

Breaking through the Green Box: Sustainable Initiatives of Dutch Fashion Labels

An analysis of corporate communication and sustainability

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Abstract

The fashion industry is in the midst of a transition that encourages the decrease of environmental impact. Amongst the various corporate practices that sustainable fashion brands have communicated, Dutch sustainable start-ups have increased significantly. Such start-ups have widely used corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication to be transparent about their practices, thus enhancing their brand reputation on social media platforms such as Instagram. Yet the integral part of the brand, which is identified as the *green box*, is an aspect that needs to be uncovered. The collaborative performance of the brand is estimated in the green box, by understanding how it adds to sustainability and whether such collaboration complies with its CSR communication towards its stakeholders. The sustainable practices that have been identified in this research range from innovative methods such as 3D printing, to the use of new raw materials to substitute for cotton and animal fur/skin (vegan leather or fur), and the circular economy by reusing textiles and giving it a prolonged life, which reduces waste and overproduction. Scholars have demonstrated that consumers are overwhelmed by the CSR claims of fashion brands, and therefore encouraging green washing. On the basis of such theory, this study investigates the internal green box, and how the brands communicate their CSR initiatives. The results of this research indicate that start-ups realize that it is challenging to be 100% sustainable, and therefore communicate as much as they can about their practices, making sustainability their ultimate goal. Moreover, transparency becomes a topic of debate, and whether sustainability should be communicated at the foreground, or in the background. CSR communication solely in the foreground may lead to a negative brand reputation with regards to green washing, whereas communication CSR in the background could establish the commercialization of sustainable fashion, and therefore be more beneficial for companies that want to create value whilst decreasing environmental impact. Creating a positive impact should be a standard, not solely a marketing tool due to pressure of the transition or a unique message in a market full of messages.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Fashion, CSR Communication, Social Media; Instagram, Brand Reputation, Green Box

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1. Introduction

The fashion industry is in the midst of a transition that encourages the decrease of environmental impact, and fair fashion. The transition is the consequence of critique on the industry that has a detrimental effect on the environment, and discusses poor working conditions of farmers and workers in production processes (Brouwer, 2017). The fashion industry has seen numerous corporations that have been communicating its sustainable practices through advertising and on social media platforms such as Instagram. Due to the current transition, start-ups view a potential to establish a lasting change and impact on the fashion industry by changing the production process. Such start-ups have been widely using their corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication about their practices, and therefore transparency becomes a key factor as it enhances brand reputation. Yet this new transition requires an analysis of the internal structures of the brand, to ensure its sustainable practices are valid. The internal structures of the brand are identified as the *green box*. This notion has been discussed in Brouwer's (2017) research and is derived from the notion of the black box. The black box is the integrated process of collaboration with stakeholders that is the least understood (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Since the integrated process of close collaboration is least understood it is necessary to uncover the box, to prevent the notion of green washing (Thomson & Perry, 2006). The 'black box' is renamed to green box for the purpose of this research, as sustainability is often associated with the color green (Doug Sereno, 2014 in Brouwer, 2017). The fashion industry has seen a transition towards a closer collaboration meaning businesses are more aware of the individuals working in their production. Especially local workshops ensure close-working relations moreover collaborating with technology has ensured the reduction of waste products and designers recreating vintage garments into newly refurbished garments. Therefore researches into new raw materials that are to be used for the creation of textiles are necessary. However, the sustainability aspects of such internal structures and collaborations are unclear (Wiener, 1961 in Brouwer, 2017). Therefore complying with what its CSR communication towards its stakeholders.

Organizations have started to put pressure on fashion companies to be more transparent about the internal structures of their brand (i.e. the green box). Organizations such as The Fashion Revolution are using social media as a power tool to ensure fashion companies start adapting to the sustainable movement and become more transparent. This is a consequence of the economic system of fashion that is highly unsustainable resulting in negative impact on the environment, people and economic growth (Dean & McMullen, 2007 in Brouwer, 2017). The Fashion Revolution is one of such organizations that has done research into large fashion companies such as H&M, who are implementing sustainable practices, but have also been known for green washing. Brands that are caught green washing,

i.e. presenting themselves as a green company, while internally no to few green practices have been adopted, and are often subject to media pressures. It has been explicitly demonstrated that fast fashion (extensive volume of textile production) is particularly harmful to the environment being the second largest pollutant of water next to the agricultural industry, which includes toxic dye from textile dying, and fabric waste (Perry, 2018). In response to the negative impacts and large companies that are green washing, start-ups have seen a significant transition and ability to decrease environmental impact and spread a new and vital message. Numerous innovative methods have been developed in the past years, especially with regards to 3D printing, the use of new raw materials to substitute for cotton and animal fur/skin (vegan leather or fur), and the circular economy by reusing textiles, which reduce waste and overproduction. These new methods ensure different CSR communication from companies as green washing must be avoided, and a new approach is to be taken. It has been understood that sustainability should be a standard within the business model, and therefore new radical business thinking is required.

The new sustainable business model consists of a triple bottom line theory, which is a model used to define ‘sustainability’ within the principles of fashion. When fashion start-ups decide to incorporate sustainable values, the triple bottom line is often referred to. The triple bottom line has been established to allow firms to understand and implement sustainability, and start producing in a more responsible manner. It consists of three elements, (1) environmental, (2) economic, and (3) social. The environmental aspect focuses on the reduction of waste and toxins. The social aspect ensures appropriate working conditions, and payment; this could mean that start-ups decide to have production localized. The economic aspect focuses on the need for profit but ensuring both environmental and social aspects are treated properly. If the company changes to the benefit of all three aspects, then sustainability occurs (Park & Kim, 2016). However, when it comes to analyzing how companies are using the triple bottom line it becomes clear that there is a large gap. The communication of the practices is part of CSR, and has been predicted to increase brand reputation. Broadly defined, corporate social responsibility is used to achieve commercial success that honor and respect ethical values, people, and the natural environment (Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, Larceneaux, 2011). Moreover, brands can decide to focus on environmental research only, as they want to create value whilst decreasing environmental impact, such terminology is defined as eco-efficiency. Eco-efficiency appears to be a more appropriate terminology for brands that are making an effort towards changing their production processes for the benefit of the environment, but have not reached full sustainability yet. Therefore, brands that are communicating their 100% sustainable practices can be misleading as it is deemed impossible at the current state of the fashion industry. Creating a positive impact should be a standard, not solely a marketing tool due to pressure of the transition or a unique

message in a market full of messages. The transition towards a sustainable fashion industry must be standardized within entrepreneurship and its brand philosophy.

Therefore, regardless of the corporate social responsibility initiatives taken by numerous corporations and its efforts of becoming 'green', production still occurs with a harmful impact on the environment and the people. Studies have also indicated that consumers frequently receive green-marketing communication from brands, however, the validity of its environmental claims are questioned, confusing, or unverifiable (Bonini & Oppenheim 2008; Yan et al. 2012 in Kim & Hall, 2015). Therefore, this research sets out to unravel the green box. Insights into this green box are related to questions such as how, and to what extent these fashion brands integrate sustainability into their vision, mission and overall brand value (brand reputation).

1.1 Research gap

Previous theory and research on sustainable fashion provided different qualitative and quantitative methods. Research done by Yang, Song, & Tong (2017) focused on sustainable retailing, using two approaches of the methods of research. Their research was conducted through the use of surveys and a content analysis. Based on content analysis, the research was performed by identifying key words in news articles, with its primary focus on recent articles found in the domain of sustainable retailing in the fashion industry (Yang, Song & Tong, 2017: 2). The time span used by Yang, Song & Tong (2017) were articles between 2000 and 2017. According to their research, there are no articles on sustainable retailing in the fashion industry before 2006, and therefore the period after covers the most relevant articles for this field. In 2017 Weiner conducted further research was performed to understand purchasing intention of consumers using a quantitative research method of assessing surveys through SPSS. Moreover, a semiotic analysis provided insights into possible research methods by Serrano & Garcia (2016) on visual communication on selected photographs by influencers on Instagram. Therefore, for this particular research, content analysis will be used on selected photographs posted on Instagram profiles of new fashion labels that integrate sustainability based in the Netherlands.

Moreover, a study on green brand initiatives in India by Venkatasamy (2017) was conducted through the use of surveys. The survey analyzed the impact of green fashion brand initiatives on Indian consumer behavior of women teenagers. Finally, Toemen (2017) wrote a research paper on the extent to which social and environmental sustainability is compatible in the production of clothing by Dutch sustainable fashion companies. This research is also focused on the Netherlands, and is based on qualitative interviews.

2. *Research Question*

The aim of this study is to analyze the green box and make sense of the sustainable initiatives of Dutch fashion labels and how such initiatives are translated into their corporate communication and brand reputation. This study will focus on an under-researched group of Dutch start-up fashion labels that are actively shaping their own discourse around the notion of sustainable fashion. The research question is therefore presented as follows:

Breaking the Green Box: How are Dutch fashion brands integrating sustainability as part of their brand reputation?

This research question provides sub-questions that are to be discussed while conducting two qualitative methods of research. The following sub questions are presented as follows:

1. *What is the brands' definition of sustainability?*
2. *Is sustainability connected to Corporate Social Responsibility, or is it the brands philosophy?*
 - a. *Is it simply a marketing stunt in an over-crowded market of messages?*
3. *Are brands that communicate sustainability implementing sustainable practices?*
4. *Do brands have close relationships with their production line?*
 - a. *Who works there?*
 - b. *Is their fabric environmentally friendly?*
5. *What type of content/messages are the brands posting on Instagram?*
 - a. *What is the predominant theme in the images?*
 - b. *Does the text inform consumers about the sustainable fashion brands' values?*
 - c. *Which hash tags are used?*

The sub-questions will allow for more in-depth feedback in order to answer the research question. This research will provide a new insight into a niche market, and will be analyzed through means of a combination of qualitative methods: (1) in-depth individual interviews, and, (2) a content analysis of Instagram posts. This combination has not been used in prior research, and is functional to answering the question whether brands consider sustainability to be a brand philosophy, or whether they are using it as a marketing communications tool. The practices within the green box shall elaborate on the brands sustainable practices. The following section will discuss the scientific and social relevance of this research.

3. *Social Relevance*

This research is socially relevant, as it will provide an insight into the green box of how and why Dutch fashion labels are integrating sustainability. Moreover, the social relevance of this research presents itself as an effort to understand whether sustainable initiatives, such as green fashion production, or the selling of second-hand clothing are only part of a marketing strategy, or if it is integrated in the brand philosophy. If it is integrated, how is it integrated? Do the brands ultimately want to change the fast fashion environment? Or are brands simply looking for a unique message in an overcrowded market of messages? There are numerous questions that one can ask regarding social relevance of this research, as it is a social phenomenon.

More and more individuals are becoming aware of the environmental impact that the fashion industry has had, and brands are taking initiatives to protect the environment in an effort to reverse the negative effect. Many individuals that want to start their own brand are recognizing the need to change the fashion industry, and are therefore integrating sustainable initiatives. Moreover, brands are noticing that consumers want more transparency. Especially large fashion companies such as H&M, Zara and C&A are feeling the pressure from media sources and activist groups such as Fashion Revolution with “Who made your clothes” (Fashion Revolution, 2018). Therefore, these large companies are starting to recognize the need for change with regards to their corporate social responsibility in becoming a more sustainable and thus a transparent company. However, consumer acceptance of sustainable products in the market depends on how the information is being processed as presented by a brand's identity (Kim & Hall, 2015). A brand's general attitude towards environmental issues is where the social relevance plays a significant role. Enabling sustainable initiatives, means that there will be more individuals employed in the manufacturing of clothing in Europe, which had detrimental effects in the four-year period of 1999-2002 (De Brito, et al. 2008), where employment in the fashion-related industries declined due to the search for low cost production in countries located in the Far East (De Brito, et al. 2008). Moreover, if new sustainable initiatives can ensure that their clothing is made at a closer proximity (locally in Europe), or even handmade in the Netherlands, then social welfare and prosperity may increase in the Netherlands. Therefore, this research may shed light on larger corporations who are doing the bare-minimum to start producing their clothing more environmental-friendly causing for a more negative brand reputation, and that are experiencing more pressure from new entrants into the fashion market. Moreover, it will strive to uncover the sustainable initiatives that Dutch fashion labels are unfolding in an effort to improve life on a social, but also a scientific level.

4. *Scientific Relevance*

The scientific relevance of this research is based on sustainable fashion, and where the science of corporate communication meets new media. This research can have a significant impact due to understanding how a fashion labels' brand reputation is communicated on social media platforms such as Instagram, and whether consumers can trust these labels to be producing sustainably. Furthermore, it will fill the research gap of the green box with an understanding of the new and innovative sustainable initiatives that are being established by fashion brands entering the fashion market. The green box will allow for a better understanding of the thought processes of integrating sustainable practices in fashion brands, and how this is communicated towards consumers.

This research can be influential for science as the need for technology is rising, and innovative methods such as 3D printing are under researched (Amed & Berg, 2018). It has been evaluated that across the fashion industry, an increasing number of fashion companies are aiming to emulate start-up initiatives. Tech innovation ensures recyclability from creating fibers to the end product (Amed & Berg, 2018). Moreover, tech innovation provides more collaboration, transparency, efficiency, cost reduction, and ethical upgrades, as third world countries are trained to work with technology (Amed & Berg, 2018). Overall, this research is relevant as it helps future fashion labels that are entering the market to understand what it means to be a sustainable brand and how to incorporate this notion in brand reputation and understanding how communication impacts consumers' image of the brand. Moreover it will allow for existing companies to understand the importance of researching the science of new raw materials and technological advancements that can be profitable in future business models. The following section will be comprised of a theoretical framework in which the main topics will be discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

Fast fashion developed in the 1990s and led to overproduction and consumption across the globe (Fraser, 2015). As a consequence, ‘throwaway’ fashion has become a norm, leaving millions of tons of clothing in landfills, which causes for environmental hazards having adverse effects on humans (Fraser, 2015). Such adverse effects cause for contaminated groundwater sources as fibers decay and eliminate toxic gases that have a harmful impact on human health (Fraser, 2015). Moreover, the production process is considered more alarming, as it requires hazardous pesticides for a successful harvest of cotton or polyester (Fraser, 2015) and therefore slowing fashion down becomes of key importance, and must be analyzed.

2.1 *Slowing down: sustainable fashion*

The United Nations published 17 sustainable development goals on September 25th 2015 where the main goals were to protect the planet, end poverty and ensure prosperity for all. These goals were set to be achieved before 2030 and were designed to transform the world into a more sustainable one with all governments serving under such guidelines. This transformation is highly necessary as raw materials are diminishing and more pollution is occurring (Brouwer, 2017). Reports have alleged that the fashion industry has had significant impact on climate change, ozone depletion, and contributes to the destruction of biodiversity, on a global scale (Brouwer, 2017). Such effects are paired with localized problems such as toxic waste in groundwater and air pollution (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011).

Due to rising environmental concerns from consumers and stakeholder groups within the fashion industry, awareness surrounding sustainability is growing. Environmental responsibility and its management are becoming important factors in today’s fashion and textiles manufacturing processes (Kemp, Schot & Hoogma, 1998). For instance, the production of textiles requires a large amount of energy and water, and emits vast quantities of toxic waste and other pollutants to the environment (Lo, et al., 2011). Moreover, Henninger et al. (2016) considers environmental management as a response to the paradigm of fast fashion, which is causing for unsustainable growth of businesses. The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainability as ‘the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’ (Shen, 2014).

Sustainable fashion is defined by Aako & Koskennurmi-Sivonen (2013) as an ‘endeavor that draws together sustainable development and fashion’, adding that sustainable development is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’ Furthermore, sustainable fashion as interpreted by Harris et al. (2015), ‘is clothing that can integrate one or

more aspects of social and environmental sustainability such as Fair Trade or fabrics that are produced out of organic material'. Princen (2005) appraises Harris et al. by stating that sustainable fashion concerns the re-use of materials, instead of ending up on landfills. A sustainable product is made in an environmental and social friendly manner, across the entire supply chain – therefore including raw material production, manufacturing, distribution and retailing. The products are made more organically produced, and therefore emit less toxic waste in waters, and harmful chemicals (Shen, 2014).

The notion of sustainable fashion has attracted a considerable amount of attention from scholars and industrialists concerned with the area of textile manufacturing and the fashion supply chain. Scholars and industrialists agree that an effective sustainable fashion supply chain will allow for companies to enhance their brand image and reach a larger audience, such as ethical consumers (Shen, 2014). A transition towards more sustainable initiatives is seen as policy makers and public pressure are affecting large fashion companies' brand reputations. Therefore, existing companies and start-ups have understood the necessity to change the radical ways of business thinking, and start focusing on the future – which means that a movement is made in establishing a more sustainable fashion industry.

2.1.1 Sustainable initiatives in the fashion economy

Taking sustainable measures within the fashion supply chain has been understood to be a corporate social responsibility for many companies. Such practices involve the reduction of using chemical products that have a harmful impact on land and water, but also the welfare of human beings. Numerous companies are exclusively including sustainability in their communication strategies, while other companies are attempting to integrate stakeholders' expectations in managerial orientation and decisions (Salvioni, et al. 2016). The main challenge for fashion companies/labels is to do the latter. Some of the sustainable initiatives are undeniably the result of pressure put on fashion companies by Non-Governmental Organizations such as Fashion Revolution, which is an organization that unites people to work together to change the way clothes are sourced, produced and consumed, and ensure that clothing is made in a safe, clean and fair way (Fashion Revolution, 2018). Clean Clothes is a Non-Governmental Organization that is based on the International Labor Organization standards, which is comprised of Recommendations that countries can comply to textile and clothing manufacturing. The Clean Clothes Campaign is working on ensuring that the fundamental rights of workers are respected, and therefore strive to educate consumers, lobby governments and companies, and offer direct support to workers in garment factories to fight for their rights in demanding for better working conditions (Clean Clothes, 2018). Moreover, it is an international framework that ensures the growth of the global economy, which provides benefits to all individuals (International Labor Office, 2014).

One of such initiatives is by contributing to a circular economy. The principles of the circular economy in connection to fashion are easy to understand as it means to close the negative loop within the fashion industry by reusing, repairing, remanufacturing and selling services rather than goods by for example renting clothing services (Lovins, et al. 2013). Many companies and organizations understand that the current waste of limited resources is not sustainable (Johnsson & Selin, 2015). Consumers are therefore able to exchange clothing with one another, or buy in second-hand stores. Clothing can also be recycled, and the fabric can be used to create a new garment. Normally, second-hand clothing is retailed in low and middle-income countries such as in the global South. The United States alone ships 500,000 tons of second-hand clothing annually to more than one hundred different countries (Brooks, 2012). Second-hand retailing has not been as popular, mainly due to the fact that the clothing items have been worn by others, many consumers enjoy buying what is new and in trend. Apart from exchanging clothing online or selling to second hand stores, it is also possible to donate clothing to charities. This can be done over the counter to high street fashion shops, clothing banks, or curbside collectors (Farrer, 2011). The clothes are eventually dispersed across the globe as second hand clothing. The images that show tribes on TV documentaries wearing branded t-shirts are the result of unregulated free trade, or dumping. Textile waste becomes a huge problem in many third world countries as a result of this free trade and dumping (Farrer, 2011).

Aside from the circular economy and reusing fabrics to reduce waste, innovation has played a significant role in sustainability as a contributor to the circular economy. Such technology can also be implemented in garment factories in third world countries, which will allow for less hazardous working conditions, economic welfare and technological education.

Amed & Berg (2018) mention that sustainability will evolve from being a marketing-focused CSR initiative, to an integral part of the brand. Circular economy principles are included in the value chain, and many will also turn towards tech innovation for efficiency, transparency, localization and ethics. And finally, the use of new raw materials that are innovative and suitable for a circular system have been analyzed by Ellen McArthur (2018), as searching for solutions are proving to be challenging, especially those materials that would fit a circular system more rapid. Such innovative ideas for the use of raw materials have emerged on small-scale, which consist of Orange Fiber, which is a waste from orange juice production that makes cellulose-based fibers (Ellen McArthur, 2018). Additionally, a similar company, QMilk uses waste from dairy production. Agralooop creates cellulose-based fibers by using agricultural waste, and EcoAlf uses coffee grounds to create fibers. Currently, innovation with new materials are still in development and need more research, however, two high-fashion brands have employed such new materials in one of the collections. These high-fashion brands consist of Stella McCartney, who incorporated Bolt Threads, which are made

of artificial silk, and Salvatore Ferragamo who incorporated Orange Fiber (Ellen McArthur, 2018).

Furthermore, fashion brands can be considered green based on intrinsic characteristics of the fashion item with regards to the process by which the product is made, and whether their practices contribute to environmental business practices. These initiatives are best communicated through their online profiles, as it is the most powerful way to increase awareness and knowledge of the brand's environmental practices. This type of 'green brand communication' must be integrated in the brand's strategy, which consists of a deliberate and proactive action aiming to define sustainability and generate trust from its consumers.

Besides innovation contributing to the circular economy, new raw materials and technology, governments have adapted to the movement towards a more sustainable fashion industry. The Fashion Network revealed that Europe throws away approximately four million tons of clothing annually, whilst five million tons is put into the market. In France, for example, 17.5% is waste, and 22.9% is recycled. In France, the government has been extremely progressive towards eliminating waste from products. Two years ago, France was the first country to pass a law that did not allow supermarkets and grocery stores to throw food away that was nearing expiration. Recently, a new law has been passed that prevents all fashion companies to prohibit the throwing away. The reason being that in 2016, France had seen an increase in homeless people going through store dumpsters, which led to stores adding locks to their garbage. Therefore, France decided the best option would be to donate leftover clothing to charity. The Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe wants to reach the goal of France being a circular economy by prohibiting unsold items to be thrown away (Spaen, 2018). The discussion was sparked after Nathalie Beauval posted a photo of a French clothing store, Celio, destroying their old clothes. She claimed that instead of destroying the clothing, it could be given to charity. France is the first country to implement the law that fashion companies will not throw away or destroy their unsold clothing, which will have effect starting in 2019 (Spaen, 2018).

The Netherlands has seen a change in the top of the consumer pyramid where people have shown more interest and willingness to invest in good causes – and therefore, to ensure that sustainable fashion consumption becomes more established, many entrepreneurs have started their fashion labels in the Netherlands with this a mentality (Subrahmanyam & Gomez-Arias, 2008).

2.1.2. *Dutch sustainable brand initiatives*

The Netherlands has been at the forefront of sustainable initiative taking when it comes to fashion. The Dutch fashion business is considered a capitalist economy where consumers delve into the realm of buying throw-away-clothes, whatever is out of season, is out of fashion. The criticisms on the fashion industry are connected to environmental costs, which must be reversed, and are reversed by numerous green initiatives. The Netherlands has been aiming towards a circular economy where recycling is a basic principle (Tilstra & Dubbeld, 2016). A circular economy in fashion consists of (1) providing product life extension, which is consists of repairing, re-using and upgrading products; (2) sharing platforms, where clothing is shared one another or for example through the selling of second-hand clothing; (3) providing the product as a service, which is to for example lease clothing items (Johnsson & Selin, 2015: 9). These are the three different types of business models that are connected to contributing to a circular fashion economy and are widely used in the Netherlands. Dutch brands have also come up with lease clothing such as MUD Jeans, Dutch Spirit and Filippa K (The Green Scene, 2015). In Amsterdam and Utrecht there are many new shops that sell clothing in the form of a library. The clothing library allows for the renting of clothing, and therefore not contributing to more waste (Dziubanowska & Neumaier, 2015). These initiatives are all in order to move towards a circular economy – however, Dutch brands that are leading this movement are doing more than simply re-using clothing items.

Dutch organizations are working towards change, and consumers are willing to adapt their buying behaviors. Amsterdam is currently at the forefront of sustainable fashion, organizations such as Made-By, which is an award-winning Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working with brands in the Netherlands to improve their production and distribution of clothing, along with working towards making the industry more sustainable as a whole. Moreover, Shuttelar and Partners have established a “Sustainable Fashion Advice” plan, which was made in collaboration with the Dutch Fashion Action Plan. The Dutch Fashion Action Plan is a coalition between the Dutch government and the fashion industry, which offers consultancy to fashion brands in enabling an effort to increase the brands’ transparency of their environmental practices and efforts (Scully, 2016). Amsterdam hosts numerous eco-fashion events throughout the year. One of such eco-events was MINT, which was part of the Modefabriek’s annual fair, which selects specific brands with a philosophy in sustainability (Scully, 2016).

Kings of Indigo is sustainable denim wear fashion label originated in the Netherlands. The brand uses organic cotton that is free of pesticides, insecticides and chemical fertilizers, and is better for the health of farmer and consumer. Moreover, the brand also uses recycled cotton, which can be made from pre-consumed cotton waste and post-consumed cotton waste,

which can be collected, shredded and spun into new yarns. Therefore, Kings of Indigo ensures the reduction of waste by recycling, and does not use pesticides or insecticides to create their garments (Kings of Indigo, 2018). Kings of Indigo clearly has a corporate social responsibility towards sustainability, which is apparent in their transparency about where the clothing items are made and how.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

Advocates of social paradigms (Constanza et al. 2012) assert that new technologies are changing the nature of businesses, along with new questions that are concerned with corporate social responsibility and sustainability (Wheeler, et al. 2003). Managers of fashion labels are continually encountering demands from multiple stakeholder groups that are requiring brands to devote its resources to corporate social responsibility (Wheeler, et al. 2013). These pressures emerge from customers, but also community groups, government, shareholders, and employees however corporate social responsibility is not always clearly defined due to many conflicting objectives and goals (Constanza, et al. 2012).

Corporate social responsibility is defined by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (2017), 'is a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders'. Additionally, CSR is strongly connected to the idea that it is necessary to meet the need of the present, without having to compromise the future, according to Christensen et al. (2010). In specific, companies that are voluntarily implementing the interest of social and environmental initiatives into their business plans are embracing CSR. However, CSR efforts have often been criticized causing for deference from the fundamental goal of the company, which is to earn profit (Christensen et al., 2010). CSR is further defined by McWilliams and Siegel (2001), who believe that it is a means to go beyond obeying the law, which includes using waste products such as Nylon to create new fashion garments – this clears the oceans. Although scholars have revealed that there is some evidence of a potential disconnect between green-brand strategize and consumers because there is a strong market that expects companies to consider their corporate social responsibilities of environmental sustainability (Kim & Hall, 2015). Furthermore, Vitell (2015) defines CSR as a focused business that proactively presents a service or social benefit and voluntarily practices behaviors that are less harmful on society, regardless of legal pressures. The firm anticipates support and satisfaction from its consumers in exchange for such social behavior. However, such a strategy is only successful if there is sufficient consumer demand for such products and services (Vitell, 2015). Within the fashion industry, 'an increasing amount of consumers are willing to purchase ethically produced products, and are therefore expecting brands to deliver' (Weiner, 2017; Flash Eurobarometer, 2009: 20). It is therefore important that

companies are able to promote their responsible efforts to society, and in doing so may gain competitive advantage over brands that are falling behind on their CSR (Yang et al., 2010; Weiner, 2017). Therefore, in order to foster engagement for green brands, an emphasis must be placed on environmental sustainability as part of CSR, and must be further developed through the consumer attitude towards such practices.

CSR is one of the drivers with regards to a sustainable movement, and it is about integrating social and environmental concerns into business strategy and operations. As the environmental concerns are part of business strategy and operations, Wolff and Mauleon (2005) suggest that 'sustainable management' is the appropriate concept to use, as it establishes a direct link between the sustainability and the corporate social responsibility applied at company level (de Brito et al., 2007). There have been signs of a new paradigm within the supply chain management that are moving towards incorporating sustainable values, where the key-function is *responsibility management*. Incorporating sustainable practices is therefore not simply a corporate social responsibility, but is a key value of a new responsible management (de Brito et al., 2007), which can be explained through the green box approach.

2.2.1 The Green Box

The green box is derived from the notion of the black box, which consists of the internal structures of collaboration within a fashion brand. Such collaboration involves a three-stage framework that has been explained by Thomson & Perry (2006); Gray (1989), which involves (1) problem setting; in this case is the negative impact on the environment that needs to be reduced, (2) direction setting, and (3) the implementation. Thomson & Perry (2006) propose that the definition is 'the act or process of 'shared creation' or discovery. [It] involves the creation of new value by doing something new or different'. The definition by Thomson & Perry (2006, 20) is argued to be most appropriate for this research in understanding the green box through its sustainable practices and whether their production processes ensure transparency and close working relations with all aspects in the production chain. For example, local designer workshops can ensure the working together with brands in the Netherlands therefore not only reducing production costs but can also ensure better working conditions and higher quality garments that are more durable and therefore can be reused for reducing waste. Within the green box it is possible to measure performance, which is done through ensuring costs of collaboration should be greater than coordination/direction costs, and the exchanging of ideas must achieve economies of scale, and must reduce overall costs (such as transportation costs) (Yoganingrum et al., 2017). Finally, it must be ensured that there is access to a wide range of sources in order to grow opportunities, however a more sustainable production involves various costs, as investing in sustainable production is costly

(Yoganingrum, et al., 2017). Such new business thinking necessitates a new business model (Amed & Berg, 2018).

The emergence of radical business thinking to incorporate collaboration to ensure a more sustainable fashion industry requires three values. This model is the triple bottom line, which focuses mainly on stakeholders and is considered to be a new tool that measures the performance of the brand with regards to sustainability. Sustainable development consists of three interconnected principles: (1) environmental integrity, (2) social equity, and (3) economic prosperity (Hubbard, 2009). Performance in one of the three principles has effect on the other two principles – as shown in the figure 1 below.



Figure 1 derived from Ernst & Young (2018)

The environmental dimension of sustainability is linked to the long-term viability of resource use and emphasizes the issue of environmental degradation and resource depletion (Sheth et al. 2011; Park & Kim, 2016). Economic sustainability refers to the dynamic economy that needs to survive for a long period of time, but also, must ensure and secure long-term employment (Edwards, 2005; Park & Kim, 2016). Additionally it measures income or expenditures, business climate factors, taxes, employment and factors such as business diversity (Slaper & Hall, 2011). The social aspect is linked to the well-being of people (workers, cotton farmers, etc.) and refers to equity/equality issues (Edwards, 2005; Park & Kim, 2016). It further analyzes the working conditions in garment factories where education, access to social resources, health and well-being, equity, and quality of life are important factors, this includes banning child labor or forced participation of female labor.

Firms have been forced to re-evaluate their business models with regards to their approach to measuring performance (Hubbard, 2009). Elkington (1998; Park & Kim, 2016) integrates that the three aspects of the triple bottom line are reflected in business performance. He argues that businesses should not simply analyze their traditional measures of economic performance, such as profits, but they should also consider analyzing their social and environmental performances as reflected in the triple bottom line system of sustainability

(Park & Kim, 2016). However, many firms continue to think in traditional performance i.e. profits, because there is simply not enough money or time to change their model to a sustainable model.

Organizations have responded to the triple bottom line system as standardizing their measurement systems, which are to meet the requirements of management accounting and reporting, along with responding to the community demands for more transparency – especially in the fashion industry. However, in contrast to measuring environmental performance, the triple bottom line aspect that is far less understood is the social aspect, as many firms are struggling to articulate their social impacts and responsibilities (Hubbard, 2002). Corporate social responsibility, as mentioned previously has been understood to describe the social activities conducted by a firm, but it can be interpreted differently to different people/firms (Hubbard, 2002). Therefore, multiple suggestions have been made to change the notion of corporate social responsibility in order to include all aspects of the triple bottom line.

With regards to corporate sustainability, three suggestions have been made. Andriof and McIntosh; 2001 (in Classon & Dahlstrom 2006, 7) recommended changing the notion of corporate social responsibility to “corporate societal responsibility”. This recommendation was advanced in order to “avoid the limited interpretation of the term ‘social responsibility’ as this is applied to social welfare issues only (Van Marrewijk, 2002; 7). The term ‘societal responsibility’ covers all aspects of a company’s impact on the society as a whole, which include their relationships and responsibilities towards the environment. A linguistic approach was taken to change ‘responsibility’ to ‘accountability’ as it can be interpreted as a social issue only (van Marrewijk, 2002). The contemporary term is therefore corporate societal accountability – however, to change such a term is difficult for policy makers and executives – and so it is up to the companies to interpret corporate social responsibility on their terms. Another suggestion was made that corporate sustainability must be the ultimate goal of companies and that meeting the needs of the present goes without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (van Marrewijk, 2002). Corporate sustainability is often referred to as possessing environmental issues and policies only, but the main definition should involve all aspects the triple bottom line (economic, environmental and social). Corporate Sustainability Conference was held at Erasmus University Rotterdam in June 2002 where various contributions were made to the issue, establishing that there was sufficient interest to integrate social and societal aspects into the term ‘corporate sustainability’ (van Marrewijk, 2002). Furthermore, the Erasmus University’s Business Society Management has placed corporate sustainability as the ultimate goal for companies, with corporate social responsibility being the intermediate stage in which companies attempt to balance the triple bottom line. Before the triple bottom line was established, in 1995 the 3P

formulation was developed which consisted of ‘people, planet and profits’, which have been widely used by companies in the Netherlands (Elkington, 2013). The 3ps are explained in the figure 2.

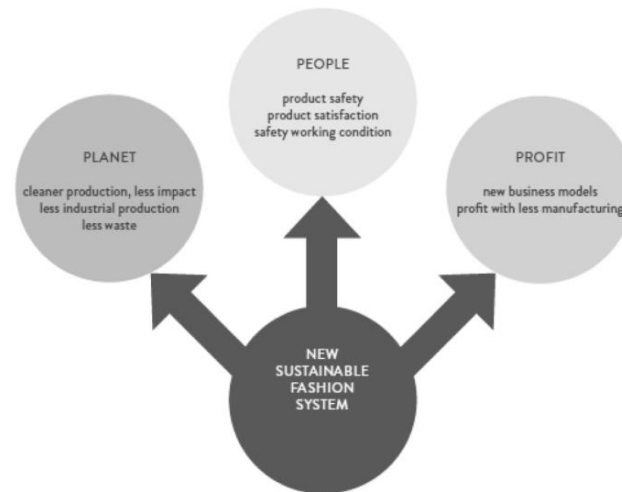


Figure 2 derived from Niinimäki (2015)

For the planet, i.e. the environment, through producing more clean and perhaps fewer industrial production and waste, the benefits of producing more sustainably and at a slower pace are clear. Less waste, is a healthier environment; moreover, using cotton is not sustainable both as it causes for soil erosion, and it is not biodegradable. By using other raw materials that are biodegradable such as tencel™ Lyocell, which is made of beech wood. For people, the system can ensure a safe working environment by using fewer chemicals in production, for example using safer products for end-users. The system can moreover promote a greater satisfaction amongst consumers as it has better quality, and can last longer. It can also promote well-being and happiness as consumption will be less materialistic, for example, by sharing, lending, swapping or do-it-yourself fashion. Therefore, we learn to invest in higher quality products, and use them longer. Furthermore, it can also provide better working conditions in garment factories and therefore enable social justice. Even though the system slows production down, the end price can be increased, and therefore companies can invest in better factories. Finally, the new business models are to ensure profit in an environmentally and socially beneficial manner. The system causes for radical business models that encourage new business opportunities through for example encouraging less

materialistic industrial manufacturing, and a service approach – moreover, technology can slow fashion down but allow for the fashion system to continue to be commercialized.

Business executives continue to agree that strategies related to sustainability are necessary in order to remain competitive on the market, and will be even more so in the near future (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). Executive's report that organizations are committing to sustainability and the industry has already been seeing an increase in the movement towards more sustainable production chain, along with further development (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). Reports show that there are multiple benefits to addressing sustainability, which does not only include the environment and society, but also for companies themselves (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). Tangible benefits such as the reduction of costs and risks of business because production becomes more localized and can therefore be monitored effortlessly. In addition it provides intangible benefits because it can positively impact the brand reputation, along with increased competitiveness and attractiveness to new talents by taking new designers on board that are working with for example 3D printing on garments (Dyllick & Muff, 2015).

In addition it has been proclaimed that when entrepreneurs decide to focus on sustainability as their core business value, there may be motivational concepts that are different to normal entrepreneurial motivations. These entrepreneurial motivations primarily focus on the triple bottom line (balancing environmental resilience, economic health and social equity) (Brouwer, 2017; Gibbs, 2006; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011; Schaper, 2016).

The green box of a fashion brand must include a truly sustainable core, meaning that the responsibilities and the accountability are appropriate at all levels of the production chain (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). This integral part should include sustainable decision-making as well as implementation in collaborations. It should have an understanding of social and environmental responsibilities and identify the engagement with relevant stakeholders, therefore must be communicated accordingly as part of CSR.

2.2.2 Corporate Communication

Scholars have discussed the link between strategy and communications, and concluded that a company is able to build competitive advantage not only by creating desired outcomes through the use of material resources, but also by managing communications (Forman & Argenti, 2005). By managing communications it is possible to mould the perceptions and interpretations of constituents. Similarly, a company can create competitive advantage by socializing its constituents to its own culture and can use communication strategies to form long-term relationships with the constituents who shape the organization's image and reputation (Forman & Argenti, 2005). Moreover, Yamauchi (2001 in Forman & Argenti, 2005) argues that the use of corporate communication is a management strategy as it engages constituencies that are important for the necessary information (Forman & Argenti, 2005). He

goes on to explain that probable responses to communication with stakeholders have been known to inform management strategy (Yamauchi, 2001; Wuolanne, 2010 in Forman & Argenti, 2005).

The benefits of corporate communication vary between the amount and frequency of communicating, and the various issues that a brand reveals. With regards to sustainability, corporate communication is highly beneficial, especially with regards to a brand's transparency. For example, if a fashion brand is transparent, its stakeholders will appreciate the brand's operations more and therefore can positively enhance a brand's reputation. The reputation that is derived from corporate communication is derived from the impressions that the community has of the brand, which includes the impressions of consumers, employees, investors, the government and suppliers (Forman & Argenti, 2005). Corporate communication instruments consist of practices such as reporting the CSR initiatives, through publication of ethical code or on websites (Parquel, et al. 2009). Corporate communication can ensure a positive impression, but also a negative reputation for the brand. However, beyond the perception of consumers and how the brand communicates with regards to transparency, it has been researched that such communication comes with specific challenges. If a brand decides to be transparent, it is important that consumers trust their sustainable activities. Therefore it is crucial to establish ethical corporate perceptions, and social legitimacy (Parquel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larcenau, 2011). In order to reach such legitimacy, communicating the identity of the brand serves as a nexus that lies between the company's identity and its image, and is immediately reflected in a consumers' mental image of the brand and of the organization as a whole (Parquel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larcenau, 2011). In addition, Fukukawa (2007) argues that if the brand proclaims that their identity is based on sustainable fashion, thus must be congruent with its communication in relation to transparency. Moreover, Brown & Dacin (1997) argue that if a brand focuses too carefully on its CSR claims, the consumer may suppose that the brand is hiding something. This is due to the increasing perception of green washing, which has been considered to affect the consumers' attitude towards a brand (Parquel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larcenau, 2011). Veljkovic et al. (2011; (Parquel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larcenau, 2011)) elaborates on this claim by stating that there is a growing sensitiveness to consumer perception of a brand with regards to its ethical, social and environmental responsible operations. Sensitivity is growing significantly in sustainability, as consumers may believe the brand is misleading. Therefore communication becomes important for ensuring a prospective business (Charter & Polonsky, 1999; (Parquel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larcenau, 2011), otherwise green washing may occur.

2.2.3 Green washing

Green washing is considered as a phenomenon that is not recent; the notion has been used since the mid-1980s, and the term had gained a broad recognition to describe a practice that made unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability for the purposes of gaining market shares of environmental friendliness, i.e. for a positive brand reputation (Dahl, 2010). An environmentalist, Jay Westerveld, who noticed an inconsistency in hotels that were not employing concrete recycling programs, while the hotel was encouraging the visitors to reuse their towels, coined the term. Moreover, it has been proposed that the term green washing refers to ‘the promotion of green-based environmental initiatives or images without the implementation of business practices that actually minimize environmental impact (or any of the other negative effects of their businesses’ (the Fashion Law, 2016). Companies may see their consumers growing demand for green products, and view it as an opportunity to increase sales, and thereby gaining more profit. Therefore, they may make dubious environmental claims whilst avoiding any attempts of regulation (Dahl, 2010). Niinimäki (2015) asserts that communicating environmental or sustainable issues can easily mislead consumers, as it is a complex system. Additionally, Niinimäki (2015) concludes that companies are able to use sustainability as a ‘marketing ploy’, which can be considered green washing (Goworek et al., 2013, 388). Green washing is defined by Delmas & Burbano (2011) as the intersection of two different behaviors by firms, which are (1) poor environmental performance and (2) positive communication about environmental performance. For example, brands can “make vague claims or omit important and relevant facts. They may do this inadvertently, just using information from their suppliers; in the recent case where several clothing companies claimed that they sold eco-friendly bamboo-clothing when they in fact sold rayon produced from bamboo – but processed in a way that uses harsh chemicals and can also release hazardous air pollutants.” (NFA; the Fashion Law, 2016). Another example taken from Quartz criticizes H&M’s use of cotton. “It’s the material H&M uses most and the company boasts that the non-profit Textile Exchange has recognized H&M as the world’s number-one user of organic cotton, which has a lighter environmental impact, and reduces the use of “probably” carcinogenic pesticides. But only 13.7% of the cotton H&M uses is organic” (Bain, 2015, 1)

Sustainable values lay the foundation for credibility and responsible business and marketing of sustainability. Being a sustainable brand not only focuses on the values but also on ethical considerations – which continues to be an aspect that is problematic for certain manufacturers and companies meaning they do not wish to make moral claims concerning the rights and wrongs (Niinimäki, 2015). Delmas & Burbano (2011) conclude that there are three drivers of green washing: external, organizational, and individual. The external drivers are

derived from pressures of NGOs and regulators or market actors, such as consumers and competitors. If one company decides to communicate sustainable practices, other companies are first to do the same to remain competitive. Regulation of green washing is currently limited and therefore governments are required to enforce such regulation, which may take more time.

Regardless of a company using eco-labels, it will still be overproducing due to the fast cycle of the fashion industry. It therefore does not truly change the fashion system, nor does it change the economic logic behind it; because the environment continues to be damaged. One example where the system does not change is where fast fashion companies decided to use paper bags instead of plastic ones – the business logic will not change by not using plastic bags. Therefore, eco-labels are much better than relying on the company's own sustainable statements; eco-labels are certificates that are based on tests and an evaluation criteria, which are conducted by an independent organization; such criteria are more reliable and objective than the information provided by the company itself (Niinimäki, 2015). The fashion industry is at the beginning of a sustainable transition, and has seen small sustainable movements therefore a start-up brand communicating its 100% sustainable practices may be incorrect as not all aspects can be sustainable. Therefore, in defining sustainability in fashion companies a different terminology has been proposed. The correct terminology has been illustrated as *eco-efficiency*, which is described as the relation between two concepts: the reduction of the environmental impact, and an increase in the value of production (Huppes & Ishikawa, 2005). The value of production is connected to the value of the products produced, and in sustainable fashion this means it must be stronger and more durable textiles for reuse instead of a throwaway textile. The textiles that are produced for value must have as minimal an impact on the environment and therefore brands must be able to demonstrate their dedication to improving the environmental impact (Huppes & Ishikawa, 2005). Therefore the environmental and economic impacts relate to the output of the activities that are conducted in production, consumption and disposal management (Huppes & Ishikawa, 2005, p. 45). This shows that the social aspect is not included, which has been used in the triple bottom line (three p's), which has been used in radical business thinking of establishing a sustainable business model. Therefore, brands choose to either be eco-efficient or focus on fair fashion (fair working conditions and rights), which are two different concepts that have contributed to the notion of sustainability (Kong, et al. 2002). Brands could also decide to focus on both, however, are unable to satisfy all means through transparency in their communication as not all aspects may be *sustainable*.

The rise of Web 2.0 has made it easier for one individual to communicate with a large audience in different and unique ways. This has allowed for business to consumer interpretations of environmental issues, such as the harmful impact of the fashion industry.

Media outlets also enable brands to communicate their sustainable practices in a more efficient and effective manner.

2.3 Media and the Environment

A growing number of scholars have done research into media coverage of environmental issues. Mass-media campaigns have been designed to influence public opinion on for example environmental issues (Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui, 2009). Mass media has been considered to have democratizing influences on people as these channels offer a platform for empowerment, and therefore becoming content producers to spread a particular message (Luedecke & Boykoff, 2017). Traditional media has seen a switch to social media, which involves interactivity meaning people are able to access and thus interact with information and become influential actors (Luedecke & Boykoff, 2017). For example, climate change is currently a highly politicized topic on social media, and has influenced the change in formal environmental policies to public perceptions of the environment. Media journalists strive for truth, accuracy and independence in coverage (Luedecke & Boykoff, 2017), and allow for different perspectives. In fact, Luedecke & Boykoff (2017) state that ideologies, experiences, perspectives, and priorities influence environmental problems. Therefore, sustainable decision-making relates to an individual ideology that is communicated on social media (Niinimäki, 2010), on the contrary, when consumers are confronted with media that concerns the environment, it is received and categorized on different levels of own interpretation. This means that the scale of interpretation varies, and may be more significant to others and thus varying approaches of understanding and reflection (Luedecke & Boykoff, 2017).

Additionally, much media reporting concerns the ‘current process through science and technology’ on the environment (Hansen, 1991, 452). For example, when it comes to media coverage of environmental issues, it is a collection of ‘nonlinear relationships between scientists, policy actors, and the public that is often mediated by journalists’ news stories’ (Luedecke & Boykoff, 2017, 3). Such stories can allow customers to become emotionally linked, and such linkages are related to personal issues, but also to environmental issues and animal rights (vegetarianism/ veganism) (Faulds & Mangold, 2014). The examples of environmental issues as presented by the media vary from campaign programs that include the conservation of energy, or waste reduction. European countries, such as the Netherlands have used mass media for national campaigning to reduce GHG emission (Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui, 2008). Results from the research conducted by Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui (2008) concluded that the number of mentions on ‘global warming’ increased after the number of articles on global warming increased, therefore showing that the more media coverage exists on a specific topic, the more widespread it becomes. Social media is a typical platform for the fast-pace spread of messages. The use of social media has a direct bearing on not only the

image, but also the voice that the brand projects to the community as proclaimed by Forman & Argenti (2005). The use of social media has a direct bearing on not only the image, but also the voice that the brand projects to the community as proclaimed by Forman & Argenti (2005).

Social media is an online technological tool that has mediated communication in countless of ways. Such communication has changed the way individuals think and speak about current issues. Social media is changing the way that stakeholders and companies communicate on a daily basis, which provides new opportunities for collaboration, interactivity, participation and engagement (Gomez-Vasquez & Soto-Velez, 2011). Additionally, Mangold & Faulds (2009) have concluded that social media has become a more advanced platform, where consumers learn more about their favorite companies and the products that they sell. Brands, especially new entrants to the fashion market, are currently using social media platforms as primary tool for engaging and reaching their desired target group (millennial consumers for example), through ‘targeted advertising’ (Paquette, 2013), which is one of the benefits of social media. Social media is defined by Katona & Sarvary (2014) as ‘the way in which people interact to create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas and virtual communities and networks. Social media is different from the traditional media and advertising practices because of its immediacy, cost, frequency, quality, permanence, and reach. By 2013, social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram established increasing popularity. The online platform, Instagram, will be the focus of this research as it provides new traditions of communication for companies with its customers and other companies – especially in fashion (Katona & Sarvary, 2014).

2.3.1 Instagram

Instagram is a Facebook-owned visual mobile app where individuals can post and share appealing images and video footage with their network. Instagram has become the fastest growing social media platform, most frequently used for communication purposes. Instagram is a new technology that has enabled customers to feel more powerful, brand value creation has shifted from a firm-centred and top-down approach to online social sharing of customer experiences that are more personal (Chang, 2014). Brands are able to tell their own story and express themselves through this visual centric platform. Furthermore, a brand can base its identity on Instagram on the notion of sustainability through its corporate social responsibility management. With the increasing popularity of Instagram, firms are finding it more and more difficult to differentiate their brand from others in an over-crowded market of messages (Chang, 2014). When posting an image, hash tags can be added in the description in order to receive more engagement, which is a symbol created by Twitter. Today, companies on

Instagram are finding it difficult to differentiate from other brands, and wanting to stand out, brands are competing with one another for customers' attention. However, customers are given great freedom on Instagram to the extent that customers are able to share brand images at a faster pace than the brand can itself (Chang, 2014). In particular, Instagram has been revolutionizing the fashion industry as the interest in new trends, designers and products has been increasingly unfolding online (Park et al. 2016). It has become customary for users to upload photos and videos (content) of for example runway events on Instagram. Due to the significant impact and audience reach that Instagram has enabled, fashion designers are being influenced, which has become apparent in the extravagance of some of the luxury brand (e.g. Tommy Hilfiger, Chanel and Dolce and Gabbana) runways in the Fashion weeks (Park et al. 2016). It has been reported that Instagram is consistently used for customer engagement by fashion brands. An image posted on Instagram is unsuccessful if it does not produce a mental change in the consumer: the consumer must, after viewing the advertisement, think differently about the brand (Waijya, 2012). Posting content that successfully generates engagement, female millennial may start buying more responsibly and focusing on sustainable fashion, and will include elements such as brand awareness, brand engagement, and word of mouth, will become important players for brands.

Marc Jacobs and Instagram CEO Kevin Systrom revealed during an interview for *Collectively (2018)*, that social media is the new standard for how consumers experience the world, and each other. Others, such as scholars, are referring to social media as the new cultural and social phenomenon that is highly relevant for businesses today (VanMeter, Grisaffe & Chonko, 2015). Moreover, Instagram is a popular social media platform that has developed a new and personal interactivity for brands and its consumers. Companies are using social media for the purpose of digital advertising, handling customer services, mining innovation ideas, and creating engaged brand communities. Scholars have demonstrated that Instagram is a social media platform that focuses on archiving images, giving users the possibility to participate in various content and interact with other users (Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015). Furthermore, Instagram has been said to foster the largest industry, which is fashion, according to Akerlund (2015). It is important to notice that fashion is a visual industry, and Instagram is a visual platform, and therefore compliment one another (Hansson & Eriksson, 2016).

Studies have further indicated that consumers frequently receive green-marketing communication from brands, however, the validity of its environmental claims are questioned, confusing, or unverifiable (Bonini and Oppenheim 2008; Yan et al. 2012; Kim & Hall, 2015). Therefore, if fashion labels are incorporating sustainable practices, it is important to communicate such practices to their audience effectively. With such labels, brand reputation is a strong and vital factor as will be explained in the following section.

2.4 Brand reputation

The reputation of a brand has been defined as an extrinsic cue, which is an attribute that is related to the product, but not to the physical composition of the product (Loureiro et al. 2017). Brand reputation is an ever-changing concept, and is mainly established by the flow of information from one user to another (Loureiro et al. 2017). A brand's emotional values are not just communicated through advertising, but also through the interaction that employees have with different stakeholders. Brand identity is where the brand portrays their vision, and brand image is how the audience received this identity. Therefore, for this particular research, brand identity is what will be defined in response to brand reputation. In order to establish a brand identity, emphasis is placed on differentiation, such as offering sustainable garments, which is a competitive advantage to the firm (Ghodeswar, 2008). The identity of a brand is based on the thorough understanding of the customers, competitors and the business environment the brand finds itself in. It is important that the brand identity is reflected in their business strategy, along with their willingness to invest in programs that are needed for the brand to live up to its promise to its customers. In this research, new Dutch fashion labels that are incorporating sustainable initiatives into their brand, must therefore ensure sustainability is reflected in their business strategy, along with their willingness to live up to its customers' expectations of purchasing sustainable clothing items. Major brands such as Gucci, Ivanka Trump, Macys, LVMH and Ann Inc are taking sustainable initiatives as reported in the media (Kim & Hall, 2015). There is a growing commitment to environmental sustainability, however brands are not only viewing it as a necessity of their corporate social responsibility, but also as a source of financial profit.

Based on the literature of Ghodeswar (2008), a conceptual model for brand building has been established known as PCDL model, which consists of four elements. The four elements in this model are: positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging the brand equity (Ghodeswar, 2008). The PCDL model will be discussed during the interviews that will take place for this research in order to establish to what extent sustainability is part of the brands' reputation, and how it is reflected in their business strategy and their willingness to live up to the sustainable expectations.

Brand reputation PCDL model

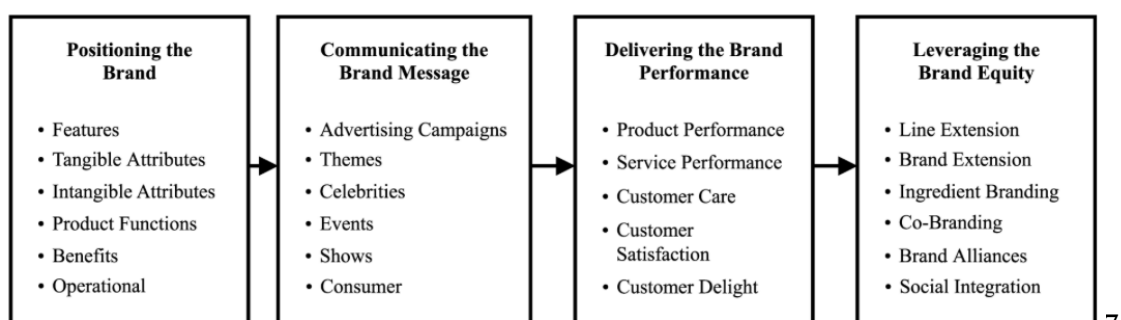


Figure 3. Retrieved from Ghodeswar (2008).

The positioning of the brand is part of a brand identity and its value proposition, which is to be actively communicated to its target audience, and is demonstrated through the brand's advantage and competing with others. It should also meet the consumer's needs and expectations, and hold a highly attractive competitive position. The communication of the brand message is aided by the brand positioning, which helps to prioritize the focus of the brand identity. This results into communication themes that set the company forward accompanied by communication objectives such as the type of message, brand differentiation that is to be achieved, and themes that appeals to the target audience. Advertising that is creatively executed can help the brand break the clutter of messages within the market, and build a strong impact within their target community. Delivering the brand performance consists of companies that need to continuously track their brands against the effect of its competition, especially with regards to aggressive competition. The brand performance can be assessed, however, on Instagram this is often more difficult to analyze as compared to on a website or Facebook. Finally, leveraging the brand equity is define by Keller (2003) as a process that links the brand to another entity, which creates a new set of associations, as well as from an existing brand of associations. Fashion brands that incorporate sustainable initiatives may be better able to make use of emotional appeal to its customer base such as Stella McCartney who's website offers not only informative details of the green products that are incorporated in her clothing line, but also provides evidence as part of her brand values and her mission. Such values can be further developed on social media as new entrants in the fashion market to spread their message and communicate their values and mission frequently use such online platforms. With regards to Instagram and brand reputation, image power is becoming increasingly important. Visual-based communication has been powerful in shaping such influential public images (Alshawaf & Wen, 2015). In order to stand out on Instagram, companies are starting to focus more on differentiating their brands through the use of unique emotional characteristics, which is a new technological paradigm of corporate communication.

2.4.1 Reputation and Branding in Sustainability

The reputation of a corporate brand can be enhanced through careful management, which include guiding and stimulating a company's actions and to ensure that the management keeps focus on the strategy that has been implemented. Saxton (1998) implies that a corporate reputation is 'seen through the eyes of the stakeholders and expressed through their thoughts and words.' Moreover, Saxton adds that 'investing in communications designed to improve

corporate reputation is a worthy endeavor because research has shown that improved reputation positively affects not only financial performance but also customer and employee loyalty' (Forman & Argenti, 2005).

Scholars have established a link between reputation and branding, which is presented as follows: the reputation of the brand is connected to its behavior. Moreover, it is related to the actions the brand delivers, along with the performance of the brand that brings it to life. The brand is the expectation or the promise of their performance (Punjaisri, et al. 2008). The link between reputation and branding, calls for new guidelines within brands with regards to sustainability. This means that brands are required to work together with their stakeholders and develop a common knowledge designed to enable trust and a vision with all partners (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). Brands should be taking on sustainable measures as a result of observing and listening to marketing trends, along with nature and society's need, rather than being an action that is forced by current issues and accompanied pressures (Eccles, et al. 2014). If a brand decides to adopt sustainable measures, then all measures must be testified, analyzed, improved and justified through consumer perception, the welfare of society and a company's reputation, etc in order to reach a positive brand reputation and avoid consumer or media perception of green washing (Eccles, et al. 2014). Green washing has been previously defined as an intersection of two different firm behaviors, which consist of a poor environmental performance, whilst communication is positive about the environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Brand reputation holds factors and values such as functional and emotional characteristics given by consumers. A brand has a symbolic value, as it has the ability to represent an interest that goes beyond the brand itself (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). Consumers determine the development of such a brand, and in recent years, consumer interests in environmental-friendly alternatives have dramatically increased. Accompanied with this new interest, consumer expectations of brands have also changed – and therefore more and more brands are starting to incorporate environmentally friendly values in their fashion collections. Not only existing companies are doing so, also many start-ups are starting with a sustainable idea in mind in order to keep up with consumer interest (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). Paul Polman, the CEO of Unilever stated in Grubor & Milovanov (2017, 80), "Businesses can not succeed in societies that fail. (...) With liberty comes responsibility. Sustainable brands have the heritage, ability and drive to bring this alive. Sustainability, as a strategy, inevitably emerges in forefront of branding and overall business policy, demonstrating responsible stance toward mankind requirements" (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017, 80).

Besides the fact that sustainable brands have a heritage, ability and drive to bring the topic to the fore, each brand defers from one another by the degree of integrated green issues. A term such as 'green' or 'sustainable' are often used as synonyms in literature, and therefore

green brand attributes are ‘ecological’ (minimize the negative impact on the environment), and ‘equitable’ (prevents promotion of unsustainable social practices such as poor working conditions), and economic (encourages long-term economic development through the brand). For such differences in “greenness”, scholars have established three different categories which are presented as (1) green as core value, (2) green as integrated in core values, and (3) green values as the guarantee. Other values have placed brands into four groups of ‘greenness’ – (1) *unsung heroes* – these are brands that conduct strong green practice, but with insignificant public awareness, (2) *free passers* – are brands that conduct limited green practice, but with distant brand echo that drives green reputation, (3) *losers* – brands that conduct limited green practice with public recognition of the limitations, and (4) *winners* – brands that conduct strong green practice that is recognized in public. Green branding is becoming significantly important, however, it may also simply be a marketing strategy to come with a new and unique concept (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017: 80-81).

Green branding is more than eco-labeling because there must be a strategy such as product production, design, packaging and positioning, convincingly communicating to target market – are all aspects that are essential for the process of becoming a more sustainable fashion industry (Luchs et al. 2010). For such ‘green communication’ companies can easily use social media platforms as main vehicles to maximize their impact on reputation.

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology of this research, and will examine how the research will provide insight into the green box of Dutch fashion labels and how sustainability is communicated through their Instagram profiles.

3.1 Research design and Sampling

Qualitative research was chosen as the most applicable approach for the research and is derived from the works of Toemen (2017), Ottman (2017), and Hansson & Eriksson (2016). Qualitative research is applied when studying an occurrence within the environment, which is usually supported by social meaning that occurs naturally (Van Esch, 2013). Previous research revealed a quantitative method such as surveys and recording the data through SPSS. Other researchers dealt with qualitative interviews only, or a mix of content analysis with a survey. The content analysis was conducted through the coding of news articles related to sustainability in the fashion industry moreover, the surveys were directed towards consumers and their consumption patterns with regards to fast fashion versus sustainable fashion. However, a mix of interviews and a qualitative content analysis has not been used in prior research. This mix of research methods will allow for a new depth of understanding the sustainable initiatives by start-up fashion brands. The interviews will allow for an insight into the green box, which will allow for an analysis of whether the brand is sustainable or not and how they aim to be more sustainable in the future (what measures will be taken, for example). The interviews are necessary for this particular research, as it will provide the researcher with the relevant information regarding each sustainable start-up fashion brand, and therefore being able to uncover the green box and understand the true efforts of each brand. A content analysis will provide insight from a communications perspective that will connect sustainability with certain key aspects. The content analysis will provide an understanding of how sustainable brands are communicating their practices, and to what extent. Moreover, the analysis will provide knowledge about whether the pictures are commercialized, or whether they are more focused on spreading a message and whether they appear old fashioned. Therefore, a mix of two qualitative research methods has been used, which are semi-structured interviews, and a content analysis.

Interviews

For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Semi-structured interviews contain several key questions that keep focus on the specific area that needs to be explored. Moreover it allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge from the questions at hand. In doing so, more in-depth information can be received, and to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). This structure will be

most appropriate, as it will provide the participants with guidance in giving their answers (Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). In addition, the interview is considered as a standardized, open-ended interview, meaning all interviewees have been asked similar open-ended questions, which allows for a more concrete conclusion when compared in analysis. Ten Dutch fashion labels have been chosen in a purposive sample to conduct the interview with. The informants are chosen based on defined qualities based on whether they communicate that they are sustainable or not (i.e. brands were chosen based on searches on Google, and referral to their website, Instagram or Facebook) (Tongco, 2007). Moreover the Instagram accounts of the brands hold the necessary information (i.e. claiming they are a sustainable brand on their social media accounts and how much information they provide with regards to their sustainable practices), and therefore purposive sampling is used. The interviews will also depend on which brands are responsive and their willingness to be interviewed.

The interviews have been conducted with the founder of the fashion brand, and the reason for doing so is firstly because most brands are small scale and are therefore either a one or two-man company. The founder has had the ability to provide the researcher with the internal information concerning its sustainable efforts. Additionally the founder has the most expertise about the brand in relation to the fashion industry as a whole and their views towards sustainability and incorporating such values in their brand, which is related to the purpose of this research. By receiving such information, it will be possible to uncover the green box and understand whether their label has been originated from the true willingness to change the fashion industry, or whether it is simply a new and unique message. Using interviews as qualitative research is justified as it provides robust insights into the production processes, and the brand philosophy. It has allowed for the ability to understand the underlying intentions of fashion brands integrating sustainability, which can ultimately enrich the fashion industry with new information as the issues are explained. It can also humanize the theory that has already been researched in this particular field, and therefore if a quantitative method were applied, it would have been difficult to produce a similar and effective outcome (Van Esch, 2013). At the end of each interview, the researcher performed snowball sampling in order to get more information about the sustainable brands located in the Netherlands – along with being able to get in contact with other brands easier. In doing so, the rationale was to prevent taking too much time on searching for new candidates, as most were able to put the researcher in contact with other brands.

Content analysis

In addition, this research includes a qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is used to analyze written, verbal or visual communication messages (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Instagram

is a visual platform that provides the ability to analyze written and visual communication messages. It is a platform that is often used by brands to reach a larger audience. Nowadays, sustainability is commonly used as a communicative message on Instagram in order for customers to become more aware of their consumption behaviors and the accompanied impact it has on the environment, as well as society (Meppelink, 2013). In content analysis there are two different approaches, deductive and inductive. For the purpose of this research the inductive approach is used, which is a process that includes open coding, creating categories and abstraction (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). For this research, the Instagram accounts of 25 Dutch fashion labels that integrate sustainability have been analyzed based on the content of the first 6 posts. The rationale for using 25 Dutch fashion labels for content analyses is due to saturation and applicability. Purposive sampling has been taking place prior to coding to ensure the brands reveal sustainable imagery. Moreover, choosing a group of the first 6 posts of each profile has been conducted through cluster sampling. A sample was taken from those 6 posts only (Rose, 2001). The rationale for cluster sampling is due to the differing visual images that would provide different information, and thus more coded themes.

Once the images had been selected, the images were coded. The first 6 images of the 25 brands have been coded on the basis of open coding. In open coding an image is analyzed and clusters of codes are examined. Some of these codes will become repetitive per image, which will create a category. The final and most prominent categories will be placed as themes/concepts and will connect to theory. The different elements analyzed in this research are firm-generated content (Smallegange, 2017) which consist of image type (whether it is visual, textual or both), image content (what information can be found in the visual image), and finally, image description (what information has been written in the description of the image and whether it is informative about sustainability or not), and the most common hash tags used (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Smallegange, 2017). The coding analysis will be divided in (1) codes derived from image and description, which have been placed in a coding scheme as can be seen in Appendix B and, (2) the five biggest categories and 5 subcategories that have been considered the most recurring and popular hash tags, which can be found in the analysis under 4.5. The rationale for conducting content analysis as a qualitative method is to present an overview of how brands are communicating sustainability and what themes are most dominant in connection to existing theory.

Overall, the research design consists of a mix of two different qualitative research methods, with the rationale being that it provides in-depth feedback. In-depth research can be more valid as individuals give feedback face-to-face in comparison to a survey, which causes for research to remain on the surface and not provide in-depth content.

3.2 Operationalization

Since this research will be conducted using two qualitative methods: individual interviews and content analysis - for each method of research there will be a concept or objective that is to be observed and measured. The operationalization of each method will be explained as follows:

Interviews

The concept that will be analyzed in the individual interviews is a general concept of sustainable fashion and how the Dutch fashion brands perceive this notion. In an effort to analyze the green box of the brand, the questions posed during the interview should answer why the fashion brand decided to integrate sustainable initiatives, and whether such initiatives embody the notion of sustainability. Furthermore, it was analyzed why or why not the brand communicates sustainability, and to understand whether it used as a marketing strategy or if it's part of the brand philosophy, which includes the wish to make consumers more aware of their consumption patterns. A pre-established interview guide had been developed in order to focus on certain topics and questions that needed answering for a concrete conclusion, which can be found in Appendix C.

The interview was conducted with the founder of the new fashion label, which have been recorded, and transcribed accordingly with a coding analysis that took place afterwards. The interview analysis process consisted of coding by highlighting the data that was discussed and most relevant for further research. The codes were implemented in a table, after which the analysis consisted of highlighting similar codes from different interviews, which were used for the final analysis of the themes in relation to theory. The coding frame can be found in Appendix A. The most prominent themes are discussed in the analysis that is connected to theory. Moreover, the response of the brand's representatives will count as evidence for the concepts used, meaning that their point of view will be considered reliable and valid for the purpose of this research. The concepts (main themes) are derived from literature, and can therefore be used as valuable evidence of the concepts used by the brand's representatives. The participants have been approached via e-mail through April and May and all interviews have been conducted by the beginning of June.

Content Analysis

The concepts will be measured through the use of a coding scheme, and will be provided by the visual content on the Instagram accounts of 25 different Dutch fashion labels based in the Netherlands that integrate 'sustainability' in their brands' profile description. For the operationalization of the content analysis, the study of Serrano & Garcia (2016) and Smallegange (2017) will be used as inspiration. In the study of Serrano & Garcia (2016),

several significant values were taken into account when analyzing the images, and therefore set the foundation for this part of the research. Visual composition is taken into account with different variables such as the colors in the image, whether they are cool or warm, or visual space aesthetics such as whether the image has an informative or a narrative effect. Additionally, the research of Smallegange (2017) will provide a coding scheme of the most prominent categories as analyzed in the image, the description and hash tags. After the categories have been established and themes/concepts have been derived, the observations should connect to theory. Through performing content analysis it will be determined what will count as evidence, and what will not.

The coding scheme is derived from the methodological guidelines of Saldana (2008), and has been established after the open coding process had reached saturation. The coding scheme was based on a data-driven analysis, meaning that the analysis stayed close to the data. The analysis consisted of categories and its codes, which would saturate the data in order to bring together similar meaningful parts to create a framework as outlined by Saldana (2008). The categories consisted of the aspects that the researcher wanted more information about, and the subcategories consist of what is said in the material (image, description and hash tags) about these aspects). The coding frame was established as a coding tree – therefore it was continued until saturation was reached and no new categories or sub categories could be found within the data; this can be seen in appendix B. The subquestions are essential for answering the research question as it will allow for the understanding of how Dutch fashion brands (start-ups) are communicating their brand on Instagram, and whether this appears to be effective. The effectiveness is reflected through open coding of images and its text.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Interviews

The data collection process consisted of finding participants for the interviews, which was conducted through an online search (Google, Instagram and Facebook). The researcher has emailed approximately 25 Dutch sustainable fashion labels located in the Netherlands, and requested an interview with the founder of the label. The interviews were held, recorded and monitored by the researcher with prior consent of the interviewees. An analysis took place during and after the interview, and has been transcribed according to the audio recording. The transcription was used for further analysis to answer the research question. Furthermore, at the end of each interview the researcher performed snowball sampling, which was done in order to find more brands and individuals to conduct interviews with. The interview analysis process consisted of coding, which was linked to similar codes from other interviews, therefore a final analysis provided for different themes and were connected to theory.

Content Analysis

With regards to the content analysis, the data collection took place on Instagram through the profiles of 25 Dutch sustainable fashion brands. The first step within the analysis is to extract the first six images, and place them in a word document. Under each image open coding will take place by analyzing what is seen in the image itself, the description, and the hash tags. This means that the analysis consisted of a selective coding process, as the researcher chose the sustainable fashion label based on relevance and appropriateness for coding. Performing selective coding was therefore established in order to extract relevant information, appropriate for this particular research. In order to ensure reliability, other social media platforms such as the website of the brand will be analyzed to find whether their sustainable communication matches their description on their Instagram profile.

4. Analysis/Results

During the coding process of interview data treatment, the main themes were identified:

Fashion (no goat wool socks), green washing, innovation, mainstreaming/commercialization and transparency. The main themes that were identified were understood by the researcher as the need for implementing a new strategy in business models for sustainable fashion brands. Such a business model was analyzed in sub-coding as the triple bottom line, three p's or eco-efficiency were often referred to. For many brands, the willingness to decrease environmental impact and incorporating fair fashion should be standardized. Additionally, establishing credibility without the perception of green washing is explained with a debate about to what extent brands should be transparent. However, there are challenges to being transparent as it may not be in a brand's advantage as it might target an alternative lifestyle target group only. Therefore, through innovation and collaboration, sustainable fashion must become more commercialized by making it mainstream.

The content analysis concluded that Instagram is a platform used by brands to market their brand through visual representation. Start-ups realize the potential of Instagram in making sustainable fashion more commercialized, therefore the sustainable practices must be an inherent standard within the brand itself, and focus on the clothing being their marketing tool. The main themes derived from the content analysis are, *CSR Communication, sustainable fashion and environment.* Proper implementation of these three themes can enhance the overall brand reputation of the brand because consumers may trust such a media outlet, as they are inspirational. Being influential will ensure for the ability to reach a large audience and ensure action (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). However, inconsistency in communication on media outlets such as Instagram may lead to consumer confusion, and therefore linked to green washing. Therefore, it is important to create appropriate strategies in order to minimize the gap, and ensure profit (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). The following sections will further discuss the findings of this research.

4.1 Dutch sustainable fashion brands

The sustainable fashion brands from the Netherlands that have been interviewed and have shared their insights, have implemented sustainable practices in numerous different ways. Their practices are explained as follows:

LabeledBy

LabeledBy is a brand that creates fashionable garments through the innovative use of 3D printing. With their prototypes of their brand they pitch at larger companies to show that there are sustainable techniques, such as using 3D printing techniques, also establishing more profit

in the long-run. They have a small budget, and can therefore not produce as sustainably as possible – but the future plan is to use filaments for 3D printing, or waste products such as PET-bottles.

AnoukXVera

One of the representatives from AnoukXVera was interviewed and argued that the label is a sustainable sportswear brand. Both founders love the environment, and do not want to contribute to a negative impact. By avoiding overproduction, the sports leggings are custom made and therefore not contributing to unnecessary waste. The fabric is specially printed at Print Unlimited in the Netherlands, which have been carefully assembled in their atelier.

Green Labels

The founder of The Green Labels has set up her own sustainable fashion online-shop. Within this online-shop the founder collaborates with other sustainable fashion brands and sells their clothing on her platform. These brands have to go through a tough selection ensuring their sustainable honesty. The web shop allows customers to identify themselves with the kind of sustainability they'd like to engage with. All brands on the website must already comply with fair fashion. Furthermore, the integration of sustainability towards the environment is split up into four different aspects: vegan (where no animals are harmed for the use of making the garments), local (clothing that has been produced locally to support communities and maintain social wealth and prosperity), clean processes (clothing that is made of natural and organic materials such as sustainable fibres, the use of less or no harmful chemicals, low consumption of water, logistics, and clean energy), and finally waste reduction, which is linked to the circular economy of re-using and recycling fabrics. The packaging is made of 90% recycled cardboard and encourages the buyer to throw the packaging in the paper bin in order to be recycled again. Furthermore, in an effort to reduce CO₂ in the Netherlands, the Fietskoerier – the first bike delivery in the country that has won several words for their sustainable solution, delivers the packages. Finally, their business cards are made of leftover cotton fabric. It is clear, that their communication is highly transparent, and the founder is open to answering any questions that customers may have about further transparency. The founder of the web shop has a vast background in marketing, and a passion for sustainability.

O My Bag

The founder of the Green Labels also works at O My Bag, which sells sustainable and fashionable bags. The sustainable aspect is the leather that is used, which does not include any heavy chemicals. Moreover, the bags are vegetable tanned. This considerably lowers the environmental impact. They also incorporate the circular economy by allowing customers to

bring their bags back for reparation or for re-sell. O My Bag also has a fair aspect as the products are made in India to support local communities, and these are special producers where auditing takes place regularly so they know how the employees are treated.

Drezzunique

The founder has her own high-end sustainable fashion label. The fabric is handpicked in Italy and Spain, and she often uses waste fabrics that aren't used in manufacturing. Her designs are handmade in the Netherlands and are therefore produced locally with fair labour. She only produces limited numbers in order to reduce waste. Her website reveals "Behind the Seams", where the story of the garments is told and thus contains the transparency of the brand.

Bodil Lois

The founder is currently working on her sustainable lingerie label called Bodil Lois. She studied Sustainability in Fashion at the Academie Fur Mode und Design in Berlin and is started up her label in the Netherlands. Her lingerie label is sustainable because the material that she will be using is not made of cotton, but of eucalyptus pulp – which still requires trees to be cut down, however, it is all regulated and for every eucalyptus that is cut down, a new one is planted. The brace and the clips of the bra will be made of recycled plastics, which she will be melting herself. She will also have a repair service, so that people keep wearing their bras and make the bra have a long life.

Osni Clothing

Osni Clothing is sustainable fashion brand founded by two girls who are sisters. They buy selected items that represent their style from vintage stores all around the Netherlands, thereby contributing to the circular economy and giving back to the environment by reducing waste garments. The clothing that they select is fashionable, and is repaired wherever is necessary. In the future they would like to have their own designs – which will be created by local designers and therefore adding to the social aspect of the triple bottom line, along with the environmental aspect for creating the garments from Hemp or create bags from Pineapple or mushroom leather. Furthermore, their packaging is made from biodegradable materials or re-usable plastics.

Guave

Guave is a brand founded by two fashion students who are both half Dutch – half Indonesian. Their brand resembles their cultural heritage as they make clothing from Batek. Batek is a specially printed fabric from Indonesia, and is a very durable product. The founders create the garments themselves, and are therefore embracing fair fashion. They also work together with

a fabric maker in the Netherlands (Enschede Textiel Fabriek) therefore ensuring that most of the production is done locally and promoting collaboration. The fabric is made in Indonesia, and they have understood that fair fashion takes place. Moreover, due to the fact that they produce their own clothing on demand, they also embrace fair fashion.

Vegetable Fur

The founder of Vegetable Fur has created her own 'fur' coat made of hemp. Hemp is a raw material that is very efficient and durable. This raw material should come in place of cotton. Her research on hemp, and biomimicry resulted her to design the vegetable fur coat, which can keep humans warm, and has many other benefits such as for the environment, and humans. She is currently still in the process of finalizing her coats to ensure that all aspects are sustainable; therefore doing research on sustainable water resistant.

By-Wire.net

By-Wire is a developer of smart textiles, wearables, textile technology, and confection processes, integration of hardware and textile products. Through the representative company the aim is to foster innovation in large companies. Through innovation the representative aims to show that technology can become fashionable, and also has sustainable aspects to it, which are the incorporation of the circular economy by using old fabrics, and having a machine create a new garment with it. Furthermore, the representative aims to expand her knowledge with others by sharing and developing innovative prototypes.

Marina Kleist

The founder of Marina Kleist creates handmade vegan bags that promote the non-usage of real leather. The bags are made of cork, and the brand tags are made of recycled cotton. Additionally, her business cards are also made of recycled cotton – meaning clothing is recycled to reproduce into something new, such as paper-like cards. The production process consists of an environmentally friendly procedure whereby cork is extracted from the trees without cutting them down. These trees are sustainably grown in Portugal, where the fabric is also made, and therefore Marina Kleist also promotes localized production. Marina Kleist produces one or two bags for sale in order to reduce waste and keep the collection limited and on-demand. When cutting the material to create the bags, she does not throw any excess material away; instead she uses it for experiments or to use on other bags.

The interviews were conducted in order to gain insights on the green box (the internal sustainable and collaborative efforts) of the brand, and to understand the underlying message that they want to communicate with their brand. The interviews covered extensive material

and therefore have been divided into different topics that have been identified through the coding scheme as shown in appendix A.

4.2 Sustainability as defined by Dutch fashion brands

Every brand that was interviewed during the research process approached sustainability in either an individual or collaborative, and unique manner, providing a differentiation of brands regarding the term sustainability. The documentary *the True Cost* was often identified as the reasoning for setting up a sustainable fashion brand as it was an effective critique on the fashion industry. The critique on the fashion industry resulted in start-ups understanding the effects and the negative impact, and therefore ensuring their brand philosophy to produce as sustainable as possible. In multiple interviews, the researcher discussed the notion of sustainability and the comprehension of this term. The aim of discussing the definition of sustainability provided the researcher with an understanding of whether the individuals that set up their own brands truly value sustainability and understand the notion of the term to integrate such values into their brand. Scholars such as Harris et al. (2015) have defined sustainability as clothing that can integrate one or more aspects of social and environmental sustainability such as Fair Trade or fabrics that are produced out of organic material. Moreover, a definition that provides the understanding of sustainable business is the use of the triple bottom line (three p's), which is frequently assessed in the interviews. The triple bottom line embodies three aspects that are important for sustainable business, which are: environment, social, and economic. Moreover, the need for giving back to society and environment was also important.

The representative of The Green Labels and O My Bag, proposed the scientific definition of sustainability, which is the triple bottom line theory that incorporates socio-economical and environmental aspects:

“The scientific definition is the social-economical and environmental one so I do think that sustainability is partially an economical question, I really believe that for example at O My Bag, one of our sentences is we support trade, not aid, because we really believe that we can make a change, through our business – and business can be a forceful good, as long as it is not misused for profit. In that sense, if you keep in balance those three aspects the social aspect, environmental aspect and the economical aspect then you have a great positive loop effect” (Interview 3, p.5).

Moreover, the representative of Drezunique uses the three p's as a definition to sustainability.

“When you make something or have something made that it is done with respect to people, planet and profit” (interview 4, p.2).

Such a definition has been demonstrated by Niinimäki (2015) that integrates the importance of people, planet and profit as a new fashion system, which people need to move towards. Currently, the consequence of the fast fashion industry is ‘throwaway’ fashion, which ends up in landfills and cause for environmental hazards having adverse effects on humans, as assessed by Fraser (2015). Therefore, by slowing fashion down it means to produce differently and adding value to clothing. The representative of AnoukXVera explains,

“My definition of sustainability is actually the opposite of over-production. I think that we produce way too much. [...] Sustainability requires a different view on the world, a switch in the way of living. I think there should be more production on-demand, so producing when there is a need for it, in a good quality, in as good working conditions” (Interview 2, p. 6-7).

In order to reduce waste, and therefore being more sustainable, AnoukXVera work with a limited collection to prevent over-production. Reducing the amount of clothing that is produced, meaning not producing more than necessary, which is illustrated by the representative of LabeledBy:

“We should produce on demand, so not more than necessary. Another form of sustainability is if the working conditions of the workers are humane. Next to that, there is another form of sustainability, the third, transport, where it is being made, that the travel time of clothing is as short as possible so that there are fewer CO₂ emissions” (Interview 1, p.2).

Such definitions provide numerous interpretations to the negative impact of the fashion industry, as established by media outlets. Many large companies and start-ups have differing ideas of how to contribute to sustainability and therefore proposing different methods of production processes. The interviews are indicative of three main sustainable practices that have been implemented in the movement towards a more sustainable fashion industry, which are explained as follows.

4.3 The different types of sustainable practices

The Circular Economy in Fashion

The principles of the circular economy in connection to fashion are simple to comprehend as it means to close the negative loop within the fashion industry by reusing, repairing, remanufacturing and selling services rather than goods by for example renting clothing services (Lovins, et al. 2013). Osni Clothing is one brand that has embraced the notion of circular economy by reusing and repairing vintage clothing and making it their brand's product. Vintage stores are therefore collaborating with start-ups that can use their garments for further sales. Many companies and organizations understand that the current waste of limited resources is not sustainable (Johnsson & Selin, 2015). Moreover, the extension of the life of a product is part of the notion of circular economy. By repairing garments or reusing fabric, it is possible to ensure a prolonged life cycle. Representative 2 of Osni Clothing mentions that:

“[...] You have a lot of vintage stores out there, and second-hand is basically the first way to change. So if you want to be more sustainable then you go for things that are vintage, same as when you use recycled materials, you re-use things, so that's why vintage is sustainable [...]” (interview 6, p.2).

Moreover, the representative of The Green Labels states that contributing to the circular economy is essential to change the current linear fashion system:

“I really like all the concepts sustainability proposes, and I think if you apply these kinds of concepts in the whole chain, you can create really positive changes with it. Sustainability is a completely different system than we have now. We currently have a complete linear system [...] you create a lot of product, and [...] whatever happens with it, you do not care, and it needs to be answered differently – therefore you have the circular economy system and I am not sure we can achieve that in fashion, but I do think that in the circular economy it can be a really good answer to every problem we have [...]” (Interview 3, p.6).

The current fashion industry is linear meaning the clothing items are made, sold to the buyer, and then it stays with the buyer. Products are not taken back, and therefore do not contribute to the circular economy, and become a waste item.

Fashion companies are able to integrate circularity into their business models in order to focus on the life extension of garments (Sandvik, 2017). When a garment reaches the end of its life, it is essential to utilize such waste. By taking on the circular approach, garment waste can be considered a resource, and can therefore utilize these materials to avoid the increasingly scarce resources on earth, and also address the increase of waste (Sandvik,

2017). Within the circular economy there are two different approaches that companies can take, which are either to extend the life of the product, or to recycle and regenerate the products' components. The findings of the interviews provided that Osni Clothing and O My Bag especially, embraced certain aspects of the circular economy. At O My Bag a second hand program has been launched to support the notion of the circular economy,

“We offer people to bring back their old O My Bag's that they haven't used for a while and we give them a discount for a new bag. So that encourages them to bring them back and we give them a second life, or we sell them. There are different options, and that's something quite new – furthermore we have the repair services really strong so we want to help people if their bag breaks down or in a year or two or even more we always try to take the bags back to repair them” (Interview 3, p.6).

Therefore these companies ensure the high quality and durability of their clothing, which allows for the maintaining of value of clothing and fashion items. Valuing clothing is also present in the efforts of designing out waste, whereby new materials have been used and researched for being a sustainable substitute for cotton, amongst others, which are outlined in the following section.

New raw materials

The cultivation of cotton represents over 31 million hectares of the arable land in the world, which involves the manpower of approximately 20 million farmers that depend on cotton production for their income (Pyburn, et al. 2005). The environmental impact of the production of cotton has been gaining more attention from activists as it poses environmental problems, along with human health problems – the main problems consist of salinization, desertification and poisoning. Cotton requires a large amount of water for its cultivation and processing, and irrigation is used whenever the quantities are not compatible with the requirements of the crop that is being cultivated (Pyburn, et al. 2005). 73% of all cotton production is irrigated in order to gain higher yields per unit of area. Irrigation causes for water shortage and pollution, moreover some arable land is abandoned, as it isn't usable for the cultivation of cotton or other crops any longer. Moreover, pesticides are used in approximately 50% of all cultivation of cotton, in addition, the use of pesticides and its storage are badly managed. The techniques that are used for the application of pesticides have a strong negative environmental impact, however, human exposure is worse (Pyburn, et al. 2005). The result of pesticide use is seen in contaminated neighboring villages along with the poisoning of workers who apply the pesticides – this is especially common in developing countries.

The main problems related to cotton cultivation are the excessive use of water and pesticides, which affect soil, biodiversity and human health. Organic cotton has been seen as a green replacement for non-organic cotton however, organic cotton also requires a lot of water and is therefore not considered the most sustainable replacement. The representative of Vegetable Fur coats explains that,

“I saw how polluting the fashion industry is. They are responsible for 1/4th of all worldwide chemicals and pesticides, so that’s 25% of global warming. Next to that the textile industry is the second largest consumer of water. For example to make one pair of jeans you need 10.000 liters of water, and that water is thrown back into the ocean with paint and waste etc. And with regards to raw materials, cotton is really not good, it exhausts the soils and needs a lot of water, needs lots of pesticides and next to that erosion occurs in the soils and so it literally dries out the soil” (Interview 9, p. 1).

Cotton requires a vast amount of water and land to grow, which is highly unsustainable for the environment. Therefore, one of the replacements of cotton is hemp. Hemp is an old raw material that has been used by Levi Strauss to create the first jeans, along with its continuous use in Eastern countries such as China (Ranalli & Venturi, 2004). Hemp has been considered a great replacement for cotton because it has the lowest ecological footprint, needs approximately 2000 liters of water per kilo of usable fiber, and is up to four times stronger than cotton (Ranalli & Venturi, 2004). Hemp provides many opportunities in relation to a more sustainable fashion industry, but also as a whole for a more sustainable world. It provides weed control, pesticides are not necessary because they are resistant to pest and disease, and finally, soil is improved through crop rotation (Ranalli & Venturi, 2004). The agricultural benefits accompanied with hemp are suitable for both conventional as well as organic farming procedures and are able to provide “high biomass production with low inputs” (Ranalli & Venturi, 2004). The founders of Osni Clothing both identified hemp to be a solution for the use of cotton, as one proposed:

“[...] It is very sustainable, when cotton and those fabrics started to be used, hemp just disappeared, but hemp doesn’t need as much water, and doesn’t need any chemicals as it can grow by itself, you don’t need to erase forests and its really ecological in so many ways, even the fabric itself is wearable to be warm and cold and that is really interesting” (Interview 6, p.9)

Hemp has been considered to be an environmentally friendly and profitable option for fur, but also a more ethical option. Fur is not only non-animal friendly, but it also has many health hazards for humans. As outlined by the representative of Vegetable Fur,

“To prevent fur from fading they use a lot of chemicals and that’s for example formaldehyde and people become infertile from that or you get cancer. Kassa Vara, have done research into fur collars on children’s jackets, kids of 3-5 years or so and there were 80 times more chemicals in it than allowed [...] I think that it is very important that people start buying clothing more consciously” (Interview 9, p. 7).

Organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States (2009) have proved this statement as the Fur Council of Canada reports that formaldehyde is a toxic substance, and according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the chemical is carcinogenic, and can therefore seriously affect human health. Moreover, the production of fur has been assessed to be highly detrimental to the environment as it pollutes immensely, it is energy intensive and can damage ecosystems.

Additionally, the different raw materials that can act as a substitute for animal leather are piñatex, mushroom skin and lotus, which has been understood from the analysis of the interview with Osni Clothing, as representative 2 provided:

“They make piñatex from the waste, the skin, and its biodegradable and you can make a leather from it. You also have mushroom leather, and so many types of leather that are sustainable. I went to Cambodia and I learned about lotus flower, there is this fabric that’s made from lotus flower, so from the twig, it’s really easy, with water in your hands you have a thread and you can weave it into a fabric. In Asia you have a lot of it” (Interview 6, p. 9)

The piñatex fiber is made of pineapple leaf fiber – which is an agricultural waste product. The fiber provides an opportunity to build within the commercial industry and is scalable for developing farming communities moreover it has minimal environmental impact. The process consists of decortications, which means the extraction of the long fibers, which is done with an automated machine that assists farmers with the process and allows them to utilize greater quantities of their waste leaves. Once the fiber has been stripped from the leaves, the leftover biomass can be used for different means such as biofuel, or a nutrient-rich natural fertilizer, nothing is wasted (Hijosa, 2018). Piñatex is the substitute for leather, therefore being a vegan approach – whilst reducing waste as an environmentally friendly approach. Another vegan approach that reduces waste with an environmentally friendly approach is the use of cork.

The brand Marina Kleist uses cork leather (vegan leather) as a substitute for real leather and therefore fighting for animal rights. Cork is primarily produced in Portugal and comes from a special tree, these trees are not cut down cork is simply extracted from the bark of the tree.

The representative of Marina Kleist explains,

“The trees are not cut. Its like leather that is not from animal, its resistant, resistant of water and many things, no pesticides are used – it is all biological” (Interview 10, p. 3).

However, it is unclear whether cork production touches all aspects of the triple bottom line (the three p's) as it may be considered a more sustainable raw material, there is insufficient research on cork production. Therefore, using existing waste, such as the piñatex, would be considered a more environmentally friendly method. It is therefore necessary to critique and evaluate the use of cork, and conduct more research, as has been demonstrated with the research done for fungi.

The Swedish giant, Ikea, has researched the use of biodegradable fungus-based packaging in order to replace polystyrene, which is difficult to recycle and the mushrooms are an eco-friendly replacement for such (Gosden, 2016). The reason for researching the use of biodegradable fungi packaging was part of an effort to reduce waste and increase recycling – therefore examining innovative alternatives to non-recyclable materials (Gosden, 2016). The representative of AnoukXVera mentions the practice of fungi that is designed for packaging,

“[...] There is for example the printing with sugar where bacteria is thrown on it, or fungi actually, which is designed to use for packaging in order to replace plastic packaging” (interview 2, p. 3).

Such packaging can also replace plastic bags, which is an aspect that many start-up sustainable brands are researching. Packaging continues to be a developing process, as representative 2 of Osni Clothing states,

[...] “Packaging is tricky, [...] you need something that’s going to protect the clothing from the rain, waterproof, and what you think about is plastic, right away, and therefore we look at every component of our packaging so that it is either reusable or biodegradable so it doesn’t become waste” (Interview 6, p.7).

Research is still being done regarding the use of new raw materials, but by innovating and experimenting it is possible to create new, biodegradable and less wasteful materials, that can

also contribute to a circular economy, as new raw material fibers are more durable. If brands decide to be sustainable, it is important for them to aim to be sustainable on all aspects of the business. However, one of the raw materials that brands have started to use more and more is the fiber that comes from beech wood; tencel™ Lyocell.

Bodil Lois is the only brand that was interviewed that is using tencel™ Lyocell. This fiber is used to create bras, which is a modal fiber that helps to maintain environmental balance by being integrated into the nature's cycle. It is a renewable raw material that is created through the natural process of photosynthesis. The fabric, tencel™ Lyocell is biodegradable and compostable and can therefore revert back to nature completely. The fibers are mainly manufactured from beech wood, which is a renewable raw material, and is sourced in Austria and neighboring countries – which are derived from sustainable managed forests and plantations (Tencel for Business, 2018). The fibers of tencel™ Lyocell have obtained a positive reputation for their environmentally responsible closed loop that transforms wood pulp into cellulosic fabrics, recycles process water, and reuses the solvent that has a recovery rate of more than 99% (Tencel for Business, 2018). The tencel™ Lyocell are durable, meaning they have a long-lasting quality moreover the smooth touch is good for the skin as it is also more breathable. The fact that tencel™ Lyocell is more breathable ensures that less moisture is formed on the surface of the fiber which allows for bacteria to grow, therefore, the fabrics offer better hygienic qualities. Furthermore, it regulates the body's natural temperature and therefore creates a refreshing and cooling sensation on the skin (Tencel for Business, 2018). The representative of Bodil Lois states,

“[...] I am going to use tencel, and that is made of the pulp of a eucalyptus. And that requires a lot less water than for example cotton, and it's also really good for your skin because it's considered a skin-care product too, and therefore it is not damaging to your skin [...] you can recycle these materials and my goal was to ensure that everything is biodegradable” (Interview 5, p.2).

The final aspect of moving towards a more sustainable world is connected to the circular economy, along with the use of new materials such as recycled PET-Bottles, etc. This is innovation. Innovation provides a more commercial side to the fashion industry with regards to the re-use of textiles. Overall, there are numerous new raw materials that can replace cotton or animal fur or skin to move towards a more sustainable fashion industry. However, to critique the use of raw materials, it is uncertain whether some of these materials are truly environmentally responsible or if they continue to contribute to waste and pollution. More research needs to be done in order to ensure new raw materials are usable, meaning that start-ups should be collaborating with researchers such as biologists and scientists. Therefore,

innovation is necessary to continue developing and researching the use of new raw materials that can contribute to a circular economy, and a more sustainable fashion industry.

Innovation

Amed & Berg (2018) mention that sustainability will evolve from being a marketing-focused CSR initiative, to an integral part of the brand. Circular economy principles are included in the value chain, and many will also turn towards tech innovation for efficiency, transparency, localization and ethics. As explained by the representative of By-Wire,

“Personally I am very pro local production. So to get more productions out of Europe, so that we have more control over it, and so if things do happen it’s important that it happens properly. [...] I am very pro that manner of approach but it will have a huge impact on the practices in Bangladesh, and that would mean that there are fewer hands on machines. However, we also had that in the 1950s when the productions disappeared here and it didn’t negatively impact us. So let us grant that to the Bangali’s as well that they can also develop further instead of continuing slavery in the garment factories” (Interview 9, p.5)

Moreover, the technological industry has seen an urgent and intense need for innovation. A growing number of fashion companies have been aiming at emulating qualities that start-ups have come up with. Such qualities consist of agility, collaboration and openness (Amed & Berg, 2018). The representative of AnoukXVera agrees with the statement that the important qualities are collaboration, agility, and openness,

“What I am working on personally is more with 3D printing and unmanned production techniques. [...] All people who try to work with lasercutting techniques or who are trying to produce unmanned see each other often with lectures, that is a select group of people that are interested in it and are working on this with such a specific technique, and of course there are people at universities or other labs that are working with this as well but coincidentally we are always at the same lectures. [...] I think there are so many people who have a lot of ambition and motivation. [...] But I must say that 3D printing projects that end up in research projects, if anyone asks about someone who has any expertise in this I will name all the people that I know, and they will do the same for me. So, then sometimes I get an email saying “Hey I heard about you from this and this person”, so it’s more a friendship than competition” (Interview 2, p.10).

Traditional players in the fashion industry will need to adapt to opening up to new types of talent, working in new ways, new kinds of partnerships (such as 3D printing designers), and new business/investment models (Amed & Berg, 2018). The wish to commercialize new technologies in fashion is connected to LabeledBy's view – by pitching at larger fashion companies they want to show what 3D prints can create, which are beautiful and most importantly, fashionable and wearable designs. Moreover, the representative of By-Wire works in education and consults for companies in projects with regards to innovation in technology and focuses on how we can produce better. Larger companies such as H&M are investing in young technology companies such as Ivy Revel or Worn Again (Amed & Berg, 2018).

LabeledBy is an innovative brand that encourages the use of 3D printing to foster sustainability. Their aim is to make use of technology that has the power to automate the whole production line – which can ultimately cut labor costs and enables profitable local production anywhere in Europe. The key production characteristics of innovation that encourage sustainability consist of five approaches. Firstly, the *personalization and customization of fashion items* reduces the return rate of garments and improves customer satisfaction through style and fitting because it allows the consumer to have more power of choice. Arora et al. (2008) supports these statements as personalization and customization have become more prevalent in different industries. In the fashion industry, companies such as Adidas have produced shoes that are co-designed by the customer, and studies have systematically proven that personalization of products yields higher customer satisfaction (p.3). The representative of By-Wire adds to this statement by LabeledBy as she explains the importance of personalization and customization of fashion items, and understands the future of sustainable fashion in innovation to be this way. She suggests,

“Ideally, you come in, in a physical space with your old clothing that you don't want to use anymore, you are received and a design process starts by asking ‘what did you think of your old clothing’, ‘what would you like now?’ ‘What do you need?’ ‘I see you aren't balanced’, ‘You have a very nice waist line’ ‘but your shoulders aren't in line’ etcetera, a designer will help with that and say it would be great if you start wearing this and this and then the machines start, your old fabrics are discredited and the knitting machine starts, a nice print is added, there will be extra features in it that support your body so that they stand more straight so that your waist line looks even better and ensure you are supported physically but also ethically as it is done as good as possible, you get a cup of coffee and fifteen minutes later you're outside with your new clothing at the back of the store where the old materials are implemented in your

new clothing or it will be used for the following customer. That circle is what I'm hoping for" (Interview 9, p.4).

In addition, the representative of AnoukXVera also mentions that the personalization of clothing is a positive transition towards sustainability:

"I think the more influence we allow the consumer to have on a specific item, the less production needs to take place, which is something I am pro doing, and am working on it myself too" (Interview 2, p.4).

Secondly, through means of 3D printing, the production becomes more localized which reduces the carbon footprint from shipping and it encourages the local economy. Moreover, by collaborating and implementing 3D printers in garment factories in third world countries it has been examined that it prevents unethical working conditions internationally and can stimulate global economies to produce technologically and therefore educating, and training workers internationally as well. LabeledBy's representative outlines,

"Manufacturing factories in Bangladesh are applying laser cutting to their manufacturing process, and the digitalization of the first step of creating a garment meaning they do not have to draw the design by hand anymore. There you see that those workers who had to spend hours drawing patterns, do not have to do this anymore. Through the use of digitalization, they have been able to check quality more properly, and are being trained to be more technical employees, and therefore you do not get 'rid of employment', you're just adapting them to the constant change and shift of the fashion industry. This means that you need to ensure your employees are properly to work with such technology – everything is being digitalized" (Interview 1, p. 6).

Thirdly, the overhead costs can be reduced because of the reduction in the cost of shipping. Automation minimizes electricity and labor costs. Furthermore, materials can be designed and cut in such a way that there is minimal waste and all materials will have the potential to be reused and therefore also contribute to the circular economy. Fourthly, the demands of consumers are changing fast and therefore companies need to adapt. Clothes need to be reimaged and quickly created to keep up with the demand. Furthermore, trends can potentially be 'predicted' through machine learning and later on implementation. Lastly, the speed of the delivery will still be at fast pace as technology will be able to make clothing and accessories quickly.

LabeledBy added,

“There is a new machine, knitorate, which can very quickly sow a t-shirt, so that is the first step towards people still having their own clothing, which is the case with 3D printing, however, it becomes more personalized” (Interview 1, p. 4).

Additionally, there is no need for international shipping as production will be localized and there will be a reduction in logistics for “middle-man” type companies. This means that because it is locally produced, it will be kept closer to the source and you need less stages and people to get the clothing item to the consumer, because for example, in Bangladesh, it needs to move from the manufacturer to the warehouse, etc. Workshops are becoming more localized as demonstrated by the representative of AnoukXVera whom mentions that in London the first sightings of a future shop have already been established.

“I have seen a pop up shop in London, you unfortunately couldn’t see your item being produced on the spot, but in the clothing store, there was a kind of mini lab, where you walk inside, and you could choose your design, and then it is sent to the knitting machine that was there – this wasn’t the case then, it was created somewhere else, but if that was the case it would be so good, because knitting goes fast, and clients don’t have to wait 2 weeks” (Interview 2, p.4).

The fact that such shops can provide the customer experiences to become more personal can ensure that individuals place more value on an item, however, the representative of By-Wire mentions that it will not prevent consumers from purchasing less items considering the fact that the machinery will only provide local production as compared to over-production. Moreover the representative of AnoukXVera realizes that,

“Once you provide the client with too many choices, which is what you see with Nike shoes, the customized department, there is too much choice, I don’t even know what to choose anymore, and next to that because you can choose so much, which is what you see with Poletten glasses, then you want more and more, especially if it is very cheap and there are so many options, then you can have different glasses for every day. So yes, that is a balance, it can be abused, but it can also be applied well” (Interview 2, p.4).

Innovating with technology such as 3D printing has proven to be a collaborative effort that is both profitable and sustainable, especially if the fabrics can be re-used and reinvented and therefore contributing to the circular economy of reducing waste. New raw materials made of

waste can reduce the impact, and researching raw materials that are durable and therefore easily reusable. Such research should be communicated in order to share knowledge, and for means of transparency. The communication of sustainability was analyzed through Dutch sustainable fashion brands' profiles on Instagram.

4.4 *Communicating sustainability on Instagram*

As a whole, it became apparent that Instagram is simply a marketing tool for brands whilst visually communicating. It is a storytelling platform, and it is therefore used for marketing and communication its practices whilst establishing a brand identity and reputation. Results from the content analysis showed that the main themes on Instagram profiles were *CSR Communication, sustainable fashion and environment*. The three main themes established the overall importance of communicating sustainability in being transparent, whilst adding elements of environmental practices such as the reduction of animal skin/fur and researching vegan options, and finally ensuring that sustainable fashion is considered fashionable. The first theme that was discovered was *CSR communication*, which is derived from the fashion brand's transparent images and messages about the products or the overall brand. By posting images of for example the workers, or behind the scenes images of founders creating handmade garments, or using cultural heritage as their unique and transparent message. As explained by Forman & Argenti (2005), benefits of corporate communication can vary between the amount and frequency of communicating. On Instagram, brands can post at any time of the day and can post as frequent as they wish. Communication of CSR practices has been understood to be highly beneficial as it can positively enhance a brand's reputation. With regards to sustainability, corporate communication is highly beneficial, especially with regards to a brand's transparency. The CSR initiatives can be reported/communicated through publications, and therefore using Instagram as a platform to communicate such practices ensures a widespread audience (Parquel, et al. 2009). The second theme is *sustainable fashion*. Fashion continues to be a wide concept on Instagram. The fashion theme was coded through the representation of catalogue images of the clothing, and other editorial-like images. Numerous brands revealed different types of clothing, which ensured different target groups in most brands. For example, for some brands the clear target group was that of an alternative lifestyle (goat wool socks), others were more directed towards a commercial fast-fashion group of consumers (editorial and colorful images). Moreover, there was a clear differentiation between brands revealing an artistic side, and those portraying a colorful commercialized look. For example, some brands would post images of paintings or still life, and others would post user-generated content with their clothing items or accessories to make it more engaging. The third theme is *environment*, which is the main aspect connected to

sustainability. Many images concerned backdrops that involved natural settings moreover veganism/vegan leather was frequently communicated in through text and images of animals. Using animals in texts or other emotionally linked stories, can allow customers to identify oneself with the issues at hand, and therefore establishing a community of consumers that are willing to make a change and buy more sustainably (Faulds & Mangold, 2014).

Additionally, the content analysis observed the hash tags used by the brands to generate engagement. Figure 4 reveals the top 5 most used hash tags in the main categories, and the sub-categories reveal hash tags that were used less often, but were still found in numerous brand posts.

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
1. #organiccotton	1. #recycle
2. #sustainablefashion	2. #upcycle
3. #slowfashion	3. #localproduction
4. #fairfashion	4. #vegan / #eco-leather
5. #handmade	5. #ecofriendly

Figure 4. Retrieved from content analysis

The hash tag organic cotton is one of the most used hash tags. Organic cotton does not use pesticides or insecticides to grow, however, it still consumes a vast amount of water and requires too much energy. Research is currently still being done surrounding substitutes for cotton, but is still commonly used by brands. The hash tags sustainable fashion, slow fashion and fair fashion are all linked with one another. Sustainable fashion is interpreted as clothing that integrates one or more aspects that contribute to environment, economy and social (Harris, et al. 2015), moreover it concerns the re-use of materials, which otherwise would end up on landfills as waste (Princen, 2005). The products should also be produced more organically, and therefore emit less toxic waste in waters, and harmful chemicals (Shen, 2014). Slow fashion is where garments are being handmade and therefore performed slower than fast fashion, and fair fashion includes the fair working conditions in garment factories; or founders are having production done locally in the Netherlands by someone else, or they create it themselves. The use of #recycle, #upcycle and #localproduction is an interesting and knowledgeable manner of understanding what sustainability is and is comprised of. Therefore, brands that use such hash tags are aware of the practices that can ensure a better

impact on the environment. However, some profiles only inform the Instagram user about the collection and where it can be found in store, therefore focusing more on fashion and attracting all audiences without specifying the sustainability aspect of their brand. Therefore, sustainability is highly communicated on Instagram, but there is not much attention for it with regards to new brands. It is therefore important that brands start thinking of new ways to become more creative, therefore incorporating cultural heritage using interesting patterned fabric, which then becomes a marketing tool to stand out.

In an effort to make sustainable fashion more fashionable, numerous Instagram profiles have used this social medium as a marketing platform. Sustainability is becoming a more mainstream term, and therefore in the fashion market full of new messages, brands are required to come up with new and unique ways, which is often difficult to perform. With regards to the difficulties of standing out on Instagram, it has become clear that it is not the most effective platform for communicating sustainability. Many starting brands do not have much following, and therefore it appears that communicating sustainability is ineffective. The hash tags are rather similar on each Instagram profile analyzed, but whether it generates following from mainstream fashion lovers, is unclear. It has been analyzed that many sustainable brands are embracing an artistic style, which is not always profitable. On the contrary it is profitable to appear commercial and be fashionable, and therefore appealing to the masses. For example, the brand A is more commercial than brand B meaning that brand A has a visually pleasing Instagram feed with influencers wearing the garments etc. With regards to the interviews, Drezunique mentions the fact that she doesn't put extreme focus on communicating sustainability within her collection because it shouldn't take away from the sole purpose, which is to buy fashionable clothing,

“I do not put extreme focus on sustainability within my collection because I actually think it should be that way. But, I have the feeling that a lot of people are still unaware of what the true cost of fashion really is. So think that the more you let go of it, I mean it's the same thing with the Kilo Knallers, nobody ever thought that the organisation Wakker Dier could get two feet firm on the ground about this issue, but they managed. Well, that's perfect, isn't it? So that's how I see it with fashion as well, because the fashion industry is one of the last industries where the mindset is very old-fashioned”
(Interview 4, p.4).

In addition, the representative of Drezunique asserts that Instagram is a difficult platform to differentiate oneself, as this platform is full of creative messages and therefore start-ups constantly need to find new ways of standing out,

“I keep finding social media difficult because if I am extremely honest, that for my brand, I do not have the idea that social media really helps me with that, at all. No” (Interview 4, p. 10).

On the contrary, the representative of the Green Labels finds Instagram to be a great tool for marketing a brand,

“I think social media is a great tool for bringing people back to the source of where their fashion comes from, so Instagram is quite a good tool for stories, and the feed. We try to really share as much as possible and it needs to be appealing visually, so it is also really important to have a good design. And Instagram is what works, to have good pictures, good design, a lot of attention to details, and it is very a fashionable social media and you need to be very careful with how you communicate things there. It shouldn't be simply black and white, it needs to be branded, and look very coherent” (Interview 3, p.7).

Moreover, with regards to communicating sustainability on Instagram, the representative of Bodil Lois mentions that she is not communicating sustainability on her website nor Instagram, which is critiqued by studies, which have indicated that consumers frequently receive green-marketing communication from brands, which causes for the validity of its environmental claims to be questioned, confusing, or unverifiable (Bonini and Oppenheim 2008; Yan et al. 2012; Kim & Hall, 2015). Moreover, Niinimaki (2015) asserts that communicating environmental or sustainable issues can easily mislead consumers, as it is a complex system. Therefore, if fashion labels are incorporating sustainable practices, it is important to communicate such practices to their audience effectively, which is proposed as follows,

“I want my clients to end on my website because they like the clothing and because they want to have it. I have the background information but it's just an asset to it, its not the main thing, and it shouldn't be the reason they purchase it [...] I think that you cant distinguish yourself from others by doing it because I think you get that green washing problem that brands want to mislead you, and I think that its already in the identity of the brand, and I think that's the basis of it, and I think it should be that way in the future, it should be in the core. I think it is good that brands do it and communicate it, but no, in the end it should be an important standard that you have as a brand and then you don't need to, and it shouldn't revolve all around it, it should be a standard” (Interview 5, p.3).

Instagram should be used as a marketing platform and communicating with the target audience for the purpose of profit; it should appeal to the masses, and if the Instagram is overloaded with messages concerning sustainability, then green washing might occur, as the audience may believe the brand is trying to mislead. Approaching sustainability from the fashionable perspective would be a more commercial decision, and for sustainability to be an asset to the product and part of the internal values of the brand. The representative of AnoukXVera adds that Instagram provides many possibilities, however communicating sustainability might lead to the over-use of the term.

“It provides the possibility to show many initiatives, where you can also be overloaded with messages, but it can show their specific way of approaching it, I mean it can be a positive or negative thing [...]. It is applied to social media on Instagram, and it becomes tiring, like “oh there you have another sustainable designer” actually, I find it, it should be part of your production process, it should be integrated and therefore it shouldn’t have to be a question anymore” (Interview 2, p. 8).

In this case, both representatives of Bodil Lois and AnoukXVera agree with the fact that it shouldn’t need to be communicated because it should be integrated in the brand as a standard. By standard it means that sustainability must be mainstream and therefore integrated into brands (Ottman, 2017). The representative of By-Wire appraises this statement by explaining,

“It’s more logical that you are sustainable, of course you want to do well, but I wouldn’t further communicate it” (Interview 9, p. 6)

Furthermore, Ottman (2017) suggests that the greenization of products is no longer a unique marketing point because products are simply required to be green and socially responsible. The representative of By-Wire also states that she wouldn’t communicate it because,

“Yes, people and labels can learn from each other how you should do it (sustainability) best, but for economic reasons it doesn’t work at all because consumers don’t care at all” (Interview 9, p.7).

However, her knowledge about technology and contributing to the circular economy, which is to be transparent, is her unique selling point as it ensures collaborations and being able to work in sustainable projects. Concerning the need for achieving a selling point, Instagram is of essence, and therefore brands need to standardize their sustainable values. Brands must

ensure that this is what they stand for, and therefore using Instagram for its purpose of marketing and communicating their brand through visuals is key. The platform is designed to create the identity of the brand along with its aesthetically pleasing imagery. Every brand that reveals that they stand for sustainability take on a different identity meaning that some incorporate art, others emphasize nature as green is associated with sustainability, cultural heritage with beautifully printed fabrics, or simply a fashionable brand that appeals to the masses but inherently has sustainable standards. The content analysis provided that the Kings of Indigo, Dick Moby, O My Bag and others understand the necessity of being fashionable – and have established a large following on Instagram through representing a sustainable philosophy. The representative of O My Bags reports that,

“We try to seek a balance between different messages that we are fashionable, and that it is not only about sustainability. In the end, we are a fashion brand, we just do things a bit differently” (Interview 3, p.7).

Moreover it is important for brands to create a brand community, which can ensure a positive brand reputation,

“If you look at both of the Instagram’s of O My Bag and the Green Labels, Instagram is a strong place to gather people and to try and create a bit of a community feeling and a bit of a crowd feeling [...]. That’s where social media I think in general are helpful. It is definitely a balance between products and message and brand and basically identity” (Interview 3, p.8).

The content analysis evaluated the communication of Dutch sustainable fashion brands on Instagram towards its followers. The main categories that were examined were CSR communication, sustainable fashion and environment. These categories are connected to theory as CSR communication is important for brands to avoid green washing and set a positive brand reputation moreover it can allow consumers to receive a message and interpret it through their own social media platforms. Moreover, sustainable fashion is becoming more commercialized, however artistic brands are still aiming for the alternative lifestyle group. Media users have used social media platforms for the purpose of sharing their ideologies concerning environmental issues, which is also performed by the brands themselves. Therefore, the overall message on Instagram is to be transparent, and use visual branding as a marketing tool in an effort to establish credibility and a positive brand reputation.

4.5 The Green Box: Establishing credibility and avoiding green washing

The fashion industry is a large and complex system and transparency has been the most important issue within the field of sustainable fashion. Being able to provide information regarding the names and locations of suppliers and subcontracting partners that the brands are collaborating with, within the supply chain, sends a positive message to consumers and can therefore build trust (Niinimäki, 2015). Thus, transparency is one of the key values that will establish credibility for the brand. The Green Labels ensures that consumers can purchase clothing based on their individual sustainable values whether that be vegan or local production. All labels on this platform explain their production processes along with the Green Labels itself who explain multiple processes from the manufacturing of the garment with fabrics such as tencel™ Lyocell, to the Fietskoerier who delivers the packages to reduce CO₂. In addition, the principles of transparency include the company informing consumers about their sustainable and ethical practices, however, it is important that all information is true and objective (Niinimäki, 2015). Even if the brand is not sustainable on all levels, they should communicate this. Solely communicating that a brand is 100% sustainable may not spread a positive marketing message, and can easily turn to green washing. Additionally, Niinimäki (2015) concludes that companies are able to use sustainability as a ‘marketing ploy’, which can be considered green washing (Henninger et al. 2016, 4). Therefore, placing too much emphasis on transparency and communicating the sustainable practices of the company may result in green washing, especially when the company cannot confirm all aspects of the production process are sustainable. Here, the green box needs to be uncovered and understood on the why, what and how. The problem with green washing is that Western consumers have an increasing interest in environmental issues, and therefore companies may use the term ‘sustainability’ and elaborate on their sustainable practices simply for increasing their sales (Niinimäki, 2015). For example, brands can “make vague claims or omit important and relevant facts. They may do this inadvertently, just using information from their suppliers; in the recent case where several clothing companies claimed that they sold eco-friendly bamboo-clothing when they in fact sold rayon produced from bamboo – but processed in a way that uses harsh chemicals and can also release hazardous air pollutants.” (NFA; the Fashion Law, 2016; Delmas & Burbano (2011)).

To avoid a company brand reputation of green washing, it is important to focus on the environmental issues and take a more holistic approach (Carter & Easton, 2016). This means that the brand’s values must be a philosophy and deeply grounded in sustainability and this should be implemented in all levels and functions of the production process. This is often a difficult process, and simply not possible – however, for example, Drezzunique mentioned that it many have asked her why she doesn’t start producing in Turkey because then she can sell her clothing for a lower price and gain more profit. However, her sustainable practices are

deeply grounded in her company, and she refuses to produce elsewhere to reduce the manufacturing price. This is the perfect of example of a company that is not green washing. Moreover, all aspects of the environmental benefits that the garment or item entails need to be proven. Often brands are able to receive eco-labels, these are certificates that are based on an independent organization's evaluation and therefore more reliable than a company's own information. The reliable information must be an integral part of the brand, and therefore be part of the green box. The green box reveals that regardless of brands using the term 'sustainability' not all aspects are considered sustainable as collaboration might still be with workshops in third world countries that aren't monitored and are highly polluting. The fact that there is the ambition and wish to strive for a more sustainable fashion industry is what they are mostly trying to do. It is important to be transparent, and therefore communication is key. Corporate communication becomes ever more significant in a time where the fashion industry is changing and moving towards a more sustainable industry.

As previously mentioned, brands such as Drezzunique, Bodil Lois and AnoukXVera do not communicate their sustainable practice as their main message, but their main marketing strategy is to be fashionable and to attract consumers for their clothing and not for their sustainable values. The sustainable values must be grounded and are grounded in the brand itself, and should further not be used as a marketing strategy to attract more customers and earn more profit. The fact that the main marketing tool is, and will remain fashion ensures that green washing is not necessarily taking place – if there are questions about transparency, or a small tab on the website that reveals the story behind the label, that should be enough. Sustainability should not be at the forefront too much otherwise it could be considered that the brand is green washing. Within this green box, it is valuable if a brand is able to produce and give back to the environment. It is of essence that a company strives to ensure all aspects in their production chain are sustainable, which requires small steps. Bodil Lois mentions that,

“If we all want to do well, then we have to stop producing right now, because there is more than enough clothing. If we divide everything we would have more than enough. If you want to do something right, then I think that it is very important that if you want to bring something new into world, then you must do it as well as possible – meaning that everything you influence, you need to give back” (Interview 5, p. 2).

Bodil Lois uses tencel™ Lyocell, which comes from eucalyptus pulp. The use of tencel™ Lyocell requires trees to be cut down, and for every tree that is cut down, then a new one must come in place. Along with the social aspect,

“If you choose to produce somewhere you need to invest in your workers, so that they learn something new or get something back for it. So, giving back to the environment and the people that you involve” (Interview 5, p.2).

Ultimately, brands need to earn profit. The triple bottom line includes economics as part of the business model, and it is important that when implementing sustainable practices, that the brand remains profitable. The fact that new brands want to incorporate sustainability is meant to be for the purpose of its core values, the will to give back to the environment and to ethics. For brands to be profitable, it is important to be commercial, and therefore, fashionable. The main question that is asked by the current sustainable fashion industry is how to make it more fashionable – and thus, more profitable. The fact that business models work in this current state in the fashion industry causes for large companies to be reluctant to adapt to the new and more sustainable business models. It is difficult for production processes such as innovation to gain recognition because brands want to ensure that the future business model i.e. incorporating for example 3D printing techniques will be just as profitable as the current traditional business model, thus producing cheap and affordable clothing that is fashionable, at fast rate. The fact that new brands are taking on these new business models is a step towards the right direction. However, Bodil Lois mentions that,

“Small brands usually get away with it easier than large brands, which is unfair about it. If they find out that H&M is green washing then they will immediately take them under the loop and that’s just not fair. But, it happens a lot with smaller brands, that if you look closer actually you don’t really do much different, you invested in organic cotton, but that’s, I mean, its better than normal cotton, but it still wastes a lot of water, and then it probably still gets produced under bad working conditions, and then of course, it is a bit better, but I don’t think you should call yourself a sustainable brand then” (Interview 5, p.4).

In addition, to ensure that credibility is established and green washing is avoided, being transparent is considered a marketing tool. Being transparent ensures the brand reputation of a brand and showing the key steps that the brand has taken in order to be green. It is all about sharing knowledge, as explained by the representative of By-Wire. Transparency ensures collaborations and partnerships because one can share their expertise and information with one another and thereby gain more insight as well. Representative 1 from Guave explains that,

“We are very transparent, we do not say that we are 100% sustainable, or that we use organic paint and fabric [...] we take people with us, we just started and this is our goal to be sustainable, and we show how we work towards that, and how that can be done on small scale, but that it just takes time – if people have questions, we will just answer them honestly” (Interview 7, p.7).

Moreover, Bodil Lois’ representative mentions in her interview,

“Kings of Indigo – the denim label – explained that what happened is that they kept growing and got more and more shares, you name it, and eventually he said ‘wait a minute, now I’m moving too far away from my core, my identity as a brand, purely because it should be getting bigger and bigger’. He bought all the shares back, and said ‘I am fine with producing at this rate it doesn’t always have to be more, more, more. I have work and an income’” (Interview 5, p.5).

In doing so, credibility is established as the founder of Kings of Indigo turned away from green washing his own and his brand’s values. Moreover, the brand’s values are integrated in the philosophy of the brand, however, to critique the green box, it became apparent that due to monetary restrictions of a start-up, it is often impossible to be a completely sustainable brand. Moreover, it is not always known where all products are made and whether it is truly sustainable. In such a case, brands are trying to make consumers more aware of their purchases and making sustainability their goal, which requires a lot of brainstorming and research in the background. By remaining transparent, brands can avoid green washing and establishing a worse brand reputation. Representative 2 from Guave states,

“A large part is the awareness of it and becoming more aware, to ourselves, but also to other people, that they make more conscious decisions and being aware of the impact their purchase has on people or the environment. It sounds very heavy that people buy for €30, - at Primark, that 60 people in Bangladesh worked on it, who do not get more than 3 dollars a day” (Interview 7, p.6)

Finally, Saxton (in Forman & Argenti, 2005) adds that ‘investing in communications designed to improve corporate reputation is a worthy endeavor because research has shown that improved reputation positively affects not only financial performance but also customer and employee loyalty’. The brand reputation has been explained by the candidates to be connected to overall image of the brand; therefore, being fashionable or not, and the corporate

social responsibility aspect is the integral part of the brand; therefore being the sustainable practices that take place. Representative 2 from Osni Clothing discusses that,

“I think it’s both, everything is important. So you cant just be like this is more important, no because everything, the image, the way you produce, the way you sell, the way you communicate, everything is really important” (Interview 6, p. 15).

In addition, the representative of Drezunique critiques that communicating a brand’s corporate social responsibility doesn’t influence its brand reputation, neither brand performance as she states,

“I think that the moment you put it a lot in the foreground, then it becomes a type of marketing tool, and then you get stuck in your message. My message is actually that I want women to look more successful, which happens in a sustainable manner. But, it’s not that I say that I have a sustainable brand, because I don’t think it’s really that necessary, for me” (Interview 4, p. 7).

The brand reputation and corporate social responsibility have been assessed by the candidates and have concluded that both aspects are important and are therefore not connected. A brand reputation is built through image, such as on Instagram, by appearing commercial and fashionable, and additionally, the corporate social responsibility aspect is the performance of its sustainable practices and how they are contributing to a less harmful impact on the environment and people. By placing too much emphasis on communicating sustainability, it becomes a marketing tool, and therefore credibility will lack of such brands, more so than if brands focus on their garments and overall image as this will attract consumers. Therefore, brand reputation is focused on the image of the fashion items itself, and the corporate social responsibility concerns the green box, by ensuring the production process is performed sustainably.

4.6 The challenges of sustainability

There are multiple challenges that the interviewees have mentioned, which are the fact that the term sustainability has been a relatively difficult concept that has developed many differing opinions from the masses. The challenges range from the difficulty of the concept ‘*sustainability*’, to green washing, to making sustainable fashion more fashionable.

The first challenge of sustainability is that it is a difficult concept because it finds itself within a niche market, in which a lot of research is conducted and investment is necessary. Due to the amount of research left to be done, start-ups find it difficult to be a

100% sustainable brand, because they simply do not have the means to invest. Therefore their main goal is considered to be ‘sustainability’ and they will communicate which practices they have performed thus far. As explained by Vegetable Fur’s representative, outlines that all aspects of the product must be sustainable before selling,

“I don’t want to produce a product yet because it’s not done yet, if I were to make my product now, my jacket, [...] if it rains, then it weighs some 30 kilos heavier so that it just absorbs the water and I refuse to [...] throw chemicals over it so it’s water resistant and then it’s done, that just doesn’t work for me” (Interview 9, p. 4).

This representative proposes the need for further research until it can be communicated that the brand is 100% sustainable. Moreover, it is a difficult concept as it finds itself within a niche market, especially when it comes to targeting a larger audience. The representative of the Green Labels mentions the challenge of sustainability being a niche market,

“Reaching the masses is a difficult point, because sustainable fashion nowadays is still very much a niche, so making things that are appealing and that are reaching a bigger audience as well. [...] It is not only producing more consciously, but also finding a way to not just waste it. So there are a lot of challenges” (Interview 3, p.9).

Therefore, representative 2 from Osni Clothing proposed a different definition of sustainability that is more in-line with start-up practices. This term is *eco-efficiency*, which is defined as a general goal that creates value, while decreasing environmental impact and refers to two concepts, which are environmental impact, and economic costs (Huppel & Ishikawa, 2005), which is identified as,

“Eco-efficiency is the best word to use because then it means that instead of trying not to have too much waste, it’s more like trying to create something that is going to be good for the environment” (Interview 6, p. 14).

The concept of eco-efficiency would be more applicable for start-ups and other large fashion companies that are trying to create value while decreasing the environmental impact, meaning that if a brand reuses vintage clothing, they create value as clothing is refurbished and can be re-worn and therefore decreasing environmental waste. However, it could be difficult for start-ups to create value whilst decreasing environmental impact as sustainable fashion is linked to neutral colors like white and grey, having a sporty and baggy look as examined in

the content analyses. Therefore, the second challenge is characterized as the necessity of ensuring sustainable fashion becomes more appealing in order to achieve economic value.

Sustainable fashion is often considered as unapproachable, because it appears to target a certain group of people. Sustainable fashion is often linked to clothing being directed towards one specific target audience. People who are considered the modern-day hipsters are often associated with wearing sustainability. The challenge that fashion brands are currently facing is to get rid of that image, and to make sustainable clothing, fashionable and appealing to all. Representative 1 from Guave explains that,

“[...] It isn’t geiten wollen sokken and so that’s just not an argument anymore that sustainable clothing is boring or ugly, or that it’s for women of 60 plus, [...] and of course there are still brands that you wont like but that’s also the case in regular shops [...]” (Interview 7, p.8).

Therefore it is important that to ensure that consumers buy your product primarily for the fashionable look it has, and the sustainable aspect of doing good and giving back to the environment is a core value of the company. Bodil Lois wants to ensure that consumers buy her products because they like them,

“[...] Instead of that geiten wollen sokken sustainability idea I want to show that it is possible to be fashionable and girly. It is very challenging however because you need to make a lot of compromises but I think that’s the main reason I really want to show people ‘look it’s possible, it doesn’t have to be so old fashioned’” (Interview 5, p.3).

Moreover, the representative of By-Wire states that,

“I think it should become approachable for the consumer and commercial is a big thing” (Interview 9, p. 2).

The current and traditional business models of fashion companies work well, they are highly profitable and therefore, to change the business models is something large companies are reluctant to do. It has been said that sustainable business models are not profitable, and therefore the sustainable efforts are minimal. As the representative of By-Wire states,

“Well they have very good business models now – they earn a lot of money. Yes business models work well, and greenization worked for a little as well so that’s more of a discussion now and in reality you might purchase an item in one store, and if you

buy a Louis Vuitton which costs €800,-, from a middle-company it's a bit less expensive, but from Primark it's only €10,- and the quality is often the same, so you'd go for the one for €10,- and that's where the problem is" (Interview 9, p.5).

The representative of AnoukXVera mentions that during her master program at Sandberg the same question was posed over and over again:

"[...] Everyone has the same question, everyone is thinking and analyzing, how are we going to take the next step, how are we going to make our company profitable while you want to purchase raw materials – there is a specific label or characteristic attached to it that requires you to invest, and thus the price goes up so yes, in that case everything has an impact on each other – especially if we start moving towards something that is produced more sustainably. This is done in small parts, in small parts which is often the case where people, or in my experience, lean towards" (Interview 2, p. 2).

The representative of LabeledBy adds,

"Yes we noticed at the beginning that our pitch was very focused on sustainability, and we pitched it to these companies and their feedback was always, okay the sustainability is all fun and nice but, we don't care about that, we care about how your method (innovation) that can ensure more profit for us. How can we save money with your product and service (and that's found in returns). I guess it is linked with sustainability, but it's not the main idea. They do want to show it, but it's really only for profit. So you need to pitch it from that perspective" (Interview 1, p. 12).

Not only is it difficult to reach the masses, it also requires extensive time and investment, and therefore the products become expensive. The founders of Osni Clothing have had a similar experience:

"We were looking for sustainable shoes and we found that it was so expensive, it was €400 for heels, and we understand because the process is long and is more difficult to create" (Interview 6 p.6).

Another challenge that was proposed during the interview with Drezzunique, Guave and Marina Kleist concluded that it is uncertain whether the products used are actually

sustainable, especially concerning fabrics, therefore lacking collaborative knowledge of its supply chain. The representative of Drezzunique asserts,

“I did purchase these fabrics in Italy and Spain, so I am assuming that it has been made by locals, but it is extremely difficult to get that completely waterproof because you simply do not know” (Interview 4, p.3).

To add to the statement made by Drezzunique, representative 2 of Guave explains that,

“[...] It is sometimes difficult to trace where it comes from, so, we have the Batek and we know that it is produced fair, or at least that the people are paid a fair amount for it, but then the question is, we know the paint is chemical, but where does the cotton come from? This might come from India, or is it made in Indonesia? And that’s probably not biological and so how does that process move forward, it might not be sustainable with a lot of pesticides that fight against pests, then it is transported by plane, which is totally not sustainable of course, the wrapping is made of plastic, which is probably made in China [...] so you could focus on every detail, we do that at times, to really consciously think about it and in our current situation, it’s only possible to do minor things but it’s also part of the message, it’s just extremely difficult to do everything sustainably. It’s good that the discussion is going and that people realize that a lot of things have an impact on our society and the world, the nature, so, I think that’s very important “ (Interview 7, p.5-6).

Representative 1 recalls that green washing also occurs in countries such as Bangladesh, where brands believe they are investing in sustainable fabrics, or green-labeled products, which aren’t truly green,

“I also heard from a woman who also worked in the fashion industry she said that Western brands want for example recycled plastic as packaging materials and then she went there and asked if the plastic is actually recycled or not, and the man, this was in Bangladesh, and he said very bluntly, well, we do not have access to recycled plastic, but we do put a green sticker/label on it or the recycled logo because this is what you want. So, you need to consider the cultural relationship that you can’t say ‘we want this, so you make this and make sure it’s possible’. It’s a process that you need to go through together and so the moment that we want to make steps towards maybe using different fabrics or different paint we need to go there and see with our own eyes and discuss and see what’s good for both of us (Interview 7, p.2-3).

The final challenge is connected to the customer purchasing behavior as explained by Marina of By-Wire,

“Because consumers don’t care about it at all. It should just be cool, look good, fit well, be part of the time, and if then it is also sustainable, so it’s first all those things and then sustainability is just a bonus I think it’s very general, and I know that its general because there are a lot of sustainable thinkers and people who are less sustainable thinkers and mainstream, so” (Interview 9, p. 7).

Therefore, many (sustainable) brands have been discussing the notion of ‘how to make sustainable fashion, fashionable’. Sustainable fashion must become more fashionable, but also more mainstream – communicating it will need to happen more or less, depending on the brand itself – transparency is important – and sustainable fashion is a business model and communicating it (transparency) is a marketing tool onto itself. Bodil Lois’ representative states that,

“[...] I think that if you have a sustainable brand, then you reach the people who want to buy sustainable clothing, they are already in that green bubble and are into that, and if you want to reach those people, because in the end we all have to buy sustainable products, which is the end goal, but if you want to reach people outside that green bubble, then you should fully focus on the branding, how are you going to convince them? [...] If you managed to get them very excited by means of cool marketing, nice branding etc, then I think that if they read afterwards that it is sustainable, or socially produced well or fair trade you name it, then they will love it completely, and not the other way around” (Interview 5, p.7).

Representative 2 from Osni Clothing states that,

“For us it is attracting people by the image, they see something and they think, ‘oh that’s cool’ and then behind it, it’s also very good, and honest, and sustainable” (Interview 6, p.8).

Overall, the challenges are assessed, and require more research by the brands. The main challenge is that start-ups have limited monetary funds and therefore cannot ensure that all aspects are sustainable at this point, however, it has become an integral part of the brand philosophy, but the green box requires more research, funding and development.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings and Theoretical Implications

This research set out to analyze the internal *green* structures of start-up fashion labels and understand the reasoning for communicating such sustainable practices. The two methods, in-depth interviews and a content analysis, allowed for a discussion regarding the internal collaborative structures, along with the ways of communicating sustainability by multiple fashion brands. Start-ups can allegedly be using the notion of sustainability simply because they are searching for a new marketing tool to be unique, and stand out from other brands. In this case, the green box becomes of essence. The green box was analyzed through the means of in-depth interviews and provided an interesting analysis of different types of methods towards a more sustainable fashion industry. Numerous brands have revealed that they are collaborating with different stakeholders in order to reach a more sustainable production process. Moreover, the brand philosophy of the founders of the brands revealed the importance of producing environmentally friendly and ethically is an ideology. However, the result of such an ideology is where the internal structure poses difficulties. Many start-ups simply do not have the financial means to produce completely sustainably, and it appears that it is impossible for a complete sustainable industry. The fact that entrepreneurs are changing their mindsets towards using sustainability as their goal, which has provided for new and unique ways of manufacturing. This can be considered a marketing tool. Most brands reveal that their brand philosophy is to produce in a positive manner towards environment and people. The internal structure appears to be flawed as it is not all certain that production of the raw materials are manufactured ethically, and whether it is truly sustainably certified. Several have stated that they simply trust the judgment of the individual they are collaborating with—this means that the internal structure of the green box still has a grey area that needs to be analyzed, which can be done in further research. The Dutch fashion brands (start-ups) that were analyzed were chosen based on their communication of their sustainable practices towards their buyers. The questions that the researcher presented to the interviewees were similar in order to conclude whether it was a brand philosophy or a marketing tool. As previously mentioned, sustainability of a green fashion brand must consist of an integral part that dedicates to sustainability in the core of the brand, and therefore all responsibilities and accountabilities are appropriate at all levels (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). The integral part of the green box should include collaborative and thus sustainable decision-making, along with implementation. Decision-making in sustainability is a key factor in all brands that were interviewed; as it is part of their brand philosophy, their goal is to become more sustainable and attempt to be sustainable in and on all levels of their brand. As claimed by Niinimäki (2010) decision-making relates to an individual ideology that is communicated on social

media. However decision-making requires investments, which are often not possible to achieve, therefore the brands make decisions based on what they are able to offer and do in their current state of the business. Collaborating to develop sustainable clothing is expensive, and therefore requires a large amount of investment – especially because it is honest, and therefore production costs are higher. Moreover, if a brand is willing to be sustainable, they are meant to look at all factors in the production chain, along with the process once the garment is sold; packaging, shipping etc. It is a difficult process, but the fact that many individuals are aiming for sustainability as their main goal, and are working together with larger companies, technology, biologists and vintage stores is a great step towards changing the fashion industry. In this case, it is important for such brands to be transparent and be honest with their customers. Brands that are stating they are a 100% sustainable brand are simply not because it is impossible to be completely sustainable. For example, if brands are selling t-shirts that are made of organic cotton; cotton is not sustainable, and regardless of it being labeled organic, it often is not – therefore, using other raw materials such as hemp or tencel™ Lyocell, which is biodegradable and does not erode soils, would be a more sustainable option. Therefore, being transparent becomes a marketing tool because the brands are sharing their expertise, but is also ensuring a positive brand reputation in an effort to avoid the notion of green washing. If the brand is unable to reveal appropriate information regarding their sustainable activities, it can be certain that the brand is green washing – thereby simply using sustainability as a marketing tool. As explained by the representative of By-Wire, her knowledge of being transparent is a marketing tool because it is her power to share. The sharing of knowledge is becoming a marketing tool, and can also aid in setting the brand's reputation. The green box should also have an understanding of social and environmental responsibilities and identify the engagement with relevant stakeholders. It has been considered difficult to attract commercial fashion buyers because of the 'image' that is accompanied with sustainable fashion. The brands have exclaimed their frustration about the 'image' that is accompanied with sustainable fashion and frequently mention that they are not similar to the image of an alternative lifestyle (geiten wollen sokken) as literal translation. These brands are aiming for a more commercialized and mainstream image, meaning that their goal is to make sustainable fashion, fashionable. Few brands have explained that it is important to have sustainability be the core part of the brand, and the rest must be commercialized – therefore, not all brands place an emphasis on their sustainable values because it may cause for consumers to compare the brand with an alternative lifestyle image, and that may affect profit. The movement towards making sustainable fashion more fashionable may affect the system of sustainability. It may affect the system negatively because if all brands start producing sustainable, and it becomes commercialized, it may still result in overproduction. Especially when using new raw materials, once the brand becomes

popular amongst consumers, the brand will need to keep up with demand, therefore producing more. Multiple brands have explained that if this happens, then the whole system will have failed, and therefore limited collections will continue to be made. However, it is considered not to work well within companies with regards to profitability, and therefore some sustainable brands believe it is more important to have the sustainability aspect integrated in the brand philosophy, and use marketing for the looks of the clothing by making it commercial, and therefore profitable. Moreover, sustainability has been considered to be the future of fashion, and therefore the start-ups found it necessary to adapt to this transition in order to be first in the niche market and therefore having a new and unique message within the fashion industry. It has been understood that the image of the alternative lifestyle will disappear if more brands start adapting and ensuring sustainability within the core of the brand and further commercialize it by making it fashionable. In doing so, the brands are aiming to make sustainability more fashionable and thus more approachable for all consumers. In order to commercialize and establish the approachability of sustainable fashion, thus making it more mainstream many brands are using Instagram as their primary marketing tool.

Instagram is a visual platform that has been used by many brands for the purposes of their corporate and marketing communication. It has allowed for personal interactivity between brands and its consumers and thus collaborations. Social mediums such as Instagram are often use for the purpose of advertising, handling customer services, mining innovative ideas, and creating an engaged brand community. Within the fashion industry, Instagram has been a very powerful tool for engagement. The fashion industry is primarily a visual industry, and Instagram is a visual platform, therefore complimenting one another (Hansson & Eriksson, 2016). Brands are able to tell their own story and express themselves through this visual centric platform, which is a marketing tool in itself. Start-ups have benefited from Instagram to gain exposure, and to create a visual profile for the overall image of their brand. Considering the fact that Instagram is a visual profile, it allows for individuals to expand their creativity. Having conducted a content analysis of the coding scheme as presented in appendix B revealed three main themes. The first main theme is CSR communication, which was derived from the fashion brand's Instagram use of transparent images and texts. By posting images of workers, behind the scenes of handmade items, cultural heritage and a description of a sustainable garment, the brands are using Instagram as a tool to be transparent; thus communicating their CSR (sustainable) practices. The second theme is sustainable fashion, which was presented by the catalogue images of the clothing. Images of different types of clothing were presented, some of which were directed towards an alternative target group, but also to a more commercialized group, and thus focusing on making their brand approachable to all consumers. Moreover, there was a clear differentiation between brands revealing an

artistic side, and those portraying a colorful commercialized look. The third theme is environment, which is the main aspect connected to sustainability. Many images concerned backdrops that involved natural settings moreover veganism/vegan leather was frequently communicated in through text and images of animals. Additionally, Instagram ensures for a brand engagement through the use of hash tags. The brands often used similar hash tags that consist of organic cotton and sustainable fashion. The main standard for organic cotton is that it is grown 'carefully' considering environmental and economic aspects, which is to not use pesticides or insecticides (Boynton, 2016). However as claimed by two interviewees, organic cotton is not the most sustainable substitute to non-organic cotton as it still requires a vast amount of water and energy moreover working conditions may still be poor. Therefore further debate on this topic is required.

Whilst conducting the interviews it was examined that there were differentiated opinions regarding the communication of sustainability on Instagram – mainly due to the fact that placing an emphasis on sustainability may lead to less approachability and therefore less commercial consumers, and in the long run less profit. On the contrary, communicating sustainable practices can ensure future collaborations that can be profitable for both parties. Based on the sustainable business models, earning profit continues to play a role, but if the brands are able to focus on key aspects that can be beneficial for the environment and socially as well, then a new business model occurs. In order for brands to be profitable, it is necessary to use sustainable fashion as a marketing tool, especially because the economy needs to continue to thrive. Especially innovation such as 3D printing is establishing itself on the commercial market as one of its primary goals. The new business models that have been explained are the triple bottom line, and the people, planet & profit models. The triple bottom line with regards to sustainable development consists of three interconnected principles: (1) environmental integrity, (2) social equity, and (3) economic prosperity (Hubbard, 2009). Performance in one of the three principles has effect on the other two principles. The triple bottom line is also known as the three p's, however, the principles are slightly different. The triple bottom line focuses mainly on stakeholders and is a new tool that measures the performance of the brand. The economic measures income or expenditures, business climate factors, taxes, employment and factors such as business diversity (Slaper & Hall, 2011). Environmental measures analyze the air and water quality, natural resources, toxic waste, land use, and energy consumption (Slaper & Hall, 2011), and finally, social. The social measures analyze the working conditions in garment factories where education, access to social resources, health and well-being, equity, and quality of life are important factors, this includes banning child labor or forced participation of female labor. The triple bottom line is also known as the three p's, which consider all aspects necessary for a brand to be sustainable – the planet, i.e. the environment is considered in the sense that the brand should ensure no to

minimal waste and usage of toxins and support a healthier environment. The concern with brands using organic cotton is that it is not sustainable, because cotton causes soil erosion, it is not biodegradable, and pesticides are used to ensure fast growth. Therefore, other raw materials are being used such as tencel™ Lyocell, which is a fiber that is manufactured from beech wood, and is a renewable raw material managed in sustainable forests and plantations. The raw material is created through the natural process of photosynthesis, and is biodegradable and compostable, meaning it is possible to revert it back to nature completely. This fiber has obtained a positive reputation due to its environmentally responsible closed loop that transforms beech wood pulp into cellulosic fabrics that recycles process water and has a recovery rate of more than 99%. Other raw materials consist of cork, pineapple waste and even mushroom skin. For people, the system ensures that working environments are safer; using fewer chemicals in production by using safer equipment or products for end-users. Innovation is of extreme importance when the 'people' aspect of the 3 p's is discussed as new innovation can ensure better qualities for workers. Factories in Bangladesh have already began training workers with electronic pattern making and will continue to move towards technological advancements in these countries, which can cause for economic prosperity in the long-run. In the 1950s, the Netherlands saw a switch to technology and it ensured economic prosperity, therefore, in third-world countries, technology will ensure a better working life, along with safer working environments, enabling social justice. Even though the sustainability system aims to slow production down, the end price can be increased and therefore fashion brands/companies can invest in better factories. Innovative techniques for garment manufacturing such as 3D printing can ensure more localized production and therefore reduce costs for brands economically. The new business model ensures profit taking into account the planet and people aspects. New business opportunities are connected to all three methods of sustainable practices; as previously mentioned, technology can slow fashion down, ensure more personalized clothing and encourage the circular economy. The circular economy provides a service approach as garments are re-used, repaired or remanufactured to ensure the fabric lasts longer – such innovation can ensure commercialization and therefore profit. Moreover, using new raw materials can provide an interesting marketing tool to show the new ways of creating garments – it will make the product more unique, and durable. Using new raw materials, however, is a long and ongoing research process as there are many materials that could be used but needs experimenting. For example, hemp is a durable product, is sustainable, as it needs less water, and does not erode soil. Hemp is not only usable for clothing, but also for eradicating radioactivity in the soil along with cleaning oil spills. However, the growing of hemp is not legal in the Netherlands along with numerous other countries, as it is the brother plant to weed; therefore it is difficult to encourage the popularity of hemp as a new raw material. Not only is hemp illegal in the

Netherlands, the negative image surrounding this raw material causes for a negative brand reputation, asserting that Levi Strauss' first jeans was created from hemp, it is therefore governmental restrictions that could be adjusted for the benefit of a more sustainable fashion industry. On the contrary, it would be necessary to have a fast amount of checks to ensure hemp is grown for the sole purpose of clothing production only, which can be too costly for governments. Companies who are stating they are producing with 100% organic cotton are not contributing to a less harmful impact on the environment and cotton farmers because cotton fields continue to have soil erosion, and organic cotton is a highly water and energy consuming plant (Bain, 2017). Therefore, brands communicating their 100% organic cotton practices can believe they are moving towards a more sustainable fashion production chain, but this falls short of sustainability. Therefore, brand reputation and corporate social responsibility may be affected in such circumstances, and hemp would provide the substitution for cotton production.

The brand reputation of the sustainable fashion brands is considered to be a separate factor, and not connected to corporate social responsibility. Candidates found both aspects to be equally important, as the differentiation between brand reputation and corporate social responsibility was frequently made. The brand reputation is considered to be the overall image of the brand, therefore including how it is communicated on platforms such as Instagram, creating the brand image i.e. fashionable and commercialized, or restrict themselves to artistic values that produce less approachable clothing. Additionally, the corporate social responsibility is linked to the green box, which includes the sustainable practices within the production process, along with transportation and packaging. In order to maintain a brand reputation, instead of using the term 'sustainability' a new term was introduced by one of the interviewees, which was *eco-efficiency*. Eco-efficiency is defined as creating value, whilst decreasing environmental impact – this definition would be more applicable for start-ups and larger fashion companies as the will to create value remains strong, and necessary for economic stability, however, if value is created, it must be done in an eco-efficient manner, and therefore necessitates a production process that decreases the environmental impact. In an effort of creating value and decreasing environmental impact, the 3D printing practices have proven to be positive innovative measures as such. It has enabled more local production, therefore less costs and pollution for transportation. In addition using new raw materials to replace cotton or animal fur/skin, and all being linked to the circular economy, which allows for the reuse of new fabrics, but also to reuse current waste such as second hand and vintage textiles. However, regardless of the brand philosophy being to produce as sustainably as possible, it has proven to be impossible to be sustainable on all aspects at the current state of the fashion industry. Therefore, more research is required into how to reduce waste, and move towards a less harmful industry towards the environment,

people, but ensuring profit in order to keep economies flourishing. 3D printing has shown to ensure profit, and be used in commercial settings, along with being efficient for the circular economy. Large fashion chains such as H&M, Zara, and others have been attempting to incorporate sustainable values within their corporate social responsibility – large companies do not have a brand philosophy based on sustainability, and therefore green washing is prominent in such companies. Within their corporate communication strategies they reveal certain sustainable practices, which have been implemented, while in reality much of the practices are not sustainable. In this sense, the large fashion companies are using sustainability as a marketing tool to avoid a negative brand reputation from consumers that are demanding more transparency, and pressure from media outlets. The brands that have started with the aim to change the fashion industry, have sustainable intentions, however, it is difficult to achieve a complete sustainable production process. Start-ups reveal that they do not feel pressure from media outlets, they simply believe that sustainability is the future of fashion, and everyone must adapt as such. However, regardless of the brand philosophy, being a sustainable brand is still considered a marketing tool as it is for the purpose of adapting to a new transition with the fashion industry – and being ahead of the game. Using different collaborative methods is what currently makes the brands unique, considering sustainable fashion finds itself within a niche market and therefore intriguing to consumers – especially if the brand is fashionable and commercial as well.

Overall, this research contributes to the media and communication sciences because of the corporate communication and social media platforms such as Instagram to communicate CSR practices, which is accompanied in this research. It can ensure that future start-ups that are looking to succeed in the sustainable fashion industry communicate their practices adequately. This research contributes to existing start-ups understanding the current state of the fashion industry and that communicating their sustainable practices should be part of a standard and integral factor of the brand, instead of using it as a marketing tool. Instagram is a platform that is used for visual communication, which can continue to be commercialized – and therefore is used and must be used as a marketing tool. Corporate communication must remain transparent towards the consumers, but it must not be the main goal to place an emphasis on sustainability, as this will not be beneficial for profit.

5.2 Summary of Research

This research was based on in-depth interviews and a content analysis in order to understand the internal structures of fashion brands and their communication thereof. Based on the results, the overall findings are as follows:

There is a growing market for sustainable clothing, because consumers are becoming more aware of the negative impact the fashion industry has on the environment. Therefore

consumers are more willing to invest in sustainable fashion. Start-ups noticed this opportunity in the fashion market that could lead to profitable business. To achieve this, start-ups are focusing on collaboration with local, sustainable, vendors that are regulated based on governmental, organizational and company specific guidelines. On the basis of such guidelines, the vendors are approved and certified as a sustainable vendor. If the vendors are not complying with such guidelines, founders of start-ups may decide to manufacture their clothing themselves.

All sustainable fashion start-ups are making decisions based on a personal ideology, and therefore ensure sustainable business processes as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy. However, there's also a profitable business opportunity as sustainable fashion is a niche market. Start-ups are able to distinguish themselves from other brands and gain market share. There have been many different initiatives towards a more sustainable fashion industry, resulting in an overall trend.

Based on the analysis of the green box, the main criteria to be considered in a sustainable business are:

- Local production,
- Reduction of waste,
- Non-usage of pesticides and insecticides,
- Minimal water and energy usage
- Finding new raw materials to work with,
- Contributing to a circular economy by re-using old fabrics, and
- Technology such as 3D printing.

These sustainably produced fashion products are interesting, unique and different. It's not only those with an alternative lifestyle, but a large, and varied by segment, number of our population that are moving towards a greener planet.

Instagram is a visual platform that has proven to be one of the most suitable platforms for marketing a brand. This platform includes the consumer segments that sustainable brands are targeting, and therefore it is important for brands to communicate their corporate social responsibility through this platform. By communicating their sustainable practices, start-ups are able to sell their brand on Instagram, whilst delivering their sustainable message to differentiate themselves. Moreover, it appeals to consumers' emotions, therefore using environmental factors in the CSR communication of the sustainable fashion brands it can allow for a widespread message across media platforms.

Whilst existing companies, such as H&M, are still engaging in low-cost production, the start-ups are causing a paradigm shift and move towards a sustainable fashion industry.

The start-ups are the game changers, as they possess all the criteria, knowledge, and ability to be a more sustainable brand in the future. They are the drivers of the current shift from low-cost production to profitable, high(er) quality and sustainable production.

5.3 Limitations

The main limitations of this study are examined through the choice of brands interviewed. The brands interviewed were start-ups, which made it more difficult to retrieve information concerning the validity of the green box as many started from a brand philosophy perspective of wanting to produce sustainably in all aspects of the company. Therefore a comparison could not be made between start-ups and existing companies of 5+ years, which would have been more effective for the results section. Moreover, it was difficult to find start-ups that were in the position of conducting an interview with the researcher, therefore saturation occurred at fast pace.

With regards to the content analysis, the use of a data-driven analysis has the limitation of personal bias. The researcher came up with the main categories and subcategories herself whilst viewing the images, along with its description and the hash tags; which means that the use of nature, art or fashion are all a personal bias of what the researcher viewed herself.

5.4 Future research

For further research, larger companies could be assessed who are communicating sustainable efforts; such as G-Star and H&M. In this research, employee perceptions of sustainability could be researched, and understand the CSR communicating initiatives of the green box, or examine that it is simply a marketing communication tool, this can be achieved through qualitative research in focus groups. Additionally, a comparison could be made between start-ups and already existing brands that are integrating new sustainability into their business models. The comparison that will be analyzed is whether their brand values differ, how they are communicating it, and whether the communication reveals marketing of CSR or whether it is a true and integral part of the business. The effectiveness of sustainability in internal communications structures within large companies such as Zara and H&M can also be measured by performing a quantitative research method of surveys; i.e. the surveys can analyze the importance that employees place on sustainability and whether they believe it is an effective means for earning a positive brand reputation and thus more profits.

A quantitative research could also be conducted in future research by using a survey that is distributed amongst Dutch female consumers between the ages of 18 and 35 to analyze whether they believe companies are communicating their sustainable practices appropriately, and whether it is communicated sufficiently for consumers to change their buying-behaviors and their willingness to adapt to the current changes of purchasing garments made in 3D

printing, made of different raw materials, and whether they would consider vintage clothing as fashionable and approachable. It should be possible to see a difference between buying-behaviors in age categories, considering the variables that older females are more willing and able to buy high quality, durable products.

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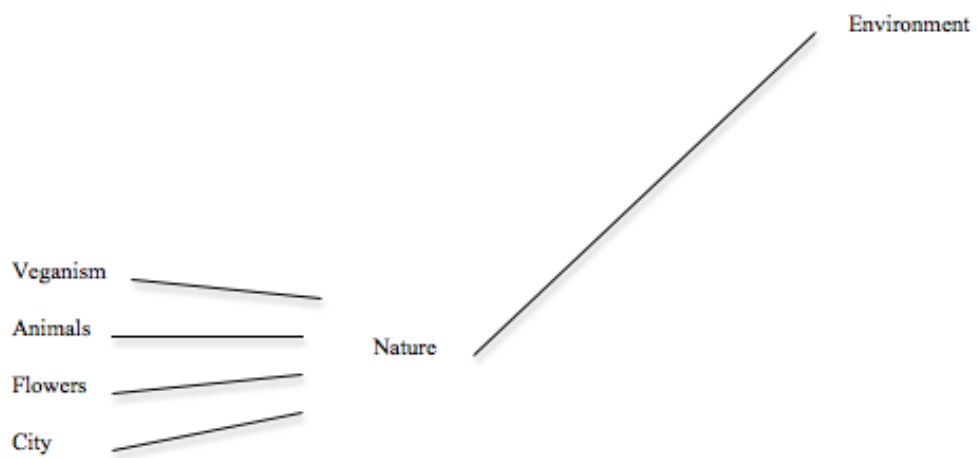
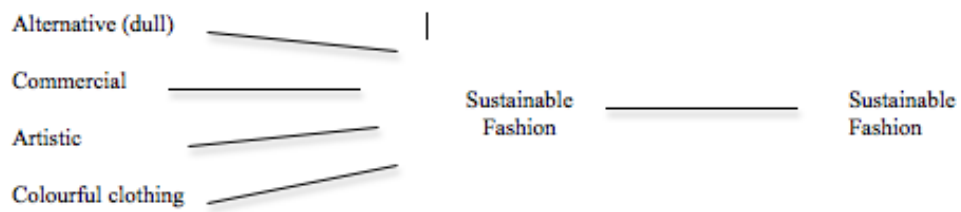
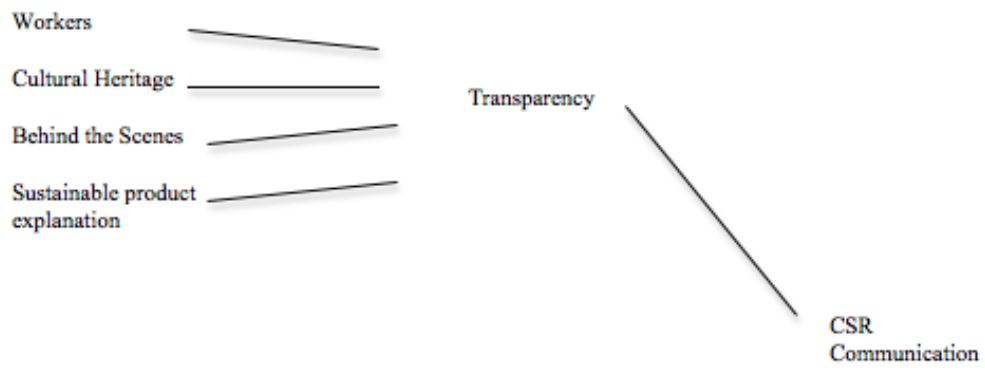
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Appendix A: Interview Coding Scheme

<u>LabeledBy</u>	<u>AnoukXVera</u>	<u>The Green Labels</u>	<u>Drezzunique</u>	<u>Bodil Lois</u>	<u>Osni Clothing</u>	<u>Guave</u>	<u>Lotte Blum</u>	<u>By-Wire</u>	<u>Marina Kleist</u>
<u>Innovation</u>	Luxury products	Platform for sustainable brands	Luxury products	Using other raw materials	Vintage	Cultural heritage	Raw materials - hemp	<u>Innovation</u>	Using raw materials
3D printing	Limited editions	<u>Mainstream</u>	Limited Editions	<u>Fashionable</u>	Circular economy	Fair fashion	Sustainable identity	<u>Commercialization</u>	Fair fashion
<u>Commercialization</u>	Produced in NL	<u>Fashionable</u>	Produced in NL	Not mainstream	<u>Fashion</u>	Sustainable goals	Not commercial	Personalization	Handmade
Personalization	<u>Geiten wollen sokken</u>	Artistic	<u>Geiten wollen sokken</u>	<u>Geiten wollen sokken</u>	Artistic	Handmade	Handmade	Marketing tool	Artistic
Technology	Personalization	<u>Transparency</u>	<u>Mainstream</u>	<u>Commercializing</u>	New raw materials	<u>Geiten wollen sokken</u>	<u>Compeptitiveness</u>	Technology	<u>Transprency</u>
<u>Greenwashing</u>	Technology	<u>Greenwashing</u>	<u>Fashionable</u>	Brand philosophy – not communicating sustainability	Brand identity	<u>Fashionable</u>	Not transparent	Circular economy	<u>Mainstream</u>
Challenge of being completely sustainable	<u>Transparency</u>		Fair fashion	<u>Greenwashing</u>	Collaborations	<u>Greenwashing</u>	<u>Mainstream</u>	<u>Transparency</u>	<u>Fashionable</u>
	<u>Greenwashing</u>		<u>Transparency</u>		<u>Greenwashing</u>	Challenge of being completely sustainable		Brand philosophy – not communicating sustainability	

Codes derived from interviews

Appendix B: Code Scheme of Content Analysis



Appendix C: Interview guide

Topic 1: Basic information

1. Incentive to start business
2. Interest in sustainability
3. Contribution of brand to sustainability
4. What do you think the main issue is surrounding the fast fashion industry?
 - a. Why did you want to change that issue?

Topic 2: Defining Sustainability

1. Define sustainability
2. Why did you start producing sustainably?
3. How do you think your brand supports the notion of sustainability?
4. Is there a strategy behind selling sustainable clothing? Why?
5. Many are saying that a company such as H&M is simply greenwashing; how important is for you to have companies like yours? To show the opposite is possible?
6. Should sustainability become mainstream?
 - a. Are you afraid that if sustainability becomes mainstream it wont be sustainable anymore?
 - b. Will all the new raw materials run out too? How sustainable is extracting new raw materials?
7. Possibility of a fully sustainable industry

Topic 3: Brand reputation

Talk about their brand and social media

1. Communicating sustainability on Instagram: Why?
2. Why would you communicate it; why not?
3. Why is it important to make sustainable fashion more fashionable?
4. Influence of communicating sustainability on brand

Topic 4: Social Media Platforms

1. Do you think that sustainability is often shown in a positive or negative light?
2. Difficulty of attracting the masses
3. Marketing tool for new entrants in the market
4. How do you aim to remain unique on this platform full of messages?
 - a. What does it take to be unique?

The questions are moreover extracted from Toemen (2017) and Hansson & Eriksson (2016), because these questions have been previously used in valid research, and were applicable to answer the questions posed by the researcher. The researcher added questions specifically

focused on understanding the green box of the sustainable fashion brand and therefore most emphasis is placed on topic 2.