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How can European B2C Companies Use Principles of Sustainability in Marketing Communication to Build Customer Loyalty and Strong Relationships?

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to identify the sustainability principles in the marketing communication strategies of European B2C companies, with the goal of understanding how these strategies can contribute to consumer loyalty and relationships. As sustainability becomes a key business priority, marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour and brand trust. The objective is to analyse effective strategies that align sustainability with marketing practices to relationships with consumers.

For the research methodology, case studies were used in this study. It consisted of the analysis of two companies working in the same sector to obtain insights into their sustainability marketing strategies and their methods for building consumer relationships.

The thesis revealed a correlation between green marketing and consumer loyalty. Thanks to effective sustainable strategies, organizations can enhance long-term relationships with their consumers. Key factors are found to create bonds with consumers, social media with influencers, branding practices with storytelling or specific marketing strategies that highlight transparency, credibility, and authenticity.

The author recommends that both consumers and organizations view sustainability as an opportunity for growth, innovation and standing out rather than a limitation for businesses.

Keywords: green marketing, sustainability, consumer loyalty, marketing strategy, sustainability principles.

The originality of this thesis has been checked using Turnitin Originality Check service.

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Glossary

EU European Union

B2B Business to Business

B2C Business to Consumer

TBL Triple Bottom Line

1 Introduction

1.1 Relevance of the Thesis

Over the past few years, the global movement toward sustainability has significantly reshaped consumer expectations. The issue of sustainability has gained considerable attention among consumers worldwide, particularly within the European Union. It has become a mainstream priority for organizations. 94% of people across European Union member states indicate that preserving the environment is a priority for them (BEUC, 2021: 6). Sustainability is now an integral part of both business strategies and consumer decision-making processes. Marketing has a major role in sustainable development, as it is the essential link in creating value and connecting businesses with consumers. In other terms, marketing is not only a business function but a crucial lever for shaping consumer behaviour, as it can guide consumers toward sustainable mindsets and practices while also developing strategies to steer the market (Martin and Schouten, 2014). Therefore, it becomes crucial for companies to not only sell a product or service but also build long-term relationships with their customers. Thanks to that, companies reassess their marketing practices, particularly concerning how they communicate and integrate sustainability principles into their strategies. According to the Boston Consulting Group nearly four out of ten European consumers (37%) state that “they consider environmental issues in their purchasing decisions”. In this context, companies must place sustainable development and sustainability at the heart of their business.

1.2 Purpose of the Thesis

This thesis aims to analyse the intersection of marketing and sustainability in the context of European B2C companies. The goal is to clarify how these companies can effectively use sustainable practices to build consumer loyalty and foster long-term customer relationships.

Several key objectives are set for this bachelor's Thesis. The primary aim is to provide a complete understanding of sustainable development and emphasize the significance of sustainability for organizations in today's context. Examples from industries will illustrate how sustainability is not just a trend, but a relevant driver of success and consumer trust. The second one is to grasp the definition of green marketing, and the value it can add to businesses. The thesis will highlight sustainability through marketing strategies to build a positive brand image. Additionally, this topic explores the role of marketing communication in aligning brands with these changing preferences, how alignment leads to customer loyalty, and how it can reach customers in this context.

1.3 Research question

This study aims to answer the following question: How can European B2C Companies Use Principles of Sustainability in Marketing Communication to Build Customer Loyalty and strong Relationships?

To better understand the scope of this study, it is important to define its parameters. This bachelor's thesis is across between marketing and sustainability. The thesis focuses on European companies operating in the European Union (EU). Additionally, the study is centered on B2C (business-to-consumer) companies targeting their marketing efforts to consumers rather than other companies (B2B). Typically, in the B2B (business-to-business) the purchase decisions are more based on rational factors, and the marketing is aimed at professionals. In the B2C sector, marketing techniques target the public and people and are utilized as part of commercial interaction between businesses and consumers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Principles of sustainability in the marketing sector

2.1.1 Sustainability as a concept and its history

Often perceived as solely linked to ecology, today sustainable development is built upon three main pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These components are interrelated, and each plays an essential role in ensuring the well-being of both individuals and communities (Capgemini, 2022: 4). In 1994, Elkington launched the concept of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) with the objectives of evolving the financial accounting-centric business model into a more holistic approach that evaluates impact and success. TBL is also called People, Planet, and Profit, refers to a threefold accounting framework that evaluates a company's performance in terms of social responsibility, environmental impact and financial viability (The Economist, 2009).

Therefore, the key stages that led to the concept of sustainable development need to be looked back on for sustainability to be fully grasped.

In 1972, the Club of Rome published a report on "The Limits to Growth", better known as the "Meadows Report". The report aimed to analyze the long-term consequences of economic and demographic growth on the planet's boundaries. In addition, the Meadows report highlighted the potential consequences of continued growth trends, which could lead to a risk of collapse. As a result, the report explained the importance of sustainability in balancing growth with environmental protection (Meadows et al.1972). The Club of Rome is a think tank that brings economic decision-makers, politicians, scientists, and high-ranking officials. For two years (1970-1972), an international team of researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology started a study on the consequences of ongoing global growth. They found five components that limit growth: population increase, agricultural production,

nonrenewable resource depletion, industrial output, and pollution generation (Mien, 2020: 209). Additionally in the same year, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm, marking the first global event that focused on environmental issues and recognized the importance of the first Earth Summit (ONU, 1972). The aim was to bring together as many countries and NGOs as possible to form an economic model that would reconcile the economy with sustainable resources.

In 1987, sustainable development was recognized by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland Commission. Gro Harlem Brundtland, prime minister of Norway presented a report titled "Our Common Future" (WCED, 1987). The purpose of this commission was to introduce an international agenda for preserving the global environment and define the term sustainable development as "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 2025).

Now, more is known about sustainable development. The concept of sustainability has evolved, shaped by varying perspectives and approaches. According to Morelli (2011: 5) environmental sustainability can be described as a state of equilibrium, resilience and interdependence that enables society to meet its demands without surpassing the ability of its supporting ecosystems to regenerate the essential services they provide. Meanwhile, other scholars like Fragnière examine the concept through its interaction with society and the environment, defining it as the way human society operates, especially regarding their interaction to the environment that support long-term stability and enable human well-being to thrive over generations (2022: 50, translated from the French using Google translate).

2.1.2 The rise of green marketing

To understand the concept of green marketing, marketing must be defined. It is a term of American origin that comes from the word “market”, the place where supply and demand meet. In 2007, the American Marketing Association (AMA) adopted the definition of marketing as:

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (Gundlach and Wilkie, 2009).

Several definitions of marketing have been suggested. For Philip Kotler, in his book “Marketing Management”, marketing can be described as a human endeavor aimed at fulfilling needs and desires through various exchange processes (Kotler, 1983 cited in Brunswick, 2014:111).

The concept of green marketing was first introduced at a seminar on ecological marketing that the American Marketing Association (AMA) hosted back in 1975 (Singh and Pandey, 2012: 22). Over the years, the concept evolved and became important in marketing and discussions. Subsequently, growing interest from economists, sociologists, and marketing scholars contributed to its development in the early 1980s (Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011). By the 1990s, green marketing evolved into a broader green movement, and this decade was recognized as “the era of the green revolution” (Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990). This multifaceted idea has been linked to several terms like environmental protection, sustainable marketing, or ecological marketing (Kadam, 2024: 14). Although there is not only one universal definition. Polonsky (1994) explains green marketing as a comprehensive set of actions aimed at creating and promoting exchanges that meet human needs and desires while ensuring that these processes have a minimal negative effect on the environment (Polonsky, 1994 cited in United Nation ESCAP, nd).

As McTaggart, Findlay, and Parkin (1992), explained green marketing has become increasingly important as businesses and consumers recognize the

need to balance our limited resources with the unlimited desires of consumers. The basic idea behind economics is that people try to meet their unlimited desires using resources far from unlimited (Polonsky, 1994). This concept is what drives the importance of green marketing. There are multiple reasons why companies turning to and using green marketing. According to Bhatia and Jain (2013), green marketing is seen as a change for companies and has new opportunities in business. Furthermore, companies need to implement more environmental practices such as minimizing waste, optimizing the recycling process to fulfill their moral obligation to the society. There is also the competitive pressure that a company takes the lead in sustainability; in fact, companies often follow other companies. Businesses are driven by opportunities for cost savings, and green marketing makes this possible.

Today, green marketing is an important concept due to the growing awareness of environmental issues. According to Hasan and Azman Ali (2014 cited in Pacevičiūtė and Razbadauskaitė, 2023: 90) companies who implement a green marketing strategy have the potential to enhance their profitability, gain and secure a competitive advantage, and influence their consumers towards more sustainable consumption. As Ball and Kittler (2019 cited in Kadam, 2024) explained green marketing is an important tool to inspire companies to put in place more eco-friendly and sustainable practices in their operations. In addition, this literature describes that companies can implement multiple environmental practices such as optimizing recycling processes, minimizing waste, incorporating eco-friendly materials, and so on.

Initiating green marketing presents some challenges for companies, as it demands a comprehensive overhaul of various practices compared to traditional marketing, and because it is a new concept for companies to manage. This transformation not only changes in production process but also adaptation in product design, packaging solutions, and advertising strategies (Singh and Pandey, 2012: 23). As noted by Ashley (1993), around 70% of a product's environmental footprint is determined by its design and the production methods used (Kadam, 2024). It shows that for companies to have a genuine

green marketing strategy, they must incorporate environmental features into their products during the beginning stage of product development. The goal of marketing or green marketing is to “facilitate exchange that satisfies human needs and wants” (Singh and Pandey, 2012: 24). Like traditional marketing, green marketing follows the 4Ps framework: Product, Price, Placement, and Promotion however, it incorporates sustainability at every stage of the process (Thoria, 2017 as cited in Pacevičiūtė and Razbadauskaitė). Companies that recognize the value of green marketing strategies can reinforce their brand image and strengthen their position in the competitive market.

Indeed, companies can integrate sustainability principles at various levels. According to Menon and Menon (1997), green marketing initiatives within an organization can be categorized into three separate sections: tactical, quasi-strategic and strategic. According to them, at the tactical level, strategies are economic adaptations rather than social responses to societal concerns about the environment. This strategy capitalizes on environmental concerns, by using them as marketing tools to facilitate transactional exchanges; this level is not driven by a distinct environmental ethic. On the quasi-strategic level, companies can change business practices without altering the corporate philosophy, aiming to reduce the negative non-market impact of a company’s actions. When companies move to a strategic level of environmental marketing it’s described as a significant shift in corporate philosophy. Businesses can integrate environmental considerations into the foundation of their operations, focusing not only on creating green products but integrating sustainability into the organization’s culture as a whole (Kadam, 2024: 21).

2.1.3 Importance of sustainability for companies

In this section, three factors that explain why sustainability has become a critical issue for companies will be analysed.

The primary focus of this study is to look at the relationship between consumer behavior related to sustainability. As Buerke et al. (2017 cited in Zaman and

Kusi-Sarpong, 2023: 493) describe consumer behavior refers to the process of selecting, purchasing and utilizing products and services based on one's needs and desires. Grasping this behavior is a crucial strategy for companies that want to influence consumers' buying choices (Zaman and Kusi-Sarpong, 2023: 493).

Consumer behavior regarding sustainability has become a central topic in the literature. The influence of consumer awareness and environmental issues on ecological impact is huge. As individuals become more and more educated about these topics, they are more inclined to make decisions that prioritize sustainability, which highlights a rising trend toward environmentally responsible consumption (Lopes et al, 2024). Multiple factors impact consumer attitudes and behavior towards sustainable products. According to a study by Zhang and Dong (2020 cited in Lopes et al, 2024: 4), they explained that the main aspects that shape customer's decision to engage in sustainable purchasing include their personal value, awareness of environmental issues, and societal expectations.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays an important role in influencing consumer behaviors. CSR involves a company's commitment to ethical practices and making a positive impact on society and the environment (Wekesa, 2024: 36). Thanks to an IBM's research from 2021, it indicates that consumers are actively seeking brands that align with their values related to sustainability. Indeed, organizations that adopt sustainable practices and effectively communicate their environmental impact tend to increase consumer loyalty which positively influences consumer behavior toward sustainable products. According to a study by Capgemini (2022: 13) on consumer behavior, it shows that 78% of participants feel that business should have a greater responsibility towards society.

Consumers can be driven to buy a sustainable product based on their emotional values. According Sheth et al (1991 cited in Parker et al. 2023) emotional value comes from a product's ability to evoke positive feelings, which can motivate

consumers to choose sustainable options. This emotional value is validated through a purchase because consumers feel like contributing to a more sustainable planet by buying these sustainable products. Therefore, the purchase of a sustainable product gives them emotional fulfilment (Parker et al. 2023). According to Capgemini (2022: 6) 64% of respondents expressed that purchasing sustainable products brings them joy about their decisions.

Social value influences consumer behaviour toward sustainability. The social value is described by Sheth et al. (1991) as a benefit derived from a different connection with one or more social groups (Parker et al. 2023). So, buying environmentally friendly products can contribute to the social image that is wanted to be projected, by reflecting positive values and affirming a certain social status (Parker et al. 2023).

Environmental concern is another element that shapes consumer behavior. Individuals who are more environmentally conscious often possess stronger beliefs and knowledge about ecological issues, which leads to a favorable attitude toward green products. (Parker et al. 2023). As Lopes et al (2024) explained consumer awareness and concerns about sustainability play a significant role in shaping their environmental impact. Some researchers have demonstrated that a high level of environmental concern increases consumer's willingness to invest additional time or money in sustainable products (Pagiaslis and Krontalis, 2014). In fact, a recent study by Capgemini (2022: 7) found that 79% of respondents are changing their buying habits based on factors such as social responsibility, inclusivity, and the environmental consequences of their purchasing decisions.

The second aspect is how sustainability can serve as a green competitive advantage for organizations. Possessing a competitive advantage is essential for organizations that are in a challenging market landscape. Competitive advantage can be defined as the "strategy of business entity in a competitive industry where it is likely possible to excel the competitors" (Juniarini and Agustia, 2024). According to Grant (1995 as cited

in Pacevičiūtė and Razbadauskaitė, 2023: 93) companies can establish competitive advantage that allows them to overtake their competitors and sustain their market position over the long-term.

Porter (1985) has identified three principles components of a competitive advantage that an organization can have. The first one is cost leadership, the aim is focused on gaining advantage by minimizing direct and overhead costs. This method is based on cost reduction based on experience, control, and optimization. The second one is differentiation which is about creating products or services that are viewed as unique within the industry. It can take multiple forms like a distinctive brand image, functions, and technology used. At the contrary to cost leadership, differentiation doesn't contribute to gaining a high market share because it is associated with the exclusivity of products or services. The third competitive strategy is focus, it is linked to focusing on a specific segment of a particular group of buyers, product lines, or geographic markets. Focus strategy is based on serving a particular audience, enabling an organization to gain a competitive edge by more effectively addressing customer needs and reducing costs within each segment (Le Hunchec, Y. 2001; Porter, 1985).

In fact, sustainability can become a competitive advantage for companies. Green competitive advantage describes a business that stands out in environmental management or green innovation. In this framework, competitors may have difficulties replicating the environmental strategies of the organization, enabling it to reach sustainable goals and realize advantages (Bintara, 2023). Several studies have explored this subject, defining key parameters for achieving a green competitive advantage. According to Bintara (2023), a company can achieve a competitive advantage by establishing a stronger environmental image compared to its main competitors, by taking the lead in crucial aspects of green products or services, or when the environmental strategies that a company implements are difficult to imitate. To have a green competitive advantage, they need to focus on product innovation, environmental

concerns, and building a green reputation, which is crucial for meeting stakeholder expectations regarding environmental concerns (Bintara, 2023).

The third point this section will talk about the role of sustainability as a key element in innovation for organizations.

The book “Grassroots Innovation Movements” (Smith et al. 2017) describes the significance of sustainable innovation and explores why innovation is essential for addressing global challenges like sustainable development. Innovation is a method for creating and introducing new products, services, or solutions to address various problems (Harper, 2024). Sustainable innovation refers to the development of new solutions that enhance environmental performance, as noted by Carrillo-Hermosilla et al (2010).

European Commission describes eco-innovation as the production, assimilation or exploitation of a novelty in products, production processes, services or in management and business methods, which aims, throughout its lifecycle, to prevent or substantially reduce environmental risk, pollution and other negative impacts of resources use. (Adomako and Nguyen, 2023)

Sustainability is an important driver for innovation, businesses want to harmonize economic growth with their environmental and social responsibilities. Fay and Flöther (2024) emphasize the necessity of evaluating how much more sustainable a new product is compared to its predecessors and the potential effects of altered processes. This author underlines the need to integrate sustainability impact assessments at every stage of the innovation process, ensuring that new developments effectively tackle both environmental and social issues.

Technological progress plays a crucial role in innovation focused on sustainability. As observed by Fay and Flöther (2024), the rising popularity of terms like “climate tech” and “green tech” in recent years is no accident. New technologies illustrate how creative solutions can tackle sustainability issues while creating new market opportunities, these technological advancements are essential drivers in the pursuit of renewable resources and sustainable

practices. Another component of sustainable innovation is the circular economy. According to Fay and Flöther (2024), “innovation does not always manifest itself in new products”. It means that it can involve redesigning processes to extend product lifecycles through methods like reuse, refurbishment, and remanufacturing. The passage from a linear take-make-waste approach to a circular one helps to minimize raw material use, reduce waste output, and decrease environmental impact. By adopting these strategies, industries can improve resource efficiency and promote sustainability. The role of collaboration is essential for promoting sustainable innovation. Fay and Flöther (2024) highlight that successful innovation frequently depends on partnerships and stakeholders. Collaboration among industries can significantly enhance both the effectiveness and reach of sustainable initiatives while also fostering innovation at multiple levels. To sustain innovation over time, organizations must foster a flexible and forward-thinking mindset. Fay and Flöther (2024) points out the importance of “organizational unlearning” which means letting go of outdated methods and embracing new ideas to remain competitive and relevant. To conclude, innovation ensures the long-term viability of organizations, meeting customer expectations, and promoting environmentally friendly solutions that tackle ecological issues while creating positive externalities (Li et al. 2017).

2.2 Integrating sustainability principles into marketing strategies

2.2.1 Communication levers to promote sustainability

“Communication is the conveyance of information between people with the goal of establishing shared understanding “(Bittner-Fessler and Weicht, 2020: 94). Due to its strategic importance, companies have started to incorporate sustainability into their marketing communications approaches (Ruyter et al. 2022 cited in Dessart and Standaert, 2023: 372).

Storytelling is one of the levers to promote sustainability in marketing communications strategy, significantly recognized as an effective management tool, it enhances knowledge sharing, aids in problem-solving and decision-

making, and fosters commitment to change (James and Minnis, 2004: 23). It fosters company image and reputation. As defined by Dessart and Standaert (2023: 373), storytelling is a branding strategy that allows companies to use narrative frameworks to shape their branded content. Due to its characteristics, storytelling has shown a strong capability to engage audiences on cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Dessart and Pitardi, 2019) and gives significance to brands' (Mills and Robson, 2020 cited in Dessart and Standaert, 2023). Storytelling in marketing allows brands to create emotional connections with consumers, resulting in a deeper engagement that goes beyond simple transactions (Delgadillo and Escalas, 2004). Beyond this role, storytelling allows to share the company's values, developing awareness and a better understanding of the company's commitment rather than just communicating a brand's values, it creates a feeling of inclusion, enabling consumers to view themselves as integral to the brand's story (Green MC, Brock TC, 2000). Storytelling is a strong tool because it has the potential to encourage changes in the behaviour of customers. As Gill (2015 cited in Jones and Comfort, 2018) said storytelling can be applied within companies to inspire people and convey messages that resonate strongly enough for individuals to act, provided the message aligns with the listener's interests.

To effectively incorporate sustainability into its business model, a company should be thoughtful about how it communicates (Dessart and Standaert, 2023). Therefore, communication is not just a bonus it's a key part of achieving sustainability in a business. Thanks to Dessart and Standaert (2023: 374-375) they implement three strategic objectives to which companies can commit to offer storytelling aimed towards sustainability. The first concern highlighting sustainability values is particularly relevant for companies that prioritize sustainability as a core principle. Many organizations are increasingly utilizing sustainability storytelling from the outset, positioning it as a unique selling proposition. Companies can emphasize key values such as environmental stewardship, social equity, and community engagement, fostering an identity that resonates with a large range of consumers. By crafting authentic narratives around these themes, brands can build a strong emotional connection with their

audience. Such storytelling not only showcases the brand's commitment to critical issues but also encourages consumers to engage with the brand on a personal level. Brands can also use their own history of sustainability values as a temporal sequence to show the evolution of their growth and the influence they have had on society over time. (Dessart and Pitardi, 2019 cited in Dessart and Standaert, 2023). The second one is repositioning toward sustainability values, usually, this type of technique is used by companies that have not been sustainable since the beginning of the creation of the company. But it's for companies that want to move toward ethical values. Companies that are shifting toward improved sustainability should focus on how they tell their stories, being mindful, and outlining their strategies for meaningful change (Dessart and Standaert, 2023: 375) as the authors explained companies need to carefully change their narrative to foster credibility and trust among customers and other stakeholders. This process requires tangible outcomes, such as clear actions toward sustainability and showcasing measurable advancements. The third point aims to engage stakeholders, for a long time the initial objective was to engage consumers (Hollebeek, 2011 cited in Dessart and Standaert). But O'Riordan and Fairbrass (2014) explained, that companies must go beyond simply engaging consumers and involve a broader range of stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, partners, and the wider community to create a more sustainable impact through their business practice and storytelling efforts.

The second point this study will focus on the promotion of product labeling and environmental certifications as a tool to encourage sustainability and foster relationships with consumers.

Environmental labelling was recognized in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. It serves to promote products with a reduced environmental impact and offer consumers more comprehensive details about the ecological consequences associated with a product throughout its entire lifecycle. (Brécard et al, 2009). The aim of environmental labeling is to inform consumers about the environmental impacts of the products they can purchase and serve as a relevant instrument in guiding consumer choices toward

sustainability. They are strongly encouraged by the European Union and public authorities, as they help to drive demand toward more environmentally friendly products and incentivize producers to design more eco-friendly products to reduce their environmental impact (Dekhili and Achabou, 2011) The environmental communication regarding a product adheres to international standards, specifically the ISO 14020. ISO is the International Standard Organization it's a non-governmental, non-profit organization, created in 1947, composed of 163 members, which are national standardization bodies from 166 countries. An ISO standard represents a global consensus on knowledge within each field. The rules and guidelines set by ISO provide reliable assurance for consumers (ISO, 2022).

Consumers are increasingly depicting awareness and preferences for environmental and social sustainability. As a result of this, they are modifying their purchasing behaviors to align with these concerns, showing a growing interest in products that have a lesser impact on the environment (Molinillo et al, 2020; Taneja and Ali, 2021 cited in Siraj, 2022). Furthermore, as Peschel et al. (2016) described that clients are gradually becoming more willing to pay a premium for sustainable products and services (Siraj, 2022). Several scholars argue that sustainable labels contribute to reducing "information asymmetry" between the demand and the supply regarding environmental matters (Siraj, 2022). Thanks to product label information, consumers are increasingly conscious of the ecological consequences of products when making purchases, so, they can do some comparisons between multiple products (Lavallé and Barenstein, 2004 cited in Siraj, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of labels depends on their credibility and readability. As Jones, (2000 cited in Achabou Mohamed Akli, 2014) explains, credibility refers to the trust and high regard an organization earns from stakeholders through fair and ethical business practices. "To be perceived as credible, a brand must be perceived as eager (reliability) and capable (expertise) to deliver what it promises" (Abachou, 2014).

The growing number of labels can lead to confusion. According to an Ethicity survey (2011 cited in François, 2016: 19 translated from the French using Google translate) states that 61% of French consumers believe there are too many labels, and this literature highlights the fact that for consumers it is difficult and can be overwhelming to identify the most reliable ones. Additionally, the trustworthiness of these labels largely depends on the integrity and independence of the certifying body. Consumers tend to have more trust in labels supported by reputable third-party organizations than in those provided directly by manufacturers (D'Souza et al. 2007). Also, communicating sustainability through labels and environmental labels is a major challenge for companies, as they must ensure that consumers understand these messages. Indeed, it is crucial that consumers understand the information concerning labels because it can influence their purchase decisions (Ates, 2021; Lee et al, 2020 cited in Siraj, 2022).

However, studies show that consumer's knowledge of the environmental impact of the product they buy remains limited. A study by BCR (2015 cited in François, 2016: 2 translated from the French using Google translate) shows that 1,9% of citizens really understand the environmental impact of the items they buy. As Ellen (1994, cited in Dekhili and Achabou, 2011) observes consumers often possess limited factual knowledge about labels. To remedy this issue, the author suggests implementing an environmental labelling system that provides clear and comprehensive information for consumers.

Ellen highlights that label awareness, label content readability and the availability of visual cues are key elements in strengthening the credibility of environmental information and facilitating its understanding.

These initiatives enable industrial players to convey information with more effectiveness and transparency (Ellen, 1994, cited in Dekhili and Achabou, 2011).

Information and education campaigns have proven successful in other areas, such as nutritional labels. Grunert (2010 cited in François, 2016) highlights that

information campaigns about nutritional labels in the United Kingdom have effectively changed consumer mindsets and behaviours, as a result, the United Kingdom now boasts a higher rate of label reading compared to other European nations, demonstrating the effectiveness of these initiatives on fostering informed decision-making. The authors Binniger and Robert (2013 as cited by François, 2016) suggest that, like with nutritional labels, consumer education could play a vital role in improving the understanding of environmental information. For example, in France, initiatives have been launched to improve consumers' understanding of environmental claims. One notable is DGCCRF's online Practical Guide, created to help consumers learn about the different environmental claims used by companies. This tool empowers consumers to explore the green market and make more informed decisions about the products they buy (Homobono and Hauser, 2014 cited in François, 2016). However, despite these efforts, a study by Bernard, Bertrandias, and Elgaaied (2015) points out that 62% of French consumers admitted that they don't know much on eco-labels and 89% of respondents claimed that organizations adopted eco-label to enhance their image. This literature highlights the need for further educational actions.

2.2.2 Social media: a key driver

In the digital age, social media plays a central role in the lives of users. In 2024, over 5 billion people worldwide were using social media, with this number expected to surpass six billion by 2028 (Statistica, 2024). Today, social media is not only a tool for entertainment and communication, but it has also evolved as a lever for brands seeking to integrate sustainability into their marketing strategies. According to Boyd and Elison (2007 cited in Li et al, 2024), social media can be described as an online platform that acts as a communication channel for community engagement, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration. As Kushwaha et al. said in 2020 social media can be used to strengthen sustainable marketing strategies, as platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitate "fast information diffusion in a wide pool of individuals", enabling real-time interactions on socially relevant topics. This characteristic

has made social media a tool for firms to engage with customers, shape brand perceptions, and communicate sustainability efforts (Jha and Verma, 2022). According to Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006 as cited in Grandin, 2018: 22 translated from the French using Google translate), social media are more likely to engage in dialogue and communication with users than websites, and so, accelerating information transmission and promoting more effective organization and information sharing. Moreover, communication on these platforms typically spreads rapidly through electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Additionally, as Colleoni, Arvidsson, Hansen, and Marchesini said in their speech in 2011 argues that similarities groups traits can lead to greater homogeneity by changing behaviour and attitudes. This shift enhances from one person to another, especially from friends to friends and from opinions leaders (influencers) to their audiences. (Grandin, 2018: 22). This literature points out that users are more likely to see information as real and trustworthy, particularly when it resonates with shared experiences or similarities within their group.

As Confetto et al. (2023 cited in Tass and Malik, 2024: 1881-1882) sustainability has become an increasing point for businesses, social media has become a key platform for companies to engage in conversations about environmental issues, share their eco-friendly initiatives, and educate consumers on how to be more sustainable. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok provide an ideal space for brands to communicate their environmental commitments and practices, such as recycling initiatives, energy efficiency efforts, and strategies to minimize carbon footprints (Tass and Malik, 2024).

Now, the focus will be on influencers and this thesis will examine the strategies, types of content, and methods of engagement that influencers use to successfully promote sustainability in their marketing communication. Thanks to social media, a new way of doing marketing has emerged: influencer marketing. This approach involves using influencers to communicate messages and promote the brand to the market (Le, Nguyen and Stokes, 2025). First, influencers can be described as people who have gained prominence on social

media and actively engage with a large number of users through direct relationships. (Munaro, Barcelos and Maffezzoli, 2024: 401). In other terms, influencers are typically individuals with a large following on social media who use their online presence to promote products and influence the opinions and behaviour of their audience. (Munaro et al 2024). They created engaging content that showcases products and brands using various interactive formats like a haul, unboxings, tutorials, and the creative presentation of products in videos. By doing this, they build a community of followers, making them appealing to brands (Audrezet and Koles, 2023: 2).

Social media influencers play a strategic and crucial role in the interactive marketing strategies of many brands since the past fifteen years (Audrezet, Koles, 2023). Companies have recognized the importance of influencers in the consumption process, as their opinions and recommendations play a crucial role in encouraging their subscribers to try and discover the new product they endorse, as a result, a lot of companies turn to influencers to promote their brands or products. (Flynn, Goldsmith, and Eastman, 1996, cited in Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014: 594). As Audrezet et al. (2023, cited in Vemuri et al. 2023: 96) state that in today's context, consumers turning to influencers for advice and insights into on sustainable living practices, presenting a notable opportunity for brands to collaborate with influencers.

Influencers can influence consumer mindsets, by making advertising campaigns and raising awareness about sustainable development, these influencers can encourage their subscribers to embrace greener behaviour and be more aware of the positive impact of consuming eco-friendly products (Verumi, 2023: 97). But to reach this point, as Buvár et al (2023) explained that the capacity of influencers to mold consumer's purchasing intentions arises on their credibility. This literature suggests that credibility is essential for strengthening the impact of their messages and there is also transparency and authenticity. Influencers must develop a high connection with their followers and be perceived as trustworthy individuals. If influencers lack these qualities, they will not be able to

effectively convey a message or motivate their followers to purchase a product. (Munaro et al, 2024).

To effectively promote sustainability, brands need to choose influencers whose values resonate with their own and who can genuinely embody the brand's message. This type of influencer is called greenfluencers (Pittman and Abell, 2011: 71). A study conducted by Pittman and Abell (2021: 71) showed that small influencers who talk about sustainability also called green micro-influencers receive more audience interaction than macro-influencers. The size of the audience plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of messages and how consumers perceive them. This is linked to the authenticity and trust that followers have in influencers. Green micro-influencers are considered more trustworthy and convincing to their audience, which results in better attitudes toward the sustainability of the product they promote. As explains Hatton, 2018, brands should consider working with several micro-influencers rather than one macro-influencer. Even though the audience may be smaller, this approach can optimize their return on investment (Pittman and Abell, 2023: 71). While more well-known influencers are sometimes seen as less sincere in their environmental commitment.

2.2.3 Value co-creation in sustainable marketing

Value co-creation has emerged as a crucial element in enhancing consumer engagement with brands. According to Şenbabaoğlu Danacı (2024), co-creation is a collaborative process where businesses and consumers work together to create mutual value and go beyond traditional consumer roles. This interaction places consumers at the heart of the brand experience enabling them to take an active role in multiple stages of value creation. Consumers play an active role in marketing, moving from being just customers to active contributors. They bring their skills, insights, and experiences into the conversation, which fosters deeper engagement and creates creativity and loyalty toward the brand. In their 2004 literature, Prahalad and Ramaswamy suggested that the traditional focus on companies has shifted to a more customer-centric approach. This new

perspective emphasizes increased customer participation in the collaborative development of products and services. (Iglesias et al. 2018: 153).

Indeed, according to Saarijärvi (2012), co-creation extends well beyond just the production phase, it involves collaboration in areas such as promotion, distribution, and sales, showcasing its significant influence on overall business strategy (Şenbabaoğlu Danacı, 2024). Participating in co-creation is a highly engaging experience for customers. Firstly, it enables them to form sincere connections with both the brand and the community members. Additionally, involvement in co-creation initiatives often leads customers to experience personal growth, and collective learning. Ultimately, co-creation not only provides opportunities for self-improvement but also offers social and enjoyable rewards that lead them to a closer connection to the brand (Iglesias, 2018:152)

A survey conducted by Wylie Harris, (2018 as cited in Muniz and Guzmán, 2023) found that 81% of respondents perceive brands that work with their consumers as being more authentic, and 86% argue that brands that are able to do co-creation with their clients are seen as more trustworthy. In summary, brands that engage in co-creation are seen as more authentic compared to those that don't, and they are connected to more positive actions. (Muniz and Guzmán, 2023). When customers choose to engage in the co-creation of a brand, it means that they share similar values with the brand, as this level of involvement demands a significant commitment. Indeed, this connection is not just superficial, it can widely enhance the cognitive and emotional engagement of consumers through their experiences with the brand. (Palakshappa, Bulmer and Dodds, 2024).

Growing societal concerns about environmental issues and sustainability have made it essential to integrate environmental considerations into value co-creation as a vital component for reaching sustainability objectives (Chen et al. 2024). Value co-creation can be the key to promoting sustainability principles in marketing strategy and fostering long-term relationships with customers. To promote sustainability, a brand can enhance value co-creation by offering eco-

friendly products and services while engaging consumers with its fundamental values. As Chang (2019 as cited in Gao and Qi, 2024) explained the concept of green value co-creation refers to the process of generating value through collaboration between business and their stakeholders by promoting environmental protection ideas and engaging in multiple phases of production or consumption. In the context of sustainability, co-creation is explained by Arnold (2017 as cited in Marisa, 2019:18) as the process of collaboratively identifying issues and developing solutions by leveraging resources, abilities, and expertise to achieve shared sustainable advantages. Green value co-creation expands the concept of value co-creation by focusing on environmental protection, encompasses the sharing of eco-friendly knowledge among stakeholders, fostering sustainable values, and enhancing collaborative relationships (Chang, 2019). Green value co-creation can be separated into two different forms: the first one is green co-production it describes the active participation of consumers and other stakeholders throughout the implementation of green innovation. The second one is green value-in-use is the experience and learning process of an organization and its stakeholders to use and maintain the green product or service, there are three important elements: experience, personalization and relationship (Ranjan and Read, 2016 as cited in Chang, 2018).

By engaging in environmentally friendly activities, consumers may increase their readiness to purchase green products, which can subsequently have a positive influence on their overall green consumption habits (Chen et al. 2024). Adopting green co-creation offers many benefits for brands, including cost savings, enhanced environmental performance, faster market entry, improved understanding of consumer needs, and a stronger competitive position (Iglesias et al. 2018: 152). Also, it can foster deeper connections with different stakeholders, which can contribute to the long-term success and building a sustainable competitive advantage.

To efficiently promote sustainability, pressure from stakeholders is used to encourage companies to engage in green activities. As noted by Aguilera et al.

(2007 as cited in Chang, 2018), there are three motives that drive companies toward these green initiatives: instrumental, relational and moral motives. Instrumental motives arise from self-interest, where companies implement green practices primarily to cut costs, such as by minimizing waste in materials and energy. Managers play a crucial role in this, as they can shape corporate strategies that enhance financial performance through sustainable practices. As a result, many companies are increasingly inclined to adhere to sustainability guidelines to enhance their reputation. Relational motives lead to relationships among various stakeholders, it is essential for companies to recognize and respond to each stakeholder's unique needs. Balancing these varying interests can be challenging. To remain competitive, companies need to align themselves with stakeholder norms. When stakeholders actively adopt green practices, companies must meet their expectations and demands. By fostering communication with different stakeholders, companies can co-create innovative ideas. Lastly, moral motives are about ethical standards and principles, companies who are driven by moral motives want to contribute positively to sustainable development. Virtue ethics involves not just following conventional moral guidelines but also embracing higher moral standards. A corporate culture that prioritizes sustainability principles can instil a sense of moral obligation within the organization. (Aguilera et al, 2007 cited in Chang, 2018).

2.3 Building lasting consumer relationships and challenges

2.3.1 Relationship marketing as a strategy for building consumer loyalty

The history of marketing shows that traditional or transactional marketing was dominant until the 1990s. During that time, markets were expanded, and the growing population was seen as an ideal environment for that model. Traditional marketing was solely focused on acquiring new customers based on short-term goals and relationships. However, significant changes began to be observed in the 1990s. Markets became saturated, brand growth was limited, and consumers were found to be more demanding and sophisticated (Egan, 2012). Relationship marketing emerged as a complementary approach to traditional

marketing. In the literature, relationship marketing does not have a single accepted definition.

According to Grönroos (1999: 328) Relationship marketing is the process of identifying and establishing maintaining and enhancing, and when necessary, also terminating relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit so that the objectives of all parties involved are met; and this is done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises.

As Rootman et al. (Rosário and Casaca, 2023: 45) defined in 2011, relationship marketing is an essential strategy that companies use to establish, nurture, and strengthen beneficial connections with their consumers. Relationship marketing is a modern approach and powerful strategy that prioritizes the development of long-term connections with customers and ensuring their satisfaction to promote ongoing relationships and repeat sales. In fact, by demonstrating a commitment to understanding and fulfilling the needs, expectations, and demands of customers, businesses can cultivate loyalty and trust (Rosário and Casaca, 2023). To build long-term relationships and improve customer loyalty, various tools can be used in relationship marketing.

The first tool is a continuity marketing program. It's a popular approach focused on customer retention, ongoing customer engagement, and encouraging repeat purchases (Bhattacharya, 1998 cited in Sheth et al. 2012: 12). This strategy often involves implementing programs like loyalty cards and membership schemes to keep customers involved over time. Loyalty programs frequently provide customers with incentives to encourage ongoing purchases, which could be bonus like points that can be redeemed, discounts, or exclusive promotions (Sheth et al. 2012). The primary objective of this is to keep customers engaged by offering incentives that make it more appealing for them to remain loyal to a specific brand instead of moving to competitors. As Harrison-Walker and Coppett (2003 cited in Rosário and Casaca, 2023) explained, the effective use of continuity marketing programs is related to the rising concerns about the expenses involved in acquiring new customers, as well as the challenges these issues present, which urge companies to focus

more on customer retention strategies. It's highlighted the fact that strategy aims to enhance investment returns by prioritizing initiatives that build customer loyalty, rather than investing solely in acquiring new customers.

Traditional loyalty cards, which consist of rewarding consumers with points or discounts for their purchases, show their limitations in the context of sustainability. The goal of green loyalty program is to engage consumers to make more sustainable choices, embracing this technique is strategic to meet consumer demands and promotes long-term business with consumers. Indeed, green loyalty programs reward consumers not only for their purchases but also for their environmental decisions, through simple actions like using reusable bags, recycling, or returning old packaging (White Label Loyalty, 2024). Green loyalty programs include green credit, it's means that consumers can earn points through their purchases. These points can then be used for discounts or contributed to environmental initiatives. This approach enables consumers to engage in sustainability across various brands, these programs not only enhance customer relationships but also give meaning to consumers to make a positive impact (Jain, 2024).

One-to-one marketing also called individual marketing is another strategy that relationship marketing can implement. It is a technique that emphasizes the specific needs of individual customers to develop enduring relationships, support and encourage personalized interactions (Rosário and Casaca, 2023: 56). The increasing advancement of information technologies, along with the rise of data mining and the establishment of data warehouses, has significantly contributed to the growth of this marketing strategy. Thanks to these tools, access to important consumer insights and technologies for personalization is now possible (Sheth et al. 2012). One-to-one marketing can offer a variety of benefits. A significant advantage of this strategy is the reduction of marketing costs. Substantial savings in resource allocation can be achieved by improving targeting efforts and ineffective large-scale brand campaigns that do not resonate with the target audience can be avoided (Adobe, 2023). It points out that marketing expenditures can be optimized, leading to an overall

improvement in marketing efficiency. Also, this strategy can improve customer retention, its involving personalized experiences are provided to customers through one-to-one marketing, aligning with their expectations. When an individual's needs, wants and preferences are met, customer satisfaction and retention are achieved (Adobe, 2023).

2.3.2 How greenwashing destroys consumer relationship

In the current era of sustainability, the goal for companies is to gain trust among environmentally responsible consumers. However, organizations are currently debating whether it is possible to be at the same time environmentally responsible, ethically conscious, and financially successful (Kadam, 2024: 19). As Polonsky and Rosenberger III (2001) described, multiple companies trying to make an effort to connect their business with environmental issues, but they aren't enhancing the sustainability of their products, and the result is that consumers don't believe the companies and lead to a growing skepticism among customers (Kadam, 2024). According to Li et al, (2022 cited in Riva, 2024), people's increasing doubts and confusion about the environmental benefits and effectiveness of green products are largely caused by harmful companies' environmental practices. Irresponsible companies' behaviour can lead to consumer green skepticism. It can be described as the uncertainty consumers feel regarding whether the company is genuinely committed to creating sustainable green products (Luo et al, 2020, cited in Riva, 2024). In fact, green skepticism is related to the reduction of trust in green companies, fosters unfavourable perceptions among consumers toward the brand, and impacts the consumer-brand relationship, as consumers may perceive a sense of betrayal (Riva, 2024). This growing skepticism, fuelled by misleading practices leads to the phenomenon of greenwashing.

Greenwashing is considered a deceptive practice and involves misleading consumers it means giving false or exaggerated impressions of a company's environmental efforts (Cheng and Chang, 2013 as cited in Feghali, Najem and Metcalfe, 2025). In the book entitled "Marketing & Sustainability" by Guyader,

Ottoson, and Parment published in 2020, the authors emphasize the fact that greenwashing refers to how companies employ marketing strategies and in the case of greenwashing is more through advertising to create the illusion that their products are much more eco-friendly than they are. These authors also explain, that if a company gives more resources to marketing itself as sustainable rather than implementing practices that reduce its environmental impact, it constitutes greenwashing, this strategy often misrepresents the company's true commitment to sustainability by prioritizing marketing efforts over real action.

As Emery (cited in Guyader et al, 2020: 167-168) explained in 2012, there are four different forms of greenwashing. The first one is the spread or promotion of misleading by an organization about its activities to conceal its actual image and create a positive image, the second one is about environmental statements that lack of solid foundation or act as a distraction, and the third one is based on actively deceiving consumers about environmental practices of a specific organizations or a particular product or service and the last one is conveying the impression that a product or service is sustainable when is actually not.

Greenwashing has a significant negative impact on consumers' trust, loyalty, and green purchase intentions. When consumers become aware that a product they purchased has been greenwashed or when consumers believe in a sustainable brand's practices that turn out to be misleading, they are less likely to purchase from that company (Vilkaitė-Vaitonė, 2024). The impact of greenwashing is very bad for a brand, as it leads to a significant loss of consumer trust. According to Braga Junior et al (2019) when consumers perceive greenwashing, they no longer trust the brand, which results in decreased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, greenwashing compromises the authenticity of a company and creates doubts about the commitment to environmental responsibility (Santos et al, 2024). As Ottman et al. (2010, as cited in Kadam, 2024) suggest, using greenwashing in their communication will have some consequences for the reputation of the brand and the future of its green products. Greenwashing methods harm consumer attitudes and decrease the chance of individuals choosing eco-friendly products

over conventional ones, because consumers may have some difficulties knowing which products are sustainable or not (Bladt, Capelleveen and Murat Yazan, 2023). As noted by Delmas and Burbano (2011) and Shahrin et al. (2017), the mistrust generated by greenwashing can significantly lower the chances of successfully promoting eco-friendly options to the consumer market (Feghali, Najem, and Metcalfe, 2025).

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research Methods

This section defines what a case is and how it is used in this thesis. First, a case study can be described as a method that uses a qualitative and quantitative methodology, it serves to explore, describe, and analyse the real situations and find solutions to concrete issues. It can examine multiple targets like groups of people, individuals, events, or an organization, and can be used in multiple fields. (National University, 2025; Raikar, 2025). The case study has two main goals, the first one is to offer descriptive insights and to imply theoretical significance (Salmons, 2021). According to Yin (2018), case studies can be used for three different types of research such as descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory. For descriptive case study as its name suggests, is used to analyse a situation. Explanatory is designed to understand the reasons behind a specific condition or to analyse why a series of events took place or failed to take place and last the exploratory case study aims to define questions or methodologies that will guide a subsequent investigation (Salmons, 2021). As Tellis explained in 1997, using case studies allows researchers to go beyond statistics and understand behaviours from the viewpoint of the people involved. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, case studies offer a complete understanding, with careful observation of the process and outcomes (Zainal, 2007).

As Yash said in 2024, case studies have advantages and disadvantages. For example, case studies allow researchers to do a deep analysis of the study and

provide a complete understanding of the subject using tangible examples. Another aspect is that case studies allow to save researchers money because it is the cheapest method. On the contrary, case studies have some limitations, such as the resources and time allocated to the research, case studies are often analysed at the level of a company or group of people, in fact, results do not apply to a broad population and last one concerns the subjectivity in interpreting the results which depend on the researcher (Yash, 2024).

For the thesis, two case studies were chosen using descriptive and explanatory approaches. These case studies will analyse two different European B2C companies operating in the same sector: the beauty and skincare industry. These companies have an international presence with price affordable prices and wide accessibility. Initially, each company will be introduced and described. Following that, their approaches and outcomes will be analysed. This analysis will highlight potential improvements or alternative strategies that could have been implemented differently. Finally, a comparison between the two companies will be presented.

The aim of this case study is to explore how European companies implement sustainable practices and principles in their marketing communication strategies. It also looks into how these businesses engage consumers to raise awareness about sustainable development and foster long-term loyalty and relationships. The goal is also to understand how a company needs to interact and communicate with their customers to be seen as trustworthy.

3.2 Case Studies

3.2.1 The case of Yves Rocher

Yves Rocher is a French company specializing in skincare, perfumes, and cosmetics, created in 1959 by Yves Rocher. The brand is a pioneer in plant-based cosmetics. In 1975, they inaugurated the creation of the botanical garden La Gacilly which is where the founder lived in Brittany, this space preserves more than 1 500 plant species (Yves Rocher, 2025). For the last 65 years, the

company has integrated the effectiveness of botanical products with a focus on CSR considerations. Today, the brand is the number one beauty brand in France in volume and value (LinkedIn, 2023). To better understand the scale of the company, here are several key statistics. Yves Rocher employs more than 6,800 people worldwide and has more than 20 million customers in 90 countries. The company operates roughly 2,300 stores and 3,500 resales points worldwide (LinkedIn, 2023).

First, the case study will analyze the sustainability effort of the brand, then how the companies communicate on the sustainable development and the brand's relationship with its consumers.

In terms of sustainable development, Yves Rocher is one brand that stands out on the market as being eco-conscious and has the ambition to progress with its stakeholders toward a more sustainable beauty. According to the sustainability report published in 2023, the brand has realized a program called "Act Beautiful" composed of 10 commitments towards 2030. These 10 acts are represented by real actions to reduce the environmental and social impact of Yves Rocher. For example, act 6 aims to "support the activity of our agricultural partners". In 2022, the brand accompanied more than 7,200 partners in their sustainable agricultural practices. Another example is act 3, is about plastic reduction, the goal of the brand is to reduce 30% their plastic consumption by 2030 compared to the year 2019, and in 2030 Yves Rocher wants to have 100% of both recycled plastic and recycled packaging. Additionally, Yves Rocher has become the first company to get the certification Union for Ethical Bio Trade (UEBT) on their botanical garden La Gacilly, it is a certification that guarantees sourcing that respects biodiversity and humans. Through this concrete's actions, Yves Rocher places sustainability as a core of its business (Yves Rocher, 2020).

Now, the look will be on how Yves Rocher communicates with its customers about sustainable development and which techniques they use to integrate

sustainable principles in their marketing communication strategies to foster relationships.

First of all, Yves Rocher works with an omnichannel strategy, it's means that the company uses different types of communication channels like digital one with a website and app store but also real ones like stores and those in an interconnected way to ensure a seamless customer experience. Yves Rocher is an active brand on social media, especially on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Tik Tok to reach as many people as possible. To promoting their responsible products, they use a lot of social media as a driver to create engaging campaigns or collaborate with famous beauty influencers (Serrano, 2024).

Yves Rocher incorporates sustainability in their communications by sharing their progress, their engagements and by educating consumers to be more sustainable through educative videos on social media. By sharing their environmental practices, they can influence positive consumer behaviors. In terms of social media communication, Yves Rocher employed different approaches depending on the platform. On LinkedIn, the strategy is more based on credibility and sustainable commitment, for example, the company will give informative content about the brand's commitment such as statistics. (Appendix 1). Whereas on other social media, the company is more educative and friendly like on TikTok or Instagram.

To improve the communication strategy, in 2023, Yves Rocher launched a social media campaign in the form of 4 short videos to highlight its commitment to sustainability through agroecology and plant-based company. During the 4 episodes, consumers discover Yves Rocher's botanical garden, the different types of plants used for cream, and all the process of fabrication. Thanks to this action, Yves Rocher allows customers to feel more connected with the brand with this type of communication (Launay, 2024).

Additionally, the brand incorporates sustainability in its loyalty strategy. Yves Rocher tries to engage its customers through green loyalty program, where the

customer is double rewarded with some bonus points for the purchase of responsible products (AC Franchise, 2024). In 2024, Yves Rocher tried a new strategy to engage more its customers through environmental practices. The goal was to encourage customers to return empty cream bottles in exchange for compensation. To attract customers to bring empty cream bottles, the brand proposes a financial reward of 1 euro gift card for each bottle returned. For the moment, this action was a test to know if the customers were involved or not. According to the responsibility of impact and CSR of the brand, the result of this action was great, and especially customer was really involved in this action. They must ambition to continue to do that further. Also, to give deeper to this action, Yves Rocher has created “targeted reminders to reinforce this habit when returning to the store”. This marketing technique uses personalized follow-up to build connections with customers and enhance customer relationships (Bouaziz, 2024).

Yves Rocher communicates on eco-certifications and labels. For example, their botanical garden has been certified organic since 1999, and the entire 60-hectare site adheres to an agroecological approach, it's shown a positive model of agriculture. (Yves Rocher, 2024). Additionally, some of Yves Rocher's products have the label “Organic Farming” certified organic and free for the absence of pesticides and chemical substances. These certifications are important for Yves Rocher to demonstrate their commitment to their consumers and environmental sustainability.

Additionally, Yves Rocher wants to be as transparent as possible with its consumers. To achieve this, the brand and 24 other organizations have developed a tool to measure the environmental and social impact of each product and it's given consumers the opportunity to be more aware when choosing a product. This tool is called the “Green Impact Index”, it is easy to understand for consumers and based on 5 criteria such as the composition of the product, packaging, fabrication, transport, and social impact. Through this action, Yves Rocher wants to show its transparency and its progress to reach sustainable beauty (Yves Rocher, 2025).

After analysing Yves Rocher's brand, the conclusion is that this company has placed sustainability as the core of its business, by being transparent and presenting itself as a credible and dedicated brand for more sustainable beauty. Indeed, Yves Rocher can still improve and reinforce their practices by doing green co-creation value with their consumers, if the brand integrates consumers in the early stages of the value chain, it fosters a stronger connection between the consumers and the brand. This collaborative approach allows consumers to contribute to the creation of new sustainable products, making them feel listened and understood by the brand. The aim of the green co-creation value is to create shared value, where the consumers become active actors in the brand's sustainable development. In fact, if Yves Rocher plans to do this, it could enhance the legitimacy and transparency of their actions, create a real community, and better understand the types of products consumers desire to align their business with customer needs.

3.2.2 The case of Nivea

The second case study is about a German brand called Nivea. Founded in 1911 by Paul C. Beiersdorf, the company specialised in skin and body care. Nivea is a company owned by Beiersdorf, a German corporation focused on skincare and cosmetics. The history of Nivea begins with only one product the Nivea Cream. Invented by Dr Isaac Lifschütz who discovered "eucerit", an ingredient that acts as an emulsifier. Eucerit played a key role in the cream's texture and largely contributed to the success of Nivea products. Today, Nivea has developed over 500 products and established a presence in more than 200 countries worldwide (Nivea, website, 2025). Nivea comes from Latin origins, and this means "snow white" in reference to the famous Nivea Cream.

In 2020, Nivea has set multiple objectives of sustainable development to reduce their negative impact on the planet toward 2025. For instance, the first goal is an absolute reduction of their scope by 30% on their emissions in all the supply chain towards 2025. They put strong consideration on more responsible plastic packaging with some key insights like 100% recycled, rechargeables, and

refillable by 2025. They also want to focus on adopting eco-friendly and sustainable agricultural practices, aiming to use renewable ingredients sourced sustainably by 2025, ensuring a deforestation-free supply chain for its key raw materials. The last key point is to reduce by 25% the water consumption per product manufactured by 2025 compared to the year 2018 (Nivea, 2025). Additionally, the brand has a partnership with “My Tree”, an association that actively acts for the environment by planting all kinds of trees in different spaces like agricultural operations, organizations, and local authorities (Nivea, 2025). This schedule is clear and organized, it's aims to reduce the environmental impact of Nivea on the planet.

Now, the look will be on how Nivea integrates these principles (above) in their marketing communication strategy.

Nivea products are available in supermarkets, department stores, drugstores, on its websites, and other online shops, the company has a strong presence in both physical and online marketplaces, Nivea makes it easy for consumers to buy its products because they are widely available. Nivea uses digital platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, and LinkedIn, social media is a valuable channel for engaging with its audience. Nivea partners with famous influencers worldwide to promote its products and connect with fans and potential new customers. These partnerships not only enhance the brand visibility, but it is also a way to build credibility and trust. On Instagram, the brand has more than 765k followers. On this platform, Nivea gives a lot of tips for the utilisation of its products, and how to apply them. The brand interacts a lot with consumers on Instagram through stories, surveys, and through questions and answers asked by their followers.

The company adopts customer-centric communication with their consumers. For Nivea, it is essential point to keep their customers informed by providing accessible and clear information about product ingredients and composition, through this point, Nivea tries to simplify scientific language for its consumers so

they can be more aware of the products they buy. Nivea is based on values such as transparency, innovation, education, and trust (Uğrasız, 2022)

In 2021, Nivea launched a product available in different options depending on skin type. This product is called “WonderBar” and consists of face cleaning that looks like soap, the product is made from 99% natural ingredients, is vegan, and packaged in recycled materials. Thanks to this, Nivea has obtained the Ecocert Cosmos Natural Standard Certification (Garcia, 2021).

To conclude this second case study, Nivea is a company that understands the principle of sustainability and the importance of setting multiple goals to reduce its environmental impact, but Nivea is not sustainable in its core business. This analysis points out that sustainability is not integrated into its global marketing strategy.

For the improvements, it is crucial in today’s context that Nivea includes its customers in the co-creation value especially in green co-creation value in order to include more consumers to be part of the brand. Additionally, Nivea doesn’t encourage their consumers to be more sustainable, the brand could launch actions, and awareness campaigns to integrate sustainability into its strategy. The only platform where Nivea communicates their environmental action is the official website. In terms of improvements, Nivea could allow itself to have more open communication on sustainable development on its various networks and with the influencers with whom they collaborate in order to convey a message. In fact, Nivea’s core value is education, through this value, Nivea must integrate sustainable development to raise consumer awareness of the need to become more responsible.

In 2022, Nivea and some other companies were accused of greenwashing by a German NGO, accusing them of misleading consumers about the climate neutrality of their products. Environmental Action Germany claims « false climate protection » that hides emissions and uses compensation systems that

are vague and unknown to consumers. The NGO claims that such practices are a sale of favors with no real impact on the environment (Amelang, 2022).

3.2.3 Conclusion of Case Studies

The analysis of Yves Rocher and Nivea shows us that, even if the two companies operate in the same sector, this analysis describes two different approaches in terms of implementing sustainability in their marketing communication strategies.

Yves Rocher places sustainability at the heart of its business with strong commitment, and a clear roadmap to achieve its objectives. Yves Rocher integrates a lot of principles of green marketing in their marketing communications. The 4 Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) are essential to any marketing strategy, and Yves Rocher uses them with a green dimension. For example, Yves Rocher focuses on responsible products, by using ingredients of plant and organic origin, often from agroecological crops. The company has its botanical garden with a growing number of plants, also Yves Rocher communicates about sustainable and recyclable packaging for its products. For promotion, Yves Rocher implements social media campaigns to raise consumer awareness and makes partnerships with famous beauty influencers to talk about the benefits of the new packaging in a way to enhances customer responsibility.

Also, Yves Rocher uses green innovation by implementing tools such as the Green Impact Index to let the customers be more aware of the product. Thanks to the history, the storytelling of the brand, Yves Rocher fosters relationships with its customers by creating long-term connections with us through a green loyalty program or also relational marketing.

On the other side, there is Nivea who engage also in sustainable practices through multiple targets towards 2025, but places sustainability and green practices not as the core of its business but more like a secondary goal in its commercial plan. In fact, Nivea only communicates with the official website and

not a lot on social media, and in the current context, it would be better to start communication on both platforms to make the customer aware of their environmental efforts and like Yves Rocher to integrate the customer in environmental practices to really connect the brand with their customers.

By implementing concrete environmental initiatives such as bringing their own bag, returning old packaging, participating in green loyalty programs, or supporting recycling programs. Nivea can educate its customers to be more involved in sustainable practices. Lastly, Nivea could also do the same as Yves Rocher and launch some campaigns that promote their sustainability products to improve transparency and foster consumer loyalty.

To conclude, thanks to these case studies, it's highlighted that there are different ways to communicate sustainability and various approaches to integrating sustainability principles into marketing strategies to foster customer relationships. According to Menon and Menon (1997), Yves Rocher works on a strategic level compared to Nivea which operates at a tactical level.

3.3 Limitations

This study shows several limitations regarding the thesis. The first one is the abundance of references about green marketing. The concept of green marketing has been analysed by a lot of scholars with sometimes different points of view, and it was sometimes quite hard to have an objective definition of this term and to select the right definition or the reference that suited best with the study.

The geographical context of the thesis is one of the limits, because the study was centered on companies that operate in European Union countries. Multiple times, statistics, data, or percentages were relevant for the thesis, but included United States or China in their literature. It was more challenging to find data on European companies because there is less literature focusing solely on Europe.

The last limitation was the rapid evolution of the entire study. In fact, the research question that this thesis aims to answer is not a closed topic, but on contrary it is a current societal issue, and scholars continue to explore sustainability related to green marketing. As a result, there are always new references with a new vision of the subject, and many references can be seen as outdated. During the study, it was necessary to consider whether more recent references were available each time to not use outdated scholars' literature.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, this bachelor's thesis explores the use of sustainability principles in the marketing communication strategies of European B2C companies to build consumer loyalty and strong relationships. Thanks to the study, answers have been found.

Firstly, the thesis has explored the concept of sustainability and its growth over the years, and how it has become a fundamental key in the organization. Today, sustainability is not viewed as a bonus for companies, but a real driver for ensuring long-term relationships and business success. Indeed, to create greener marketing, companies can implement several practices to ensure long-term relationships with their consumers to meet their sustainability commitment.

Moreover, the study analysed key communications tools to enhance sustainability in marketing such as storytelling and the use of the social media. Storytelling allows consumers to connect in a deeper level with the brand. It's also an opportunity for the brands to express their sustainability values. Additionally, social media is seen as a communication platform for community engagement with the brand. The brand that shares their environmental commitment is seen as more transparent and trustworthy by consumers and can encourage their consumers to be more responsible toward the environment by doing awareness campaigns, stories or simply communicating around sustainability. Another tool which is effective for promoting sustainability and

consumer trust is the eco-certification and labels. Many companies want to have eco-certifications made by a third-party on their product to ensure good quality, treatment and trust. Today, companies must focus on how consumers understand the importance of the label, and through this, they must adopt an awareness campaign to ensure proper comprehension of these labels.

Moreover, to reach at the same time sustainability principles and customer loyalty, companies can use marketing techniques such as the green co-creation value to enhance customer satisfaction. Green co-creation value appears like a driver to deliver satisfaction for consumers, because they become actors of the product with the brand, their opinions are considered during all the process, and for companies it allows them to adopt a greener production with some benefits like cost-savings and enhanced environmental performance. Relational marketing can drive consumers thanks to individualized connection and continuous follow-up, green dimension is crucial for relational marketing because it can lead to better consumption behaviours from consumers. To conclude, companies can successfully implement sustainable principles through different communication and marketing practices. However, to enhance consumer relationships and loyalty, it's a long-term goal to achieve. When consumers are loyal to a brand, companies need to be transparent about their sustainability practices. If a brand fails to do that, it risks being accused of greenwashing, which can destroy consumer loyalty.

The subject is not delimited by a timeframe, on the contrary, it is a current societal subject today and will continue to grow and evolve over time. In March 2023, new EU directives known as "Green Claims" directives were introduced, bringing significant changes to how businesses operate. This measure is implemented to protect consumers from greenwashing practices and has several key goals such as supervising environmental claims, requiring tangible evidence, and encouraging sustainable development strategies. As a result, companies must now justify their environmental claims regarding the environmental aspects of their products using solid and verifiable methods. Furthermore, European companies are obliged to become more sustainable

and transparent in their practices. They also reassess their business operations from a more sustainable perspective to comply with the requirement of this new measure. It will take some time to comply with this, but business will change over the years due to directives like this (European Commission, 2025).

For this study, other areas of research can be explored by doing a qualitative or quantitative research. Qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups can be interesting to know more deeply the desire, expectations, and values that push consumers to engage with sustainable brands. Furthermore, qualitative research can help to explore how consumers see companies that put sustainability at the core of their marketing strategy. On the other hand, quantitative methods such as surveys can be used to evaluate the influence of sustainability-focused marketing on consumer loyalty or also compare different types of sustainable communication, such as informative or emotional approaches, to find out which is the best fit to answer the research question.

In conclusion, integrating sustainability principles into marketing communication strategies is crucial for improving long-term consumer loyalty in response to shifting consumer behaviours. By using transparency, employing effective tools and engaging in authentic practices, companies can build meaningful relationships with their consumers.

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Appendices

LinkedIn Yves Rocher Post

Figure 1: Example of communication by Yves Rocher through a LinkedIn post

Yves Rocher Yves
125,484 subscribers 125,484
6 months • 🌐

#YvesRocher, No. 1 of the most virtuous beauty companies and the 2nd most acclaimed company by the French. ✨

It's a beautiful day for our doubly rewarded Brand!

🌍♻️ Yves Rocher, recognized as the most virtuous company in our category by **Capital Magazine**.

This recognition underlines our constant commitment to innovate to offer ever more demanding and efficient products while preserving our planet as well as possible. From the search for natural raw materials to the formulation of our products, each step is designed to offer a unique **#beauty** and more **#sustainable** experience.

Article to be found on newsstands in the October 2024 issue - Capital Magazine

🏆👏 Yves Rocher, 2nd company enjoying the best image according to the Posternak / **Ifop Group** barometer

From Brittany to the heart of the French there is only one step! This distinction testifies to the privileged relationship we have had with our consumers for more than 65 years and the trust they place in us. In a constantly evolving market, we also have the ability to adapt to their expectations.

Link to the article > <https://lnkd.in/ebEtQX54>

We are proud of this double recognition that salutes our **#collective commitment** and encourages us to continue on this path.
Thank you ❤️

#EntrepriseMission #ActBeautiful #MarquedeBeauté #CSR

