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Empowerment Through Social Media?

Examining Individual Communication Behaviour Towards Corporate
Sustainability

Uppsala University Campus Gotland

Lisa Glowinski

Chiara Kerber

Supervisors:

Jenny Helin and Anna Ljung

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this master thesis is to examine individual social media behaviour in relation to corporate sustainability issues. Based on a model from environmental psychology, factors that influence this behaviour are identified.

Methodology/approach - The study followed an explanatory and qualitative approach. Three focus groups, that consisted of 19 students in total, were conducted.

Findings - Key findings are (1) the level of social media activity with regard to corporate sustainability issues is not directly connected to the students' *awareness* and *knowledge* of sustainability issues; (2) *responsibility and priorities* have a weaker influence on social media than on offline behaviour; (3) the perceived *locus of control* can prevent students from communicating about corporate sustainability in social media; (4) students with high knowledge on sustainability are less inclined to *trust* corporate sustainability communication.

Research limitations/implications - To further examine individual social media behaviour in relation to corporate sustainability issues, future research needs to apply long-term studies with bigger samples. Furthermore, participants with different socio-economic characteristics should be compared to see if key factors, relations, and barriers that have been the result of this study, are also true for other socio-economic groups.

Practical implications - The study's findings suggest that corporations need to consider three main issues if they want to inform and engage individuals in corporate sustainability activities via social media: (1) content has to be tailored for target groups with different levels of knowledge on sustainability issues; (2) third-party-endorsements significantly support the creation of confidence in the communication of corporate sustainability activities and are therefore crucial; (3) detailed replies to critical comments from individual users help to create trust and transparency.

Originality/value - This study differs from previous research on social media in two ways: (1) it focuses on social media's empowerment potential for sustainability instead of political issues; (2) it addresses the gap on individuals' reasons to actively participate in social media.

Keywords Communication, social media, corporate sustainability, individual empowerment, environmental psychology

Summary

The purpose of this master thesis is to examine individual social media behaviour in relation to corporate sustainability issues. This differs to previous research on social media in two ways: First, it focuses on social media's empowerment potential for sustainability instead of political issues. Second, it addresses the gap on individuals' reasons to actively participate in social media.

In order to examine the individual social media behaviour related to corporate sustainability issues, the study followed an explanatory and qualitative approach. Three focus groups, that consisted of 19 students in total, were conducted. Afterwards, the data material was content-analysed. A model from environmental psychology served as a basis for the category system and enabled the researchers to identify factors, as well as relationships between the factors, that influence individual social media behaviour related to corporate sustainability issues.

Key findings of the data analysis are that (1) the level of social media activity with regard to corporate sustainability issues is not directly connected to the students' *awareness* and *knowledge* of sustainability issues; (2) *responsibility and priorities* have a weaker influence on social media than on offline behaviour; (3) the perceived *locus of control* can prevent students from communicating about corporate sustainability in social media; (4) students with high knowledge on sustainability are less inclined to *trust* corporate sustainability communication.

The study's findings suggest three practical implications for corporations that want to inform and engage individuals in their sustainability activities via social media: First, content has to be tailored for target groups with different levels of knowledge on sustainability issues. Second, third-party-endorsements significantly support the creation of confidence in the communication of corporate sustainability activities and are therefore crucial. Third, detailed replies to critical comments from individual users help to create trust and transparency.

To further examine individual social media behaviour related to corporate sustainability issues, future research needs to apply long-term studies with bigger samples. Furthermore, participants with different socio-economic characteristics should be compared to see if key factors, relations, and barriers that have been the result of this study, are also true for other socio-economic groups.

Table of Content

1. Introduction	1
2. Social Media as a Communication Network.....	3
2.1 The Rise of Social Media	3
2.2 Social Media and the Empowerment of Individuals	4
2.3 Communication about Corporate Sustainability in Social Media.....	5
3. Environmental Psychology as a Perspective on Communication about Corporate Sustainability in Social Media.....	7
3.1 Environmental Psychology: Definition and Characteristics	7
3.2 Applying Environmental Psychology to Communication about Corporate Sustainability: The Model of Pro-Environmental Behaviour by Kollmuss and Agyeman....	8
3.2.1 The Demographic and External Factors.....	9
3.2.2 The Internal Factors	10
4. Methodology	13
4.1 Research Design and Approach	13
4.2 Kind of Data and Data Collection	13
4.3 Data Analysis	16
4.4 Limitations	17
5. Results	18
5.1 Social Media Usage Behaviour	19
5.2 Communication Behaviour towards Corporate Sustainability in Social Media	21
5.2.1 External Factors.....	21
5.2.2 Internal Factors.....	23
6. Discussion	28
6.1 Social Media Usage Behaviour	28
6.2 Communication Behaviour towards Corporate Sustainability in Social Media	29
6.2.1 External Factors.....	29
6.2.2 Internal Factors.....	30
6.3 Key Relationships	33
6.4 Applicability of the Pro-Environmental Behaviour Model by Kollmuss and Agyeman	35

6.5 Critical Reflection of Results and Further Research	36
7. Conclusion and Outlook	37
Attachment	40
References	49

1. Introduction

The amount of daily social media use has significantly increased in recent years (Statista, 2016a). In connection to this, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram are just a few social media platforms that have become popular (Luca, 2016, p. 566) and thus, gained a considerable impact on both organisational and individual communication (Castells, 2009; Reilly and Hyan, 2014). They facilitate the dissemination of information, opinions, and contents, as well as promote social interactions among individuals, and between individuals and organisations (Botha and Mills, 2012; Wang et al., 2015).

In this context, research has highlighted social media's potential for political participation and activism (e.g. Conroy et al., 2012; Davis, 2010; Downey and Fenton, 2003; Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Maireder and Schwarzenegger, 2012). On the one hand, it enables individual "new-opinion-makers" (Zerfaß and Boelter, 2005; cited in de Witt, 2011, p. 85) to spread content with global reach in a fast way; and on the other hand, it facilitates the organisation of political and social movements on a transnational level (Downey and Fenton, 2003, p. 190). Thus, it has become an important tool for individuals to find like-minded people and to become organised in order to raise their voices. However, previous research focused on political issues and less attention has been paid to another topic of increasing public concern: Sustainability. In general, sustainability has been discussed in research for decades, mainly in the context of corporate responsibility towards social, human and environmental topics (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p. 596). Due to this, the spotlight has been put on corporations to take on their environmental and social responsibilities (Johansen and Nielsen, 2011, pp. 204-205).

An example that illustrates social media's empowerment potential for sustainability is Greenpeace's Detox campaign. In 2012, Greenpeace successfully used several social media platforms and mobilised a high number of supporters in order to force the apparel industry to eliminate all hazardous chemicals from their supply chains (Coombs and Holladay, 2015, p. 94). This shows how social media enabled a group of individuals to pressure corporations towards a more responsible behaviour and also highlights social media's importance for corporations in terms of managing stakeholder relations and reputation (Coombs and Holladay, 2015, p. 89).

As the example illustrates, social media represents a significant challenge to corporations since they are not the only creators of content in this communication channel. Consequently, they have lost the exclusive control about their public image (Eberle et al., 2013, p. 742) and individuals can use social media in order to change their power relationships with corporations (Coombs and Holladay, 2015, p. 90). Nevertheless, there have been few studies to date that examine why individuals actively participate in social media and little attention has been paid to individual motivations for sharing information and personal opinions (Oh and Syn, 2015, pp. 2046-2048).

At the same time, the individual empowerment potential of social media is an increasing concern in discussion amongst researchers (de Witt, 2011, p. 80), but lacks attention towards corporate sustainability (CS) issues. Therefore, the individual communication behaviour in relation to CS topics is an interesting and relevant phenomenon to examine. This leads to the research question of this master thesis: *Why do individuals exert or not exert their power in social media when it comes to communication about corporate sustainability issues?*

In order to examine the research question, an explanatory and qualitative study with three focus groups was conducted. The focus group participants were students with three different majors. This was valuable for the study since it enabled the researchers to compare different views and therefore, to gain a broader understanding of social media behaviour in relation to CS topics. Students were chosen as participants since young people increasingly use social media in order to inform themselves about other opinions as well as to “make, exchange and share meanings about ethical and political issues” (Andersson and Öhman, 2016, p. 4).

The focus group discussions were content-analysed by applying a category system. Before the results of this analysis are presented, the theoretical background for the study is provided: The second chapter illustrates the rise of social media and depicts it as an empowerment tool for individuals. Furthermore, CS is introduced as an increasingly important topic for individuals.

In chapter three, a model from environmental psychology is presented as an approach to explain individual social media behaviour in relation to CS issues. Thus, it serves as a basis for the category system. Afterwards, the methodology for the study is described in chapter four, before chapter five presents the study’s results. These are discussed and critically assessed in chapter six.

The thesis ends by summarising the most relevant findings with regard to the research question. Furthermore, theoretical and practical implications are named. Additionally, it is pointed out how future research could further enhance the understanding of individual social media behaviour with regard to CS issues.

2. Social Media as a Communication Network

The following subchapters provide an overview of social media and its impact on individual communication behaviour. In order to highlight the possibilities and challenges of social media, compared to traditional ways of communication, the subchapters focus on illustrating the power shift towards individuals. In this context, CS will be considered as a topic of increasing concern for individuals.

2.1 The Rise of Social Media

During the past decades, developments in communication and information technologies have led to the emergence of globally intertwined digital networks (Castells, 2009). This formation has strengthened the importance of social media as a communication channel. Social media are online tools that are “designed to facilitate the dissemination of content through social interaction between individuals, groups, and organizations” (Botha and Mills, 2012, p. 84). Thus, they enable individuals and organisations to interact through platforms, such as blogs, social networks or wikis, anywhere and anytime with a global reach (Castells, 2009; Reilly and Hyan, 2014). In comparison to traditional media, which distributes information in a one-way direction to the audience, social media facilitate a two-way, interactive communication between involved units (Reilly and Hyan, 2014, p. 749).

According to Wang et al. (2015, p. 35), individuals use social media because of the following functionalities: identity, conversations, sharing, relationships, and reputation. These functionalities differ for different social media channels. Social networking websites, for example Facebook, focus on identity, in terms of self-presentation by creating profiles, and maintain relationships by using integrated messenger services (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 62; Wang et al., 2015, p. 35).

Regarding the usage behaviour of social media users, Shao (2009) distinguishes three types: consumption, participation, and production. The usage type consumption represents the lowest level of interaction. It refers to users, who only read or watch content that other users present, without producing content themselves. Thus, this usage type is connected to the traditional one-way communication. The next higher level of interaction is participation, which includes an active user interaction in terms of sharing content with other users or rating content. When users create and publish own content, e.g. texts, images or videos, this demonstrates the highest level of interaction and is described as production. This also includes text production through commenting on existing posts (Ruehl and Ingenhoff, 2015, p. 291).

Concerning the users of social media, a worldwide survey from 2014 states that more than 50% of the social media users are younger than 35 years. In certain channels, e.g. Instagram, the percentage even is around 70% (Statista, 2016b). This generation, which has grown up and is familiar with new media in terms of social networks as well as with the usage of new communication technologies, can be described as the one of “digital natives” (de Witt, 2011, p. 85).

As Andersson and Öhman (2016, p. 1) argue, especially young people use social media to exchange opinions and perspectives regarding political and moral issues. In this way, social media influence the meaning making about these issues (Andersson and Öhman, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, discussions in social media can easily become global and thus, provide the potential for users to be crucial actors in a global context. Hence, they can become more responsible actors by exchanging content (de Witt, 2011, p. 80).

2.2 Social Media and the Empowerment of Individuals

Based on the changes towards global communication networks outlined in the previous subchapter, the question about the impact of social networks on individual communication behaviour arises. How do people use this new capacity to communicate about their own perspective and opinion with a global reach?

According to Di Bitetto et al. (2015, p. 47), mainly young people actively use the internet to participate in campaigns and to express their opinions. Social media provides them with the ability to create own content and to influence their own channels of information and news (Castells, 2009; de Witt, 2011). In this context, Zerfaß and Boelter (2005, cited in de Witt, 2011, p. 85) introduce the term “the new opinion-makers” to illustrate how the control of content creation has changed due to social media: Nowadays, the formerly passive audience in traditional mass media communication controls its own communication channels. However, Sunstein (2001, p. 65) highlights the risk that people are exposed to more biased information and expression of opinions in social media, compared to the traditional way of information transmission via mass media.

At the same time, Castells (2009, p. 136) points to social media’s potential to create shared meanings, which determine actions and in this way, represent a form of social power. For example, Downey and Fenton (2003, p. 189) emphasise that social media make it easier for individuals to find people with same opinions and understandings. Thus, they facilitate the mobilisation of other individuals for social, environmental or political issues.

Previous research has considered this empowering function of social media for example in terms of a so called “Facebook Revolution”. This focuses on political activism, e.g. based on the ‘Arab spring’ (Olorunnisola and Martin, 2013, p. 276). Furthermore, both press and research highlight social media’s potential to increase the efficiency and success of social movements (Olorunnisola and Martin, 2013, p. 277).

The same is true for its potential to foster democratisation and participation worldwide. This is also considered by Downey and Fenton (2003, p. 189) as well as by Fieseler and Fleck (2013, p. 760), who argue that social media increase political mobilisation and participation. This is accompanied by a homogenisation and fragmentation of civil society: On the one hand, as already mentioned, social media connects people with similar understandings. Thus, it facilitates the group formation of like-minded people. This is a process of homogenisation. On the other hand, the formation of like-minded groups can lead to an increasing polarisation and confrontation between the single groups. This might have a positive impact on individuals' willingness to participate in public discourse (Fieseler and Fleck, 2013, p. 760).

2.3 Communication about Corporate Sustainability in Social Media

As indicated in the previous subchapter, social media facilitate the mobilisation of individuals for social, environmental or political issues, while a focus of research has been based on scrutinising the relationship between political protest and internet communication (Downey and Fenton, 2003, p. 196; Olorunnisola and Martin, 2013). However, issues like environmental catastrophes, criticism against labour conditions and the general exploitation of resources by corporations around the world have drawn public attention to the environmental and social responsibilities of corporations (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p. 596).

In this context, the internet provides a platform for individuals to challenge corporate actions (Coombs and Holladay, 2015, p. 87): By creating their own content and participating in social media, they can put significant pressure on corporations to engage in responsible behaviour (Di Bitetto et al. 2015, p. 47). Besides, this interactive network communication of social media limits corporations' control over content that is spread about them. While this represents a huge challenge for corporations, social media can unlock a considerable potential at the same time: As a study conducted by Ruehl and Ingenhoff (2015) illustrates, the acceptance of corporate profiles on social media has increased over the last years. Thus, this channel has gained importance for communicating with individual users.

If used to its full potential, it can enable corporations to create common meanings and values with their audience (Dovleac, 2015, p. 34). Moreover, they can actively encourage social media users to give feedback on corporate activities through directly addressing posts and thus, engage in a dialogue with individuals (Ruehl and Ingenhoff, 2015, p. 298). However, a survey among corporations has revealed that the lack of control over the generated content is a major obstacle for corporations to engage in social media in an interactive way (Statista, 2016c). First, this implies that corporations only take the position as an observer in social media communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 60) and second, they often use this channel in the same way they use traditional media, i.e. for self-presentations. Consequently, possible positive outcomes of social media use become less likely (Dovleac, 2015, p. 34).

This might pose a risk to corporations since stakeholders' perceptions of organisational behaviour start to rely more heavily on direct peer communication instead of being shaped by traditional media and traditional forms of organisational communication (Colleoni, 2013, p. 234). In this context, a study by Ali et al. (2015) has shown that a majority of respondents considers social media to be an important way to communicate CS activities.

Furthermore, Godemann and Michelsen (2011, p. 11) have emphasised that social media are important for communicating sustainability issues, since community actions are supposed to have a considerable power over individuals' behaviour. One example that illustrates this situation is Greenpeace's Detox campaign. Its aim is to eliminate all hazardous chemicals from the apparel industry's supply chain (Greenpeace International, 2015). In 2012, Greenpeace targeted Zara to join this campaign and used several social media platforms in order to mobilise supporters. Within a few days, over 7 million people were following their efforts (Coombs and Holladay, 2015, p. 94). Finally, this made Zara commit to the Detox campaign's goals (Greenpeace International, 2015), which shows how a group of individuals had the ability to pressure a corporation to engage in a more responsible behaviour. Even though offline protest also took place during this campaign, the main activity was executed via online channels.

3. Environmental Psychology as a Perspective on Communication about Corporate Sustainability in Social Media

This chapter presents environmental psychology as a perspective on communication about CS issues in social media. In order to do so, it first gives a brief overview over the term's definition and key characteristics. Afterwards, the model of pro-environmental behaviour by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) is presented as an approach to understand individual social media behaviour in relation to CS issues. This model serves as the basis for the data analysis.

3.1 Environmental Psychology: Definition and Characteristics

Environmental psychology is a rather new field of psychology research that has been recognised since the 1960s and has grown steadily due to the increasing awareness of environmental problems. It is defined as “the discipline that studies the interplay between individuals and their built and natural environment” (Steg et al., 2012, p. 2), while the built environment refers to “the very large and complex human-made environment” (Morgan, 2008). In general, environmental psychology research follows an interactive, reciprocal approach: First, it scrutinises the influence that the environment has on “human experiences, behaviour and well-being” (Steg et al., 2012, p. 2); second, it also considers the influence that individuals have on the environment (Steg et al., 2012, pp. 2-5). In this context, human-environment relationships refer to both the relationships between humans and their physical settings as well as to the relationships between humans and their social settings (Moser and Uzzell, 2007).

One main objective of the discipline is to explain what constraints individuals, who possess environmental knowledge and awareness, to engage in pro-environmental behaviour, respectively how their behaviour could be changed (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 240; Steg et al., 2012, p. 4). According to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), pro-environmental behaviour means that individuals “consciously seek[s] to minimize the negative impact of [their] actions on the natural and built world” (p. 240).

As human behaviour includes perceptions, cognitions, emotions, and social interactions, among others (Sörqvist, 2016, p. 583), one way to influence environmental behaviour is through social drivers, e.g. social learning and norms (Steg et al., 2012, p. 282).

This reinforces an argument by Uzzell and Rätzsch (2009, p. 341) who emphasise that behaviour does not only depend on an individual's rationales, evaluations, and deliberations, but also on cultural traditions, family, friends, emotional impulses, and trends. Furthermore, social and cultural factors influence the shaping of values and attitudes that, in turn, can influence human behaviour. However, this relationship has to be handled with care since certain attitudes will not automatically lead to a certain human behaviour (Uzzell and Rätzsch, 2009, p. 342).

Relative to the role of individuals, a shortcoming of existing environmental psychology research has been described by Uzzell and Rätzzel (2009). According to them, many studies assume that individuals have one role, for example the role of consumers. This is due to the fact that the field focused on “understanding, meeting and changing user needs and preferences” (Uzzell and Rätzzel, 2009, p. 341) in its early years, which made it an attractive approach to understand consumer attitudes and behaviours. In contrast to that, Uzzell and Rätzzel (2009, p. 341) advocate that individuals always have several roles in their lives and therefore should not be limited to one role when one attempts to understand their behaviour.

For increasing the understanding of individual human behaviour in an environmental context, several models from different scientific fields have been applied in environmental psychology, e.g. the *Theory of Planned Behaviour* (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) from social psychology and several models from sociology (e.g. Blake, 1999; Fietkau and Kessel, 1981). However, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) felt that no current model is sufficient to explain environmental behaviour. Thus, they developed their own model, including all the factors from previous models that they consider to be the most influential ones. This model is presented in the following subchapter. Prior to that, the perspective of environmental psychology is applied to individual communication behaviour about CS in social media.

3.2 Applying Environmental Psychology to Communication about Corporate Sustainability: The Model of Pro-Environmental Behaviour by Kollmuss and Agyeman

Applying an environmental psychology perspective to CS communication in social media is fruitful for three reasons: First, the definition of the term environment is not limited to the natural environment only, but does also refer to social settings (Moser and Uzzell, 2007). Social networks are such settings that have become important for social interactions worldwide today (Castells, 2009; Reilly and Hyan, 2014): As already mentioned in chapter two, they can both serve as a source for information, but also support the creation and exchange of meanings by the participants (Andersson and Öhman, 2016, p. 4).

Second, some environmental psychology scholars have started to use the terms sustainability or sustainable development instead of referring to the environment only (e.g. Corral-Verdugo, 2010; Uzzell and Rätzzel, 2009). If these terms are used, there is a shift from a solely environmental to a broader perspective. This is due to the fact that sustainability is usually characterised as having three pillars: a social, environmental, and economic. This is for example expressed in the view of the *Triple Bottom Line*, introduced by Elkington (2004).

Third, as Andersson and Öhman (2016) have pointed out, it is likely that “sustainability issues dealing with political and moral concerns are also discussed and learned about in social media” (p. 1). This is supported by Castells (2009), who emphasises that social media mobilise individuals for social, environmental or political issues. Considering the role that social media have for two-way communication and public activism (see chapter two), it is highly interesting to examine how individuals communicate about CS issues in social media - both among themselves and with the corresponding corporations. As an approach to understand individual communication behaviour related to CS topics in social media, Kollmuss and Agyeman’s (2002) model of pro-environmental behaviour is adjusted and applied. It is explained in the following sections.

3.2.1 The Demographic and External Factors

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 248) see two *demographic* issues as crucial influencers for pro-environmental behaviour. These are the gender and the years of education. The more years of education an individual has received, the more likely it is that there is existing knowledge on environmental issues. However, the only existence of knowledge might not be sufficient to motivate pro-environmental behaviour.

Concerning the external factors, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, pp. 248-249) distinguish three of them: Institutional, economic, and cultural and social factors. The *institutional factors* refer to the existing infrastructure that individuals can use in order to engage in pro-environmental behaviour. The worse the infrastructure, the less likely it is that individuals will engage in such behaviour. In the original model, this refers to possibilities to recycle and to take public transport.

Economic factors are defined as money, time, and the effort that is necessary for individuals to engage in pro-environmental behaviour (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 249, 252). They are supposed to have a significant influence on individual decisions and behaviours. However, this relation is complex and a causal relationship cannot be proven. Although it is possible to influence individuals towards pro-environmental behaviour by offering economic incentives, e.g. by lowering prices for environmentally friendly products, these factors have to be seen in an interplay with psychological, social, and infrastructural factors (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 249).

The last set of external factors, the *social and cultural* ones, also exerts a huge influence on individual behaviour. On the one hand, they refer to cultural norms (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 249), on the other hand, other environmental psychology scholars mention factors like social pressures and the influence of peers, such as family members and friends (Steg et al., 2012, p. 282; Uzzell and Rätzsch, 2009, p. 341).

3.2.2 The Internal Factors

By including eight different factors, the internal factors are the most extensive category in Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) model. They include motivation, environmental knowledge, values, attitudes, environmental awareness, emotional involvement, locus of control, and responsibility and priorities.

Motivations determine which behaviour is chosen from the options available. They are either conscious or unconscious and can be distinguished into two kinds: primary and selective motives. Primary motives are those, that make individuals "engage in a whole set of behaviors" (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 250), while selective ones will only influence one single action (Moisander, 1998, cited in Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 250). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 250) assume that primary motives are often overridden by selective ones, since those would usually have a stronger influence on individual behaviour in one specific situation in the specific time when it does occur.

Concerning the factor *environmental knowledge*, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 250) point to previous studies that have proven that there is no causal relation between the existence of environmental knowledge and the engagement in pro-environmental behaviour. In this context, it is emphasised that even people with little concern for environmental problems might engage in pro-environmental behaviour due to economic benefits that are connected to the choice of this behaviour, e.g. a high tax on gasoline fosters a decrease of individuals driving. However, behaviours that are only economically motivated are supposed to be reversed easily when the economic benefit disappears or other circumstances change.

In contrast to environmental knowledge, *values* probably have a more significant influence on environmental awareness and concerns. According to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 251), they have a high stake in shaping intrinsic motivations. While this statement is quite clear, it is rather unclear how the values themselves are shaped. Family, friends, and other social groups probably have a key influence, whereas other actors, such as the media or political institutions, have a less significant influence. Finally, the individual's cultural context is the weakest of the three influences (Fuhrer et al., 1995, cited in Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002, p. 251).

The role of *attitudes* in shaping pro-environmental behaviour is more complex. In general, attitudes are "the enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object, or issue" (Newhouse, 1991, cited in Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 252). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) highlight that their influence on pro-environmental behaviour is indirect, varying, and usually rather weak. By referring to the Low-cost-high-cost-model of pro-environmental behaviour by Diekmann and Preisendoerfer (1992), they explain that people will choose an environmental behaviour based on cost concerns. These costs do not only refer to financial resources, but also to the time and the effort that has to be taken in order to engage in pro-environmental behaviour.

Due to this, even people that are aware of environmental problems and have a positive attitude towards pro-environmental behaviour will not necessarily engage in such behaviour when it is connected to high costs. Thus, there is a gap between attitudes and behaviour. Nevertheless, such individuals are likely to engage in low-cost-behaviour, such as recycling and also tend to be more open to changes in politics that foster an environmental behaviour (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002, pp. 252-253).

The *awareness of environmental problems* has just been mentioned and is a crucial factor itself. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) define it as “knowing of the impact of human behavior on the environment” (p. 253). They state that this awareness can be limited by cognition in three ways: First, environmental problems are often abstract and thus, their impacts are not immediately visible. Therefore, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 253) emphasise the need for creating an emotional involvement in order to make information on such problems more understandable, e.g. by using engaging pictures. In the context of sustainability issues, this is also supported by Adomßent and Godemann (2011, p. 35) who recommend creating an emotional involvement by using images that the target group can relate to. Emotional involvement is another factor of the model itself and will be explained more detailed shortly. The second cognitive limitation is that environmental destruction happens gradually and slowly. Thus, individuals are often not capable of seeing these changes. The last limitation is connected to the characteristic of environment problems to be complex systems. This makes it difficult to understand them and to see all their consequences. All in all, the cognitive limitations do not only limit the environmental awareness, but do also influence to which extent individuals engage with the environment emotionally and to which extent they are willing to contribute to the solution of these problems (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002, pp. 253-254).

The crucial role of *emotional involvement* to make environmental problems more comprehensible has just been mentioned before. In Kollmuss and Agyeman’s (2002) model, it is defined as “the extent to which we have an affective relationship to the natural world” (p. 254) and as “the ability to have an emotional reaction when being confronted with environmental degradation” (p. 254). In general, emotional involvement is supposed to have a significant influence on shaping values, attitudes, and beliefs connected to the environment. It is assumed that the stronger an individual reacts to environmental problems, the more likely it is that this individual will actually act in a pro-environmental way (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002, p. 254). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) explain a lack of emotional involvement with a lack of knowledge and awareness, as well as with a resistance against information that is inconsistent with existing values, beliefs, and mental frameworks. With regard to the first reason, it is important to highlight that those individuals with existing knowledge and awareness will not automatically show emotional involvement. However, this is more likely compared to those who lack the same.

According to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 254), the second reason is closely connected to Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. It states that information that is consistent with existing values, beliefs, and mental frameworks is perceived and processed, while inconsistent information is neglected.

As for the creation of emotional involvement, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) assume that individuals experience emotions of fear, sadness, pain, anger, and guilt when being confronted with environmental problems. These are supposed to be necessary preconditions to engage in pro-environmental behaviour. However, individuals tend to use "secondary psychological responses" in order to fight negative emotions (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 255), which makes the performance of pro-environmental behaviour less likely. The responses include four defense mechanisms, which are denial, rational distancing, apathy and resignation, and delegation. An individual that is in *denial* will refuse to see the given reality, or existing problems, and only accepts information that fits its own version of reality. When applying the second defense mechanism, *rational distancing*, an individual acknowledges that there is a problem, but does not feel any emotions connected to it. *Apathy and resignation* occur when the negative emotions mentioned are combined with a feeling of helplessness. This mechanism does usually occur when individuals feel they cannot influence a given situation or problem. Finally, this might lead to the circumstance that individuals stop to obtain information on the situation or problem. They might still perform pro-environmental actions, but these are probably rather passive. Individuals who refuse to accept their personal responsibilities for a situation or problem and see others as the responsible parties instead, use the defense mechanism *delegation*. By applying this, they try to stop feelings of guilt. It is very likely that those individuals will not take any actions themselves, as long as they include personal sacrifices (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 255).

Another crucial factor for an individual's decision to act is the *locus of control*. According to Newhouse (1991, cited in Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 255), this refers to the question if one believes that own actions can change current problems or not. When individuals feel a sense of helplessness, or in other words a lack of control, they are unlikely to act and only consider other actors to be successful in effecting a change.

Finally, the last factor that is supposed to play a significant role for pro-environmental behaviour is *responsibility and priorities*. If an individual feels responsible for an issue is influenced by values, attitudes and the locus of control. Depending on this, individuals assign different personal priorities to their responsibilities. Thus, the motivation to perform pro-environmental behaviour is likely to increase when it is in accordance with the personal priorities, and likely to decrease when it is in conflict with them (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, pp. 255-256).

4. Methodology

This chapter explains the research design and approach of the conducted study. Afterwards, the kind of data and data collection process is described. Finally, information on the data analysis process is provided. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the methodological approach.

4.1 Research Design and Approach

Since the aim of this study is to investigate individual behaviour in social media related to CS topics, a subjectivist and interpretative stance as well as an explanatory research approach is chosen. The taken stance is suitable to understand interactions between different social actors and the individual meanings people create towards an issue (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 132). This is supported by applying a model from environmental psychology, which is concerned with explaining the behaviour of subjects, or individuals (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 240; Steg et al., 2012, p. 4). The explanatory research approach is reflected in the use of focus groups, which is a strong research method for gaining insights into complex behaviours (Bryman and Bell 2007, p. 511; Morgan and Krueger, 1993, cited in Morgan, 1996, p. 139; Hennink and Leavy, 2014, p. 20).

Hence, the use of this research method contributes to the examination of the research question in three areas: First, focus group discussions offer valuable and detailed insights into the participants' use of social media and their attitude towards CS issues in social media. This is due to the characteristic that focus groups encourage participants to work together, but also to argue with each other and to challenge each other's views. Second, it is possible that issues, which have not been part of the guiding questions for the focus group, arise during the discussions. This might uncover further key themes that are relevant in order to understand individual behaviour in social media with regard to CS issues (Hennink and Leavy, 2014, p. 3). Third, focus groups offer a platform for the participants to discuss ideas related to CS in social media. Such findings would be very interesting in order to deduce theoretical and practical implications for CS communication and for individual engagement in CS discussions in social media (Bryman and Bell 2007, p. 511).

4.2 Kind of Data and Data Collection

In order to examine the research question, three focus groups were conducted. The discussions had a duration of one and a half hour per group and were held in Germany between April 8, 2016 and April 21, 2016. All participants of the focus groups agreed to have the discussion audio- and video-recorded.

The focus group participants were 19 students from three German universities with three different academic backgrounds: The first group consisted of business administration students on a bachelor level, while the second one was conducted with master students in sustainability sciences. The third group represented journalism students on a bachelor level. All students were aged between 18 and 26 years, except for one student from the US, who was 40 years old. However, he was included in the second focus group since his different cultural background and age had been seen as an enrichment for the study. Apart from that, the choice to only use students as study participants is supported by the fact that focus groups should be homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (Malhotra and Birks, 2006, p. 160). Moreover, this group was easily accessible for the researchers, and, as mentioned in chapter 2.1, part of the age group that represents the majority of social media users.

It was assumed that a focus group sample of students that are already familiar with each other facilitates the group discussion and makes the participants comfortable to speak their minds spontaneously (Acocella, 2012, p. 1127). Due to the groups' variety of educational backgrounds, it was furthermore expected that the participants have a different knowledge on sustainability and social media, which leads to different perspectives on the topic. According to Hisrich and Peters (1982, p. 12, cited in Acocella, 2012, p. 1127), having such minor differences within focus groups is valuable since it enables the collection of diverse points of view. In this study's context, this provided a broader understanding of young people's social media behaviour in relation to CS topics.

Ethical concerns did not occur since the participant selection process was transparent in terms of stating the question areas that were discussed in the focus groups. Therefore, it was assumed that the participants are willing to share their thoughts, opinions and knowledge. Moreover, it was made sure that the questions avoid to intimidate the participants and that the participants identity is not revealed. The latter was assured by using codes for the participants instead of their names. These codes were composed of abbreviations for the city in which the focus groups were conducted and of a number that was assigned to each participant in each group. Table 1 shows an overview of the codes that were given to the participants:

City	Major	Participant	Participant Code
Hamburg	Business Administration (Bachelor level)	1	HH-P1
		2	HH-P2
		3	HH-P3
		4	HH-P4
		5	HH-P5
		6	HH-P6
		7	HH-P7
		8	HH-P8
Lüneburg	Sustainability Science (Master level)	1	LG-P1
		2	LG-P2
		3	LG-P3
		4	LG-P4
		5	LG-P5
Eichstätt	Journalism (Bachelor level)	1	EI-P1
		2	EI-P2
		3	EI-P3
		4	EI-P4
		5	EI-P5
		6	EI-P6

Table 1: Participants and Participant Codes

According to methodology literature, the common size of focus groups is between six and ten participants (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 517; Hennink and Leavy, 2014, p. 2). However, the focus groups for this study consisted of five to eight people. This size was chosen since smaller groups are more suitable for complex and controversial topics. Such topics are those that strongly involve people and thus, make them engage in vivid discussions (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 518).

The questions that were posed to the focus group participants were divided into three phases: During the first phase, participants were asked about their activities in social media and about the relevance they ascribe to sustainability and CS. This enabled the researchers to gain knowledge on the participants' attitudes towards CS and social media use prior to the study. The second phase was concerned with questions about CS issues in social media. Mainly, these questions aimed to find out if and how the participants interact with companies or other social media users who communicate about CS issues.

As a part of this, it was asked how the communication of other social media users influences the participants' attitudes towards CS. In the last phase, Facebook sample posts of CS communication were given to the participants.

Posts from Facebook were chosen as examples since this social media platform has the largest number of registered users worldwide, compared to other social networks (Statista, 2016d). The posts should help the participants to envision CS in social media and to make the discussion more hands-on by adding practical examples. The reasons to choose Facebook posts from three sustainable fashion companies and one well-known multinational fashion corporation were two in particular: First, sustainability is a critical topic within the apparel industry. Especially events like the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 have drawn public attention towards working conditions (Kozłowski et al., 2015, p. 377). Second, apparel is an everyday product and thus, relevant for most people. For these two reasons, it was assumed that participants would have views and opinions to share when being confronted with these posts from two different kinds of companies. With reference to the stakeholder communication strategies by Morsing and Schultz (2006), three posts that represent a one-way communication (information) as well as three posts that represent a two-way communication (involvement), were chosen by the researchers. The posts can be found in part two of the attachment from page 43 to page 48. All guiding questions for the focus group discussions can be found in part one of the attachment from page 41 to page 42.

4.3 Data Analysis

The focus group discussions were transcribed and subsequently analysed. In this context, the qualitative data analysis programme MAXQDA was used as a helping tool. Once the transcription had been finished, it was checked by the researchers to avoid any errors (Saunders et al. 2012, p. 485).

The data analysis itself was based on a content analysis, which was conducted in four steps: First, the main statements from all participants were summarised per focus group. In this way, the key themes and patterns as well as relationships between them became visible more easily. This helped with the second step of the analysis, which was to develop categories in order to group the collected data. The model of pro-environmental behaviour by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) was used as a basis for building those categories. Subsequently, all categories were made visible in MAXQDA and connected to examples from the conducted focus groups as well as to coding rules. Third, the data from the focus groups was sorted into the developed categories within MAXQDA (Saunders et al. 2012, pp. 489-494). This classification of the empirical data was double-checked by both researchers to avoid discrepancies. As a last step, the category system was interpreted with regard to the research question.

4.4 Limitations

All in all, it was expected that a qualitative research approach is suitable to examine the research question. Nevertheless, this approach bears limitations and risks: For instance, it does not make the data universally comparable: Other researchers may form different categories from the data material and thus develop other interpretations (Saunders et al. 2012, p. 493). In addition, the focus groups only represent single cases that might not be generalizable. However, a generalisation of the results was not the aim of this study. Rather, it was a first attempt to better understand the individual use of social media with regard to CS topics.

Regarding the choice of focus groups as a research method, following risks had to be considered (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 525): First, is the question of control. Focus group discussions are mainly dependent on the participation of the group members. Nevertheless, it is important that the interviewer leads the discussion with the right level of control to gain valuable outcomes. Second, participants with strong opinions can suppress the perspectives of others. Therefore, it is vital that the interviewer includes all participants in the discussion and creates an atmosphere that allows everyone to speak out. However, based on the collected data material, these risks did not appear in the conducted focus groups.

5. Results

As a first step, the individual social media use in general was assessed. In this context, five primary factors were identified: *consumption of content, participation in content creation, production of own content, one-to-one communication, and barriers to participate and to produce content*. These results gave a first insight into the participants' general attitudes and behaviours in this communication channel.

As a second step, it was assessed if and how participants do exert their power in relation to CS issues in social media, for example by interacting with companies or other social media users who communicate about CS issues. For this purpose, the model by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) served as a basis to categorise the collected data. Thus, deductive key themes were *external, demographic, and internal factors*. Although these key themes were sufficient to explain the material, they were modified in order to apply them to the sustainability and social media context. In this context, emotions have emerged as an additional sub-theme. Table 1 shows an overview of the coding categories:

Main categories	Codes	Subcodes
Social Media Usage Behaviour	Consumption	no
	Participation	no
	Production	no
	One-to-One Communication	no
	Barriers to Participate or to Produce Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy Concerns • Low Quality • Reluctance to harm others
Communication Behaviour towards Corporate Sustainability in Social Media	External Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure • Economic • Social & Cultural
	Internal Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivations • Knowledge & Awareness • Responsibility & Priorities • Locus of Control • Attitudes • Emotional Involvement & Emotions

Table 2: Coding categories

In general, the following sections will refer to the focus groups by naming their majors. This is only due to structural reasons, since certain patterns could be observed during the data analysis. However, it was not this study's goal to compare the single groups to each other, but to gain a broad understanding of young people's social media behaviour in relation to CS topics.

5.1 Social Media Usage Behaviour

Results show that all participants use social media and have active accounts in social media networks, mostly in Facebook. Although the usage behaviour differs among the participants, the most important reason to use social media is to exchange messages with friends and to organise university groups and events (e.g. LG-P3, HH-P7, HH-P2). Below, the five key themes related to the social media usage behaviour are presented in detail.

Consumption

Most participants from the business administration group emphasised that they only consume content in social media. This includes reading news (HH-P8) and the ratings of companies, restaurants, or other places, that were produced by other social media users (HH-P4, HH-P7, HH-P8). Obtaining information on events and university related issues were further prominent reasons to consume content (HH-P7). Overall, the participants from this focus group stated that they are passive users and avoid any interaction with organisations or personally unknown persons in social media (e.g. HH-P3; HH-P7).

In the sustainability science group, half of the participants only consumes content in social media (LG-P1, LG-P2, LG-P3). Another participant, who is more active than the three ones previously mentioned, emphasised that he only reads comments generated by other users "if there is (..) a controversial topic" (LG-P5).

Similar to the business administration group, the journalism focus group is also mainly concerned with consuming content (EI-P2, EI-P3, EI-P4, EI-P5). One of their main reasons to consume is reading the news (e.g. EI-P3). While most of the participants from the other two focus groups indicated that they only scan presented content, participants from the journalism group were more interested in reading comments that other users gave to certain posts, e.g. posts from news agencies or companies (EI-P2, EI-P3, EI-P4). For one participant (EI-P1), reading comments was only interesting when her friends have written those comments.

Participation

Participation was rather low in the business administration group. Only two students mentioned that they regularly participate in social media. For HH-P7, participating in university groups on Facebook is the main reason, while HH-P1 often tags her friends in a comment in order to draw their attention to a specific post.

In the sustainability science group, two students stated that they only participate in university groups and very rarely like or share content (LG-P2, LG-P3). Two other students (LG-P4, LG-P5) showed that they participate in a stronger way. However, sharing a post does only make sense for LG-P5 if the message reflects his opinion.

LG-P4 agreed with this behaviour: “for me it’s more about elaborating, or more than I do comments. I think I’m like you, I like a lot and I share”. This student mainly shares posts connected to topics of justice and equity. He stated that he actively uses the option to share such posts in order to spread information among his friends.

A similar picture emerged in the journalism group. Half of the students indicated that they only react to content on Facebook by liking it, while the other half showed stronger participation. One student (EI-P4) tags friends in comments and two others (EI-P5, EI-P6) sometimes share news articles on Facebook.

Production

In total, five students indicated that they produce own content in social media, while this is concentrated on the social network Facebook. HH-P7, from the business administration group, produced content once when she was in need of information about a delayed flight. Thus, she posted her question on the corporate profile on Facebook.

Two students from the sustainability science group regularly produce content in order to spread information on political, social, and sustainability issues. LG-P4 mainly posts information “that people could use to critically assess the situation [US elections] all the better and [tries] to present it in a way that’s not polarising”, while LG-P5 posts content in relation to three main topics: the refugee crisis in Germany, sustainability, and the US elections. He stated that he tries to use Facebook as a channel to actively spread his view on these topics among other users. However, he refrains from commenting on posts:

I would usually just share it because I agree with the message and, yeah... because for me, to, to comment on that I would have to disagree somehow. (LG-P5)

In the journalism group, two participants stated that they sometimes comment or post content, but the reasons are more for entertaining than for information purposes (EI-P2, EI-P5).

One-to-One Communication

All in all, the use of social media is mainly connected to social reasons, like staying in touch with friends or participating in university groups and events (e.g. LG-P3, HH-P7, HH-P2). Therefore, all participants use social media, especially Facebook and instant messenger services like WhatsApp and Snapchat, in order to exchange messages with people they know in real life. In this way, they rather use social media as an additional tool for one-to-one communication than for communicating issues from one-to-many. Exceptions are only five students, as previously mentioned.

Barriers to Participate or to Produce Content

Overall, the general willingness to actively participate in social media or to produce content is limited. Throughout all three focus groups, main reasons to not participate and to produce content are *privacy concerns*, a perceived *low quality* of social media content, and the *reluctance to harm others* by giving critical comments.

Privacy concerns are related to participants' unwillingness to appear on social media sites with their names (HH-P1, HH-P4, EI-P5).

The quality of social media content is perceived as low since participants feel that many comments of other users are either not relevant or not constructive for the discussion. Thus, they do not want to take part in them (HH-P6, LG-P1, EI-P4, EI-P5). Furthermore, they accentuated that the most active users in social media discussions seem to be people with a highly negative attitude towards the topic ("hater", EI-P4). In their view, this circumstance hinders constructive outcomes of social media discussions.

An interesting barrier was mentioned in the business administration group. Two students (HH-P3, HH-P8) of this group indicated that they do not want to harm corporations by criticising them publicly via social media. Instead, they would rather contact the corporations directly by e-mail.

5.2 Communication Behaviour towards Corporate Sustainability in Social Media

Findings indicate that most participants do not exert their power in relation to CS issues in social media. Despite the fact that participants in each group show some variation in their opinions, it is possible to observe tendencies with regard to attitudes as well as with regard to sustainability knowledge and awareness for each group.

Results for all key themes and sub-themes that were discovered in the data material are presented below. The demographic characteristics (age, level of education) of the focus groups were named in the method section on page 15. Therefore, they are not explained separately at this point.

5.2.1 External Factors

An infrastructure in terms of social media access is given for all students. All of them use at least Facebook and for most of them, it is the main social media channel (e.g. LG-P1; LG-P2; LG-P3; EI-P4; EI-P5). Other popular social media platforms named by some students are Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube as well as the instant messenger services Snapchat and WhatsApp (e.g. HH-P7; LG-P1; EI-P5).

In the study at hand, *economic factors* appeared as the availability of time to engage in online discussion about CS issues and as the time and money the participants are willing to spend in order to act sustainably offline. It was expected that this sheds light on the importance that participants ascribe to sustainability issues in their personal lives, which helped to understand their online communication behaviour related to CS issues.

In the business administration group, economic factors had a significant influence on sustainable behaviour. The students emphasised that a higher price of sustainable products (in terms of organic vegetables or fairly produced clothes), compared to conventional products, hinders them to consume more sustainably (e.g. HH-P2, HH-P7). Furthermore, they stated that a certain time effort is required to act sustainably (HH-P1, HH-P7).

In the other two focus groups, economic aspects were less important for individual behaviour. Some participants from the journalism group dislike that social media is very time consuming and distracts them from offline activities (EI-P1, EI-P4). Another participant (EI-P1) mentioned that the financial aspect is relevant when purchasing sustainable products, but highlighted that this is no significant criteria for her own purchase decisions. In contrast to that, the sustainability science students rather discussed economic aspects of sustainability from a global perspective:

If those organisations are now incurring the true cost of doing business, the impact, the externalities globally, now the price of products goes up pretty high and our ability to consume goes down pretty extremely too. (LG-P4)

As already mentioned in subchapter 5.1, social media is an important tool for the participants to stay in touch with their friends and to contact people that they know in real life. However, only few of them (e.g. HH-P1, HH-P2, EI-P1) stated that it influences them when content is shared by one of their friends:

But I give it a different meaning when it is posted by friends of mine because then I am interested in the person as well. In this case, I rather read the content or look at it than when it is posted by someone else. (HH-P2, translated from German)

For another participant from the sustainability science group, it does not make a difference what other say to a specific content (LG-P3).

Participants of the business administration group stated that they perceive a high awareness towards sustainability issues in Germany. They argued that this influences their individual behaviour since they feel it is expected and common:

For us it is natural. I think everyone in Germany pays somehow attention to it unknowingly because you have been brought up like this... that is the society... and you do not necessarily think about it anymore like: Ohh, I am environmentally conscious. We just do it. (HH-P8, translated from German)

5.2.2 Internal Factors

Motivations

As primary motives for the participation and production of content in social media, several participants mentioned to exchange messages with friends and to organise university team projects (HH-P1-8; HH-P7; LG-P3; EI-P4) as well as other events (HH-P5; HH-P7).

The motivation to inform themselves or to communicate about CS topics in social media was rather low throughout the three focus groups. Most participants stated that they do not follow corporations in social media and are not interested to do so (e.g. LG-P1, LG-P4, HH-P1, HH-P7). Nevertheless, this does not mean that all of them are passive when it comes to sustainability topics in general. Especially two of the sustainability science students (LG-P4 and LG-P5) indicated that they regularly participate by sharing and liking. Moreover, expressing their political opinion and convincing others of their opinion was a highly relevant motive:

My behaviour has recently changed from being a passive consumer to becoming more of a political activist because (...) so many people were... not really political, even though the situation in Germany became... bad. I, I'm specifically talking about the refugee crisis and this was when I started posting more on Facebook and sharing more links other people post, 'cause I, I felt (...) I needed to express that and (...) to convince people of the right things. (LG-P5)

While LG-P5 mentioned that he regularly participates and produces contents to convince other users in general, LG-P4's motives are more selective. He stated that he gets active when a specific comment or post raises his interest and pointed out that his main topics for posting content are equity and justice:

Every once in a while (...) there is just something I have to share regarding equity or justice (...) I will find some statistics that I think are generally, like informative, that, I think, information that people could use to critically assess the situation all the better and try to present it in a way that's not polarising, I just want the information to be out there. (LG-P4)

Although their motives slightly differ, the two participants seem to disagree with prevailing political and social circumstances. This is an incentive for them to get active, which was also illustrated when LG-P5 mentioned that he would only comment on posts if he disagrees with the posted message.

Knowledge and Awareness

Two participants from the sustainability science group (LG-P4, LG-P5) mentioned that they participate and produce content related to sustainability. They presented a significant knowledge on sustainability issues during the discussion. Their fellow students showed a similar knowledge and awareness (LG-P1, LG-P2, LG-P3), but do not perform the same behaviour. As already indicated earlier, they were rather passive with regard to participating and producing social media content. The journalism students (EI-P6, EI-P5, EI-P1, EI-P4) showed awareness of CS issues:

Everyone knows these negative stories and everything about Nestlé but still people buy their products. (...) I had a look at Nestlé's PR page and it is really good. They consider the criticism and answer it by telling you exactly what you want to hear... (EI-P1)

The business administration students presented less knowledge, but were also aware of some sustainability problems. Related to that, they mentioned that they changed some offline behaviour patterns, e.g. bringing own bags to the supermarket instead of buying them, but they did not feel the need to communicate about such issues in social media (e.g. HH-P1, HH-P7).

Responsibility, Priorities and Locus of Control

Participants from the business administration group indicated that sustainability is not a priority for them, respectively that they only engage in sustainable behaviour when it is connected to existing cultural norms, as mentioned in section 5.2.1. For them, acting sustainably is especially difficult in relation to fashion consumption. They prioritised the pleasure of shopping over sustainability issues and felt that sustainable fashion is neither matching their taste nor is affordable for them (e.g. HH-P1; HH-P2).

Participants from the journalism and sustainability science group showed a stronger tendency to prioritise sustainability issues, but rather expressed this by lowering or changing their consumption behaviour than by engaging in sustainability communication or questioning CS actions via social media (e.g. LG-P3, LG-P5, EI-P6, EI-P1).

In terms of tackling sustainability problems, participants from the business administration and journalism group felt that they do not have the power to change prevailing circumstances (e.g. HH-P1; EI-P5). The journalism students assumed that expressing their opinions in social media might not be effective to change corporate practices or to be considered by other users in general (e.g. EI-P6; EI-P4).

I don't know if a company actually pays attention to negative or positive comments on social media. If that really puts pressure on them... (EI-P4, translated from German)

Other participants saw the need for individuals and society to change towards a more sustainable lifestyle, but rather connected these actions to the offline than to the online world (e.g. LG-P4; EI-P4). Some journalism students delegated this responsibility to other actors, such as political and economic ones (EI-P2, EI-P4, EI-P5). They felt that these “big players” (EI-P4) have more power in effecting a change.

Attitudes

When it comes to companies in social media, many participants do not want to follow them because they do not want to be carriers and receivers of advertisements or because they feel annoyed by the amount of company posts (e.g. HH-P1; HH-P7; LG-P1; LG-P4; EI-P4).

With regard to CS activities, the participants showed similar *attitudes* as well: Distrust on companies’ honesty is prevailing and communication on sustainability activities is often perceived to only happen for marketing or image reasons (e.g. HH-P1; HH-P3; HH-P8; LG-P5; EI-P1). However, participants across all three focus groups highlighted the role of third-party-endorsements for creating confidence in CS activities. These could be endorsements from media (e.g. HH-P1; LG-P2; LG-P3; LG-P4; EI-P4; EI-P2), through certifications (e.g. LG-P4; LG-P2), non-governmental organisations (e.g. LG-P2; LG-P5), and political institutions (EI-P4). The doubts about CS activities in general were also reflected in the participants’ attitude towards the communication of CS issues in social media:

I think I will always have the feeling if a company posts something about their sustainable... work, I will always have the feeling, what do you hide? (LG-P2)

I think it is difficult if they are starting to post more on Facebook themselves. One does not know if this is really true, or just consider how many things are photoshopped... (EI-P6, translated from German)

As the participants’ statements and reactions towards the sample posts showed, the amount and way of communication are crucial factors in this context:

If they [the corporations] spam you, you do not want to deal with it [information about sustainability activities] at that moment and you are just annoyed and then you will certainly not look at it anymore. (HH-P8, translated from German)

I think this is slightly connected to the frequency, how often do people click on that. If it is only one article or contribution from time to time, then the chances are higher that one says: Ok, I click on it and have a look on it. But when there is something coming up all the time, one does not read it. (EI-P6, translated from German)

Moreover, some participants did not consider social media, especially Facebook, to be a reliable platform for communication about CS issues (e.g. LG-P4; EI-P4).

While doubts about the reliability of CS communication existed across all focus groups, it was interesting to see that the sample posts were perceived differently by the groups. Informative posts were rather less appealing to participants from the business administration group:

Even if the message behind that is super, this rather is an advertisement post for me. (...) we are sustainable and this is the explanation, but if I already follow them, I do not need to be reminded of that. So, I would not be that happy if I would see that, that would annoy me. (HH-P1, translated from German)

For me, this article is too much connected to the eco-movement. Also the comments, these are the typical people, little bit of activists, that are into the topic (...) sure, this is a high level, but it is too difficult for me to connect with that (...) it is not really tangible. (HH-P8, translated from German)

Two commonalities of all groups were the overall negative reaction towards the multinational corporation's post and the positive reaction towards a smaller, sustainable fashion company's detailed replies to critical comments. The first one is mainly connected to doubts about the company's honesty and the feeling that the communicated issue is ridiculous (e.g. HH-P5; HH-P7; LG-P5; LG-EI-P4; EI-P5, EI-P1), whereas the second one is seen as an indicator for transparency and honesty (e.g. HH-P7; EI-P4; EI-P6).

Emotional Involvement and Emotions

As already mentioned above, two participants from the sustainability science group (LG-P4, LG-P5) indicated that they express their political opinion in social media in order to convince others. According to their statements (see *motivations*), both participants seem to share a feeling of injustice connected to current political and social issues that they want to fight by spreading information on social media. The feeling of injustice can be classified as a negative emotion. At the same time, it seems to cause a positive emotion for LG-P4 if he can share such information with others via social media:

Even if, like, I can influence anybody or I don't influence, and maybe I just feel a little bit better, because I, hopefully somebody finds it and that kind of maybe gives him a little bit better informed decision. (LG-P4)

However, there are also negative feelings connected to that action:

I try to stay away from that as much as I can, but every once in a while (...) something gets me fired up (...) but then, (...) it's almost like I'm apologetic, 'cause immediately after that I will post some, like, silly pictures of some cat (...) like I'm, not trying to steer political agenda or something. (LG-P4)

Concerning the reactions towards the sample posts, participants from the business administration group showed positive emotions when being confronted with those posts that try to engage social media users and do not directly point to sustainability issues. As the following statement illustrates, this is connected to the use of appealing pictures and contents that match the participant's interests:

For me, it is important that the issue is communicated like this, that it does not bear this eco-impression from the very beginning, but that it is exactly like this (...) that it sparks my interest. (HH-P1, translated from German)

In contrast to that, participants from the sustainability science group reacted rather negatively to all sample post, no matter if they communicated their messages in an informative or engaging way. They were mostly considered as superficial, marketing or not truly sustainable (e.g. LG-P1; LG-P3; LG-P4; LG-P1).

The journalism group's reaction can be considered to be in between the other two groups. They reacted positively to one post that gave detailed informed, since the corporation "explained everything step by step" (EI-P4), but the reaction towards the more engaging posts were rather mixed. Some participants considered them to follow a good concept (e.g. EI-P3; EI-P4), while others were not convinced by their approach (e.g. EI-P5).

6. Discussion

This study suggests that one-to-one communication is a main incentive to use social media, rather than to share content and communicate with many. This finding contrasts existing literature. This usage behaviour seems to have an impact on the participants' communication behaviour towards CS issues in social media as well: Results indicate that the level of social media activity with regard to CS issues is rather low, with only few exceptions. Thus, social media's potential as an empowerment tool is not unlocked by the participants.

6.1 Social Media Usage Behaviour

Overall, the classification of the collected data into three social media usage types is in accordance with the types defined by Shao (2009). However, these three types could not be found in every focus group. Moreover, findings suggest that the classification by Shao (2009) is not sufficient since it excludes one-to-one communication.

As already mentioned in subchapter 5.1, most of the students use social media in a *consumptive* way. This rather passive behaviour illustrates a discrepancy to previous research, since for example Castells (2009) highlights the possibilities for individuals to create own content in social media and spread it with a global reach. The level of *participation* varied among the three focus groups, however content sharing was limited to certain topics and sometimes to content produced by friends. Only two students unlock the full potential of social media in the role of "the new opinion-makers", as it is defined by Zerfaß and Boelter (2005; cited in de Witt, 2011, p. 85), and *produce* contents.

In general, the majority of participants acts rather passive in social media, which suggests that the distinction of social media users to the passive audience in traditional mass media is not as clear as Castell (2009) states. In connection to this, the study reveals that social media does not change communication behaviours totally since most participants use social media for *one-to-one communication* with friends or with people they know in real life. This points to the need to extend Shao's (2009) classification of social media usage types by including personal one-to-one messaging.

Barriers to Participate or to Produce Content

Participants across all three focus groups indicated that privacy concerns are a major barrier that makes them refrain from posting or commenting on corporate social media sites. Those concerns are also mentioned by Sánchez et al. (2012) who conducted a survey among students in order to assess their privacy expectations in the social media context. Their findings suggest that students want to keep their privacy towards potential employers, but still publish a lot of personal information in social media networks.

Since the present study found that participants do not want other individual users and corporations to see their names on corporate social media sites, the first finding by Sánchez et al. (2012) can be supported. However, participants in this study are in general rather passive when it comes to sharing their personal information and opinions on social media networks. This contradicts Sánchez et al.'s (2012) second finding, but is in line with a more recent study, carried out by Custers et al. (2014). They analysed consumers' privacy expectations with regard to social media and came to the conclusion that those were significantly high (Custers et al., 2014, p. 291).

Another barrier for the participants in the study at hand is that they often perceive content and discussions in social media as low quality ones. Thus, they do not want to engage in the same. To the authors' knowledge, low quality has not explicitly been mentioned as a barrier for individual social media use in previous research. However, research by Agichtein et al. (2008) and Figueiredo et al. (2013) points to the potential lack of quality in user-generated content. A second finding that - again, to the authors' best knowledge - has not been covered by previous studies is that some participants from the business administration group refrain from contacting corporations publicly in social media since they do not want to harm them.

6.2 Communication Behaviour towards Corporate Sustainability in Social Media

Results indicate that the level of social media activity with regard to CS issues is not directly connected to the participants' sustainability knowledge and awareness. Even if these two factors are given, most participants were not inclined to communicate about CS. One reason might lie in the perceived locus of control. A second reason might be that personal responsibility and prioritising sustainability apparently has a weaker influence on social media than offline behaviour. Finally, findings suggest that students with a high knowledge on sustainability issues are less inclined to trust CS communication and to be involved emotionally by engaging pictures and texts only.

6.2.1 External Factors

The findings of this study suggest that external factors play a role for individual communication behaviour towards CS issues. However, the original definition, as suggested by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), is only partly applicable to the present data material.

While they see institutional factors as related to the infrastructure of public transport and recycling facilities (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 248), this definition was not entirely tenable for the analysis of the focus groups at hand since their main focus was online instead of offline behaviour.

Thus, institutional factors mainly appeared as online infrastructure. This refers to the availability of social media accounts in order to participate in CS discussions on these platforms.

Although economic factors were visible in the data material, as explained in section 5.2.1, they do not seem to be directly connected to the participants' social media behaviour towards CS issues. As in the original definition, social and cultural factors were visible as influences from the participants' culture and from people in their environment, i.e. family, friends, and acquaintances. Nevertheless, only few participants mentioned social and cultural influences explicitly and thus, they do not seem to play a decisive role for their behaviour in social media.

6.2.2 Internal Factors

For the data analysis, Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) internal factors had to be modified. The modifications are explained below. The factor *values* could not be assessed based on the data material.

Motivations

In the context of the data material at hand, motivation was scrutinised with regard to two issues: First, the motivation to participate and produce content in social media in general. This helped to gain a better understanding of the communication behaviour in social media, which was relevant for scrutinising communication about CS issues. Second, the motivation to consume, participate or produce content in social media with regard to CS issues was assessed.

The data analysis showed that participants' behaviour is driven by both primary (e.g. the comfort of social media as a communication tool for private and university issues) and selective motives (e.g. getting or spreading fast information in one specific situation). This is in accordance with Kollmuss and Agyeman's model (2002, p. 250). However, the participants' motivations to inform themselves or communicate about CS topics in social media were rather low throughout the three focus groups. Thus, the question remains why most participants do not use their communication power when it comes to CS issues.

Only two participants (LG-P4, LG-P5), who were from the sustainability science group, indicated that they regularly participate and produce content with regard to social, political, and sustainability topics. Their main argument for this action was to inform others about these topics, either in order to convince them of their opinion (LG-P5) or in order to provide information that helps them to reflect the topics critically (LG-P4). This behaviour is in accordance with a statement by Oh and Syn (2015). They highlight that people are more likely to participate in social systems if they "feel that they have enough knowledge and expertise in a particular subject and that this will help others" (p. 2047).

Although LG-P4's and LG-P5's motives slightly differ, they seem to share a feeling of injustice connected to political and social issues that they want to fight by spreading information on social media. Thus, disagreement with prevailing circumstances is an incentive for them. This positive impact of polarisation on individual willingness to participate in public discourse is also highlighted by previous research (e.g. Fieseler and Fleck 2013, p. 760).

Knowledge and Awareness

As indicated by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 254), *knowledge* and *awareness* of environmental problems do not automatically foster pro-environmental behaviour, but can make it more likely to occur. Thus, it was assumed that knowledge and awareness of sustainability problems make a pro-sustainability behaviour, including the communication about these problems, more likely, but not a necessity. This was confirmed by the focus group participants. Although participants from the sustainability science group showed the most extensive knowledge on sustainability issues, only two students from this group claimed to regularly engage with social, political, and sustainability issues in social media. The participants of the other two focus groups stated that they neither communicate about CS issues in social media nor contact corporations directly, even if they are aware of sustainability issues.

Responsibility, Priorities and Locus of Control

According to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) it is more likely that individuals engage in pro-environmental behaviour when these are "in alignment with [their] personal priorities" (p. 256). When considering the findings from the business administration group, this can be confirmed since participants stated that sustainability is not a priority for them and apparently, this is why they also do not engage in communication about CS issues in social media.

However, this factor fails to explain the social media inactivity of the journalism and sustainability science students. Some participants from the journalism group acknowledged the importance of sustainability issues. However, their activity level with regard to CS issues in social media was no different from the business administration group.

With only two exceptions, the same was true for the sustainability science students since sustainability is a priority for all of them and they are aware of their own responsibilities. As already indicated, they rather show this by changing their consumption behaviour. This suggests that responsibility and priorities might have a weaker influence on social media than on offline behaviour.

Furthermore, another reason for this inactivity might be the locus of control. This is for example visible when participants stated that they would not have the power to change sustainability problems. Instead, they felt that other actors from economy and politics have more power in effecting a change, which is in accordance with Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 256).

Attitudes

Although Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 252) ascribe a weak, indirect and varying influence to *attitudes* as the shapers of pro-environmental behaviour, the participants' attitudes offered valuable insights into their social media communication behaviour related to CS issues. Attitudes could mainly be observed with regard to three areas: the attitude towards social media, the attitude towards CS, and the attitude towards CS communication in social media.

Concerning the first area, participants showed mixed attitudes: On the one hand, they valued social media as an easy tool to organise events and university team works as well as to stay in touch with personal contacts (see *motivations*). On the other hand, they doubted its reliability and effectiveness when it comes to topics that are not directly related to their private lives. The attitude towards CS activities is quite similar across all the focus groups since distrust towards corporations' honesty is prevailing and the communication on sustainability activities is often perceived to only happen for marketing or image reasons.

With regard to the third area, many participants stated that they do not want to follow corporations in social media which is contrary to findings presented by Smith and Gallicano (2015). They have found that young people wish to establish a dialogue with organisations and thus, have subscribed to their content. However, participants in the present study did not subscribe to content from corporations. Especially the sustainability science students showed a strongly negative attitude towards CS communication in social media. Similar to their opinion on CS activities in general, they judge this communication as a marketing and reputation management tool. Hence, they do not perceive it as trustworthy or really addressing sustainability issues. This critical opinion is probably related to the fact that students from this group show the highest levels of sustainability awareness and knowledge, compared to the other two focus groups. Still, even the majority of this group was not willing to express their opinions on CS issues in social media or to discuss these issues with corporations or other users. The main reason was that social media is not considered to be an appropriate tool for getting information and for having discussion about CS issues. For this purpose, other channels, such as accredited sustainability reports, are favoured. In relation to that, participants across all three focus groups emphasised the relevance of third-party-endorsements in order to create confidence in CS communication. This relevance has also been pointed out by existing literature on corporate communication (e.g. Walter, 2012, p. 152).

Emotional Involvement and Emotions

A feeling of injustice seems to motivate two participants (LG-P4, LG-P5) from the sustainability science group to participate and produce contents on current political, social, sustainability issues in social media. This feeling can be classified as a negative emotion which might lead to emotional involvement. Consequently, actions become more likely (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 254).

With regard to LG-P4, the posting of entertaining content after political content might point to concerns about social acceptance, which can be seen as a negative emotion. Although he considers the content he posts or shares to be important, he might feel that it is not popular in his network. This underlines the purpose of social media networks for self-presentation and social-integration, which has been identified by previous research (Lin and Chung, 2014; Wang et al., 2015, p. 35). Furthermore, according to Goffman (1959, cited in Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) “the concept of self-presentation states that in any type of social interaction people have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them”. Thus, with regard to this and to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 255), LG-P4 might try to fight this negative emotion by posting entertaining pictures and hence, create a distance to the content he had posted before.

When looking at the focus groups’ reactions towards the sample posts, the finding from the business administration group was interesting. Their rather negative attitude towards corporations and sustainability topics in social media contrasted their reaction in this case. The pictures and contents seemed to appeal to them on an emotional level, since they were more inclined to react after they had seen these posts. This is accordance with Adomßent and Godemann (2011, p. 35) who highlight that communication should create emotional involvement by using images that the target group can relate to.

Apparently, this does not work for the other two focus groups since the journalism students considered posts with detailed information on sustainability topics to be most interesting and trustworthy, while the engaging posts caused both positive and negative reactions. For the sustainability science students, the reactions were negative towards all posts. Consequently, the willingness to react on the posts and participate in the discussion did not increase for most participants from those two groups.

6.3 Key Relationships

In conclusion, the data material shows that the level of social media activity with regard to CS issues is not directly connected to the participants’ *awareness* and *knowledge* of sustainability issues. However, two participants with high sustainability knowledge and awareness were the only ones who claimed to regularly participate and produce content with regard to sustainability topics.

This suggests that knowledge and awareness make activity more likely, but not a necessity since the other participants from the sustainability science group were not engaging in the same behaviour. As already indicated, they rather showed that sustainability is a *priority* for them by changing their consumption behaviour, instead of communicating about these issues online. This points to a weaker influence of responsibility and priorities on social media than on offline behaviour.

As findings from the journalism focus group suggest, another reason for not communicating about CS issues in social media might be the *locus of control*. Participants felt that not themselves, but other actors from economy and politics have more power in effecting a change.

The participants' reactions towards the sample posts implied another relationship between the factors: While most of them had negative *attitudes* towards social media as a communication tool for corporations and sustainability issues, the business administration students' reaction towards the sample posts contrasted this attitude. The posts seemed to cause *emotional involvement* since the participants stated that they were more inclined to react after they had seen these posts. Thus, their attitude towards CS topics in social media seemed to change after emotional involvement had been caused.

The fact that most participants from the other two focus groups reacted rather negatively towards the sample posts might be connected to their level of knowledge on sustainability issues. Especially participants from the sustainability science group indicated that they are very critical towards corporate actions and thus, have difficulties to trust CS communication.

Although all participants of the sustainability science group agreed on this view, two of them (LG-P4, LG-P5) show a more active social media usage than their fellow students. This suggests that the *level of education* does not have a decisive role for activity since all participants went through several years of studies. This is contrary to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 248) and Oh and Syn (2015, p. 2057), who describe the level of education as a crucial factor for motivation and information sharing. However, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 248) mention that the educational level might not be sufficient to motivate a behaviour, but that other factors play a role for this as well. This is confirmed by the findings of this study. They rather point to the relevance of the *subject of education*, since the most active participants are from the sustainability science group. However, the fact that both participants put a higher emphasis on communicating about social and political issues, rather than about sustainability issues, might relate to *cognitive limitations*, as they are mentioned by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002). While environmental destruction happens slowly and is not immediately visible, the political issues the participants are referring to have a high current relevance. However, this is only one possible explanation and other factors are probably shaping this behaviour as well.

All in all, the mainly critical *attitudes* towards social media as a communication tool for sustainability issues, as well as the barriers to engage in social media discussions, are often too high for the majority of the students. Most of them were not motivated to follow, comment or react on CS issues in social media. Thus, they are not inclined to exert their communication power with regard to CS topics in this channel.

6.4 Applicability of the Pro-Environmental Behaviour Model by Kollmuss and Agyeman

Most categories from Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) model were suitable for the analysis of the focus group discussions. However, some categories and underlying factors were modified due to the context of social media: While most external factors could be applied to the data material in their original definition, their impact was mainly connected to individuals' offline behaviour towards sustainability issues. Thus, their relevance for the aim of this study was limited.

The internal factors *responsibility and priorities* and *locus of control* could be applied in their original definition (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 256). *Values* could not be assessed based on the data material. The other internal factors had to be modified to match the context of sustainability and individual social media behaviour:

First, *awareness* was not only considered as "knowing of the impact of human behavior on the environment" (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 253), but as acknowledging the environmental and social impact of human behaviour. The same is true for *knowledge*, which was understood as knowledge on sustainability issues and thus, was broader than environmental knowledge only.

As suggested by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 250), *motivations* could be divided into primary and selective ones. Nevertheless, they were not considered in relation to pro-environmental behaviour, but first, with regard to the motivation to participate and produce content in social media in general, and second, with regard to the motivation to consume, participate or produce content related to CS issues.

A similar modification was made concerning the factor *attitudes*. While the definition of the term could be maintained (Newhouse, 1991, cited in Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 252), attitudes towards pro-environmental behaviour were not a key theme in the data material. Instead, attitudes could be observed with regard to three areas: the attitude towards social media, the attitude towards CS, and the attitude towards CS communication in social media.

The last modified factor is *emotional involvement*. In Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) model, it is defined as "the extent to which we have an affective relationship to the natural world" (p. 254) and as "the ability to have an emotional reaction when being confronted with environmental degradation" (p. 254). In the data material, emotional involvement rather emerged as the participants' emotional reaction when being confronted with CS communication in social media. In connection to this factor, *emotions* appeared as a relevant factor. Especially negative emotions in terms of a feeling of injustice could be identified as an incentive for active participation. This is in line with previous research conducted by Fieseler and Fleck (2013) who state that an increasing polarisation can have a positive impact on individuals' willingness to participate in public discourse.

6.5 Critical Reflection of Results and Further Research

As mentioned previously, studies about individual communication behaviour related to sustainability topics in social media are still rare. In connection to this, it is rather unexplored how individuals use social media in order to challenge corporate actions and CS issues. Therefore, this thesis aimed to contribute to that field. The purpose was to examine individual social media behaviour related to CS issues. This was analysed by using three focus groups, composed of students from different academic backgrounds. As a result, knowledge has been gained about factors that might foster or hinder individuals to use their communication power with regard to CS issues in social media. For this purpose, Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) model of pro-environmental was applied in a modified way.

The qualitative approach of using focus groups and content analysis was suitable to achieve this study's goal. Still, it has limitations. First, the factor *values* from Kollmann and Agyeman's (2002) model could not be assessed based on the data material. Future research could specifically target how this factor influences a pro-sustainable communication behaviour in social media. Second, several participants only use certain social media platforms, mostly Facebook. Thus, the findings of this study are above all connected to this social media platform. Further research could examine whether the individual communication behaviour with regard to CS issues is different in other social media platforms. Third, the chosen participants only represent one socio-economic group with two cultural backgrounds (German and American). Therefore, further research could apply long-term studies in order to scrutinise bigger samples or to compare participants with different socio-economic characteristics (e.g. cultural background, age, income, education level). This enables to see if the key factors, relations, and barriers that have been the result of this study, are also true for other socio-economic groups. Since only two participants of all focus groups indicated that they are regularly active on social media when it comes to political and sustainability topics, the results on factors that determine such behaviour are rather weak. Further research could scrutinise samples of active participants in order to find out what motivates their behaviour.

7. Conclusion and Outlook

Overall, the model of pro-environmental behaviour by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) was a suitable basis to evaluate students' social media behaviour in relation to CS issues. The key themes were sufficient to explain the data material, but they had to be modified in order to be applicable to the context of social media and sustainability.

The empirical results of the study suggest that (1) the level of social media activity with regard to CS issues is not directly connected to the students' *awareness* and *knowledge* of sustainability issues. However, knowledge and awareness may make activity more likely; (2) *responsibility and priorities* have a weaker influence on social media than on offline behaviour; (3) despite of an acknowledgment of sustainability issues, the perceived *locus of control* can prevent students from communicating about such topics in social media; (4) students with high individual *knowledge on sustainability* are less inclined to trust CS communication and to be involved emotionally by engaging pictures and texts only.

In conclusion, most participants are not inclined to exert their communication power over corporations in social media. According to the collected data material, this is not only true for CS issues, but for most discussions in social media in general.

The findings point to several theoretical and practical implications: First, findings question the relevance of social media as an empowerment tool with regard to CS issues. This is contrary to previous research on political and social movements. Thus, further research is necessary in order to validate this study's results for the area of CS issues.

Second, there has been a lack of studies to date that assess the reasons for individuals to use social media interactively. Moreover, little attention has been paid to individual motivations for sharing information and personal opinions (Oh and Syn, 2015, pp. 2046-2048). The study at hand contributes to this area of research by focussing on CS topics. In connection to this, three main barriers for individuals to communicate about CS issues in social media were identified: While privacy concerns are an issue that has already been considered in previous literature (e.g. Custers et al., 2014; Sánchez et al., 2012), this study found two additional barriers that have not been mentioned previously: a perceived low quality of social media discussions and content, and the reluctance to harm other social media users, in this case corporations.

Finally, three practical implications can be drawn: The mainly critical *attitudes* towards social media as a communication channel for CS topics question its appropriateness to communicate these issues. According to this study's findings, corporations that want to inform and engage individuals in their CS activities via social media need to consider the following issues: First, it is crucial to communicate CS content in a way that is tailored for different target groups. While students with high knowledge on this topic prefer to have in-depth information rather than engaging posts, students with lower knowledge are more inclined to react to engaging posts that do not directly point to sustainability issues.

Second, corporations benefit from third-party-endorsements, since they significantly support the creation of confidence in the communication of CS activities. Third, it is crucial for corporations to give detailed replies to critical comments from individual users in order to create trust and transparency.

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Visby, 31.05.2016

Lisa Glowinski & Chiara Kerber

Attachment

Table of Contents

Part I: Guiding Questions for Focus Groups	41
Part II: Facebook Sample Posts for Focus Groups	43

I. Guiding Questions for Focus Groups

- 1) Are you active on social media and what are your main activities?
- 2) Do you follow any companies in social media?
- 3) If so, which companies do you follow and why? If not, why do you not follow any companies?
- 4) Do you know the term sustainability and what do you connect with it?
- 5) Do you consider sustainability to be important in your personal life?
- 6) Do you consider companies to be responsible to address social and environmental issues?
- 7) Which channels do you trust most when it comes to corporate sustainability communication?
- 8) Do you trust corporate sustainability communication in social media? Why or why not?
- 9) Do you have the impression that companies are open to feedback in social media?
- 10) Do you give such feedback to companies by commenting on their posts or by messaging them?
- 11) Do you share companies' posts on sustainability?
- 12) Do you follow comments to corporate sustainability posts that you have liked?
- 13) What are the factors that encourage or hinder you to comment on posts / to share them /to message companies?
- 14) Do your friends / family members communicate about corporate sustainability in social media or share corporate sustainability posts?
- 15) If so, does their communication influence your opinion on corporate sustainability?
- 16) How important is the reaction of companies on user comments or their reaction on user feedback to you?


- 17) Does it make a difference for you if the company only distributes information on its sustainability engagement (one-way communication) or if it tries to engage the users in sustainability actions and goals (two-way communication)? (in terms of credibility, legitimacy, developing the own understanding of sustainability,...)
- 18) Do you know these examples of corporate sustainability posts on Facebook? → The participants will see examples of corporate sustainability posts on Facebook. With reference to the stakeholder communication strategies by Morsing and Schultz (2006), they will see posts that represent a one-way communication (stakeholder information) as well as posts that represent a two-way communication (stakeholder involvement).
- 19) What do you think about the way in which the information is presented? Do you consider it to be comprehensible and transparent?
- 20) Do you consider the corporate sustainability activities to be legitimate, judging from the Facebook posts and user comments?
- 21) Do you have the impression that the companies are committed to sustainability judging from the Facebook posts? Why or why not?
- 22) Would you react to these particular posts or share them? Why or why not?
- 23) When considering your own experiences and the examples that we have shown you: What would you like to change with regard to corporate sustainability post contents and/or the way of communication about corporate sustainability in social media (e.g. preference of one-way or two-way communication, who should communicate, which contents,...)?

II. Facebook Sample Posts for Focus Groups

People Tree
31. März um 19:47 · 🌐

It's brilliant to see the ethical fashion movement growing among the new generation of designers. With more education and awareness, together we will be empowered as consumers. <http://fal.cn/2tiv>

Übersetzung anzeigen



Fur-free coats and wood heels: study a master's in sustainable fashion
The shift is towards more ethical and sustainable practices in the manufacturing process, and a number of postgraduate courses are setting the trend
[HTTP://FAL.CN/2TIV](http://fal.cn/2tiv)

👍 Gefällt mir · 💬 Kommentieren · ➦ Teilen

👍❤️ 116 Top-Kommentare ▾

3 Mal geteilt

People Tree
1. April um 19:13 · 🌐

Does the [#SlowFashion](#) lifestyle speak to you?
Our team have been inspired to take a fresh look at our wardrobes and we've pulled together our top tips to help create a unique and stylish capsule wardrobe. We'd love to hear your tips and ideas too!
<http://fal.cn/2tZx>

Übersetzung anzeigen



6 Tips to Create Your Perfect Capsule Wardrobe
Capsule wardrobes are becoming increasingly popular but this fashion movement is about more than the average catwalk craze – it's a long-term commitment.
[HTTP://FAL.CN/2TZX](http://fal.cn/2tZx) Mehr dazu

👍 Gefällt mir · 💬 Kommentieren · ➦ Teilen

👍❤️ 20



ARMEDANGELS

2. Februar · 🌐

Für uns ist Bio kein Trend, sondern eine Einstellung und Verantwortung gegenüber unserer Umwelt, keine Option, sondern ein Muss. Deshalb setzen wir auf nachhaltige Materialien wie z.B. Bio-Baumwolle...mehr dazu gibt's hier: <http://www.armedangels.de/bio-baumwolle>



👍 Gefällt mir

💬 Kommentieren

➦ Teilen



👍 424

Chronologisch ▾



Sonja Krout Super Sache!

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 3. Februar um 17:46



Ladies first Gemünd Ein großer Teil der neuen Kollektion von ARMEDANGELS ist schon bei uns eingetroffen. Wir führen Armedangels bis Größe XL, also Größe 46

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 👍 1 · 3. Februar um 19:35

↪ 1 Antwort



Carsten Behr Sie schreiben, dass Ihre Baumwolle weniger Wasser benötigt, als konventionell angebaute. Wie sieht es mit dem Wasserverbrauch je produzierter Einheit Baumwolle aus? Ich gehe davon aus, dass der Wasserverbrauch je Einheit Fläche wirklich geringer ist, ... [Mehr anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 👍 1 · 4. Februar um 13:35

ARMEDANGELS Hi Carsten, der Wasserverbrauch ist bei Bio-Baumwolle deutlich geringer als bei konventioneller. Wieviel das genau pro Einheit ist, müssten wir aber checken. Zum Kuhmist: Viele unserer Bauern arbeiten bereits mit Wurmkompost Anlagen. Als wir im Novembe... [Mehr anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. Februar um 14:02

↪ Weitere Antworten anzeigen



Carsten Behr Zweite Frage: Aus welchen Ländern stammt die BioBaumwolle?

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. Februar um 13:37

ARMEDANGELS Unsere Bio-Baumwolle stammt aus Indien und der Türkei. Wenn Du auf unserer FB Seite etwas runterscrollst findest Du auch Bilder unserer Indienreise. Im November waren wir dort, haben die Bauern besucht und bei der Ernte mitgeholfen.

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. Februar um 14:04



Michael Riewendt Bio ist ein Irrglaube!

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. Februar um 16:30



Tamino Monte Schade, dass ihr nicht komplett vegan seid. "Fair" bedeutet für mich auch, fair unseren tierischen Brüdern und Schwestern gegenüber zu sein, also nichts Tierliches zu verwenden

die Bauern besucht und bei der Ernte mitgeholfen.

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. Februar um 14:04



Michael Riewendt Bio ist ein Irrglaube!

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. Februar um 16:30



Tamino Monte Schade, dass ihr nicht komplett vegan seid. "Fair" bedeutet für mich auch, fair unseren tierischen Brüdern und Schwestern gegenüber zu sein, also nichts Tierliches zu verwenden.

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 1 · 5. Februar um 16:41



ARMEDANGELS Hey Tamino, sehen wir genauso. Obwohl wir uns nicht dazu entschieden haben ein veganes Modelabel zu sein, achten wir bei der Arbeit mit tierischen Rohstoffen auf ein tierwürdiges und dennoch nachhaltiges Verfahren. Für unsere Artikel nutzen wir ledigli... [Mehr anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 2 · 17. Februar um 15:14



Céline Müller also dann sind die gewisse hosen mit lederpatches auf der website noch alte modelle? <http://www.armedangels.de/frauenbekleidung-skinny-zoe...>



Zoe Skinny | ARMEDANGELS

erhältlich in schwarz, rot, braun, oliv, blau und türkis - Skinny, 97% Baumwolle (bio), 3% Elasthan, Slim Fit -...

ARMEDANGELS.DE

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 2. März um 12:33



ARMEDANGELS Ganz genau...sorry, Kommentar irgendwie übersehen...Ab SS16 nur noch Jacron.

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 1 · 11. März um 14:42 · Bearbeitet

[Weitere Antworten anzeigen](#)



ZARA

18. März um 09:59 · 🌐

In support of #earthHour the lights in our store windows will remain off on March 19 from 8.30 to 9.30pm
CHANGE FOR CLIMATE

Übersetzung anzeigen



👍 Gefällt mir · 💬 Kommentieren · ➦ Teilen

👍 🗨️ 🗨️ 1123

Top-Kommentare ▾

86 Mal geteilt



Kaitlyn Webb Patience Whatever happened to customer service? The Inditex website states "Customers lie at the heart of our business model. Customer service is an absolute priority."

What a joke!... Mehr anzeigen

Übersetzung anzeigen

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 👍 2 · 4. April um 19:34



ZARA Hello Kaitlyn, please accept our sincerest apologies for any inconvenience caused as all of our items undergo strict quality measures before distribution. In order to further assist, please send us the following information via a private message to our... Mehr anzeigen

Übersetzung anzeigen

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 4. April um 21:49



Meghan Lewison Your customer service is the worst!!! I placed an order a week ago with expedited shipping and when i finally contacted customer service to find out where it was they told me that through a warehouse glitch my order had been canceled and offered me free shipping on my next order. They did not offer to place the order for me and get it to me quickly even though it was completely your fault. Unbelievable!

Übersetzung anzeigen

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 👍 4 · 29. März um 23:21



ZARA Hello Meghan, we apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. Please send us a private message through our Customer Care account ZARA Care <http://on.fb.me/1zZphdI> with the order number. We await your reply. Thank you.

Übersetzung anzeigen

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 30. März um 00:01

↪ Weitere Antworten anzeigen



Sara Daley I bought a trench coat a week and a half ago in Paris that is completely falling apart. I am living in Germany and I have the amount charged to my credit card, but I can't find the receipt. I called the France and US customer service with everyone just pushing me around to the next person. Who can I talk to about this?

Übersetzung anzeigen

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 👍 3 · 28. März um 16:15 · Bearbeitet



BGMEA Thanks ZARA for its support to #earthHour. Really any development won't be sustainable leaving our environment vulnerable. We have to minimize industrial impacts on the environment we live in.

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 31. März um 06:56



Alison Halmos Good initiative! That would be great that all the stores turn off the lights in their store windows everynight... I keep dreaming that will happen one day 🌱 At least what you do is a beginning 😊

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 9 · 18. März um 12:15 · Bearbeitet



Mike Têvê if you stop polluting rivers in underdeveloped countries, maybe your "change for climate" would have better results. don't you think?

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 7 · 19. März um 15:54



Diana Stepanova Absolutely disgusted and disappointed with Zara and there customer service team. I purchased a shirt last Thursday for me and my roommate, my roommate by accident threw away my receipt as it was in a bag that she thought was garbage. I didn't like the ... [Mehr anzeigen](#)

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 1 · 30. März um 22:50



Courtney King Humphrey ZARA! holy hell, yall are killing me! who is desinging for yall right now bc they need to be stopped! The collection is SCHIZO...I scroll through and it feels like I'm on a site that combined Forever 21, American Apparel and threw some Limited i... [Mehr anzeigen](#)

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 30. März um 02:06 · Bearbeitet



Lizzle Fo'shizzlemydizzle Seriously Zara only one hour ? What keeps you from just plainly stopping to light your windows at night ?

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 6 · 18. März um 22:02 · Bearbeitet



Matt Szura After having been assured that we were going to be credited on 3/17/16 (for package number two #2111860 of order #173744193 for \$478.82) and being told that all we need to do was provide verbal confirmation that here was not a open (or reopened) disput... [Mehr anzeigen](#)

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Gefällt mir · Antworten · 1 · 28. März um 21:48



People Tree

1 April at 11:23 · 🌐

Today is Walk to Work Day! If you're inspired to make it a new habit with the longer days and better weather on the way, check out our top tips: <http://fal.cn/2txr>. And we'd love to hear yours on getting up and being active in the morning! Organic coffee anyone?



Make a New Start this Walk to Work Day | The Thread

We're big advocates of anything that encourages health and positivity at People Tree; life is too short not to be out there enjoying every day! But the work/life balance can be difficult to maintain, and finding easy ways to fit things in around...

[HTTP://FAL.CN/2TXR](http://fal.cn/2txr)

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

👍 15



Mud Jeans with Adèle Vainoraitė and Janne Erxleben.

Yesterday at 13:39 · 🌐

Launching The Recycle Tour at B Corporation. We're going to bring our returned jeans to the recycle factory in Valencia. Roadtrip! Hand in your old jeans at our goodbye event May 1st in Amsterdam. More info soon!



👍❤️ 28

Top comments ▾

1 share



Write a comment...



gNappies that's such a good idea! Nice to meet you fellow B Corporation people! 😊

Like · Reply · 8 hrs



All Clifford that's brilliant! Look gNappies - another brilliant B Corporation brand for you!! 😊

Like · Reply · 👍 1 · 8 hrs

↩️ 1 Reply



Jacqueline van der Wel Mooi! Ziet er goed uit
See translation

Like · Reply · Yesterday at 18:58



Jacqueline van der Wel



Like · Reply · Yesterday at 18:58

Write a comment...

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