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Sven Rosemeier
Abstract

Title: Sustainability Marketing - The Implementation of Sustainability Communication in Marketing Related Activities

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Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how apparel and apparel brands are communicating their sustainability activities through marketing in the respective offline and online retail environments with the support of communication appeals to engage the consumer to purchase clothing items more sustainably.

Method: The study implemented a qualitative research nature. Through a semi-structured interview, six department managers of three different apparel companies have been interviewed to give input concerning their sustainability marketing activities and their use of various communication appeals within the retail environment.

Conclusion: The communication of sustainability related marketing activities is still a major challenge for the clothing companies. It has been proven however that through the implementation of communication appeals with a focus on sustainability related marketing activities a change in the consumers’ purchasing behaviour can be achieved.

Keywords: Sustainability, Marketing, Communication, Appeals, Fashion, Clothing, Price, Efforts, Efficiency
Table of Figures

Figure 1 Developments of Marketing (Based on Kumar et al., 2013) ........................................... 8
Figure 2 Marketing Mix: The Four Ps Model (Based on Kotler, 1996)........................................... 10
Figure 3 Sustainability Marketing Mix Model (Belz and Peattie, 2012).......................................... 14
Figure 4 Communication Efforts (Based on Belz and Peattie, 2012).......................................... 16
Figure 5 Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model (Based on Belz and Peattie, 2012; and Iyer and Bannerjee, 1993) ...................................................................................................... 19
Figure 6 Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model Revised........................................ 58

Table 1 Sustainability Appeal Characteristics (Based on Iyer and Bannerjee, 1993; Belz and Peattie, 2012) ................................................................................................................................ 17
Table 2 Sample Overview ............................................................................................................. 22
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background ...................................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Problem Statement and Research Gap ............................................................................. 3
   1.3 Purpose ............................................................................................................................. 4
   1.4 Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 4
   1.5 Delimitations .................................................................................................................... 5

2. Theoretical Background .......................................................................................................... 7
   2.1 Sustainability Marketing .................................................................................................. 7
      2.1.1 The Origins of Sustainability and Marketing ............................................................ 7
      2.1.2 From Ecological and Green Marketing towards Sustainability Marketing .......... 10
      2.1.3 Framework and Definition of Sustainability Marketing ......................................... 12
      2.1.4 The Aspect of Communication in Sustainability Marketing ................................. 15
         2.1.4.1 Communication Efforts and Appeals ..................................................................... 15
         2.1.4.2 The Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model ................................. 18

3. Research Methodology and Limitations ................................................................................ 20
   3.1 Research Strategy and Design ........................................................................................ 20
   3.2 Sampling ......................................................................................................................... 22
   3.3 Data Collection Method ................................................................................................. 24
   3.4 Method of Data Analysis ................................................................................................ 26
   3.5 Reliability and Validity .................................................................................................. 27
   3.6 Limitations ..................................................................................................................... 29

4. Empirical Research ................................................................................................................ 30
   4.1 Results of the Interview: Case Wise Results .................................................................. 30
1. Introduction

The first parts of this paper will define the background, problem statement, research gap and purpose. In continuation, research questions have been stated in order to define and limit the study in terms of focus and range.

1.1 Background

The change of the fashion consumers’ mindset in terms of sustainability proposes a major challenge for the whole apparel industry. The consumers have identified and learned that clothing consumption has an impact on the boundaries of the planet which includes the natural resources and social framework (Schrader & Thøgersen, 2011; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). The amount of clothing waste that is produced and managed unsustainably, plus the impact on the social and ethical aspects of using low-cost workers in developing countries creates tensions in society that needs to be resolved (Ölander & Thøgersen, 1995; Bonacich et al., 1994). Unfortunately, the rather new business model of ‘Fast Fashion’ in which apparel brands are producing fresh styles in matters of weeks has changed the way consumers perceive clothing and what they expect from apparel brands to offer them in terms of speed and quality (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009).

Attala and Carrigan (2001) have found that fashion consumers however are demanding products that are ethical and environmentally friendly manufactured, however that clashes with the wish for rapidly changing fashion trends which challenges not only the supply chain management of apparel brands but also the pillars of sustainability (Li et al., 2014). The product and value consumption has reached unsustainable levels especially when it comes to the apparel industry which has accelerated the overindulgence of consumption and increased the level of acquisitions and unsustainable disposals through cheap offerings of clothing (i.e. fast fashion) plus investments in inveigling advertisements (Schor, 2005). It can be seen that increasing numbers of apparel brands and retailers are implementing new strategies and processes to initiate a change in the consumer’s mindset towards a more sustainable consumption of clothing (Fulton and Lee, 2013). Research has already shown that sustainability efforts are taken to increase the production
of greener and more eco-friendly clothing which signals the possibility for a sustainable fashion future (Hethorn and Ulasewicz, 2008; Fletcher, 2008). This contributes to the complicated relationship between apparel brands and the consumers as every fashion brand defines sustainability, including environmental, social and financial aspects, differently which raises the question how apparel brands can communicate their sustainability activities through their marketing channels (Fletcher, 2008). According to a survey concerning the sustainability issues of the apparel industry established by Deloitte and Touche Consulting (2013) the “management of sustainability in the apparel industry is mainly focused on overall commitments to sustainability and less so on acting on the commitment and showing the results”. They further state that nine out of ten fashion companies have not a high commitment in terms of engaging with consumers regarding sustainability issues or activities. Unfortunately, as they conclude, fashion companies put not enough effort into initiating sustainable consumption strategies. As Johansson (2010) remarks that fashion consumers are expressing a growing demand for sustainable clothing but continue to pursue their interest in fast fashion. Thus, it is understandable why apparel brands are showing averse and conservative behaviour in terms of sustainability activities as the anxiety for investing in the incorrect means is still present.

On the one hand, there is the consumer who in basic terms wants to follow the trends adhoc and renews the wardrobe on a constant basis and neglects sustainability aspects completely, either by choice or lack of knowledge. On the other hand, a rise of anti-consumerism establishes itself in the fashion world in which the demand for longevity and timelessness of the garments is starting to evolve (Beard, 2008). Increasing awareness of what impact garment production has on the environment and on the people is the implication enforcing apparel brands to start acting and engaging the consumers more. Furthermore, growing awareness that the continual cycle of appetite for new garments is prodigious and uncontrollable (Joy et al., 2012; Shaw and Riach, 2011). Therefore, apparel brands need to take into account that different consumer groups exist and the marketing processes must be aligned according to the needs of those consumer groups (Beard, 2008). Unfortunately, growing uncertainty among the consumers in terms what is ethical, environmental friendly or green ‘fashion’ is in fact the reality (Carrington et al., 2010). Subsequently, confusing terminologies in terms of what sustainable consumption is makes it
difficult for the consumers to differentiate between the terms and marketing strategies become inapt (Ourahmoune et al., 2014).

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Gap

The challenge that businesses within the apparel industry are facing today, is the growing demand of sustainable clothing and the availability of information consumers demand in terms of the origin of the clothing, working conditions and environmental impact (Joergens, 2006). Furthermore, the increasing amount of environmental and social legislations proposed and implemented by governments and the change of values in the consumers’ mind have a major impact on the business practice of apparel brands (Charter et al., 2006). The question arises how apparel brands manage this growing demand and which tools they are using to inform their consumer base about their sustainability activities. Furthermore, as fashion businesses always strive for better performances and a steady improvement process, it must be analyzed if Sustainability Marketing can make a difference in business reality and creates a more efficient communication towards the consumers of the apparel brands (Deloitte and Touche, 2013).

Multiple studies have shown (Joergens, 2006; Attala and Carrigan, 2001; Sanne, 2002; Johnston et al, 2007) that ethical and sustainability conscious consumers exist and that their demands and expectations are increasing.

However other research also shows that the ethical buying behaviour of those consumers is not reliable in a practical sense. Recent research analysing the purchasing behaviour of ethical and sustainability consumers has found that they rarely perform the last step of actually transforming the mental intention to an actual purchase (Futerra, 2005; Auger and Devinney, 2007, Belk et al., 2005). Therefore, the allegation can be made that current marketing schemes and strategies are not effective enough to convert visiting ethical and sustainability consumers towards purchasing the offered sustainable products. Subsequently, the question arises how and what Sustainability Marketing can offer in order to solve the problem of the stated fashion consumer contradictions and to guide the consumers towards achieving the final purchasing step. As it has been discussed in the background chapter, fashion companies do see a definite need to invest in sustainability processes and the transformation of having sustainability as an integral part of the business
strategy is advancing. Charter *et al.* (2006) states that there is an increasing demand for Sustainability Marketing as it is offering sustainable business solutions towards satisfying consumers and other stakeholders. Sustainability Marketing will be explained and defined more thoroughly within the theoretical background chapter as it is a fundamental part of this thesis.

As been presented in the background chapter, the contemporary sustainability research focuses mostly on the supply chain management in terms of production and logistics and rarely how brands are supposed to market and communicate it towards the consumers at the point of sales (Fletcher, 2008; Aspers and Skov, 2006; Beard, 2008). In addition, even though Sustainability Marketing as a term has been acknowledged by researchers and professionals, it is yet to become an integral part of the business and focus of the fashion, clothing and textiles research (Beltz and Peattie, 2012). This research will attempt to give more insights about how apparel brands are currently communicating sustainability activities through Sustainability Marketing within their respective retail environments and what future developments can be expected in order to achieve a diverse strategy among competitors and effective sustainability communication towards the consumers.

### 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how apparel brands are communicating their sustainability activities through marketing in the respective offline and online retail environments. The question how Sustainability Marketing is used by apparel brands to market their sustainability activities and which communication appeals can be implemented to promote sustainable purchasing behaviour towards the consumers is answered.

### 1.4 Research Questions

In order to address the research gap two research questions have been formulated to provide a focus within the study. The research questions concern the Sustainability Marketing activities of apparel brands and the implementation of communication appeals in their retail environment.
The research questions are as follows:

*RQ1:* How are sustainability activities marketed and communicated through retail environments of apparel brands?

*RQ2:* How can sustainability communication appeals be interpreted and used to communicate sustainability activities of apparel brands towards the consumer?

The first research question aims to present the current state-of-the-art of how apparel brands communicate their Sustainability Marketing activities. In this paper, Sustainability Marketing activities are defined as every marketing and communication action taken by apparel brands to promote sustainability activities to their customers within their retail environment. Retail environment as a term which will be used in multiple occasions throughout this research is limited to the physical store and online environment of apparel brands. Further, the second research question will, through the qualitative research, analyse how apparel brands interpret and use sustainability communication appeals in their communication and marketing strategy in order to communicate their Sustainability Marketing activities towards the consumer side. Through these research questions, new knowledge in terms of how Sustainability Marketing as a tool functions, how it influences the marketing strategies and how it can give apparel brands a diverse method of communicating sustainability activities in their respective retail environment in order to create meaningful effects on the purchasing behaviour of the clothing consumer, will be generated.

### 1.5 Delimitations

Prior to presenting the contemporary literature and theories, it is necessary to state delimitations (Bryman, 2012). Due to the focus of the study and time limitations certain theories such as the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; 1991), the expectancy-value model (Rosenberg, 1956; Fishbein, 1963) or the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) have not been included. Reason being that this thesis has the focal point on the sustainability marketing aspect and not consumer behaviour. Therefore, the theories are named here but are not further developed within the theoretical background chapter. Furthermore, the research resolves solely
around the apparel industry and the sustainability challenges involved and the contributions are only adaptable to this specific industry. Due to the time limitations only Swedish fashion and apparel brands have been contacted and subsequently interviewed. Moreover, the research has been performed only from the apparel brands’ perspective. Additional information concerning the research process will be presented in chapter three.
2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical background chapter will present the theories and research in terms of marketing, sustainability, Sustainability Marketing, and sustainability communication in order to establish a foundation of knowledge and theories which is necessary to understand the further developments in this thesis.

2.1 Sustainability Marketing

2.1.1 The Origins of Sustainability and Marketing

The field of sustainability and marketing are fundamentally set to collide with each other. Marketing with its purpose to increase sales and constant growth is in contradiction with sustainability which aims to decrease the overall consumption and acts as a transformational change in society (Jones et al., 2008). Sustainability Marketing is an approach which attempts to form a bridge between the conventional marketing and sustainability (Belz and Peattie, 2012). Before defining the term itself it is necessary to characterize Sustainability and Marketing separately and highlight briefly where both terms derive from. Sustainability derives from the Sustainability Development and is defined by the Brundtland Report as the following:

“...[Sustainability Development] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundtland Report, 1987)

This definition refers to the growing challenge of the ever increasing consumption and production within society that contributes to global warming, pollution, lack of waste management and depletion of natural resources and demands a change in practice to enable future generations to sustain themselves (Nash, 2009). McCann-Erickson (2007) adds to the sustainability definition that it proposes a change of consumption behaviour that contradicts the contemporary ever increasing demand scheme of buying more and more. Therefore, sustainability can be seen as a societal change within society that aims to change the established order of unsustainable consumption.
Marketing as a business field has a long history and underwent several developments and changes in terms of focus as can be seen in later stages of this chapter. In order to fully grasp the road towards the final Sustainability Marketing stage it is necessary to start where marketing itself comes from and how it changed over time. Figure 1 shows the progression of the marketing term which will be described in this part of the chapter. Firstly, marketing in its original form and key founding research will be depicted, followed by ecological marketing and green marketing, greener marketing, sustainable marketing and is concluded by the final transformation towards Sustainability Marketing. In addition, it will be explained why each of the previous marketing schemes fail to adhere to the sustainability agenda. In order to keep the scope of the thesis precise and focused it has been decided to omit minor marketing developments such as greener marketing and sustainable marketing.

Figure 1 Developments of Marketing (Based on Kumar et al., 2013)
Marketing as a term contains various different definitions. According to Gronroos (1990) marketing can be described as being a philosophy that guides the thinking of an organisation plus determining concepts to organise various functions and activities of a company. Furthermore, marketing can provide a set of diverse tools and techniques i.e. packaging, promotion, distribution practices and pricing. Palmer (2000) defines marketing as the arrangement of companies’ resources to match the changing needs of the consumers. The American Marketing Association (2013) makes it clear that sustainability is not given thought in the definition of marketing as they define it 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.”

This definition fails to incorporate the limitations of the economical, social and environmental boundaries. Kotler et al. (1999) describe marketing as a “social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.” Kotler can be considered to be one of the main contributors of the marketing field through his research surrounding the marketing mix. The marketing mix is a business tool consisting of several pillars which helps companies to increase the market performance in terms of sales and presence of their offerings. Based on former marketing research (Culliton, 1948; Borden, 1964; McCarthy, 1964), Kotler refined the concept of the marketing mix and subsequently formed modern marketing approaches that aimed to provide business the opportunity to increase their competitiveness (Kotler, Saunders and Wong, 1996). The marketing mix consists of four different dimensions (See Figure 2). One of the first aspects of the marketing mix model is product. Product refers to any form of object or service that can be acquired and subsequently satisfies the need of the customer. The price pillar determines the exchange value needed for customers to take possession of a product (Kotler, 2008; Popovic, 2006).
*Place* describes the distribution channels used to sell and offer the product to the consumers and finally *promotion* deals with the various communication methods brands use to provide information about the products to their stakeholders (Kendall, 2009; Needham, 1996). Kotler revisited the marketing-mix model in 2012 and proposed a new model where the “Four P’s” consist of *people, processes, programs* and *performance*; taking intra-company resources more into consideration in combination with consumer relationships and digital technology (Keller and Kotler, 2012). Kotler’s marketing-mix model(s) depicts however just the traditional form of marketing and ignores the social, economic and environmental forces of sustainability making it unusable for further sustainability developments within marketing (Belz and Peattie, 2012).

### 2.1.2 From Ecological and Green Marketing towards Sustainability Marketing

Besides conventional marketing as described by Kotler (1996, 2012) there is a further branch of marketing which pathed the way towards Sustainability Marketing. One of the first marketing
developments that took air pollution into consideration was called *ecological marketing* developed by Kassarjian (1971). However, it soon proved to be too insufficient in order to fully cope the environmental and social aspects of sustainability as elaborated by Henion and Kinnear (1976). Therefore, ecological marketing did not fulfill the requirements for taking into account the sustainability agenda. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, a growing number of consumers are interested in purchasing green products which initiated marketers to focus on that niche. *Green marketing* according to Lee (2008) was established through three stages. Starting in the 1980’s marketers started to initiate their focus on selling greener products which had a lower impact on the environment in terms of energy efficiency for instance (Peattie and Crane, 2005). Subsequently within the second stage during the 1990’s green marketing took a backlash as consumers felt more and more brainwashed by various offerings and confusing promises which led consumers to decrease their spendings on those particular products and final purchasing decisions have been unsuccessful. In green marketing research this phenomenon is called *green washing* where companies purposely decepted consumers with false environmental commitments (Vermillion and Peart, 2010). Marketing decisions have been made that exchanged long-term customer loyalty with short-term profits diminishing the trust consumers had in environmental efforts performed by companies (Zinkhan and Carlson, 1995).

The third and final stage with the turn of the century however gave the green marketing a new impulse as new technology was implemented and stricter governmental regulations where put in place (Wong et al., 1996) in connection with millenials as the most recent consumer generation that cares more about green products and has increased customer loyalty towards green brands which unfortunately does not signify higher conversation rates when it comes to the consumption process (Smith and Brower, 2012).

Unfortunately, green marketing may have achieved to increase the performance of selected green companies however it cannot be applied to every company in every sector, namely the apparel industry. In addition, when applying Kotler’s marketing-mix model it becomes apparent that greener products might challenge the price and promotion aspect. Research has shown that green consumers refuse to pay premium prices and are to some extent still affected by the green washing backlash of the 90’s thus declining to be persuaded or attracted by environmental
campaigns (Kilbourne, 1995; Davis, 1993). Subsequently, leading to the conclusion that green marketing failed just as ecological marketing to incorporate the sustainability agenda and another marketing approach is necessary to tackle the challenges of sustainability (Belz and Peattie, 2012). Greener marketing and sustainable marketing both developed towards a holistic and responsible management approach in terms of taking into consideration stakeholder requirements and sustainable economic development however the maintenance of those relationships were still not in focus (Kumar et al., 2013).

2.1.3 Framework and Definition of Sustainability Marketing

The previous subchapters have shown that the conventional marketing approaches have failed to fully incorporate the sustainability agenda. The question arises how marketing can address the relationship between the social, economical and environmental pillars of sustainability. Sustainability Marketing is a rather new approach which attempts to tackle this problematic nature. Certainly, it is important to define what is meant by Sustainability Marketing and what aspects of sustainability it is addressing. Martin & Schouten (2014) define Sustainability Marketing as:

“...the process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers in such a way that both natural and human capital are preserved or enhanced throughout.”

Belz and Peattie (2012) provide enhanced explanations which state that Sustainability Marketing consists of:

“Planning, organizing, implementing and controlling marketing resources and programmes to satisfy consumers’ wants and needs, while considering social and environmental criteria and meeting corporate objectives.” (Belz and Peattie, 2012)

In addition, with the focus on the long-term relationship in terms of:

“... building and maintaining sustainable relationships with customers, the social environment and the natural environment”. 
The two definitions may vary in content however concern the same issue of generating sustainable value that serve the consumer’s wants and needs while ensuring that all activities of the consumption process do not distress or cross the boundaries of the sustainability pillars. Peattie and Peattie (2009) state in comparison to green marketing approaches Sustainability Marketing does not focus on “the development of new products and product substitutions among consumers” but initiates the idea of creating a meaningful progress towards sustainability which requires more radical solutions.

Rettie et al. (2012) add that the role for Sustainability Marketing is to motivate consumers to adopt to sustainable products and services as acknowledging them as the standard purchasing behaviour and neglect purchasing unsustainable products. Whereas unsustainable products should be considered discouraging and consumers should refuse them as they represent abnormal behaviour. Furthermore, Belz and Peattie (2012) describe and argue in their book Sustainability Marketing that Kotlers’ marketing mix model with the contained four P’s (price, place, promotion and product) must be transformed towards the Sustainability Marketing mix model which utilizes the ‘four Cs’ to better suit the sustainability agenda (See Figure 3). As Belz and Peattie (2012) argue, the traditional marketing mix by Kotler (1996) reflects the viewpoint of the seller and not the buyers or in other words the consumers therefore eventually misinterpreting the true needs and wants. The Sustainability Marketing mix model focuses on the customer relationships and the sustainability development instead. The four Cs consist of customer solutions, customer costs, communication and convenience. Customer solutions take a step further as the traditional ‘Product’ aspect in Kotler’s model and aim to resolve a consumer’s problem in preference of simply selling a product. Furthermore, customer solutions focus on satisfying the needs and wants but also take into consideration that there are social and environmental boundaries. Customer cost resolves not only around the financial price of a product or service but also the psychological, social and environmental costs that occur when obtaining, using and disposing a product (Belz and Peattie, 2012).
When it comes to the communication aspect, the old-fashioned one-way promotion process between consumer and brand is neglected and instead transformed towards an interactive dialogue creating not only credibility but also trust in the customers’ mindset (Belz and Peattie, 2012, Kotler, 2008). Lastly, convenience entitles the mean of providing customers with the specific products and services which satisfy their needs and wants in an easy and convenient way (Lauterborn, 1990). The Sustainability Marketing mix model marks the transformational change of sustainability and marketing. Both terms have been defined and the progression of marketing over the last decades have been demonstrated. As this thesis aims to analyse the future developments of the communication appeals in Sustainability Marketing, it is necessary to elaborate what is meant by communication within Sustainability Marketing.
2.1.4 The Aspect of Communication in Sustainability Marketing

2.1.4.1 Communication Efforts and Appeals

Communication in marketing has been in the spotlight of criticism as it usually promotes overconsumption and unsustainable purchasing behaviour among consumers (Southerton et al., 2004). However, for sustainability marketers, communication is one of the cornerstones of making consumers aware of sustainability solutions that have been developed and how they can influence the lifestyle in terms of needs and wants (Belz and Peattie, 2012). The simple process of communication relies on physics in which a sender encodes a message and transmits it through a particular medium to a receiver, who decodes and interprets it (Schramm, 1954). In marketing practice this relates to the effect for instance fashion campaigns have on consumers when promoting a new style or trend. The campaign as a sender transmits a message towards consumers’ mindset with the objective to create a purchasing need. Marketing communication was in conventional terms discussed as the fourth marketing ‘P’, promotion with the focus on advertising products and services to consumers in the most accessible and efficient way (Kotler, 2012). Through the sustainability development the term evolved into communications with the aim to build relationships and dialogue instead of a one-way transmission. Especially within Sustainability Marketing, communication is vital to inform the consumers about specific product characteristics and create awareness. Marketing communication efforts within the Sustainability framework are necessary to transmit valuable information to the consumers (Belz and Peattie, 2012). Figure 4 presents the consumer efforts or objectives that enhance the sustainability communication within retail. Generating awareness can be considered to be one of the key factors that prohibit the development of more sustainable products. For instance in fast-moving fashion markets it is necessary to extent ‘green’ niche products towards the mass market among the consumers as traditional competitors have been longer established and enjoy consumers’ trust (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008). Furthermore, informing consumers is essential for Sustainability Marketing in terms of knowledge exchange about the sustainability agenda and how they correlate to the consumers’ lifestyles (Rose et al., 2007). Reminding, persuading, reassuring and rewarding of consumers are efforts that aim to teach consumers about availability
and durability as well as convince consumers to switch over to sustainable products (Belz and Peattie, 2012).

Furthermore, reassurance that past purchases were thoughtful even in comparison with products from competitors. Verghese et al. (2012) focus on the importance of engaging the consumer through visibility and reassuring of benefits through purchasing sustainable products. Motivating and connecting as the last two efforts have the objective to engage the consumer to not just purchase a product but also to interact and respond to different marketing actions as through relationship building and interactive communication increased spending on sustainable products can be expected (Belz and Peattie, 2012). Hawkins et al. (1998) adds that emotional content within advertisement increases the attention and raises the awareness of the consumers. In
combination with the communication efforts, an early theory established by a study of sustainability-oriented print advertisements by Iyer and Bannerjee (1993) and other underlying research (Russell and Lane, 1991; Ottoman, 1991) demonstrated that there are six different kinds of appeals that have the purpose of engaging and motivating the consumers to respond. The appeals are namely: Financial appeals, management appeals, euphoria appeals, emotional appeals, zeitgeist appeals, and comparative appeals. These appeals have different characteristics and objectives in the field of sustainability communication. Table 1 showcases these characteristics.

Table 1 Sustainability Appeal Characteristics (Based on Iyer and Bannerjee, 1993; Belz and Peattie, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Linked to price reductions from resource conversation or to donations to charitable causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Positioning of the company as part of the green movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphoria</td>
<td>Invoking a sense of well-being by highlighting the naturalness or health benefits of a product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Evoke fear for the future or guilt about our impact on the planet, or to generate a sense of empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeitgeist</td>
<td>An attempt to link into prevailing social concerns about environmental and social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>Showcasing superior product characteristics directly in comparison to competing products with the support of celebrity endorsements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Iyer and Bannerjee (1993), these appeals can additionally be divided into three generic types of appeal. These generic types are namely rational, emotional and moral appeals. Rational appeals are focus on the consumer’s self interest, emotional appeals on emotional connections and finally, moral appeals aim to engage consumers’ sense of right and wrong. Beltz and Peattie (2012) describe that the rational generic type can be connected with financial and management appeals, and euphoria plus the emotional appeal are coherent with the moral and
emotional generic type. Zeitgeist and comparative appeal are excluded to the generic types. The next subchapter will explain the establishment and the development of the appeal-effort communication model that is tested in this research.

2.1.4.2 The Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model

As part of the theoretical foundation of this paper, the concept of Belz and Peattie (2012) in combination with the framework of Iyer and Bannerjee (1993) has been related to each other as a relationship as shown in Figure 5. Both the inner ring of appeals and the outer ring of efforts have an impact on the decision making process when it comes to the sustainable purchasing behaviour of the consumer. Hence, they are represented as circles around the consumer. In the center-point of the model the consumer is exposed to the sustainability activities and appeals of the brand. The connection between the rings can be explained as both, appeals and efforts, have the objective to transmit the activities within sustainability of the apparel companies towards the consumer. Therefore, a relationship exists between them as one complements the other. The outer ring of efforts can be understood as the sustainability activities of the brand focusing on engaging the consumer to motivate, inform, connect, reassure etc. In other words, through the company’s use of the sustainability appeals, the companies implement the efforts to influence the purchasing behaviour (Belz and Peattie, 2012; Iyer and Bannerjee, 1993). The focus of this research are the sustainability communication appeals and to explore how they could be improved concerning the Sustainability Marketing towards the consumers. Furthermore, the research will investigate what sustainability activities the apparel brands are implementing to engage the consumer regarding the sustainability efforts. In summary, the sustainability appeals shape the sustainability efforts and through the efforts the appeals are implemented in the retail environment. In addition, it has to be stated that the theoretical foundation used in this research is a general concept applicable to non-industry specific entities. Through the research, the Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model will be adjusted to the characteristics of the apparel industry.
Figure 5 Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model (Based on Belz and Peattie, 2012; and Iyer and Bannerjee, 1993)
3. Research Methodology and Limitations

In this chapter the research method will be presented in order to indicate the way the research has been conducted in terms of theoretical and empirical approaches and how the process of data collection has been performed. It will be shown why the selected method has been chosen and what kind of limitations were set in place to demarcate the research.

3.1 Research Strategy and Design

In order to certify that the research has been conducted in a scientific procedure, it has to be stated what research strategy and design was implemented to analyse and frame the extracted data. Firstly it is necessary to consider epistemological and ontological considerations which refer to the process of how the knowledge is collected and understood. When it comes to epistemology in this research the position of interpretivism has been chosen as it is aimed towards understanding how and why social processes occur. However, it has to taken into consideration that this position requires the possibility that clear patterns might not emerge (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, ontological foundations have been implemented as this research resolves around the interaction of social actors within businesses and the implementations of concepts (Ding and Foo, 2002). The nature of the thesis is deductive which indicates that on the basis of a theory, observations and findings are concluded and compared with the used model (Bryman, 2012). However, through the findings and adjustments to the theory in later stages of the research it has been identified that there are indeed some influences of inductive research detectable. The sustainability appeal-effort communication model serves as a theoretical foundation and the data input of the observations will feed the model and test its usability in practice. The decision has been made to implement a qualitative research strategy as in-depth data is needed to contribute to the chosen Sustainability Marketing field. Qualitative research is characterised by generating non-numerical data and aims to understand people’s attitudes, beliefs, experiences, interactions or behaviors (Gibson et al., 2004). Kirk and Miller (1986) add that qualitative research involves “watching people in their own territory” and allows in-depth conversations about thoughts and feelings within the participants’ subjects. As this research has the objective to discuss and analyze if the communication model and the contained appeals are applied in the apparel industry in order to transmit sustainability messages, quantitative research
methods seem not to be appropriate for this research as the topic has to be discussed in-depth and statistical tools cannot reach those depths of expressions.

As the research strategy has been presented it is necessary to elaborate the used research design. According to Bryman (2012) a research design can be defined as being “a framework for the collection and analysis of data” and further “reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process”. Within this thesis a comparative case study design has been chosen to frame the extracted data as multiple cases (several apparel companies) are used as a data source. Within this design various cases are compared with each other and similarities and differences are analysed. Yin (1994) and Eisenhardt (1989) argue that case studies are most appropriate when exploring theories and their connected key variables and their relationships. Furthermore, they add that case studies are carried out very close to professionals or in other words practitioners within the industry which adds to the value of the data. In the case of this thesis, the case study approach would provide the appropriate framework in order to connect the sustainability communication theory with the experience of the professionals within the industry.

Typically, a basic case study demands an intensive and detailed analysis of a complex and particular single case (Bryman, 2012; Stake, 1995). However, for this research it is necessary that multiple cases or companies are analysed as the different departments and expertises of the professionals could lead to different results within the data collection process. Furthermore, different apparel companies incorporate different values and guidelines when it comes to Sustainability Marketing and communication, which strengthens the fact that multiple cases are needed in order to compare the findings. Through a comparative and cross-sectional design approach, the various cases will be confronted in a qualitative manner and the similarities or differences analysed. A cross-sectional design approach is defined collecting data on more than one case at a particular point of time, collecting qualitative data and analysing patterns within the answers given by the participants (Bryman, 2012). A cross-sectional design uses a ‘rectangle’ of data that opposes the various cases (in other words apparel companies) with the observations made during the data collection (Marsh, 1982).
3.2 Sampling

Within the research process, it has to be demarcated which participants or in other words companies are eligible for the study. The process of sampling describes which segment of the overall population of apparel companies has been selected for the research (Bryman, 2012). According to Coyne (1997) the type of sampling used has a major impact on the quality of the research. Therefore, a purposive sampling has been implemented in this research. By definition this sample type internalises a non-probability form which means that companies were not selected randomly but along definite purpose (Coyne, 1997; Bryman, 2012). After researching the different sub-sampling types, it has been decided to use a criterion sampling type. This sampling type recognises all units (or companies) that meet certain criteria that are necessary for the research (Bryman, 2012). As a consequence, apparel companies were selected which fullfil certain criterias.

First, the company must be acting within the apparel industry and be actively communicating or advertising their products, values or sustainability activities through their retail environment (offline and online). Furthermore, due to time limitations and accessibility it has been decided to only take into consideration and subsequently contact apparel companies situated in Sweden as face to face interviews could be more realisable. These two criterias limit the sample size and demarcate the population which enables the researcher to ensure a focused and high quality research. Various Swedish apparel brands have been contacted with the result that three apparel brands agreed to be interviewed. Table 2 presents the samples and displays the successfully contacted companies, interviewed positions and mode of the interview.

Table 2 Sample Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apparel brands</th>
<th>Positions</th>
<th>Mode</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gina Tricot</td>
<td>Visual Merchandising</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Production Manager</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quality Manager</td>
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The contacted and successfully interviewed companies, especially H&M and Gina Tricot, can be considered to be appropriate representatives of the fast apparel industry. Both apparel companies use sustainability communication to a large extent in their retail environment. Didriksons generated data concerning the general apparel industry and their challenges with sustainability activity issues. Didriksons has been chosen as their represent a traditional and conventional apparel company. Further, their focus on functional and toxic-free clothing make them valuable when it comes to the elaboration concerning certain appeals such as the euphoria appeal. It can be stated that the interviewed respondents added valuable data concerning the research topic and in addition sufficient data could be gathered to reach theoretical saturation. The conclusion of theoretical saturation could be made as the gathered data began to recapitulate itself and no new insights could be obtained by interviewing more apparel brands. This is in accordance with the requirements of qualitative research as no new data can be extracted and the concepts of the theory are fully developed (Morse, 2004). As one can see in Table 2, an imbalance exists with the weight of the various interviewed apparel companies. Through limited availability of resources it was only possible to interview one department at H&M and Didriksons and four departments at Gina Tricot. As a brands’ corporate culture is unique, repetition when it comes to the elaboration of the sustainability marketing activities within Gina Tricot have been identified. Overall the objective was to interview different department managers. However the power of the brand culture has been underestimated and the imbalance in terms of an uneven interview weight exists. The high amount of interviews performed at Gina Tricot and the data generated may interfere with the external validity of the study as more data is generated from the interviews of Gina Tricot then from the others.
3.3 Data Collection Method

When it comes to the data collection method, it has been decided to use a semi-structured interviews for the primary data collection. Semi-structured interviews in a qualitative study are characterised by having a fixed set of questions and structure (Wilson, 2014). Furthermore, open-ended questions where the interview-subjects can express their opinions and statements openly and free of restrictive answers during the interview are a further characteristic of this chosen data collection method. Therefore, the first part of the interview consisted of fixed set questions about the general sustainability activities of the apparel brand and the future outlook of their Sustainability Marketing. The second part of the interview was dedicated towards the theory of this thesis and questions were regarded towards the sustainability appeals and their influence on the consumers purchasing behaviour. The decision of using a semi-structured was made due to the requirement of explorative data in order to adapt the model towards the apparel industry. Moreover, as Carson et al. (2001) state, this method allows the interviewer to explore the answers of the interviewees as the flexible nature enable follow-up questions which increases the depth of the interview and the discussion. In practice this has been realised through making the interview questions available to the respondents prior to the interviews which allowed the respondents to prepare their answers and to reflect the topic of discussion so that follow-up questions by the researcher could be answered efficiently. This decision might have had a major influence on the validity of the study as the interviewees could have answered differently if they would not have been exposed to the questions beforehand. Due to brands’ non-disclosure agreements the decision was made to sent the questions before the interview in order to ensure that the interviewees were allowed to provide input. Semi-structured interviews propose some weaknesses which the researcher has to take into consideration. Wilson (2014) states for instance that the interviewer has to be careful to not give cues that might lead the interviewee into particular answers and in addition the interview has to provide consistency throughout all the performed interviews. Due to the complexity of the topic concerning the appeals, it has been realised that during the interviews further explanations were necessary in order to receive appropriate responses from the interviewees. This, additionaly might have affected the research quality. As the research method has a qualitative nature and the answers to the questions are
open it is possible that there is a lot of flexibility within the data which can make it difficult to compare and subsequently generalisations can be hard to establish. In order to avoid the potential weaknesses, the interviews were conducted strictly according to the interview template however due to the nature of qualitative research equal data sets between the respondents could not be achieved but through the interview guidance the topic of discussion has always been retained.

First contact basis was in all cases via email and subsequent negotiations about possibilities, mode of the interview, time frame and discretion. If possible, face-to-face interviews were conducted and otherwise the interview template containing all questions was sent via email and a telephone interview was performed afterwards. Concerning the face-to-face interviews it has to be stated that the environment in which the interviews have been performed plays a major role (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, all the face-to-face interviews were performed in closed meeting rooms to ensure a calm and professional environment. Also the telephone interviews were, from the side of the interviewer, conducted in closed rooms to decrease possible disturbances. As one can see in table 2 the interview with H&M was conducted firstly with an E-mail interview and afterwards a telephone interview was conducted. Reason being that the interviewee had to double check if input was allowed to be provided. After the questions were checked and shortly answered, it was agreed to perform a telephone interview to discuss the questions more in detail. The interview questions and the general template can be seen in the appendix. The interview questions have been divided into two parts or categories. First, general questions about Sustainability Marketing activities have been asked in order to introduce the interviewee to the topic and focus of the interview. Within the general questions category it has been asked what activities are currently performed, how Sustainability Marketing as a field is developing and growing within the company and questions regarding different types of communication and their efficiency of influencing the purchasing behaviour of the consumer. The second part of the interview consisted of focused questions about the communication appeals, their importance and possible interpretations in practice. Furthermore, data has been added through conducting an online research of the three cases. Thus, complementing the data with their online representation and generating data that supports answering the research questions.
3.4 Method of Data Analysis

When it comes to the method of analysing the collected data it has been chosen to implement a coding process. According to Charmaz (1983) coding allows the researcher to “label, separate, compile, and organize data”. Moreover, it is used to review the transcriptions of the interviews in order to find significant theoretical components which is the key element of the analytical process (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). It has been decided to incorporate the coding after the transcriptions of the interviews were completed instead of initiating the coding during the process of transcribing. This allowed for a coherent labelling of topics, important key terms and discussion fields. Criteria for the coding were statements that concerned the sustainability activities of the brand, present and future views on the subject plus elaborating on the communication appeals. The statements were then grouped into themes and matched to the interview questions to establish a coherent data structure for the result chapter. The identified themes were the following:

- Current Sustainability Marketing and communication activities
- Growth potential of Sustainability Marketing and challenges
- Types of communication used
- Differentiation Strategy
- Evaluation and implementation of sustainability appeals
- The future of Sustainability Marketing

Through this decision, it was possible to show patterns in sustainability activities and parallels within the data and draw conclusions on statements between the individual respondents concerning the sustainability communication appeals (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The analysis of parallels and pattern can be considered a necessary step as it was important for the theoretical framework, in detail the sustainability appeal-effort communication model, to be fostered with the interpretations and input of the respondents. It has to stated, that the author decided on which data had enough importance in order to be qualified as input for the model. Furthermore, through the semi-structured interview design, the transcriptions had a clear structure and flow which allowed for an efficient coding process in respect to the criteria between the individual data sets.
which allowed for the establishment for the grouping of discussion themes. Subsequent to the coding process, the most important parts of the coded data of each interview have been stated in the results chapter. Data which seemed to be insignificant, such as information about general sustainability thoughts or data that had not direct relations to the field of research, has been disregarded. Then within the analysis chapter, the different topics of discussion have been divided into several subchapters. First, the various implemented sustainability activities have been discussed and afterwards the sustainability communication appeals have been compared to each other on the basis of the responses. As described in the theoretical background chapter, the sustainability appeal-effort communication model serves as the framework of this paper and the collected data was used to feed the model and test its validity. Therefore, the analysis of the data aims to test each of the appeals of its usability for sustainability communication and practical implementation within the apparel industry. Ultimately, through the use of coding valuable connections between the extracted data sets and the proposed theory frameworks was established and analysed efficiently. Concerning the online research of the interviewed apparel brands, the analysis focused on studying how those brands present their sustainability activities within their online representation. Furthermore, the decision has been made to anonymize the interviewees and replace the names with the coherent department manager label. Further, through the analysis of the data it was clear that the newly discovered knowledge would require the need of additional references from other researchers within the discussion chapter in order to adjust the Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model more in detail.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity of the research have been taken into consideration throughout the whole research process to guarantee the quality of the study. The interviews have been recorded and transcriptions created to enable analysis of the data. The interviewed companies and interviewees are named which allows for repetition of the study and subsequently fulfills the requirement of reliability according to Silverman (1997) and Bryman (2012). Furthermore, it can be expected that iterations of the interviews will lead to the same conclusions and data generations if performed multiple times with various other brands. Moreover, conducting interviews with department managers from other brands than the sampled ones can be expected to lead to the
same conclusions. However, it must be acknowledged that within the realms of a qualitative study it is not possible to receive the exact same data in case of a repeated study. A rapid change in social or consumer trends or in business nature could lead to a change of response from the interviewees. Therefore, the demands for internal and external reliability have been met by the researcher. When it comes to the validity of the research, the differentiation between internal and external validity has to be made. Internal validity has been assured as the researcher’s observations match with the theoretical developments of the study and coherence throughout the research which is one of the core foundations of internal validity (Mason, 1996). Every participant had the opportunity to revise the data and approve the usage of it with the presented research. Furthermore, the selection of respondents and the respective expertise within their professions matched with the theoretical propositions. Therefore, the aspects of internal validity have been respected as the selection of the respondents and the generated data contribute to the theoretical propositions and lead to valuable conclusions. External validity describes the usability and generalizations of the research across multiple study fields (Cho and Trent, 2006). It can be argued that the research achieved analytical generalisability concerning brands active in the apparel industry. It has to be stated that the study is not applicable to non-apparel brands. The Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model has been explicitly adjusted to the parameters of apparel brands and generalisations are only applicable to apparel brands specifically due to the implementation of the style appeal. Furthermore, it has to be stressed that the model has been adjusted towards the opinions of the interviewed department managers and brands which leads to the conclusion that the model contains the input of just the three brands and the six department managers. Meaning that more data input and more revisions of the model could lead to different adjustments of the model. In addition, as mentioned before there is an imbalance of interview weight throughout the sample which might affected the outcome of the research very strongly. Nevertheless, within the apparel industry external validity has been partly achieved as the model can be implemented by apparel brands performing in various segments such as luxury, outdoor or sport which underlines the theoretical saturation. Furthermore, the research is based on three diverse apparel brands and six different department managers have been interviewed which establishes a valid foundation of the theory. Therefore the external validity according to the parameters stated by Bryman (2012) are partly met.
3.6 Limitations

During the research process certain limitations have been set and identified. First and foremost, the conducted research has been performed within Sweden and therefore only Swedish apparel companies have been sent interview requests to. This decision has been made on the basis of increasing the possibility for face-to-face interviews and easier access to the companies. However, it has to be stated that the choice of the data collection method has the disadvantage of being very time consuming which may have led to companies denying or to ignore the interview requests, leading to a rather low feedback-rate. Within the companies, certain department managers were preferred to be interviewed. Namely marketing and sustainability managers as well as visual merchandising and communication responsible employees. The filter was implemented to address the Sustainability Marketing and communication issues and developments towards those employees who have to deal with those aspects on a daily basis. However, as the research progressed and networks have been established opportunities arose to also interview employees from the quality and sourcing departments. These interviews have been included to present different perspectives of various departments within a clothing company.
4. Empirical Research

This chapter will present the gathered results of the performed interviews. Every clothing brand within the primary data collection has been dedicated an individual subchapter and the data is written down according to the themes of the discussion.

4.1 Results of the Interview: Case Wise Results

4.1.1 H&M

H&M is one of the major global clothing retailers, distributing merchandise in 54 countries. Due to H&M’s size and production output, they are constantly in the spotlight when it comes to sustainability issues. The interview was performed with a Sustainability Communication Planner for H&M at the Head Office in Stockholm, Sweden. The interview questions were firstly answered via email and a subsequent telephone interview has been performed to answer follow-up questions and to elaborate in greater detail about the issues.

Current Sustainability Marketing and communication activities.

In adherence to the interview-template (See appendix) general questions about the sustainability activities of H&M have been asked as a starting point. When it comes to the sustainability activities that H&M performs, it was stated that in general among apparel brands there are various approaches. Certain brands have a limited marketing communication around sustainability whereas other brands engage much more with consumers and take many more opportunities. In terms of H&M, it was described that the activities are implemented as a holistic approach dealing with more “eco-friendly products and collections, cause-related marketing” or clothes recycling initiatives within the retail environment to engage the consumers.
**Growth potential of Sustainability Marketing and challenges.**

Furthermore, regarding the growth-potential and future role of sustainability the Sustainability Communication Planner commented that:

> “Sustainability communication will become more important but also more subtle, i.e. integrated into general communication and using less sustainable wordings”.

However, regarding the challenges of sustainability communication and the development of the field, two major issues were stated. First, complex topics of various economic and environmental aspects were challenging to communicate and therefore the engagement can be difficult as the Sustainability Communication Planner stated:

> “Many topics such as wages, water, pollution, climate change etc. may be perceived as quite abstract by Scandinavian consumers.”

Secondly, through the history of negative publicity within the apparel business and specifically the backlashes of certain sustainability communication activities, various clothing retailers’ motivation to communicate sustainability issues proactively have been diminished.

**Types of communication used.**

In connection with the next question it was asked which communication types are more efficient than others, the Sustainability Communication Planner stated that the focus should lie on ‘what’ is communicated through each channel. It was refered that short messages are transmitted more efficient when placed on hang-tags or in-store advertisement whole others, more comprehensive and detailed information is communicated more satisfactory via the corporate website and CSR-reports. Moreover, social media channels are also an efficient way to communicate around sustainable fashion or brand building activities such as using events or films transmit information and inspiration. It was stated:
“That is a complex question to answer as I would say that it is more about “what” is communicated through each type of communication. Some channels are more efficient for short and “hands-on” messages such as hang tags and in-store advertisement. While others are great to communicate comprehensive and detailed information like the corporate website and the CSR report. Social media is good to communicate around sustainable fashion or brand building activities and films are great to mix information and inspiration.”

**Differentiation Strategy.**

Concerning the differentiation strategy and the question what makes H&M’s sustainability communication special H&M commented that:

“Our strength and challenge resides in our size and global presence. Meaning that we reach consumers in 54 countries with the same sustainability messages.”

H&M decided to keep the communication globally, while knowing that other retailers might have a differentiated strategy of locally adapted communication. A further aspect of differentiation mentioned was the specific marketing of conscious collections which are made of more sustainable materials to engage the consumers.

**Evaluation and implementation of sustainability appeals.**

H&M started off by mentioning that the comparative appeal, which encloses the showcasing of superior product characteristics directly with competing products sometimes with the use of celebrities is “always important for brands in retail where prices might be quite similar and other added-values can make the difference.” Furthermore, it was considered that the management and euphoria appeals being very value-adding concerning the brand-building which is important for some brands. Furthermore, emotional and zeitgeist appeals are valuable to create a movement and engage with consumers around specific actions and topics concerning sustainable purchasing behaviour. Regarding the financial appeal H&M commented that:
“It is still a very strong motivation for consumers [price], but it is not perceived as a driver for communication for companies.”

There H&M stated that mostly the management, euphoria, emotional and comparative appeals are used and all of them are used however not at once but according to their campaigns and advertisement strategies the focus of the appeals changes. Following with the question of how the appeals are incorporated, H&M stated that:

“It is the comparative appeal that prevails, with the focus on more sustainable products or materials in combination with the euphoria appeal.”

With comparative appeal meaning the use of celebrities like Olivia Wilde who is currently promoting the Conscious Exclusive collection of H&M.

The future of Sustainability Marketing.

Unfortunately, the Sustainability Communication Planner was unable to give any input to question number ten. It was emphasized however on the final question regarding the future of Sustainability Marketing and communication that sustainability will be more integrated in marketing as a added-value process and as it more develops nobody will speak any longer of “sustainability communication and marketing”. Further, H&M added that the consumers will expect sustainability added-values or in other words stories about how brands and products have a positive impact on the planet and people. This, H&M stated, will be incorporated in a brand’s standard communication.
4.1.2 Gina Tricot

Gina Tricot is one of Sweden’s biggest clothing retailer focusing on womenswear. There actions within sustainability with projects such as ‘The Good Project’ and their use of green architecture when it comes to Gina Tricot’s Headquarter in Borås made them eligible for this study. A Visual Merchandiser Manager at the Headquarter of Gina Tricot responsible for implementing the Sustainability Marketing and communication activities within the retail environment in the physical stores has been interviewed. Further, a Production Manager, a Quality Assurance Manager and a Sustainability Manager also took part in the study. Their knowledge about sustainability consumer demands and value chain management in terms of sustainability made them qualified for this study. Due to the closeness of their working field the results have been combined. The interviews have been performed at the Gina Tricot Head Quarter in Borås, Sweden.

Current Sustainability Marketing and communication activities.

According to the Visual Merchandising Manager, Gina Tricot currently focuses promoting sustainability activities online and offline. In addition, the so-called ‘Good Project’ is the core sustainability representation of Gina Tricot. The Good Project is a Gina Tricot collection which solely uses sustainable materials. The Visual Merchandising Manager stated that the ‘Good Project’ collections are available in the stores in dedicated areas and also serves as a online platform where information about sustainability can be found concerning Gina Tricot’s practices. Currently, known Scandinavian fashion bloggers are used to market and communicate their sustainability actions and collections. When it comes to why Gina Tricot has chosen fashion bloggers, The Visual Merchandising Manager commented that:

“We are making campaigns with Swedish bloggers, they have sustainability blogs and they are rather big in Sweden, [...] we have chosen those as they are reliable and trustworthy persons to have as a front face for this campaign.”
Gina Tricot utilizes those bloggers as stylists who select specific sustainable garments to be then presented in the campaign areas of the store. The Visual Merchandising Manager remarked the use of social media and how QR-Codes are used to directly link the consumer towards the sustainability activities of Gina Tricot on their online website.

Contributing to the other respondents from Gina Tricot concerning the sustainability activities and communication, The Sustainability Manager described that all spectrums, online and offline, at Gina Tricot are now covered when it comes to the sustainability activities. The Sustainability Manager remarked the ‘Good Project’ representation online as an information portal as well as offline in form of shop displays and actual sustainable collections. In addition, emphasis was put again on the collaboration with Swedish fashion bloggers and their sustainable collection choices. However, physical stores propose major challenge within the Sustainability Marketing as he proposed:

“It is very difficult to translate the online content to the store because it is so much, its a rich content online and its too difficult to get that across.”

Concerning the sustainability activities of Gina Tricot from the production and quality assurance perspective, it has to be stated that a majority takes place at the other end of the value chain towards the supplier. According to the Production Manager and Quality Assurance Manager, their work can be considered to be the foundation of the sustainability activities as it is the preset for a trustworthy relationship and communication with the costumer. The Production Manager commented that her work with production includes that sustainable materials must be bought from suppliers that work in coherence with Gina Tricot’s policies. Only then it is possible to communicate this information forward to the consumer. The Quality Assurance Manager added, concerning the work within quality assurance that it is important to find ways to transform the complexity of chemicals and quality aspects into an efficient communication that can be understood as otherwise sustainability activities become obsolete and useless.
Growth potential of Sustainability Marketing and challenges.

When questioned about the role of Sustainability Marketing and its importance in the future The Sustainability Manager commented that brands will be forced to integrate more Sustainability Marketing as the competitors are investing more and more in it. The Visual Merchandising Manager from the visual department stated that she sees a definite growth-potential as the demands from the consumer side are increasing steadily and apparel brands have to prepare themselves for that.

Challenges the Visual Merchandising Manager encountered in her sustainability work is the increasing demand of more sustainable clothing in the stores. It was stated that an increase of sustainable clothing production is necessary but it is a long step-by-step process. The growing awareness of consumers and questions about how the garments are made and where they are originating from propose a major challenge according to the Visual Merchandising Manager as it is difficult to transmit those information with the support of visual merchandising. She added that the complexity of sustainability may even be too hard to communicate to the customer. The Visual Merchandising Manager explained that:

“It is difficult to explain how garment sewers are sometimes working with unsustainable materials and then a couple of hours later they work with sustainable materials for other clothing companies in the same factory.”

The Sustainability Manager further added other challenging factors such as training of ever-replacing store employees and limited capabilities of print media to transmit the sustainability content within the store areas. Furthermore, the Sustainability Manager discovered was the competition between the sustainability advertisements and the advertisement for the ‘normal’ collections which interferes with the financial efficiency of a retail store. It was added that the existent sustainability problematic on a product level is:
“One obvious challenge is that when you say on product level. One product is good in a sustainability perspective, does that automatically mean that the other products are bad?”

Furthermore, the complexity of sustainability in all its various excesses are according to the Sustainability Manager simply not explainable in a retail environment. As a possible solution it was proposed to implement omni-channel marketing, the connection between the online and offline world.

**Types of communication used.**

Concerning the question which type of communication works the best for her work, The Visual Merchandising Manager reflects that social media and the use of application such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat are the most efficient way to reach out to the rather young target group. Furthermore, The Visual Merchandising Manager added that in-store advertisements can be very useful, especially in the campaign areas. However, it is still very challenging to engage the consumer with the Good Project and according to the Visual Merchandising Manager being specific about the labelling and materials is utmost important. When asked about the different communication channels and their importance it was stated that the online channel is very important and PR as a tool to use every opportunity to talk about sustainability at schools and conferences. Objective here is to be influential. The Sustainability Manager summarized stating that:

“So in one sense, mass communication in terms of online and omni-channel communication, is a very targeted communication and very efficient.”
Differentiation Strategy.

When asking about the differentiation to their competitors, both the Quality Assurance Manager and Production Manager described and agreed how sustainability is incorporated within the collections as a long-term strategy. Ultimate goal according to the Production Manager is to increase the percentage of sustainable clothing in the collections as part of the production objective but also as an aspect for marketing to the consumer. The Quality Assurance Manager argued that through the sustainability team, the combined knowledge and certain buying regulations within Gina Tricot, sustainability activities are good measures in comparison with their competitors. Both described how the drive for sustainability activities come from within the company.

The Quality Assurance Manager stated that:

“*We have come along way on quite a short period and I would say its because we are so many people involved from different areas. Our managers and administrators in our sustainability group. We are set up quite well and knowledgeable and connected. Its possible to achieve a lot within the company and to develop in this area.*”

Concerning the competitors and Gina Tricot’s differentiation strategy, the Sustainability Manager referred to the ‘Good Project’ and the communication of sustainability as adventurous and fun even when it comes to factory presentations in Bangladesh.

Evaluation and implementation of sustainability appeals.

Concerning the communication appeals and there importance, the Visual Merchandising Manager argued that the management appeal and the coherent positioning of the company within the green movement may be important however is very difficult if not followed through to a very high degree as the trustworthiness might suffer. Gina Tricot may achieve some aspects of the management appeal, however does not recognize this appeal as being of high importance for them. Gina Tricot and their sustainability team visit factories in the sourcing countries and
communicate that via their online presence but do not focus a lot of resources on the communication in that regard. Furthermore, the Visual Merchandising Manager saw the financial appeal as being critically important. She remarked that the price is a very important indicator but also a challenging one. The Visual Merchandising Manager did not believe that a lowered price in comparison with unsustainable garments in the store is a trustworthy option. The objective, according to the Visual Merchandising Manager, should be to attempt to be equal in price.

The comparative appeal and the use of celebrities is considered to be the most valuable option for Gina Tricot when it comes to the visual merchandising. As the Visual Merchandising Manager stated, the face recognition and the trustworthiness of tastemakers such as fashion bloggers allow them to engage the consumers in the most efficient way possible. Through social media the bloggers can pinpoint the sustainable collections of Gina Tricot and raise awareness to the consumers according to the Visual Merchandising Manager. Gina Tricot also identified face recognition however is not enough. In today’s information age it is important to showcase the choice celebrities more in detail. The Visual Merchandising Manager commented that:

“It is important with models you use, like celebrities. You want to know more about the celebrity. What kind of person is it. Not yes she is a singer or an actress, how does her wardrobe look like? What is she eating? What clubs is she going to? You want to know everything. You want to be there yourself.”

When it comes to the euphoria appeal and the usage of well-being appeals in the advertisements and campaigns, the Visual Merchandising Manager mentioned that this was an aspect that must be used more in the campaigns as it helps explaining to the consumers what benefits of well-being they could receive when buying more sustainable clothing. However, the Visual Merchandising Manager also argued that in the whole discussion about the communication there is also the double moral of on the one hand to motivate consumers to buy more sustainable clothing, and on the other to persuade consumers to consume less clothing. Concerning the emotional appeal, the Visual Merchandising Manager commented that it is necessary to link emotions to the sustainability issues in a positive way. Due to the high risk of backlashes this appeal is not used in an extensive manner. The zeitgeist appeal as elaborated by the Visual Merchandising Manager is incorporated in a sense that the designers gather information about
current trends that are used for the collections. This appeal as the Visual Merchandising Manager described, proposes a challenge as sustainability might as well be a temporary trend and she emphasized that it is necessary to produce sustainable trend product that matches the zeitgeist of the time which can be difficult as societal trends can change. When it comes to the sustainability appeals from the production and quality perspective and the financial appeal in particular, the Production Manager commented how a certain price strategy is in place:

“Our strategy is to have the same price in order to make it easier for the costumer to choose between the collection. In many cases we had 99 SEK before for a regular t-shirt. And now we have 99 SEK for an organic t-shirt. In general the prices are the same for sustainable materials.”

The Production Manager also added that this creates a challenge as sustainable materials are more expensive in buying and therefore other appeals must be worked on to balance the costs out. Concerning the management appeal, both stated an immense importance. Repeated theme of the management appeal by both respondent was the support of the top management. The Quality Assurance Manager described:

“The management appeal is really important, if I dont get support from the company then its not worth it. If I dont have the management with me. I will never achieve anything. You need the top management. Otherwise the argument will always be that things are too expensive. Why should we be so strict in chemicals? The change comes from within the company. […] Otherwise we are not able to get this information out maybe.”

When discussing the euphoria appeal, the Production Manager commented how the goal of Gina Tricot and its products is to market a fresh and trendy lifestyle that can be incorporated by the consumers:
“We want the customer to see that this garment is good for the environment, its good for you when you wear it. Its a more modern way of producing a garment and thats a core focus of the marketing. Its always fresh and contains new thinking.”

Both commented in connection with the euphoria appeal that it is important to also spotlight the emotional appeal. Gina Tricot uses images of their workforce of their sourcing factories in order to evoke positive emotions from their consumers as positive work ethics are being portrayed. It was explained that people give consumers are more direct sense about the empowerment and welfare. In addition, the Production Manager supports the view of the Visual Merchandising Manager from the visual merchandising department that the comparative appeal is an important tool for Gina Tricot. However, it is necessary to limit the use of this appeal as the Production Manager explained:

“I think its sometimes better to use it from time to time and not always. When we see that a blogger, or famous person is matching what we want to show and what we see in the fashion then we’ll use the opportunity. Then its time to do it but not as a constant because also then its quite expensive. We need to choose the opportunity to make it interesting for the customer.”

It was mentioned that the aim of it is an attempt to engage the ‘Gina Girl’, the target group of Gina Tricot with the usage of familiar faces. In comparison to other interviewees, both interpreted the zeitgeist appeal as being incorporated through taking present sustainability trend into account when buying new materials and designing new collections. Furthermore, they added that sustainability became one of their core values through implementation of the zeitgeist appeal. When asked about the most important appeal from their perspective, both agreed upon the management appeal as the most important. They argued that, through the engagement within the company and the support from the top management this may be very useful to communicate outside towards the consumer. Subsequently, the Sustainability Manager was asked about the communication appeals, starting with the financial appeal. The Sustainability Manager commented that the financial appeal was important to the extent that it ensures the economic survival for the brand yet that aspect is untranslatable to the consumer. Therefore, a take-back
programme for used garments has been implemented in order to engage the consumers. When asked about the management appeal, the Sustainability Manager agreed the use of that specific appeal however dismisses the commitment towards the green movement but sees opportunity for being part that is fashion in the future. Regarding the euphoria appeal, there is no connection seen between garments and health benefits but Gina Tricot attempts to provide the sense of it. The Sustainability Manager argued that:

”Because the right choice is to be, to show some solidarity with the people of choosing i.e. cotton. If you are using organic cotton you are contributing to a better life of a cotton farmer.”

When it comes to the emotional appeal, the Sustainability Manager described how Gina Tricot would never utilize guilt or fear in their advertisements but focus on positive emotions and a sense of empowerment. In addition, it was stated that Gina Tricot will not focus on educating consumers about what is the ethical right purchase but present sustainable clothing that Gina Tricot believes is fashionable as the Sustainability Manager stated:

”It's not the responsibility of the consumer to be educated or empowered. We present something that we believe is fashionable. Gina Tricot says this is fashion. You could come by our store and you can experience fashion. That is what we are selling. If we believe sustainability is fashionable, it is fashionable. We are hardly an authority.”

With regard to the zeitgeist appeal, the Sustainability Manager clearly stated that there is no usability for the appeal in a practical Sustainability Marketing strategy. The comparative appeal, according to the Sustainability Manager, is widely used within Gina Tricot’s Sustainability Marketing and a definitive use can be acknowledged. The Sustainability Manager commented:

“I believe that for if you can buy a top in a good quality for 99 SEK at Gina Tricot as compared to the competitors, that is a good thing. You buy something that is better at the best price.”
Furthermore, The Sustainability Manager described how celebrities are shaping the advertisement landscape and how in modern times, society moves away from focusing on celebrities for celebrities sake but nowadays celebrities must have done something in order to be usable for brands to be a spokesperson. Most important appeal for the Sustainability Manager was clearly the financial appeal as it has most likely the strongest impact when it comes to the consumer and the survival of the brand. In connection with matching communication appeals to certain marketing activities the Sustainability Manager stated that modern marketing concerns purely what the brand is communicating.

In terms of the question whether the communication appeals can support changing the purchasing behaviour of the consumers, the Visual Merchandising Manager commented that there is a consumer group that would change their purchasing behaviour if the style aspects of sustainable clothing would adapt to their expectations. Furthermore, the appeals might be able to influence the mindset of the consumer in terms of sustainable purchasing behaviour but still the style of the garment product are dominant factors that play a major role.

**The future of Sustainability Marketing.**

Concerning the future of sustainability activities, the Visual Merchandising Manager mentioned the challenge of growing consumer demands in terms of requesting a hollistic approach when it comes to sustainability such as sustainable architecture, interiors and internal sustainability regulations within the company. Furthermore, social networks where stated as being more integrated in the Sustainability Marketing strategies in the future. The Visual Merchandising Manager stated that through social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or Youtube it is attempted to analyse the transformation of the target group when it comes to new demands of styles. In addition, visual campaigns used in social media must be on point and clear as the Visual Merchandising Manager described:

“When you make campaigns, you make them for two weeks and its rather long. When you create film clips on Youtube or you see it on your Instagram, they need to be very quick. Because it is just one click away. It needs to be very sharp and clear.”
These aspects are major drivers for future trends in sustainability related activities according to Gina Tricot.

The future of Sustainability Marketing was described as being a streamlined communication and constantly evolving in connection with the digital advancements. They argued that apparel brands must be watchful as young consumers are becoming the trendsetters of our time and Gina Tricot has to be sensitive to that. Modern apparel brands in the future, the Production Manager argued, must be open and positive and cannot be static. The Quality Assurance Manager and Production Manager stated that the more developed the internal communication about sustainability is, the more is transmitted towards the external communication in terms of inspiring people to purchase more sustainable garments. Future changes that transform Sustainability Marketing are according to the Sustainability Manager societal changes or events that will force brands to change their strategy as it already happened within Gina Tricot.
4.1.3 Didriksons

Didriksons is a functional clothing manufacturer focusing on functional rainwear situated in Borås, Sweden. They have been chosen as they have a major interest in sustainability and its developments. A Marketing Manager at Didriksons participated in a telephone interview with the researcher.

Current Sustainability Marketing and communication activities.

Didriksons’ Sustainability Marketing and communication activities are limited to an online representation of their CSR goals and implementations. According to the Marketing Manager, the sustainability focuses on the provision of information concerning their practices and initiatives. The Marketing Manager commented:

“Our currently performed activities, online and offline, are on our website you can see that it is not direct marketing but more a information page with our initiatives in the sustainability work […]”

Didriksons realized rapidly that communication sustainability activities has side-effects that can impact the business practice as the Marketing Manager described:

”However, we will not stick our head out too far because we know that we also can get some backturn because of others even if we try and that would hurt us very bad. We are doing our utmost for our own sake to be as clean as possible.”

Growth potential of Sustainability Marketing and challenges.

For one, the more a brand increases the communication, the more it will be judged how much is communicated and what. On the other hand, the resources used increase almost exponentially so that the expenditure of time spent on communicating to the consumers, researchers, press and
wholesalers about sustainability effects the business processes of the brand. The Marketing Manager stated:

"And we also try to be clear but it is also a very very dangerous topic to communicate [...], we had about 10-15 people last month visiting us and talking to and interviewing us from like schools and universities, researchers and it is a lot of time we spent and we promised that we want to share our opinion but is very time consuming."

However, the Marketing Manager promised as a brand to share its opinion and sustainability activities to the public, press and towards the trade shareholders. The Marketing Manager stated that most of the consumers or wholesalers demand a sign or a label of a branded sustainability agency in order to be trusted and to ensure a trustworthy sustainability communication. However, the Marketing Manager commented that it is not in Didriksons to spent investments on agencies that would do their job to be sustainable. Didriksons dedication towards sustainability is shown due to the fact that internally there is always one person directly responsible for the sustainability issues within the company as it was commented:

"We talk about our sustainability work and what we do and most of them they are ask for some kind of proof and most companies would like to have some sign from a branded sustainability agency. However, we do not want to support an external company just to show that we do our job. This is a very difficult way and we have since our start which is around 100 years ago, we have one person to 100% involved into sustainability related topics and work."

The challenge, the Marketing Manager explained, is that even though sustainable clothing is sold, the factories where it is produces still might pollute the environment and that is difficult to communicate towards the consumer. However, Sustainability Marketing communication is still a fundamental part of their strategy with the limitation of being very careful so that eventual backlash can be avoided as this is seen as one of the major challenges. It was also mentioned again that the main drive comes from within the company to be more sustainable.
Types of communication used and Differentiation Strategy.

When it comes to the communication towards the consumer in the retail environment, the Marketing Manager stated that workbooks or lookbooks are used that include a description of the used materials. The Marketing Manager stated:

"We do it in our workbooks and in our material and we tell them that we are doing our sustainability work and we are doing this and that and we don’t use fluoroarbon or softeners or pvc and we don’t use this and we try to save water."

Furthermore, it is communicated that sustainability work is done and aspects such as non-use of toxics, softeners or polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in the clothing. Specifically when it comes to the creation of competitive advantages, the Marketing Manager stated that Didriksons always strives to be better and their production research into non-toxic clothing for especially kids clothing is industry leading among clothing companies in northern Europe.

Evaluation and implementation of sustainability appeals.

When asked about the communication appeals, it was stated that Didriksons wants to be clear and humble in their communication especially when it comes to the complexities of sustainability. When it comes to the direct communication appeals, the Marketing Manager remarks that the financial appeal is one of the corner stones of the challenges within sustainability communication. Through own practical experiences Didriksons realized that consumers are not willing to pay a premium price for more sustainable clothing. Even when faced with superior product characteristics. It was stated:

"We made a t-shirt out of wood, I mean we are not a green company, we are a textile company but we try to make a difference. We made a garment together with Borås Väveri and we made a fabric out of barch the swedish tree and it is much better for many reasons because it is much easier to dye and everything was much better however a little
According to the Marketing Manager, it seemed to be the major challenge to create enough of an effort in the consumers’ mind to persuade them to purchase those sustainable clothing items even if they have a premium price. The Marketing Manager further stated that nowadays a brand needs to compete in more areas than just price. The branding especially it was remarked is a very vital ingredient within the sustainability communication. However, as of now Didriksons sees that the consumers who are just buying clothing without having sustainability thoughts outweighs the small percentage of consumers who have an interest in buying more sustainable. The Marketing Manager described that in the food industry it is easier to persuade the consumer to buy more ecological even if there is a premium price because there is a direct health benefit. Didriksons is well-aware that in the future it cannot be possible anymore to sell clothing for just 49 SEK and that the salaries in developing countries is so much lower. The Marketing Manager described:

”However this is very challenging because you need consumers to buy the expensive garments and then you need the consumers who buy the second hand garments and this is getting bigger and bigger and more and more people sell their clothing over the internet and I think it is a very big change in this business.”

Further, the market for second hand garments and people selling their used garments over the internet is an increasing competition for clothing companies. These facts have to be communicated in a way that no serious backlashes will occur. When it comes to the management appeal, The Marketing Manager stated that even though Didriksons does not want to be perceived as a green company, it surely understands that it needs to take responsibility however realises, as mentioned before, the dangers and challenges that are included in this strategic decision. However, it is believed that the core values of the employees at Didriksons represent the main driver of becoming more sustainable.
The future of Sustainability Marketing.

Further, the Marketing Manager added that in the future it will become more and more important to take responsibility and must be communicated through the visual communication towards the consumer as it was elaborated:

"It is just the price that is important but you need to be competitive and to be sustainable and take responsibilities in production and everywhere is more or less mandatory for the future. And of course all the visual communication within retail."
5. Analysis

This chapter has the purpose of analysing the findings in the results chapter in order to find conclusions and answers towards the proposed research questions.

5.1 Differentiation of Sustainability Activities

The interviewed apparel brands proposed various methods and ways to communicate or market their sustainability activities. Didriksons uses online information portals to provide consumers the sustainability strategies such as their CSR policy, sustainability work, actions and commitments concerning sustainable product characteristics (Didriksons, 2015). H&M (2015) and Gina Tricot (2015) also provide annual sustainability reports on their websites. The objectives within those reports can be summarized concerning information about best practices, material use, resource disposal and re-use processes. The pattern of sustainability reports as a way to inform and generate awareness has been identified as an initiative for all three brands. Gina Tricot extents their online sustainability representation with the ‘Good Project’ website. This website is dedicated to showcase Gina Tricots sustainability activities and their efforts undertaken within the sourcing countries and the choice of sustainable materials for the production. Furthermore, the use of celebrity endorsement is another pattern of sustainability marketing that is used by the fast apparel brands. Gina Tricot uses fashion bloggers or other celebrities to promote the sustainability activities and in addition, sustainable collections are established by those celebrities. There are many similarities between the sustainability activities of Gina Tricot and H&M. Both brands use celebrities to showcase their sustainable collections and integrate the celebrities into their design and selection processes. Notable difference would be that H&Ms celebrity selection is international whereas Gina Tricot currently uses national public figures to showcase sustainable collections within Sweden. Moreover, both brands integrated a used-garment collecting initiative within their physical retail enviroments in order to engage consumers to return unneeded or unused clothing to the stores before they would be diposed unsustainable.
5.2 Comparison of the Appeals

5.2.1 Financial Appeal

The performed research has shown that all of the interviewees stated that the financial appeal has an extensive impact on the efforts on the consumers. All of the apparel brands remarked in their interviews that consumers watch the price very closely and only sustainability conscious consumers are eager to pay a premium price. H&M and Gina Tricot even stated that they avoid price differences between ‘normal’ products and more ‘sustainable’ ones in order to not confuse the consumer during the decision making process. Didriksons remarked that from practical experience it is very challenging to use financial appeals to change the purchasing behaviour of consumers towards more sustainable consumption. Most consumers simply turn away and refuse to buy those specific garments even with slightly higher prices in comparison. Furthermore, apparel companies are currently dependant on the sustainable collections through conventional collections in order to make them financially viable.

5.2.2 Management Appeal

When it comes to the management appeal, the three interviewed brands had different interpretations of how to use or how to take this appeal into action. H&M and Gina Tricot use this appeal in order to be perceived as apparel companies taking action into becoming a greener company with a wide range of sustainable clothing. Their sustainability activities aim to present themselves as brands that interacts with their consumers in order to make them aware of sustainability processes and make them being perceived as part of the green movement. H&M stated in the interview that they definitely recognise this trend and are putting effort into affect to serve this growing consumer demand. In contrast Didriksons has chosen to be not affiliated with the green movement due to the risk of marketing backlashes and the pressure that comes with the choice of this strategy. A requirement for the management appeal to function is the genuine support from the top management and board of the company according to all the interviewees. Without the support from internal stakeholders it would be not possible to transmit the sustainability activities in a trustworthy and believable way. Gina Tricot and H&M both implement the management appeal through collecting used garments from their consumers.
within their retail environment. Therefore, it can be stated that both firms are taking the necessary steps to take part in the green movement that is part of the proposed theory.

5.2.3 Euphoria Appeal

The euphoria appeal was one of the appeals that did not receive as much attention during the performed interviews. H&M and Gina Tricot did not see a real connection between a sense of well-being that could be communicated with sustainability activities. Didriksons and their focus on online sustainability representation enforces the sense of well-being by describing the efforts on making clothing toxic-free and the non-use of softeners especially for their kids collections. Gina Tricot questioned the scientific background for the well-being aspect concerning garments of the appeal however approve of the possibility to evoke emotions of commitment to have an impact on the garment workers’ life.

5.2.4 Emotional Appeal

Using emotions within advertisements or sustainability related activities has a strong impact on the consumer efforts according to the interviewees. However, all of the brands agreed that positive emotions are always superior in comparison to the use of negative emotions. H&M stated that especially the communication of empowerment for the workforce in their supplying countries is in the focus of their sustainability activities. Gina Tricot also described that positive emotions would be the only choice for their Sustainability Marketing. Gina Tricot further stated that through purchasing the sustainable collection consumers might also have the sense of empowerment to support the garment workers in the sourcing countries. Didriksons mentioned the awareness of the strong force emotions have and stated a rather defensive stance when it comes to the use of emotions in advertising as backlashes are feared.

5.2.5 Zeitgeist Appeal

The Zeitgeist appeal was generally overlooked as the interviewed brands did not see a direct connection to sustainability activities and this appeal. Gina Tricot stated, that there is a major challenge to communicate the activities through this appeal as the very concept of zeitgeist is
possibly not adaptable to the sustainability challenges. Therefore, it can be concluded that this appeal might be not usable for performing efficient Sustainability Marketing. The other two brands did not comment at all concerning the usage of the zeitgeist appeal.

5.2.6 Comparative Appeal

When it comes to the use of celebrities and direct product comparisons of sustainable products as the comparative appeal dictates, the interviewees unanimously agreed that the appeal has a very strong impact on the purchasing decision of the consumers. Actors, bloggers and other public figures are used in sustainability activities in order to raise awareness and to promote sustainable collections. Reason for implementing this method of marketing was stated as being the trustworthiness and factor of recognition that increased the likelihood of usage when it comes to the comparative appeal. H&M and Gina Tricot both use celebrities to endorse their respective sustainability collections towards their consumer base. H&M uses international working actors and professionals within the fashion business to promote their collections and initiatives. Gina Tricot uses national working public figures and bloggers to engage their consumer base to be more engaged in sustainability issues and subsequently interested in their sustainable garment offerings. Didriksons uses direct product comparisons concerning their superior product functions and their usage of toxic-free garments in order to achieve a competitive advantage.

5.2.7 Summary

The conducted empirical research with the three apparel brands and six department managers has shown various interests in the sustainability communication appeals. The financial, management and comparative appeal has been stated multiple times to be very effective and usable when marketing sustainability activities. The high degree of price reflections of the consumer make the financial appeal a necessary method to motivate the consumer to rethink their purchasing behaviour. Further, the management appeal and the positioning of the company as part of the green movement enable the brand to become more trustworthy when it comes to marketing sustainability issues and sustainable garments. However, brands must be aware that the consumers expect a high degree of commitment if this appeal is chosen and false claims can lead to a serious loss of trust among the consumers. Subsequently, the comparative appeal and the use
of direct product comparisons and the usage of celebrities in sustainability related marketing activities was also selected by the interviewees to be very effective. However, it cannot be implemented excessively as it loses its effectiveness if used frequently. The interviewees commented that the emotional appeal, has its applicability however is considered to be an insecure measure as the predictability of the influence on the purchasing behaviour of the consumers is unclear and not foreseeable. The euphoria appeal with the transmission of a sense of well-being has been described by some managers as not applicable due to a lack of scientific trustworthiness, others mentioned the connection with promoting toxic-free garments which could attract consumers to make a better purchasing choice. The zeitgeist appeal has been neglected in use and the usability has been questioned. It was mentioned that the zeitgeist appeal found no importance and the connection to Sustainability Marketing was found to be nonexistent as the very concept of zeitgeist has been identified as being outdated. During the interviews with the respondents it became apparent that style characteristic of sustainable garments where an important aspect of the communication. The respondents stated that it is crucial for the sustainable clothing items to have the same product characteristics in terms of style and aesthetics as conventional clothing items. The interviewees stressed the fact that a consumer will most likely always choose the more ‘stylish’ clothing item than the sustainable one. Thus, it can be stated that the sustainability appeal-effort communication model needs the enhancement of a style appeal in order to persuade or motivate the consumer even more to change their purchasing behaviour. This means that an apparel brand needs to find a way to communicate their sustainability efforts through the garment directly. Furthermore, the aspect of internal communication about sustainability within the company is another stated important factor. The respondents described the necessity of internal sustainability communication as a foundation for marketing the subject to external stakeholders. Moreover, as the sustainability managers described was the need of support from the top management in order to receive and provide the necessary resources to establish efficient sustainability activities.

Concerning the relationship between the sustainability efforts and appeals it can be stated that the research confirmed the connection between the two aspects. The financial and comparative appeal supports generating awareness and at the same time motivates the consumer to purchase more sustainably. The management appeal makes sure that the brand is connected to the
consumer via taking part in the green movement and informs about new sustainability activities. Regarding the rewarding effort the respondents mentioned that the financial and euphoria appeal, consumers have a sense of doing something good for the work ethics of the supplier and the donations which support charities. Furthermore, the comparative and emotional appeal has been described to remind and persuade the consumer to reflect and reconsider their purchasing behaviour. The reassuring effort was supported by the management appeal on the basis that brand must be trustworthy in their Sustainability Marketing in order to convince the consumer that his purchasing has a positive impact rather then being greenwashed. Thus, it can be argued that the connection between the appeals and efforts is established as the generated data validates the relationship.
6. Discussion

The discussion chapter aims to combine the findings of the study with the theoretical background and discusses the contributions of the data collection concerning the theory and subsequently answer the proposed research questions.

Through the analysis of the collected data it is now possible to answer the proposed research questions. Before elaborating on the sustainability appeals and efforts, the first research question will be answered. Regarding the marketing and communication of sustainability activities through retail environments, it can be stated that a pattern among the interviewed apparel brands has been identified. Firstly, apparel brands use their online retail environment to communicate sustainability activities in order to inform, raise awareness and connect with consumers. Information about sustainability practices, products, future strategies and goals are common aspects of this form of communication. Secondly, apparel brands use celebrity endorsements to promote sustainable collections and to raise awareness regarding their sustainability processes. Thirdly and finally, apparel brands implement garment collection initiatives in which unwanted garments can be returned back to the stores in order to recycle them sustainably. These three sustainability activities have been identified to be the major ones. It became apparent that the respondents did not differentiate between the online and offline world. The respondents mentioned that an omni-channel approach concerning sustainability activities is an important aspect of modern marketing strategy. Concerning the second research question and the interpretation of sustainability communication appeals the responses of the interviewed brands also followed a clear pattern. The appeals have been discussed with varying degrees of importance. The financial, comparative and management appeal had the highest priority according to the research. The respondents mentioned that those three appeals could be adapted most efficiently towards sustainability activities that support the sustainability efforts. Furthermore, it was stated that sustainability activities such as celebrity endorsements, charity donations and green movement affiliations are most likely implemented within the retail environment. All three of the interviewed apparel brands stated that the financial appeal and therefore the price of the sustainable garments determines the success of for example persuading the consumer to make a sustainable purchasing decision. The use of celebrities which promote the sustainable collections, are used due to the value of recognition among the consumers. The
euphoria and emotional appeal have been met with less assurance as they seem not as adaptable in the retail environment. In more detail, the respondents mentioned an increased risk for the sustainability efforts when implementing emotional content as it is difficult to predict the outcome of such an advertisement. However, Didriksons and Gina Tricot argued that the euphoria appeal can become of importance when communicating messages concerning toxic-free apparel as this is definitely something the consumer is interested in. The zeitgeist appeal had the least recognition as being important due to the unsuitable nature towards the apparel industry and no sustainability activity can be established for it. The respondents mentioned, that the zeitgeist of a society is too abstract in order to be adequately communicated within the retail environment. According to the interviewees, the product characteristic and the aesthetic style of the sustainable product, in other words the apparel item, have a major impact on the purchasing decision of the consumer. In literature, the importance of design and style of an apparel product is supported by the research of Chan and Wong (2012). Within their research they have identified that product related attributes such as design, quality and price have an influence on the sustainable fashion consumption decision making process of consumers. Therefore, it can be argued that the style appeal on the basis of the research by Chan and Wong (2012) has its place among the communication appeals in order to affect the purchasing behaviour of the consumers and it enables the model to become more adaptable to the apparel industry. Furthermore, the research has successfully proven that between the appeals and the efforts, represented by the outer ring, a connection exists. The respondents stated multiple times, across the departments, that the communication appeals indeed have an impact on the purchasing behaviour and are able to influence the consumer in ways such as motivate, reward, inform etc. the consumers towards a more sustainable purchasing behaviour. As stated before, the sustainability appeals support shaping efforts in order to establish sustainability activities to engage the consumer in the retail environments. Thus strengthening the argument that both, appeals and efforts, are connected to each other and reinforce themselves when implemented within a sustainability activity. Therefore, the Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model presented in chapter 2.1.4.2 practiced differently in the apparel industry. Iyer and Bannerjee (1993) described that six appeals (Financial, management, euphoria, emotional, comparative and zeitgeist appeal) are able to effectively communicate sustainability messages to subsequently engage the consumer and transform their purchasing behaviour to be more sustainable. Through the conducted research
within the apparel industry it has been realised that adjustments related to the appeals must be made in order to fit the model to the apparel industry. Figure 6 showcases the apparel industry adapted Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model. In this model, the more important appeals according to the interviewees appear in different colours to display their varying levels of significance for the brands and subsequently. The appeals displayed in red showcase the appeals with the highest significance for the interviewed department managers. Appeals displayed in blue are considered to be significant, the color green for less significant appeals and subsequently grey appeals showcase no significance for Sustainability Marketing of the interviewed brands.

Figure 6 Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model Revised
The Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication Model has been developed towards the apparel industry according to findings of the three interviewed brands. In summary, it can be stated that apparel brands that aim to market their sustainability activities in order to make use of the showcased efforts could focus on using financial, management, style and comparative appeals to engage the consumer to make more sustainable purchasing decisions.

7. Conclusion

This chapter shall present the final conclusions of the study. In addition, practical and academic implications will be presented to show the contributions to the field.

The research within Sustainability Marketing has shown that there are still major challenges to overcome in order to change the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Various Sustainability Marketing activities by apparel brands have been showcased and described. Moreover, their usage and efficiency have been elaborated by the interviews, answering the first research question. The Sustainability Appeal-Effort Communication model has been adapted towards the apparel industry using the interpretations of the appeals and efforts according to the interviewed apparel brands. However, the model definitely requires additional cases in order to set it in stone and make it usable within the general apparel industry. Concerning the practical implications, the research has highlighted efficient ways to communicate sustainability activities within the apparel industry. Therefore, this thesis showcases practical examples for apparel brands to market their sustainability content efficiently towards their consumers. Furthermore, it has been reassured that consumers demand a higher degree of transparency concerning sustainability activities and further are affected by those marketing activities. Through the analysis of significance regarding the various appeals, it has been discussed that certain appeals receive better results meaning that apparel brands can realign their focus on the most important appeals according to the findings and neglect activities that are not significant for the consumer. Moreover, In respect of the academic implications, contributions to the theories of Iyer and Bannerjee (1993) and Belz and Peattie (2012) concerning Sustainability Marketing have been made. Furthermore, the elaboration of the style appeal showcased the importance of product
related characteristics and their influence on the consumer. Moreover, the study of the various sustainability appeals and efforts revealed their academic validity such as influence of price or the use of celebrity endorsement to directly engage the consumers.

8. Future Research

This chapter will present ideas concerning further research topics that could not be covered or included by the research at hand and could be topic of subsequent studies.

The research has shown the importance and usage of communication appeals concerning the sustainability activities of apparel brands. Through the research process and certain limitations it was not possible to focus more on the internal sustainability communication and its possibilities to spill over towards the external stakeholders. Furthermore, future research could investigate how the top management and leadership of a clothing brand has an influence on the sustainability communication internally and externally, and what impact it has on the brand’s culture. In terms of the communication appeals it would be of interest to investigate how to strengthen them and how it would be possible to adapt them towards new technological advancements as the research has shown that digital innovation reaches the consumers in various new ways that enable additional methods of communicating sustainability activities. Further research could also focus on comparing fast fashion brands with high fashion brands in order to showcase potential differences in implementing the sustainability appeals.

Moreover, the prevalence of the financial appeal showed that the price perception has a major impact on the consumers’ purchasing behaviour of clothing and focused researched in this regard could generate new knowledge concerning how brands could communicate the price of sustainable clothing in a more efficient way. Further research could also clarify if the zeitgeist appeal has usage for brands that are more concerned with brand history telling such as luxury brands. In addition, the research could be extended to a global approach in which brands from various different countries and segments are compared and analysed.
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Appendix

Interview Template

Sustainability Marketing/Communication Interview

Thank you for participating in this interview regarding the Sustainability Development among Apparel brands. This interview has the purpose to evaluate the Sustainability Marketing and Communication Activities within the fashion retail environment. Every promotional action that is performed that aims to educate or engage the customer about the sustainability activities of your brand is considered to be a marketing and communication activity.

I General Questions

What Sustainability Marketing/communication activities are currently performed within the retail environment (Online and offline)?

Do you see growth-potential for Sustainability Marketing/communication in the future? Will the role of sustainability communication become more important?

What are the challenges for the communication of sustainability within retail? What factors prohibit the development?

Which types of communication are (Online news, print media, clothing labels, CSR reports, in-store advertisements, etc.) efficient and which ones are less usable?

How would you describe your differentiation strategy when it comes to Sustainability Marketing in comparison with competitors? What makes your communication strategy special?
II Communication Appeals

Through scientific research it has been identified that there are six key communication appeals that can be used to transmit sustainability messages and educate or engage consumer to change their purchasing behaviour. The following questions concern the usability and efficiency of the appeals in contemporary and future form.

These six appeals are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Appeal</td>
<td>Linked to price reductions from resource conversation or to donations to charitable causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Appeal</td>
<td>Positioning of the company as part of the green movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphoria Appeal</td>
<td>Invoking a sense of well-being by highlighting the naturalness or health benefits of a product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Appeal</td>
<td>Evoke fear for the future or guilt about our impact on the planet, or to generate a sense of empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeitgeist Appeal</td>
<td>An attempt to link into prevailing social concerns about environmental and social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Appeal</td>
<td>Showcasing superior product characteristics directly in comparison to competing products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which appeals would you regard as most important and which ones as less important. Please, shortly explain your choice.

Which appeals are used currently to engage customers in terms of sustainable behaviour in your retail environment?

How are the appeals incorporated within the retail store environment (online and offline) nowadays? To what extent?
Do you think it is possible to connect the marketing activities to the proposed appeals? For instance, do your online marketing activities enclose emotional or financial appeals?

Could the selection of the appeals used currently, change in the near future due to modified customer taste? How would you adjust your marketing activities?

How do you think Sustainability Marketing and communication could change in the future? (Technology, change in society, etc.)