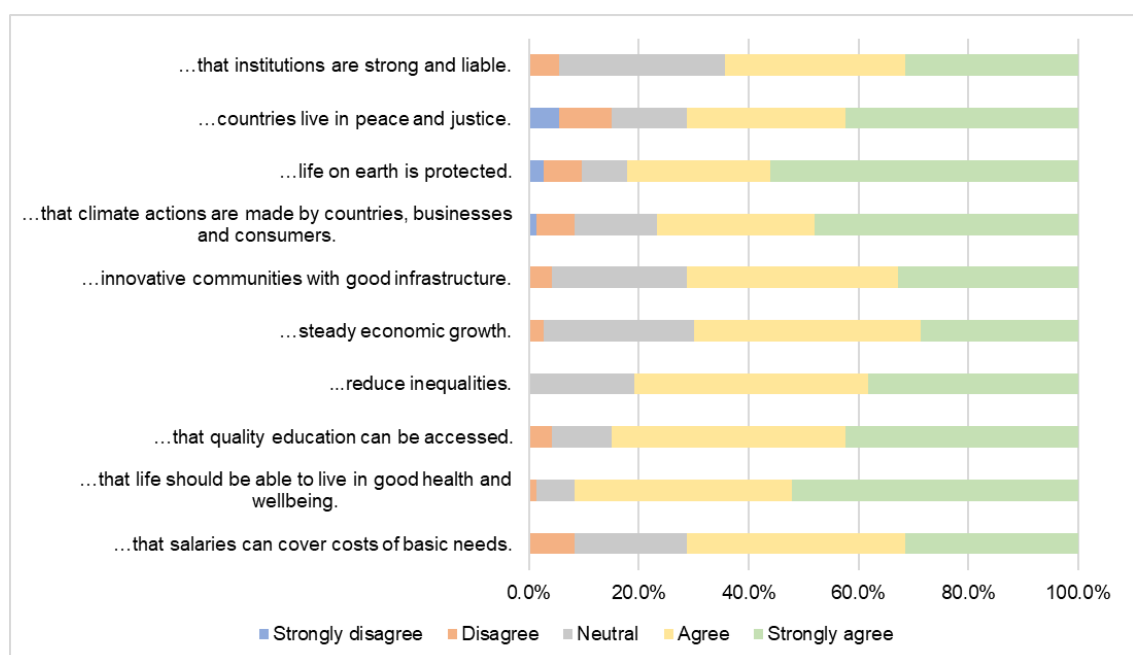


Figure 15. Respondents' level of agreement with statements about meaning of sustainability (n=73)

Figure 16 presents the percentage of cases when the respondents chose a given word to be associated with the word *sustainable*. The respondents were able to choose as many of these words as they liked. Almost all of them chose the word *ecological* to be associated with the word sustainable. Also, over 50% of the respondents chose the following words to be associated with the word sustainable: *health and wellbeing*, *peace and justice*, *transparency*, and *working conditions*. Almost 50% associated *innovations* with the word sustainable. 41,1% of the respondents associated *steady economic growth* with the word sustainable. Less than a third of the respondents associated the word *expertise* with the word sustainable.

To better understand the comprehension of sustainability, the respondents were asked to choose all the words they would associate with the word sustainable. The most commonly chosen words were ecological, health and wellbeing, and peace and justice, which are words associated with environmental and social sustainability. However, peace and justice stand out from these results since it was the most disagreed in the previous question were the respondents asked to indicate their agreement with the statement: *sustainability means countries live in peace and justice*. This may mean that the respondents split stronger based on this statement, meaning that those who do not see peace and justice associated with sustainability think it has nothing to do with it than with other statements. Nevertheless, expertise and steady economic growth were chosen unfrequently to be associated with the word sustainable. As previously mentioned, economic sustainability seems to be the least known dimension. However, all words excluding expertise were chosen at least by 40% of the respondents, meaning they have a somewhat good comprehension of sustainability.

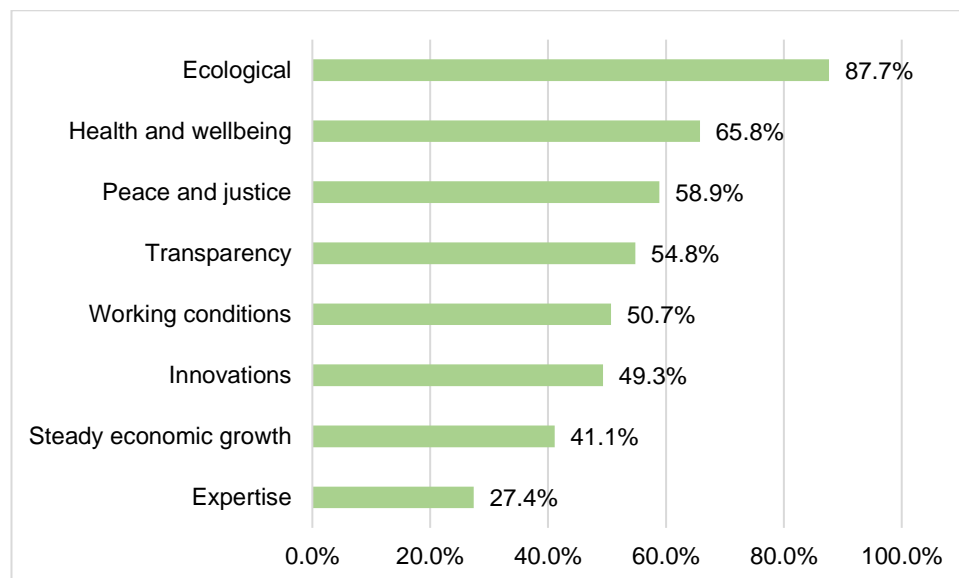


Figure 16. Percentage of cases when respondents chose a word to be associated with word sustainable (n=73)

### 4.3 The Value of Sustainability for Respondents

Figure 17 presents the percentage of the cases when a given word was chosen to be relevant to describe the word sustainable business. The respondents could choose three words that they thought were the most relevant. 78% of the respondents found *ecological* to be relevant to describing a sustainable business. *Working conditions* were chosen to be relevant to describe the word sustainable business by over 50% of the respondents. 44% of the respondents found *transparency* relevant to describe the word sustainable business. *Health and wellbeing* were chosen to be relevant to describing sustainable



business by 37% of the respondents. Less than a third found the words *innovations* and *peace and justice* to be relevant to describe the word sustainable business. Less than 20% of the respondents found the words *steady economic growth* and *expertise* relevant to describe the word sustainable business.

The most relevant words to describe a word sustainable business were ecological, working conditions, and transparency. These words are often mentioned on social media and TikTok. Thus, words related to environmental and social sustainability were the most frequently chosen, which means that those are the words that respondents associate the most with sustainable companies. Therefore, those words may be good keywords for social media posts. Respondents have a pretty comprehensive understanding of company-level sustainability, which is why sustainability communication can be crucial in some markets and can lead to a competitive advantage over others and should not be neglected. However, in competitive markets, expanding the communication to cover also economic sustainability could help to distinguish itself from others.

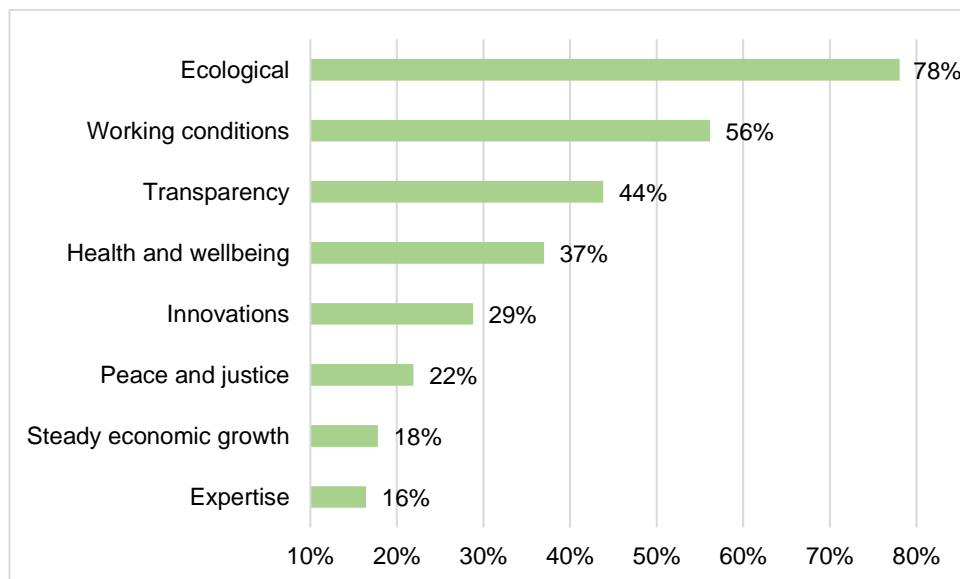


Figure 17. Words that were the most relevant to describe the word sustainable business (n=73)

Figure 18 demonstrates the importance of sustainability to the respondents from the individual's point of view. Most of the respondents (over 80%) believe that TikTok is a good platform for educating followers. Almost 40% of the respondents do not follow TikTok creators interested in sustainability. Nevertheless, the percentage of respondents who follow TikTok creators interested in sustainability is less than 40%. Over 60% of the respondents' purchase decisions are affected by sustainability. However, around 30% of them are neutral with the statement. In addition, almost 70% of the respondents practice a

zero-waste ideology, focusing on reducing, recycling, and reusing waste. However, only half of the respondents purchase second-hand clothing. Nevertheless, just a little over 40% purchase organic food, and almost 40% of the respondents are neutral with the statement. In addition, around 20% of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the statement *I buy organic food*.

Since most of the respondents believe that TikTok is a good platform for educating followers, the possibilities for sustainability communications, including social capital strategy, should not be neglected. Even though around 40% of the respondents did not follow any creators interested in sustainability, TikTok is not only about following since the robust algorithm follows users' behavior also in other ways, such as watching time, likes, and comments (Ma & Hu 2021, 385; Newberry 2022.) However, the respondents seem to be interested in sustainability and even take action when purchasing sustainable products. This means that communicating a company's sustainability may be crucial from a branding point of view. To conclude, sustainability is important to respondents in their personal life, and they want to take action on some level.

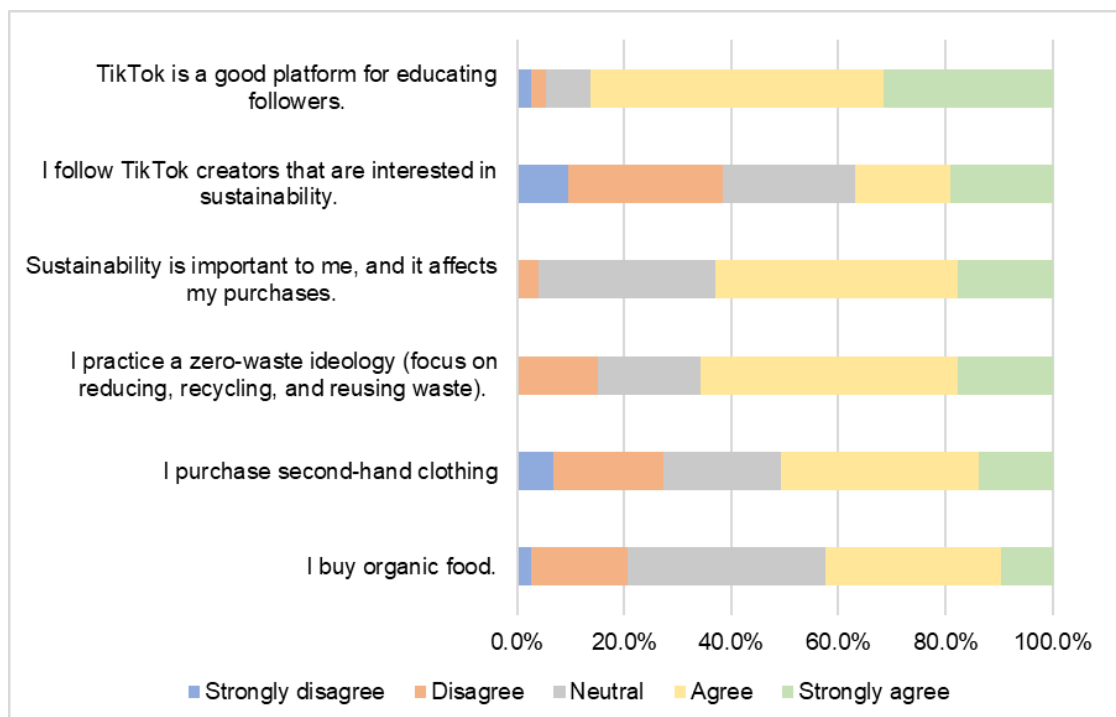


Figure 18. Respondents' level of agreement with the statement in question. (n=73)

If figure 18 demonstrates the importance of sustainability to respondents from the individual's point of view, figure 19 demonstrates the importance of sustainability from the societal point of view. Over 80% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that *companies should share their knowledge to others regarding sustainability, that*

*innovations in every field are important, and that sustainability and economic growth can develop together.* Over 40% of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree that *consuming less is the only way to solve climate change issues* and that *businesses do enough against corruption in the country where they operate.* In addition, around 30% of the respondents were neutral with the two aforementioned statements. Almost 70% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that *companies should do charity in the community where they operate,* and over 25% were neutral about that. Half of the respondents strongly agree that *strong education and possibilities in career development are important.* Around 40% also agree with that statement. However, a few strongly disagree with the aforementioned statement.

Even though some global or societal aspects of sustainability are not associated as strongly with sustainability compared to the environmental and consumer level, the respondents believe that growing businesses, an innovative environment, and global cooperation are important. Also, disagreeing with the statement in which consumers were told to be the problem-solvers for the climate change issues discloses the understanding of the multidimensional aspects of sustainability. Respondents believe that the actions made now by companies regarding corruption, which affects peace and justice, are not enough, or they do not know if they are enough, which means that most of the respondents do not believe that the actions are enough. Respondents believe that companies should be responsible in the areas they operate and do charity in the physical area. Respondents also see education and career development important to them. To conclude, respondents find the different aspects of sustainability from the global/company level important and expect the companies to operate that way.

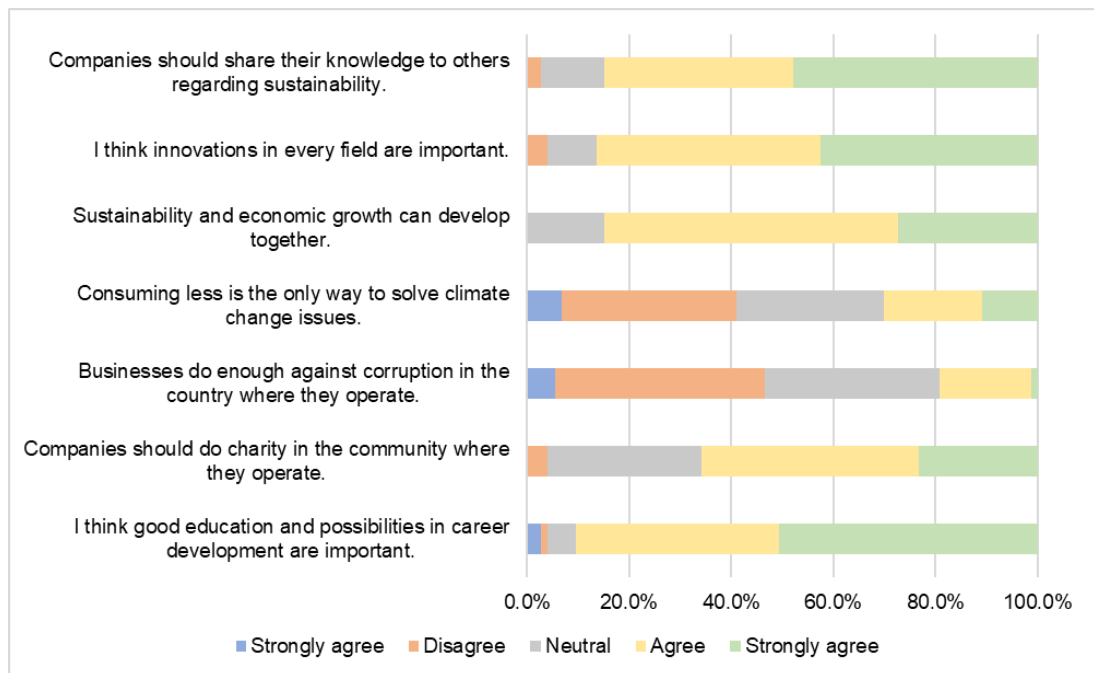


Figure 19. Respondents' level of agreement with the statement in question. (n=73)

#### 4.4 Correlations Between Age, Comprehension, and Value

This subchapter includes hypothesis testing for two previously stated hypotheses. The correlations are made between respondents' answer to background question about age and Likert Scale questions about comprehension. In addition, the correlation between the comprehension and importance of sustainability is presented.

Table 5 presents the results for the hypothesis that *Younger Tiktok users have more limited understanding of sustainability*. The correlations are analyzed between two variables, age and level of agreement with given statements. These statements were used to perceive the comprehension of the respondents about sustainability and its broad concept. There were no significant correlations between age and any of the statements. However, some negative relationship was found between age and the statement *that climate actions are made by countries, businesses, and consumers*, which means that younger respondents disagree more with the statement.

The survey data does not support the set hypothesis. Respondents' age did not correlate with the level of comprehension regarding sustainability. This means that age is not the factor why respondents' comprehension is distinguished. Therefore, the younger audience in TikTok does not require any different approach to communication regarding sustainability. However, the statistically insignificant relationship that was found means that the younger the respondent, the more they agreed with that statement. Younger respondents agree more that *climate change actions are made by countries, companies,*

and consumers, which may mean that they see climate actions more as group work rather than something that countries and companies should solve. Even though the roots of sustainability are deep in history, the word became popular in the 1990s. Its multilayered concept and global aspect may make it hard to understand where the issues arise in the world (Caradonna 2014, 1-2,6.). Therefore, the opinion of whom the issues should solve may distinguish. Also, older TikTok users may have a more comprehensive understanding of the political world which is also part of climate actions by countries and companies.

Table 5. Summary of the Appendix 5: Correlation between age and comprehension of the wide concept of sustainability. (n=73)

On a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements:	How old are you?
Sustainability means...	
that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.	0.008
that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.	0.049
that quality education can be accessed.	-0.070
reduce inequalities.	0.012
steady economic growth	-0.076
innovative communities with good infrastructure.	-0.066
that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.	-0.201
life on earth is protected.	-0.006
countries live in peace and justice.	0.000
that institutions are strong and liable.	0.072

The following table presents the correlation calculations for the hypothesis *TikTok users have value for all sustainability aspects without understanding the wide concept of sustainability*, first from individuals' point of view and then from the countries' and companies' points of view. Table 6 shows the correlations between the comprehension of sustainability by the respondents and its importance in their lives. The correlations were made by using two different Likert Scales. The comprehension was measured by statements about broad concept of sustainability. The statements about importance represent the actions made in everyday life.

A correlation of 0.408 was found between two statements. The stronger the agreement with the statement: *that climate actions are made by countries, businesses, and consumers*, the stronger the agreement with the statement: *I purchase second-hand clothing*. Some positive relationship was also found between the first-mentioned statement

and the statements: *sustainability is important to me, and it affects my purchases*, and *I follow TikTok creators that are interested in sustainability*. However, those correlations were not statistically relevant. Some negative relationship was also found between statements of *steady economic growth* and *I follow TikTok creators that are interested in sustainability*, but the correlation was not statistically relevant. Similar statistically nonrelevant positive relationship was found between the statement: *life on Earth is protected* and the statements: *I buy organic food* and *Sustainability is important to me, and it affects my purchases*. A positive relationship between statements *that institutions are strong and liable* and *TikTok is a good platform for educating followers* were found but the correlations was not statistically relevant.

One statistically significant correlation was found between two statements. The respondents who thought that *climate actions are made by countries, companies, and consumers* also bought second-hand clothing.

Those respondents who agree that *climate actions are made by countries, companies, and consumers* find sustainability important and affecting their purchases, and they follow TikTok creators interested in sustainability. However, the correlations were not statistically significant. To conclude, the respondents who see sustainability as a wide group work in which they play a role are more likely to take action in their everyday lives.

Those who also found economic sustainability being part of the meaning of sustainability were less likely to follow TikTok creators interested in sustainability. That may be due to the sustainability content in TikTok does not really focus on the wide and advanced level of sustainability but rather on environmental sustainability and focusing on how you can make small changes in your life. These people may have a wider understanding of sustainability and would probably like to hear more advanced information about it. How actively TikTok users interact with the content and creators that are interested in sustainability needs more investigation.

Many of the statements had a statistically insignificant correlation between each other and to get deeper understanding of how these correlate with each other, further investigation is needed.

Table 6. Summary of the appendix 6: Correlations between respondents' understanding of sustainability and importance of sustainability in their lives. (n=73)

On a scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements?							
On a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements: Sustainability means...		I buy organic food.	I purchase second-hand clothing	I practice a zero-waste ideology (focus on reducing, recycling, and reusing waste).	Sustainability is important to me, and it affects my purchases.	I follow TikTok creators that are interested in sustainability.	TikTok is a good platform for educating followers.
that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.	Correlation Coefficient	0.018	-0.132	0.000	0.065	0.044	0.096
that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.030	0.072	-0.096	0.081	-0.014	0.014
that quality education can be accessed.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.124	0.014	-0.184	0.060	-0.066	0.088
reduce inequalities.	Correlation Coefficient	0.014	-0.045	-0.033	-0.054	-0.038	-0.023
steady economic growth	Correlation Coefficient	-0.078	-0.068	-0.192	-0.085	-.244	0.047
innovative communities with good infrastructure.	Correlation Coefficient	0.056	-0.168	0.140	0.110	-0.029	0.001
that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.078	.408**	-0.111	0.221	-0.227	-0.094
life on earth is protected.	Correlation Coefficient	0.201	0.059	0.106	0.215	0.122	-0.083
countries live in peace and justice.	Correlation Coefficient	0.006	0.107	-0.069	0.161	-0.034	0.060
that institutions are strong and liable.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.054	0.024	-0.175	0.188	-0.006	.235

Table 7 shows the correlations between the respondents' comprehension of sustainability and how much value it has for the respondents. The value of sustainability in this table is not by the actions made by an individual but by the governance or businesses. Positive correlations were found between multiple variables. Statements *that salaries can cover costs of basic needs* and *Sustainability and economic growth can develop together* correlate 0.372. A positive correlation of 0.325 was also found between statements: *reduce inequalities* and *Companies should share their knowledge to other regarding sustainability*. *Steady economic growth* correlated with statement *Companies should do charity in the community where they operate* by 0.318. A positive correlation of 0.385 was found between statements: *innovative communities with good infrastructure* and *Companies should share their knowledge to others regarding sustainability*. A strong correlation of 0.527 was found between the statements: *that climate actions are made by*

*countries, companies and consumers and Companies should share their knowledge to others regarding sustainability. Statements countries live in peace and justice and institutions are strong and liable*, also had a positive correlation between the lastly mentioned statement. Some statements also had some relationship between each other, but those correlations were not statistically relevant (correlation between -0,3-0,3).

Respondents seemed to have an importance of a company and country-level sustainability actions, especially regarding economic and social sustainability. Thus, those topics should be more covered in sustainability communications and when branding a company in TikTok. Respondents, who found sustainability to be a group work between countries, companies, and consumers strongly believe that companies should share their knowledge regarding sustainability. Respondents found countries' and companies' actions especially important when the concept of sustainability was found wider. Those who see economic sustainability, innovations, and institutions as a part of sustainability expect more from countries and companies. Corporate social responsibility could be used to communicate different operations and their sustainability in TikTok. For more effective sustainability branding, the company should recognize those personas who follow them on TikTok and create interesting and accessible content for them. The tone of voice and visual appearance should be considered to maximize the algorithm's work and distribution to the right target audiences. Nevertheless, using the power of communities could maximise the possibilities to change the attitude of followers



Table 7. Summary of appendix 7: Correlation between the respondents' understanding of sustainability and importance in societal actions by governance or businesses. (n=73)

		On a scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements?						
On a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements: Sustainability means...		I think good education and possibilities in career development are important.	Companies should do charity in the community where they operate.	Businesses do enough against corruption in the country where they operate.	Consuming less is the only way to solve climate change issues.	Sustainability and economic growth can develop together.	I think innovations in every field are important.	Companies should share their knowledge to others regarding sustainability.
that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.	Correlation Coefficient	0.185	-0.107	0.002	-0.090	.372**	.238*	0.207
that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.	Correlation Coefficient	.246*	0.195	-0.053	0.007	0.208	0.071	.241*
that quality education can be accessed.	Correlation Coefficient	0.183	0.223	-0.131	-0.068	0.118	0.022	.292*
reduce inequalities.	Correlation Coefficient	0.129	0.223	-0.076	0.090	0.211	0.186	.325**
steady economic growth	Correlation Coefficient	0.209	.318**	0.062	-0.183	0.097	0.035	.242*
innovative communities with good infrastructure.	Correlation Coefficient	.238*	0.138	0.151	0.041	0.186	.244*	.385**
that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.	Correlation Coefficient	0.028	.285*	-.270*	0.123	0.140	-0.045	.527**
life on earth is protected.	Correlation Coefficient	0.119	.238*	-0.094	-0.001	0.184	0.170	.286*
countries live in peace and justice.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.004	0.155	-0.138	-0.033	0.163	-0.016	.432**
that institutions are strong and liable.	Correlation Coefficient	.233*	0.160	-0.204	-0.041	0.170	0.065	.334**

## 5 Discussion

In the previous chapter, the results were introduced by presenting the analyzed data and explaining what those results mean in the wider approach. Since having an understanding of the study conducted and how it links to the theoretical framework, the next step is to conclude it all.

This chapter introduces the key finding of the empirical study, gives recommendations for further research, and explains the benefits that were gained through this research. Lastly, the researcher reflects on her thoughts on the learning process during this thesis process and research.

### 5.1 Key Findings

The comprehension of sustainability seems to be lacking in some parts of the dimensions. Environmental and social dimensions appear to be generally recognized and understood. However, the comprehension of economic sustainability is lacking, and even seeing it as a part of sustainability is insufficient. Transparency was seen as an important part of sustainability communication about operations that can lead to higher loyalty and position in a competitive field.

TikTok users seem to be interested in sustainability and even take action in their everyday life. Environmental and social sustainability are seen as more important than economic sustainability. However, it may be that economic sustainability is not as widely understood and recognized as other sustainability dimensions. However, the expectations towards companies are high and sustainable operations are expected. Thus, corporate social responsibility, including communicating the company's sustainable operations and sustainability branding, is essential and recommended to grow brand equity.

The comprehension of sustainability is not affected by age, so communicating sustainability is as important to young adults as it is to older age groups. Understanding economic sustainability seemed to be lacking, so communication about the economic dimension should be more educational compared to other sustainability dimensions. Even though, the comprehension of the broad concept of sustainability is lacking from some parts; the value of sustainability exists and expectations regarding dimensions that are lacking comprehension appear.

TikTok is seen as a good platform for education, but following creators interested in sustainability divides the population. Therefore, creating TikTok content focusing only on

sustainability may not be as effective as planting the seeds of sustainability every now and then between other content. Thus, using the social capital strategy to communicate sustainability would fill in the expectations of shared knowledge that consumers expect the companies to fill. TikTok is a great platform for companies, regardless of the size of the company, to build awareness in a non-public-centered platform. Conceptualizing some content to “TikTok community” could help to maximise the social capital strategy activities.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The research recommends company marketing managers take a deep dive into their sustainability branding. Reflect on how it is done and if the social capital strategy is used. Managers should reflect their operations on the research results and consider adding all dimensions of sustainability to their communication in TikTok. Creating educational content is recommended by the researcher.

The researcher also recommends managers consider creating a series of a niche topic TikTok content that they label with a memorable community name to strengthen the message and make the topic easier to find.

## **5.3 Validity, Reliability and Relevance**

All in all, the reliability of the results is somewhat reliable, especially for young adults in Finland, due to the population of the respondents. However, the population age wisely represents the average population of TikTok. Many people want to value sustainability since it is a topic that is generally accepted and is expected to be found important. Thus, some of the results may be even more positive regarding the importance of sustainability in respondents' lives than it is.

The researcher successfully analyzed the results and tested the hypothesis to understand the phenomena. A big picture of the new platform, TikTok, was created, and a better understanding of how consumers see sustainability branding was gained. The researcher should have found a bigger and more diverse population group to achieve more reliable and valid data. Also, the questionnaire could have been tested or created based on qualitative interviews to get a more in-depth understanding of some phenomena that appeared in the analysis.

#### **5.4 Further Research**

The researcher's recommendations for further research are to study the correlations between comprehension and value of sustainability in-depth and with broader population. Due to many found relationships that may have something relevant, were not with this population and the size of the emphasis statistically significant. That way, more in-depth research could discover if there were correlations and what kind of correlation. On the other hand, finding the factors that affect the overall comprehension and the different level of understanding between dimensions of sustainability, would be interesting to study. Thus, it would be also easier to set the topics that would be helpful to the consumers in social media to learn more about all dimensions of sustainability.

Further research would be necessary to understand how interest and importance of sustainability work in practice. Thus, more information would be gained on the user behavior in TikTok.

#### **5.5 Reflection on Learning**

The researcher learned extensively about academic writing, project management, distributing research, and analyzing results during the thesis writing process. The process has taught her patience in process writing and stress management skills. Also, time management and self-management skills were very much needed during the process since the researcher worked full-time as new marketing and communication assistant and conducted the thesis research simultaneously.

For the professional specialization, this research gave the researcher an understanding of how multi-layered and complex marketing, especially branding, can be since the brand image is not only built by the company. The process covered widely social media marketing, focusing on TikTok and comparing it to other social media and marketing efforts. During the theoretical framework writing, the researcher learned extensively about branding strategies that can be used in her work and career development.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire

How old are you?

- Drop down list

What is your nationality?

- Drop down list

How often do you use TikTok?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Every other week
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

How long do you use TikTok at once on average?

- Less than 30 minutes
- One hour
- Two hours
- More than two hours

Do you make your own purchase decisions on items such as food, clothing, services, etc.?

- Yes
- No

Do you use your parents or other care-givers money to purchase?

- Yes
- No

On scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements:

- Sustainability means...
  - ...that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.
  - ...that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.
  - ...that quality education can be accessed.
  - ...reduce inequalities.
  - ...steady economic growth
  - ...innovative communities with good infrastructure.
  - ...that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.
  - ...life on earth is protected.
  - ...countries live in peace and justice.
  - ...that institutions are strong and liable.

Choose words that you associate with the word 'sustainable'. Choose as many as you want.

- Ecological
- Working conditions
- Health and wellbeing
- Innovations
- Expertise
- Transparency
- Steady economic growth
- Peace and justice

Choose 3 words that are the most relevant to describe the word sustainable company.

- Ecological
- Working conditions
- Health and wellbeing
- Innovations
- Expertise
- Transparency
- Steady economic growth
- Peace and justice

On scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements?

- I buy organic food.
- I purchase second-hand clothing
- I practice a zero-waste ideology (*focus on reducing, recycling, and reusing waste*).
- Sustainability is important to me, and it affects my purchases.
- I follow TikTok creators that are interested in sustainability.
- TikTok is a good platform for educating followers.

On scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements?

- I think good education and possibilities in career development are important.
- Companies should do charity in the community where they operate.
- Businesses does enough against corruption in the country where they operate.
- Consuming less is the only way to solve climate change issues.
- Sustainability and economic growth can develop together.
- I think innovations in every field are important.
- Companies should share their knowledge to others regarding sustainability.

## Appendix 2. Data collection

Data collection		
Platform	Date	How?
Webropol	18.3.2022	Survey was opened.
TikTok	18.3.2022	TikTok video with survey marketing text and other text related to the video content. Sound "good soup" was used in the video.
Instagram	18.3.2022	IG story with marketing text and link. Bio description was changed to market the survey and survey link was added there.
WhatsApp	18.3.2022	The link and a marketing text was sent to all friends and acquaintances of researcher.
Facebook	18.3.2022	Facebook post with a marketing text and link to the survey.
Instagram	19.3.2022	IG Reels with a marketing text.
TikTok	19.3.2022 20.30	TikTok video promoting the survey and the winning opportunity with sound "original sound - the laurablair".
TikTok	20.3.2022 9.00	TikTok video promoting the survey and the winning opportunity with sound "original sound- bully.baloo"
Instagram	20.3.2022	Repost of an Instagram story to fill in the survey.
Facebook	21.3.2022	Post of a marketing text and the link to the survey in two Facebook groups (The University Trade, Student survey exchange).
LinkedIn	21.3.2022	Post with a survey link and marketing text.
Reddit	21.3.2022	Post of a survey link and marketing text in a community called "r/sampleSize".
Facebook	22.3.2022	Answering other people's surveys in a Student Survey Exchange group.
Facebook	23.3.2022	Repost of the survey post.
Reddit	23.3.2022	Post of a marketing text and survey link in a community called r/surveyexchange.
LinkedIn	23.3.2022	Repost of the survey.
Instagram	24.3.2022	IG reels was shared in a story and people were reminded to answer the survey and survey link was shared in a story.
Facebook	25.3.2022	Answering other people's surveys in Survey Exchange group.
Facebook	25.3.2022	Survey link was shared on the story
Instagram	25.3.2022	Survey link was shared on the story
Facebook	26.3.2022	Repost in a Student Survey Exchange group
Facebook	26.3.2022	Answering other people's surveys in Student Survey Exchange group.
Webropol	27.3.2022	Survey was closed.

### Appendix 3. Number of respondents per day

Number of responses per day	
Date	Number of responses
19.3.2022 7.00	34 (17)
20.3.2022 9.00	49 (27)
21.3.2022 9.00	57 (33)
22.3.2022 7.00	77 (49)
23.3.2022 7.00	81 (53)
24.3.2022 7.00	91 (57)
25.3.2022 7.00	104 (68)
26.3.2022 7.00	106 (70)
27.3.2022 12.00	112 (73)

**Appendix 4. Frequency table of respondents' ages (n=112)**

<b>How old are you?</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
19	7	6.3	6.3
20	9	8.0	14.3
21	6	5.4	19.6
22	12	10.7	30.4
23	10	8.9	39.3
24	13	11.6	50.9
25	17	15.2	66.1
26	2	1.8	67.9
27	8	7.1	75.0
28	5	4.5	79.5
29	4	3.6	83.0
30	1	0.9	83.9
31	2	1.8	85.7
32	1	0.9	86.6
35	1	0.9	87.5
36	1	0.9	88.4
38	1	0.9	89.3
39	1	0.9	90.2
40	5	4.5	94.6
41	1	0.9	95.5
42	1	0.9	96.4
46	1	0.9	97.3
47	1	0.9	98.2
51	1	0.9	99.1
69	1	0.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

### Appendix 5. Correlation between age and comprehension of the wide concept of sustainability. (n=73)

On a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements:		How old are you?
Sustainability means...		
that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.	Correlation Coefficient	0.008
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.948
	N	73
that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.	Correlation Coefficient	0.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.682
	N	73
that quality education can be accessed.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.554
	N	73
reduce inequalities.	Correlation Coefficient	0.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.918
	N	73
steady economic growth	Correlation Coefficient	-0.076
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.524
	N	73
innovative communities with good infrastructure.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.580
	N	73
that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.201
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.088
	N	73
life on earth is protected.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.961
	N	73
countries live in peace and justice.	Correlation Coefficient	0.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.999
	N	73
that institutions are strong and liable.	Correlation Coefficient	0.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.543
	N	73

## Appendix 6. Correlations between respondents' understanding of sustainability and importance of sustainability in their lives. (n=73)

		On a scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements?					
On a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements: Sustainability means...		I buy organic food.	I purchase second-hand clothing	I practice a zero-waste ideology (focus on reducing, recycling, and reusing waste).	Sustainability is important to me, and it affects my purchases.	I follow TikTok creators that are interested in sustainability.	TikTok is a good platform for educating followers.
that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.	Correlation Coefficient	0.018	-0.132	0.000	0.065	0.044	0.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.883	0.267	0.999	0.586	0.713	0.421
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.030	0.072	-0.096	0.081	-0.014	0.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.800	0.543	0.420	0.496	0.909	0.908
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
that quality education can be accessed.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.124	0.014	-0.184	0.060	-0.066	0.088
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.297	0.903	0.120	0.614	0.582	0.460
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
reduce inequalities.	Correlation Coefficient	0.014	-0.045	-0.033	-0.054	-0.038	-0.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.907	0.704	0.779	0.651	0.752	0.848
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
steady economic growth	Correlation Coefficient	-0.078	-0.068	-0.192	-0.085	-.244*	0.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.512	0.568	0.104	0.476	0.037	0.694
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
innovative communities with good infrastructure.	Correlation Coefficient	0.056	-0.168	0.140	0.110	-0.029	0.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.638	0.154	0.236	0.353	0.805	0.996
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.078	.408**	-0.111	0.221	-0.227	-0.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.513	0.000	0.352	0.060	0.053	0.428
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
life on earth is protected.	Correlation Coefficient	0.201	0.059	0.106	0.215	0.122	-0.083
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.088	0.619	0.372	0.068	0.305	0.483
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
countries live in peace and justice.	Correlation Coefficient	0.006	0.107	-0.069	0.161	-0.034	0.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.957	0.368	0.564	0.174	0.773	0.616
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73
that institutions are strong and liable.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.054	0.024	-0.175	0.188	-0.006	.235 <sup>†</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.650	0.843	0.138	0.110	0.960	0.046
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73



**Appendix 7. Correlation between the respondents' understanding of sustainability and importance in societal actions by governance or businesses. (n=73)**

		On a scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements?						
On a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) how much do you agree with the following statements: Sustainability means...		I think good education and possibilities in career development are important.	Companies should do charity in the community where they operate.	Businesses do enough against corruption in the country where they operate.	Consuming less is the only way to solve climate change issues.	Sustainability and economic growth can develop together.	I think innovations in every field are important.	Companies should share their knowledge to others regarding sustainability.
that salaries can cover costs of basic needs.	Correlation Coefficient	0.185	-0.107	0.002	-0.090	.372**	.238'	0.207
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.118	0.367	0.988	0.449	0.001	0.043	0.078
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
that life should be able to live in good health and wellbeing.	Correlation Coefficient	.246'	0.195	-0.053	0.007	0.208	0.071	.241'
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.036	0.098	0.658	0.955	0.077	0.548	0.040
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
that quality education can be accessed.	Correlation Coefficient	0.183	0.223	-0.131	-0.068	0.118	0.022	.292'
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.121	0.058	0.269	0.569	0.320	0.851	0.012
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
reduce inequalities.	Correlation Coefficient	0.129	0.223	-0.076	0.090	0.211	0.186	.325**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.277	0.058	0.523	0.447	0.073	0.114	0.005
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
steady economic growth	Correlation Coefficient	0.209	.318**	0.062	-0.183	0.097	0.035	.242'
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.076	0.006	0.600	0.122	0.414	0.767	0.039
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
innovative communities with good infrastructure.	Correlation Coefficient	.238'	0.138	0.151	0.041	0.186	.244'	.385**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.042	0.243	0.202	0.731	0.115	0.038	0.001
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
that climate actions are made by countries, businesses and consumers.	Correlation Coefficient	0.028	.285'	-.270'	0.123	0.140	-0.045	.527**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.814	0.014	0.021	0.301	0.238	0.707	0.000
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
life on earth is protected.	Correlation Coefficient	0.119	.238'	-0.094	-0.001	0.184	0.170	.286'
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.316	0.042	0.431	0.992	0.120	0.151	0.014
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
countries live in peace and justice.	Correlation Coefficient	-0.004	0.155	-0.138	-0.033	0.163	-0.016	.432**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.976	0.191	0.244	0.780	0.168	0.892	0.000
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
that institutions are strong and liable.	Correlation Coefficient	.233'	0.160	-0.204	-0.041	0.170	0.065	.334**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.047	0.178	0.084	0.728	0.152	0.583	0.004
	N	73	73	73	73	73	73	73