The "green" cut and sew

Examining greenwashing and bluewashing on social media within the global fashion industry

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Master's Thesis
June 2019

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates CSR communication within the current global fashion industry and provides in-depth insights into the coherency of sustainability images of fashion brands across two main channels: social media and CSR reports. Nowadays, fashion brands are largely expected to include CSR in their business model. Simultaneously, the fashion industry has received sceptic views regarding sustainability efforts; in particular an increasing number of issues with greenwashing and bluewashing has come to light in recent years. With limited literature available on green- and bluewashing, specifically within this industry, this research aims to contribute to the academic field, evaluating sincerity of CSR communication on social media. The case study analysed six fashion brands which have been separated into "sustainability focused brands" and "sales focused brands". Through a qualitative thematic content analysis on Facebook a sustainability image was formed. These images have been compared to the images created by CSR reports. By examining the coherency between the two, the aim of this approach was to obtain insights into the sincerity of CSR communication provided by North American and European fashion brands.

The results demonstrate that the initial categorization into sales and sustainability focused brands does not fit the data. Rather, three classifications have been formed holding a certain degree of coherency between its social media image and CSR report image. First, two sustainability focused brands showed strong credibility for its sustainability efforts, aiming for a societal change as well as industry change. Second, two sales focused brands illustrated questionable motives for their CSR efforts, depicting a self-centred approach towards sustainability. Third, the last pair of brands were placed in a middle category, showing signs of sincere motivations for sustainable change that has been communicated in defective ways. Interestingly, this last pair consisted of a sustainability and sales focused brand.

Moreover, the study highlights both the lack of sustainability frameworks as well as the lack of greenwashing and bluewashing frameworks and proposes future research to develop clear and binding regulations for fashion brands that aim for sustainability.

KEYWORDS: *CSR communication, fashion industry, greenwashing, bluewashing, social media*

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Abbreviations of sustainability terms

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

DSFW – Dutch Sustainable Fashion Week

FLSA – Fair Labour Standards Act

FTC – Federal Trade Commission

FWF – Fair Wear Foundation

GOTS – Global Organic Textile Standard

ILO – International Labour Organization

PACE program – Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement program

UN SDG – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

US DOL – United States Department of Labour

1.   Introduction

The Rana Plaza was an eight-story building in Bangladesh, housing five major garment factories. On April 24, 2013 the building collapsed during working hours, taking the life of 1132 of its workers. Also described as the Rana Plaza disaster this event shed light on the horrors of the fashion industry, that often happen behind closed doors. Hazardous labour conditions were revealed, including child labour, forced labour, unhygienic working environments and severe underpayments ("The Rana Plaza Accident and its aftermath", 2017). At the time, this resulted in many large Western fashion brands driven by public criticism to declare their efforts to improve labour conditions. However, critics have stated that these declarations were merely intended to limit reputation damage and could neither be directly related to changes in business practices nor to taking responsibility regarding current and future labour conditions (Elving, Golob, Podnar, Ellerup - Nielsen & Thomson, 2015).

1.1 The challenge

The tension between keeping up with society demands and outplaying competitors in order to survive have presented a major challenge for fashion brands. On the one hand, modern society contains a strong group of sustainability advocates. Operating under high media scrutiny, several sources have labelled fashion as one of the largest polluting industries resulting in substantial amounts of criticism and a negative industry image (Conca, 2015; Harrabin, 2018; Catelli & Milligan, 2018). Innovation towards the use of more sustainable production processes and final products has become an important challenge for all industry stakeholders.

On the other hand, the majority of consumers still maintains a buyer decision process based on economic benefits, focusing on lowest pricing. This has resulted in large fashion brands exerting pressure on their manufacturers to produce more, faster and cheaper. In turn, manufacturers use their power to force labourers to work extreme hours for extremely low wages, which in practice leads to socially harmful situations in the labour market (McKinsey&Company, 2019). Furthermore, the vast production amounts cause large environmental harm through polluting production processes, high carbon transportation footprints and overproduction. This last issue results from brands being unable to sell items, forcing them to keep lowering the price and leading to a situation of inflation of fashion items (Caro & Martinez-de-Albeniz, 2014). Moreover, Birtwistle and Moore (2007) explain that the excess of garments and the unsold items are often exported to developing countries assigned as 'donation', while in practice these are harming local businesses as well as causing extreme

local pollution, therefore being environmentally and socially unsustainable. However, the environmental harm of the fashion industry does not only affect developing countries. In the UK, one million ton of textiles a year ends up on landfill sites and in Australia 4% of the landfills consists of textile waste (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010). The high speed of the current fashion market has led to bleak industry references such as 'fast fashion', 'disposal culture' and an 'exploited mass market that severely impacts people and planet' (Weller, 2006). In other words, a second part of the challenge lies in the fact that the current fashion industry seems to be in a speeding downward spiral of environmental pollution and social harm that needs to be reversed at most, but slowed down at least.

Feeling society's pressure for sustainable innovation, some large players within the fashion industry have integrated sustainability efforts into their business models. Next to the company websites and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) reports, social media have become main channels to communicate a sustainable brand image (Hudson et al., 2016). McKinsey and Company (2019) have identified a significant rise of 'sustainable' fashion brands as well as adaption of sustainability by established brands in response to high public demand for it. For example, the Dutch denim brand G-Star communicates its extensive sustainability program through its website, such as using several sustainable production techniques and collaboration with the Plastic Soup Foundation, aiming towards recycled garments ("A revolution in the denim industry", 2019). Likewise, the Spanish Inditex group – holding popular brands such as Zara, Pull & Bear and Massimo Dutti – describe how they operate according to their Right to Wear ideals on their website. This includes a focus on ethical quality products that consumers can wear without concern for labourers and the environment. The largest Inditex brand Zara underlines this focus on sustainability among others through its Join Life collection which exclusively contains garments produced from recycled and environmentally friendlier materials. However, despite its efforts the brand has been criticized heavily within the media. While Zara has been subject to several accusations regarding copyright as well as racist and discriminating designs, the major controversy evolved around the shocking working conditions of sweatshop labourers that manufactured for the brand which have been exposed on several media outlets throughout the last decade (Burgen & Phillips, 2011; Wulfhorst, 2017). Especially in regards to the brand's statements of maintaining social sustainable, this revelation caused major harm to Zara's credibility.

More than once have fashion brands received criticism for making sustainability claims that were not followed up by brand operations. The divergence between the conveyed and executed sustainability efforts arises questions of ulterior motives for sustainability, such

as in the event of Rana Plaza. Ultimately such divergence can lead to issues of greenwashing and bluewashing, which will be addressed further below.

1.2 The risk

When communicating CSR or sustainability efforts there is a risk of (possibly unintentionally) participating in 'greenwashing' and 'bluewashing'. This can be defined as tactics to convey a untruthful image regarding sustainability practices of organizations or regarding a product or service, often as means of marketing (Dahl, 2010; Terra Choice, 2010). Lyon and Maxwell (2011) argue that in some cases communicating environmental and social successes may be counterproductive for corporations, as it evokes a sense of self-promotion. When this form of self-promotion through environmental sustainability is false, it is referred to as greenwashing, whereas false self-promotional issues regarding social sustainability is referred to as bluewashing. Additionally, sustainability communication has also led to confusion for the consumer. Being surrounded by vague, often left unexplained terms such as 'biological', 'Fairtrade' and 'organic', has created a difficulty in making a thoughtful and objective choice. Parguel, Benoît-Moreau and Larceneux (2011) underline this statement by arguing that the profusion of sustainability claims has resulted in difficulties for the consumer to distinguish between truly virtuous organizations and organizations taking advantage of the sustainability trend.

When in 1992 the use of "green promises" rose from 1.1 to 12.6% within a scope of 6 years, consumers, industry stakeholders and several environmental groups petitioned to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to act against inappropriate use of environmental claims (Petty et al., 1994). In response the FTC issued its Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims, which brands are encouraged, but not legally required, to adhere to ("eCFR — Code of Federal Regulations", 2019). In addition, the garment manufacturing industry operates under several labour organizations depending on geographical location. The US Department of Labour (DOL) has issued the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) that concerns US factories, while the Asian-Pacific labour industry falls under the standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO). However, major violations of such standards have been identified. As communicated by the US DOL in a press release in 2017, the FSLA was found to be violated by 94% of the researched American factories (Kay & Carnevali, 2017). Furthermore, the factories that operate under the ILO often commit such violations without facing any consequences as the standards are in many cases a mere code of conduct

without any legal power. The ILO has stated that "These standards can be either conventions, which are binding international treaties, or recommendations, which are non-binding" ("International labour standards in Asia and the Pacific", 2019). While there are some binding treaties, Merk (2017) argues that the lack of enforcing governmental bodies and legal obligation lead to lack of threat. This has resulted in profound violations within the industry. Researching false green- and blue promises might illustrate the necessity of sustaining strict and concrete laws around this issue.

1.3 This research

This research examines the issues of CSR communication, greenwashing and bluewashing, aiming to determine the extent to which sustainability claims made by fashion brands are actually reflected in its brand operations and vice versa. In particular, many so-called sustainable fashion brands have emerged over the last years, advocating for an industry change. This includes brands such as Armed Angels and Nudie Jeans, which hold sustainability as a key value and have been launched based on a sustainable business model. This is, rather than incorporating sustainability efforts in their (previously unsustainable) business model at a later stage, such as is done by G-star and Zara. As both brand types have the ability to use their sustainability efforts as a desired and powerful marketing trait and competitive advantage, it will be interesting to include and compare traditional sales focused brands as well as alternative sustainability focused brands in the analysis.

It has been stated that mass media serves as a mediator between the business world and the public (Tuten, 2008). However, transparent and accurate information regarding CSR practices is not always disclosed, creating a challenge for the consumer to identify which brands can be trusted. Existing research investigated social media advertising (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013) online advertising within fashion (Park, Davis, Burns & Rabolt, 2007) and the link between openness to sustainable innovation and social media innovation (Reilly & Weirup, 2012). However, the academic field still lacks extensive and critical analysis of CSR communication, greenwashing and bluewashing on social media within the fashion industry. A literature survey conducted on CSR communication by Aksak, Ferguson and Duman (2016) revealed that theoretical frameworks that describe the relationship between CSR and brand image are largely limited. Accordingly, they argue further studies on the relation between brand image and CSR to be essential for an increased value of CSR, both from an academic perspective and as a useful source of information for the public.

To summarize the above, the current fashion industry receives large amounts of scepticism regarding its sustainability claims. Both consumers as well as experts have questioned whether the communication of sustainability efforts are truly reflected in brand operations or are merely a means of marketing to appease the public. This research aims to obtain insights into this discussion by examining the extent to which sustainability claims on social media are reflected in brand operations and vice versa. Accordingly, the following research question has been formulated.

To what extent are the sustainability efforts communicated by fashion brands on social media and in CSR reports in line with one another?

As mentioned before, two different types of fashion brands will be included within this research. The first type are brands that were launched with the intention of providing a sustainable alternative to current (fast) fashion, being Armed Angels, Loop.a life and Nudie Jeans. While these brands remain commercial businesses that make profit, they are perceived to have a focus on sustainability which is as strong, if not stronger, than their focus on generating profit. Therefore, these alternative brands will be referred to as 'sustainability focused brands'. Secondly, there will be the brands that originated from a traditional business model which maximizes economic profit, therefore referred to as 'sales focused brands'. These entail large multinationals within the fashion industry, some of which are subject to significant amounts of scepticism. This research will focus on Gap, Zara and G-Star RAW, henceforth referred to as G-Star.

Within the research question, the Facebook image regarding sustainability will be established through conducting a qualitative content analysis on a selection of Facebook posts for each brand. Additionally, brand operations are reflected by CSR reports published by the respective brands. In order to answer the research question the Facebook image will be compared to the CSR reports. The research design will maintain a clear division between the two categories of sustainability focused brands and sales focused brands. This leads to the following sub-questions:

Sub question 1: How do sustainability fashion brands portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

Sub question 2: How do the sustainability images on Facebook of sustainability focused brands compare to their CSR reports?

Sub question 3: How do traditional fashion brands portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

Sub question 4: How do the sustainability images on Facebook of sales focused brands compare to their CSR reports?

2.   Theoretical framework

The following chapter will discuss the key concepts of this research, relating it to existing academic literature. The first section will provide an understanding of sustainability and corporate social responsibility. The next section addresses the (fast) fashion industry and its relation to social media. The chapter will conclude by connecting sustainability and fashion to the concepts of greenwashing and bluewashing. The combined discussion of these topics is believed to capture the essence of the sincerity issues that exist within the current fashion industry.

2.1.1 Understanding sustainability

Numerous understandings and definitions exist around the concept of sustainability. Heriembrundtland (1985) has provided a comprehensive definition that is still applicable today and used by current industries and defines sustainability as "means to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." The innovations of the past decades have enabled numerous ways to aid to, or in some cases even surpass, society's need. Within the fashion industry this becomes most visible through the abundant supply and overproduction of garments and other items. Accordingly, the major challenge lies in the last part of the definition provided by Heriembrundtland (1985) of "not compromising the future generations." Current practices within many industries, but especially the fashion industry, are often nondurable, wasteful and socially and environmentally harming (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012). Yet, changing these longstanding, deeply rooted practices seems to be difficult for brands within the industry. Economic costs are often a main concern, especially for brands that have a primary focus on maximizing economic profit (McKinsey&Company, 2019). However, Fisk (2010) states that sustainable innovation can lead to economic profits through creating a positive brand identity. Even more, some have argued that a focus on sustainability is not a competitive advantage but an imperative in the current, fast-paced, highly competitive markets (Lubin & Etsy, 2010). Therefore, it seems as if the question of whether to be sustainable has morphed into *how* to be sustainable.

Strähle and Müller (2017) have attempted to help address the challenge for organizational innovation towards sustainability by developing the 5R model of sustainability within the fashion industry, which brands can use as a guideline for sustainability efforts. The model describes a circular process entailing the 5 r's of Recycle, Reuse, Reduce, Re-design

and Re-imagine. Recycling refers to the process of disassembling and separating products, as well as the suitability for reuse of post-industrial and post-consumer waste. Reuse concerns the life extension of certain products by using it several times before discarding it. Amongst others, this could be done with cloak pins, garment packaging and sewing equipment. Third in the sustainability cycle is reduction, and eventual elimination of waste, which can be obtained through careful selection of source materials that can be easily recycled and reused. Subsequently, re-designed products are items that are developed in a way that reduces environmental impacts entirely. This can refer to product re-design as well as manufacturing processes re-design. The sustainability cycle is closed with the re-imagining, which entails the concept of "designing for the environment". This stimulates brands to think creatively to design new environmentally friendly products and processes. After all, it can be argued that designing low-impact products is less expensive than managing high-impact products. (Strähle & Müller, 2017). As is captured in the expression "buy cheap, pay dear", an investment in sustainability is more likely to be economically beneficial in the long term than remaining cheap yet unsustainable. Eventually, traditional resources will be depleted resulting in an inability to maintain traditional operations.

Elkinton (1998) introduced the triple bottom line, an additional model that addresses sustainability. This model takes a more holistic approach compared to the 5R model, describing three types of stakeholders a business is able to create value for. First, a business can contribute to the economy stakeholder, for example through profit made, taxes paid and jobs created. The second stakeholder, the environment, can be negatively affected though emitted pollutants and carbon footprints amongst others, and affected positively through the inclusion of recycling processes. Lastly, the social stakeholder, entails health and safety issues, community impact, human rights etcetera. The model argues that the sustainability challenge for businesses is to find a balance between creating positive value for all three stakeholders. Wilson (2015) argues that often a focus lies on two of these stakeholders, compromising the third, resulting in an issue with sustainability. Interesting is that this model includes an important aspect of sustainability that is not always found to receive an equal focus in frameworks of sustainability, such as the 5R model, namely, the social factor. Recognizing the importance of this factor, this research will include both environmental and social responsibility in its definition of sustainability.

2.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

On an organizational level 'sustainability' is generally referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility. The concept of CSR helps organizations to communicate its sustainability efforts, thus helping consumers to understand the ways in which an organization operates sustainably. CSR developed in the early 1950s, when businessmen were perceived as powerful individuals with significant influence on society. This led to the first accepted definition of CSR in the literature, then referred to as social responsibility, of "obligations of businessmen to[…] follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 1953 as cited in Caroll, 1999).

With increasing social power of organizations as well as ongoing research into this problem domain, this general notion of organizational responsibility developed to a wide range of definitions over the years. Similar to sustainability, CSR remains a social construct that many scholars and organizations approach in different ways. Dahlsrud (2008) conducted research on different definitions of CSR and demonstrated that it essentially entails five dimensions: social, environmental, economic, stakeholder and voluntariness. The five dimensions have been best captured by The Commission of the European Communities (2001) providing the following definition of CSR: "A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" Among a total of 37 definitions this definition also showed the highest frequency count from the internet search engine Google, and Dahlsrud (2008) therefore concluded it to be the most widely used in the academic and practical field.

Essentially, businesses must establish a strategy that considers all five abovementioned dimensions of CSR in a way that suits their business culture and is communicated in a clear and transparent way. This, without overdoing it in order to distance themselves from greenwashing and bluewashing. Due to the wide range of interpretations of the CSR concept, this was found to be a large challenge to businesses (Sharma & Kiran, 2013). An important framework of reference are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) developed by the United Nations in 2016. These 17 goals were formulated to help achieve the 2030 Agenda of sustainable development and to serve as a code calling for concerted efforts to create an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet (UN, 2019). The goals vary from ending poverty and social inequality to preserving biodiversity, and were designed to address society on an individual as well as on an organizational level. To elaborate, businesses can refer to the SDG's to describe their sustainability practices, helping

the public to better understand in what ways businesses take responsibility. Accordingly, they can often be found in CSR reports by fashion brands to support its CSR image.

2.2. Industry development; fast fashion and the media

The issue of consumerism is a widely discussed topic in the practical as well as the academic field. Henninger et al. (2017) argue that the excessive amounts of consumption in extremely fast paces has led to a 'throwaway culture' in which feelings of desire often overpower rational evaluation of necessity (Woodward, 2011). This statement is illustrated by the change in society's evaluation of goods as consumables or durable. The consumer market distinguishes durable goods, which hold utility over a longer period of time (such as cars) from consumable goods or consumables, which concern items that are consumed once (such as food products) (Erzurumlu, 2013). One of the main points of differentiation between these two product groups are the time periods between successive purchases, which are significantly longer for durable goods compared to consumable goods. The issue with contemporary society that has played an important role in the emergence of consumerism is the reinterpretation of durable goods as consumables. Jang, Ko, Chun, and Lee (2012) explain how especially the fashion industry has been affected by this shift in behaviour. In the late 1980s fashion was regarded as a durable goods industry, relying on brand's capability of forecasting consumer demands and fashion trends long before items entered the market, resulting in two fashion seasons a year. However, the high demand of cheap fashion and the ever-larger quantities of clothing purchase and disposal have impacted the industry significantly. Extended number of fashion seasons and shorter life cycles have led to a strong 'here today, gone tomorrow' attitude within the extremely fast paced industry (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). It can be concluded that the fashion market has transformed to a highly competitive and constantly demanding environment in as little as two decades.

During this same time scope, technology has developed significantly and social media have gained widespread popularity. However, the prominent role of social media in the fast fashion industry entails more than a correlated time frame in rising popularity. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) established that young consumers are most actively engaged with social media and most vulnerable to its influences. Correspondingly, this consumer group was also found to be the main purchasing and target group of fast fashion brands such as H&M, Primark and Topshop. Being aware of their target audience vulnerability, fashion brands have generated considerable budgets to online- and social media marketing.

Social media platforms such as Facebook reinforce brand interaction, allowing brands to directly advertise to consumers on the one hand and providing a platform for consumers to express opinions and requests on the other hand. Social media is described as a fast moving platform that is ever evolving and strictly decides on trends and popular content through its sharing mechanism, also referred to as viral content (Goh, Heng & Lin, 2013). However, with the enormous amounts of content creation, popularity can shift from one topic or user to another within a time scope as less as a few days. This feature of social media is mirrored largely in the fashion industry, in which garment production keeps increasing and fashion trends, often spread through social media, last shorter and shift faster. Having high capability to keep up with the industry pace, unlike traditional media, social media has become an extremely valuable marketing channel for fashion brands.

Recently, several organizations are attempting to oppose the fast fashion industry. The Dutch Sustainable Fashion Week (DSFW) advocates for change and has established a list of sustainability features (Dutch Sustainable Fashion Week, n.d.). While these features are established based on practical considerations rather than scientific research, they are believed to be a valuable contribution as a useful guidebook for CSR. To some extent, they can be seen as an adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals to the fashion industry. The features provide focus points for organizations to reduce and/or limit environmental and social harm. All nine features and their descriptions are presented below. Throughout this research these will serve as a key measurement of sustainability of fashion brands.

- **Responsible low impact -** Minimization of environmental impact. In order for a brand to be classified as responsible low impact it should have a maximum of 5% of waste products within the entire production process.
- **Organic -** The use of organic materials that are used in an environmental friendly way. E.g. dying processes often require substantial amounts of water and are therefore not regarded as an organic process
- **Fairtrade -** Relates to the social aspect of sustainability. A brand is classified as Fairtrade when ensuring safe and honest working conditions for its labourers, especially those residing in developing countries.
- **Vegan -** The exclusion of any animal product. This entails leather, fur and feathers, but also products for which animals do not have to be killed such as wool.
- **Local -** Products that are manufactured locally and created from local materials. Being labelled as "made in Europe" is insufficient as this often entails a European production process, while raw

materials are still transported from developing countries. This feature contributes to fair labour and eliminated transport emissions.

- **Recycled and reused -** Reducing industry waste by reusing products and materials before discarding it.

- **Handmade -** Relates to the social aspect of sustainability by considering craftsmanship. A brand is considered in this feature when selling handmade products rather than products that are mass produced in factories.

- **Transparency -** The transparency of brands regarding their production processes. It entails open communication about the origins of the materials used, working conditions of labourers and salaries of these labourers.

- **Charity donation -** Relates to brands that donate to charity in any way.

2.3 Greenwashing and bluewashing

Porter and Kramer (2006) note: *"CSR can be much more than a cost, a constraint, or a charitable deed – it can be a source of opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage."* Brands might have recognized the competitive advantage of communicating CSR towards the public and use this as a marketing strategy. Ramus and Montiel (2005) support this view by arguing that brands evidently have an incentive to provide sustainability claims as these can have positive effects on brand identity. While this a positive, it becomes an issue when brands use, possibly false, CSR communication for the sole intention of marketing. Lacking transparency regarding CSR practices and providing false claims recalls greenwashing and bluewashing. As mentioned, the concept of greenwashing can be defined as providing incomplete, out-of-context or disinformation regarding sustainability efforts to convey a environmentally responsible image to the public. Based on market research that was conducted over the past years Terra Choice (2010) has developed the conceptual model of Seven Sins of Greenwashing, including seven false sustainability claims made by brands. While the model proposed by Terra Choice (2010) was originally designed for the concept of greenwashing, it was found to be equally applicable to bluewashing, the humanitarian perspective that considers false claims regarding social sustainability (Berliner & Prakash, 2014). Derived from the colour of the United Nations flag, the term "bluewashing" was formulated by the World Summit in 2002 and concerns untruthful communication regarding issues such as fair labour, poverty and human rights (United Nations 2002; Seele & Gatti, 2015)

As mentioned, the current academic field lacks extensive research and academic models on both greenwashing and bluewashing, especially with specific application to the fashion industry. The model developed by Terra Choice has been widely used in scientific

research on sustainability within fashion (Hanlon, 2009; Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Muthu, 2015). Accordingly, it can be regarded a valuable framework for identifying and describing greenwashing and bluewashing, and it will be used to explore the extent to which fashion brands' sustainability claims are in line with brand operations within this research. Accordingly, the sins of greenwashing as established by Terra Choice (2010) have been modified to suit both greenwashing and bluewashing and are illustrated in Table 1. Every sin was applied to the fashion industry to create an example which has been included in the table as well.

Table 1 Seven sins of green- and bluewashing. Based on Terra Choice (2010)

Sin of …	Explanation	Example
The hidden trade off	Claiming a product being "green" or "blue" based on a narrow set of attributes	"organic cotton" (cotton might come from a natural source but has a largely wasteful production process. While organic cotton does exist it currently only makes up 0,7% of the global cotton production)
No proof	Claims with no (easily) accessible supporting information	"contains 30% recycled material" (impossible to be checked by consumers)
Vagueness	Poorly defined or excessively broad claim, causing misunderstanding at the consumer side	"made under good working conditions" (vague claim that does not indicate anything about the means of sustainability)
Worshipping false labels	Giving the impression of a fake or false third party endorsement	"recommended by the fair fashion federation" (such party does not exist)
Irrelevance	A (possibly true) claim that is irrelevant to current sustainability efforts	"Seal fur free" (seal fur is banned by law within the EU)
The lesser of two evils	A (possibly true) claim that distracts the consumer from the greater environmental or social impacts of a product	"We use recycled plastic for our shipments" (Using no plastic at all would be the most sustainable option)
Fibbing	Providing a false environmental or social claim	Claiming to have a certain certification or "star label" when this is not the case: "Fairtrade certified" when this is not the case

3. Methodology

The following chapter will explain the brand and data selection methodology, as well as the coding process.

3.1 Case selection

The aim of this research was to compare CSR communication on social media and CSR reports in order to obtain an insight in fashion brand's sincerity towards sustainability. Organizations each hold their own beliefs, values and brand operations, and sustainability efforts vary widely from one company to another. Consequently, we must be careful in generalizing results of a selection of fashion brands to the entire industry. Accordingly, a case study was found to be most suitable for this research. The research question has been answered by means of thematic analysis of six fashion brands.

As mentioned, a division has been made between sales focused brands and sustainability focused brands. First of all, the sales focused brands are large players in the industry with two out of the three brands being established as the top 20 in generating economic profit (McKinsey Company, 2019). These brands claim to have incorporated sustainability into their traditional business models after they recognized the need for it. On the other hand, the sustainability focused brands are labels which were launched from a sustainable business model with the intention to provide an alternative to the current fast fashion industry. As explained earlier, the current industry holds many major established players that would be classified as sales focused brands, while sustainability focused brands are still trying to find their ways to fit into the market. Acknowledging the size difference between the two types of brands, a deliberate choice has been made to include locally well-known as well as relatively larger, more established brands for the sustainability category. This helped to create a representative sample of the sustainable fashion industry and, most importantly, reinforced the comparability between the two sample categories.

It must be mentioned that not all fashion brands are designed for a change towards sustainability. An example is the UK based Primark which focusses on offering the lowest budget products and is unable or unwilling to consider environmental and social efforts. As this research aims to investigate the sustainability claims made by fashion brands, such brands that (in)directly admit to have a focus on issues other than sustainability are of less relevance and have been excluded from the research accordingly. Accordingly, all brands for this research have been selected based on their focus on at least three of the nine sustainable

fashion features as established by the DSFW. All selected brands originate from European as well as North American countries in order to maintain an internationally representative sample.

Lastly, the two types of brands were carefully selected to have coherent relations with one another, either in terms of sustainability claims, products or a combination of the two. These relations have been based on the company descriptions and sustainability focus points found on the "about us" page or equivalent such as "www.inditex.com/en/how-we-do-business/our-model" and www.armedangels.de/en/philosophy/. To illustrate, the sales focused brand Zara, as part of the Inditex group, claims to aim towards an efficient no-waste cycle for its products. Likewise, the sustainability focused Loop.a life focuses on recycling and circular, no-waste production processes. Fundamentally, the two brands focus on environmental sustainability. The sales focused brand GAP addresses diversity and inclusion, while sustainability focused Armed Angels claims to work intensively with the Fairtrade and FWF trademark, creating a relation between these brands through a mutual focus on social sustainability. Lastly, the sales focused brand G-Star is generally known for its sustainable denim. Its sustainability opponent Nudie Jeans is a smaller brand that also retails in sustainable denim, for example through the life-long repair service that is offered to its customers. The full list of brands and its opponent can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 case studies and country of origin

Sales focused brands		Sustainability focused brands		Relation
Brand	**Country of origin**	**Brand**	**Country of origin**	
GAP (representing Gap inc.)	USA	Armed Angels	Germany	Claim to focus on Fairtrade materials and fair labour/social issues
Zara (representing Inditex Group)	Spain	Loop.a life	The Netherlands	Claim to focus on recycling and circular (no-waste) production processes
G-Star	The Netherlands	Nudie Jeans	Sweden	Claim to focus on sustainable denim

To elaborate on the structure of the research, the four sub questions as mentioned in the previous chapter will be answered through addressing each of the cases separately. For

each brand the sustainable Facebook image will be established and compared to the brands' CSR report. The first two sub questions will address the sustainability focused brands.

Sub question 1: How do sustainability fashion brands portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

    a.   How does Armed Angels portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

    b.   How does Loop.a life portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

    c.   How does Nudie Jeans portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

Sub question 2: How do the sustainability images on Facebook of sustainability focused brands compare to their CSR reports?

    a.   How does the sustainability image of Armed Angels on Facebook compare to their CSR report?

    b.   How does the sustainability image of Loop.a life on Facebook compare to their CSR report?

    c.   How does the sustainability image of Nudie Jeans on Facebook compare to their CSR report?

The third and fourth sub questions are analogues and address the sales focused brands.

Sub question 3: How do traditional fashion brands portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

    a.   How does GAP portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

    b.   How does Zara portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

    c.   How does G-Star portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook?

Sub question 4: How do the sustainability images on Facebook of sales focused brands compare to their CSR reports?

    a.   How does the sustainability image of GAP on Facebook compare to their CSR report?

    b.   How does the sustainability image of Zara on Facebook compare to their CSR report?

    c.   How does the sustainability image of G-Star on Facebook compare to their CSR report?

Sub question 2 and 4 make the comparison between the communicated sustainability image on Facebook, and the actual sustainability efforts taken by brand's, i.e. represented by CSR reports. In order to make this comparison the first step was to create a sustainability brand profile for each of the six brands based on the CSR reports. The most recent reports available have been used for this analysis, which date back to 2018 and 2017. The reports have been collected from the sustainability webpages of the brands itself or the corporation it operates under. While all brands have been selected for research based on an inclusion of both the environmental and social aspect of sustainability, the profiles serve to create an image of the main focus points of each brand. Once an initial profile was created based on a first observation, the reports have been analysed again in order to compare recurring content across brands in order to form the definite brand profiles. These profiles describe the main topics each brand addresses and, more importantly, the way in which these topics are approached. Furthermore, the reports have been analysed on greenwashing and bluewashing. Contradicting, vague or other questionable statements that provoked a sense of insincerity have been reported within the brand profile as well.

3.2 Facebook data selection

While the rising popularity of many other social media platforms cannot be denied, Facebook remains the most widely used platform by businesses as well as consumers. Allowing for interaction, sharing and connecting, Facebook has been identified as the most prominent tool for social commerce (Pöyry, Parvinen, & Malmivaara, 2013). Accordingly, this platform has been chosen for the analysis. The aim was to include 25 posts from the official international Facebook page of each of the 6 brands. Criterion sampling has been used to collect the Facebook sample. This sampling method evaluated inclusion or exclusion of data based on a set of criteria that are relevant to the research design (Suri, 2011). As this study focuses on brand to consumer communication, rather than brand interaction, the first criterion included only posts created by the brand, eliminating any user generated content. For similar reasons likes and shares have been disregarded as well. While brands can communicate with its audiences through the comment section, this form of communication is a (possibly staged) response to consumer demand. As this research aimed to analyse sustainability efforts that are initiated from the brands itself, comment sections have been excluded from the data sample. In other words, the unit of analysis as a Facebook post contained the caption including the image or video posted by a brand.

Secondly, the posts were required to either address the sustainability efforts taken by the brand or any concept relating to sustainability in general, or show an inclusion of clearly unsustainable issues. To elaborate on the last part of this criterion, an example is a set of posts that was found on Zara's Facebook page encouraging Black Friday sales, showing support towards the unsustainable consumerism movement. Another example entails addressing certain unsustainable production processes or materials, such as the use of acid washing. According to Muthu (2017), acid washing releases harmful chemicals into the groundwater and causes health risk to labourers. As mentioned, these topics were required to be addressed either in the caption or in the visuals. Within the data sample the ratio between the 'sustainable posts' versus 'non-sustainable posts' has been administered in order to provide an accurate insight in the extend of each brand's focus on sustainability. To exemplify, brand A with 15 'sustainability posts' might seem to have a stronger focus on sustainability than brand B with 10 sustainability posts. However, this image changes when brand A subsequently is found to include 10 non-sustainability posts whereas this number is only 1 for brand B. In similar manner, the total number of posts is able to influence this perspective as well. With 15 posts focusing on sustainability out of a total of 100 posts, brand A has a significantly weaker focus on sustainability than brand B with 10 out of 30 posts. Accordingly, total amount of posts have been taken record of as well.

Lastly, in order to obtain the most recent results the posts have been selected within the past 24 months, i.e. April 2017 – April 2019. The selection started with posts on April 1st 2019 and has been continued in a reversed chronological order until the either the limit of 25 posts per brand or the maximum time period of 2 years was reached. In some cases brands were found to post about a certain topic several consecutive days. For example, when opening its Detox Denim pop-up store, Armed Angels addressed this on Facebook with three consecutive posts on March 6, 7 and 8. In order to avoid both time concentrated and topic concentrated results a maximum of 1 post on a singular topic per week has been maintained.

The above-mentioned selection criteria have led to the sample sizes as shown in Table 3. As mentioned, the number of posts showing sustainability relative to the non-sustainability posts has been identified. Furthermore, the total number of posts per brand that have been posted on Facebook within the regarded time scope, i.e. April 1st 2019 until the end date, have been obtained through Netfizz (see appendix A). In Table 3 these have been referred to as the absolute total. Moreover, the posts addressing a repetitive topic within one week have been counted by hand. These posts were subtracted from the absolute total leading to the

counted total, which is also included in the table below. The end date marks the date on which the 25th post was posted (15th for the case of Gap).

Table 3 Facebook posts sample sizes

Brand	N (sample size)	Sustainability / non-sustainability	absolute total/counted total	End date
Armed Angels	25	23/2	64/61	November 18th 2018
Loop.a life	25	25/0	58/58	July 16th 2018
Nudie Jeans	25	25/0	64/56	October 12th 2018
GAP	15	9/6	142/133	April 01st 2017
Zara	25	18/7	320/284	May 29th 2018
G-Star	25	20/5	189/173	December 21st 2017

3.3 Coding process

After data collection was completed a qualitative, thematic content analysis was conducted on the Facebook posts including visuals, captions, hashtags and tags. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that thematic analysis can assist in identifying meaningful patterns in data. Here, the evaluation of patterns being meaningful was not based on commonness but rather on assumptions and ideas behind explicit statements. The first parts of the coding process of Facebook data were similar to that of the CSR reports. Familiarization with the data is the first fundamental process when conducting a thematic analysis, entailing an active, analytical and critical interpretation of data. Afterwards, a list of sensitizing concepts has been developed which is fundamental in creating structure within social research. The list was based on reoccurring topics within and between the Facebook pages and serves as a reminder that whenever the researcher came across one of the topics, such as fair labour or material use, extra attention needed to be paid to the way in which the brand approached this topic (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). All Facebook data has been analysed based on the initial concept list. The individual initial concepts have been refined and expanded where necessary, upon which data has been re-evaluated based on the final concept list.

An example of a sensitizing concept is *brand representative,* which is described as any person representing the brand on Facebook, such as models, employees or labourers. The list serves as a reminder to the coder that any content depicting a brand representative needs

to be interpreted and converted to a meaningful code when applicable. Within this process, more than identifying repetitions, it was important to search for similarities and differences by looking at the ways in which brands approach the concepts (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The final list with sensitizing concepts, definitions and examples can be found in Appendix B.

Subsequently, Atlas.ti has been used to create open codes according to the sensitizing concept list. For example, based on the sensitizing concept *brand representative* some codes that have been established are "Asian female model", "coloured female model" and "Caucasian male model". Establishing open codes entailed a recurring process of analysing data, identifying codes based on the sensitizing concept list, and updating the list when new topics occur. In order to obtain a conclusive and reliable list of open codes the open coding process was reviewed and updated at least multiple times. More specifically, each time a new code was established, the presence of this code would be checked for all other brands as well. This way several open coding rounds have been conducted. Analysing all data according to the sensitizing concept list has resulted in 268 open codes.

Afterwards, all open codes that were established from the six brands have been combined in one document. The next step included a decision making process on the ways in which open codes related to one another, looking for a meaningful connection between codes that allowed them to be grouped together in certain ways. To continue the example above the open codes "Asian female model", "coloured female model" and "Caucasian male model" have been grouped into the category *equal gender and ethnic representation*. Within this step, rather than the regarding open codes as self-contained concepts, the contexts in which the codes presented themselves were inspected when assigning them to a certain category. This is, in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the ways in which open codes contribute to each category and to create additional meaning to the categories. To illustrate, each brand was specifically analysed on the ethnicities and genders that were depicted on the Facebook page. In addition to establishing the presence or absence of the category *equal gender and ethnic representation* the composite of codes revealed the alternative ways in which brand representatives appeared on Facebook. This way, a focus on a certain gender (e.g. exclusion of male models) or ethnicity (e.g. inclusion of only Caucasian models) was able to be established. A similar approach has been used for the establishment for all other categories. The total 268 codes have been categorized into 32 categories.

Finally, the categories have been analysed on meaningful connections to further regroup them into final themes. The category *equal gender and ethnic representation* has

been grouped together with the categories *fair labour* and *employees and workers* to establish the final theme *social equality*. Similarly to the categorizing process, context has been largely integrated in the decision making process for creating themes. This procedure led to the establishment of nine themes which encompass more than a simple inclusion or exclusion of a certain topic. More than describing whether or not social equality is addressed on Facebook, this theme analyses the extent of the focus on social equality or how social inequality might be present. Similarly, the theme *charity donations* looks beyond the presence of donations communicated by the brand and describes the ways in which brands donate and to what extent this donation might be derived from marketing advantages. All nine themes and its presence on the brands' Facebook page have been listed in Table 4, in which a strong focus or presence is indicated with a plus (+) sign and a weak focus or presence is indicated with a minus (-) sign. In cases the theme was found absent, the table was left empty. An overview of the codes, formation of categories and formation of final themes can be found in appendix C.

Table 4 Theme descriptions and presence

	Theme	Description	Presence					
			Armed Angels	Loop.a life	Nudie Jeans	GAP	Zara	G-Star
1.	Sustainable advertising strategies	This theme describes how brands use sustainability for product advertisements.	+	+	+	-	-	+
2.	Social equality	This theme analyses social responsibility taken by brands in the form of a focus on equality. It addresses societal equality as well as fair labour issues. This theme relates partially to the DSFW feature *Fairtrade*	+	-	+	-	-	+
3.	Encouraging longevity perspectives towards the global fashion industry	This theme encompasses the ways in which brands contribute to industry change towards sustainable fashion. It includes matters such as criticizing current industries and educating on sustainability.	+	+	+	-	-	+
4.	Minimization of environmental impact	This theme analyses environmental responsibility taken by brands. It addresses issues such as circularity, sustainable material use and waste reduction. This theme relates to the DSFW features *responsible, organic* and *recycled & reused*	+	+	-	-	-	+
5.	Contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies	This theme examines brand's focus on the local economy. This entails working with local partners, suppliers and/or supporting local images. This theme relates to the DSFW feature *local*		+		+		
6.	Organizational transparency	This theme examines the extent of transparency on CSR in order to increase trustworthiness. This theme relates to the DSFW feature *transparency*	-	+	+			+
7.	Charity donations	This theme describes how brands contribute to charity, such as donations, foundations or social and/or environmental programs. This theme relates to the DSFW feature *charity donation*	+	-	-	+	-	
8.	Vegan	This theme describes the ways in which brands approach veganism. It relates to the DSFW feature *vegan*	-		+			
9.	Greenwashing and bluewashing on Facebook	This theme entails all forms of greenwashing and bluewashing that has been identified on the Facebook pages.	-		-	+	+	+

The identification and establishment of themes within the Facebook data of the brands have assisted in shaping sustainability images on Facebook, thus addressing sub question 1 and 3.

The last part of the analysis aligned the results of the thematic analysis with the created brand profiles. Each brand has been addressed separately throughout a comparison between its focus points on Facebook and CSR reports. Particularly, this entailed establishing matching or deviating statements as well as other notable statements made by brands regarding sustainability efforts. All statements have been examined on the use of greenwashing and bluewashing, based on the Seven sins of Greenwashing (Terra Choice, 2010). This comparison addressed sub question 2 and 4, which looked at how the sustainability images on Facebook of sustainability focused and sales focused brands compare to their CSR reports.

Combining the results of all sub questions have provided an answer to the final research question: *To what extent are the sustainability efforts communicated by fashion brands on social media and in CSR reports in line with one another?*

4.   Results

The following chapter will present the findings of the thematic analysis and highlight interesting outcomes. First, the sustainability focused brands will be discussed and for each brand the main themes that were found on Facebook will be described. Subsequently, the sustainability images based on the CSR reports will be addressed and compared to the Facebook findings. Afterwards, this will be repeated for the sales focused brands.

4.1 Facebook results: Sustainability focused brands

The following section will address sub question 1, looking at how sustainability focused fashion brands portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook. Each brand will be addressed separately, starting with an overview of the Facebook sustainability image including representative posts. This is followed by a thorough analysis which will highlight the main findings and themes that were found on the Facebook pages of the brands

4.1.1 Armed Angels

While it can be argued that all social media communication by brands are a form of advertising or branding, this research has distinguished posts entailing an explicit product or product line advertisement. Within the Facebook sample of Armed Angels, 7 out of the 25 posts included such advertising. The remainder consisted of implicit forms of branding or addressing sustainability issues that are not directly related to the brand. The absolute values of these numbers are not particularly relevant, however the relative value across brands will provide valuable insights and assist in comparing the brands. Figure 1 includes an overview of significant posts of Armed Angels and assist in understanding the way in which themes were found present on Facebook.
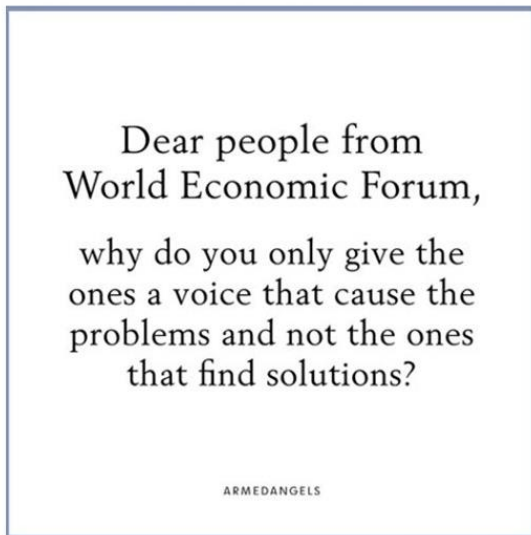
Figure 1 Facebook overview Armed Angels

1a

1b

1c

1d

On Facebook Armed Angels was found to take on a strong advocating role to change the currently unsustainable fashion industry, addressing this issue in 12 out of 25 posts. These posts consist of a combination of criticizing and opposing the current industry, advocating for industry change and educating on sustainability, which together resulted in the identification of the main theme: *encouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion.* This theme encompasses the ways in which brands contribute and aim for industry change towards sustainable fashion.

First of all, several posts were found voicing criticism of conventional (fashion) brands for their unsustainable practices, such as the use of harming materials, and express concern about labour and resource depletion. Figure 1a shows how Armed Angels denounced fashion labels that use non-renewable, oil based fibres for its denim saying "The problem [of using such fibres]? These fibres are both bad for our environment and our climate.", after which a solution to this issue is provided. This seemed to be a constructive key feature of Armed Angels' sustainability communication; when establishing an issue, the brand was found to immediately provide the alternative of the more sustainable "Tencel^{tm} Lyocell" material for denim. Explaining the issue of using such fibres and providing a sustainable alternative immediately compliments the brand's credibility.

The brand also sets an example to the public for industry change. By opposing commercial holidays and events Armed Angels takes a stance against the popular fashion culture. Figure 1b includes the post on November 23rd, Black Friday, the largest global sales event within the fashion industry. Rather than contributing to this event and maximizing profit like many other brands, Armed Angels used this day to advocate against consumerism. The visual communicates that Armed Angels values the environment, i.e. "Save tomorrow", over Black Friday sales, encouraging a movement towards sustainable fashion. The caption affirms this view through criticizing its competition, i.e. "shops", for its participation to Black Friday. Moreover, the brand has provided an explanation on the issue of large sales events such as Black Friday, a form of educating on sustainability, and advocated for industry change by stating "We can do something about that – together with you". Again, the post was concluded by stressing an alternative approach, this time in the form of the brand's opposing efforts to Black Friday which entail making donations rather than providing discounts.

Lastly, figure 1c shows a remarkable form of advocacy for industry change in which the brand addressed the World Economic Forum. This organization is criticized for giving a voice to the large multinational firms that cause social and environmental harm to speak about sustainability, rather than to smaller brands that provide solutions such as themselves.

As mentioned, ten additional posts were identified to include a combination of criticizing and opposing the current industry, advocating for industry change and educating on sustainability in order to encourage a global movement towards sustainable fashion. It is obvious that the brand recognizes a separation in the current industry that distinguishes the problem makers from the solution seekers. Whether the current fashion industry, holding a complex stakeholder structure, can be simplified to this extent is questionable. However, Armed Angels has provided a strong argument in the way society currently addresses the issue of sustainability; fashion brands, the public, media, and other stakeholders currently tend to focus on reducing problems, rather than creating sustainable solutions.

A secondary theme that has been identified on the Facebook page of Armed Angels is *social equality.* Armed Angels communicated its value for social equality through addressing everyday issues. One of the ways in which the brand showed this value is through the strong ethnic variety of Armed Angels models, such as depicted in figure 1d. In addition, the brand was found to speak up against racism in several posts.

4.1.2 Loop.a life

Looking at the advertising strategies of the second sustainability focused brand, Loop.a life, 5 out of 25 posts included a form of product advertising. Relative to the other five brands Loop.a life was found to dedicate the least amount of posts to product advertising. Furthermore, all 25 posts that were included in the sample have been assigned as 'sustainable posts', thus showing the exclusion of (unintended) unsustainable issues on the Facebook page of Loop.a life (Table 3).

Figure 2 Facebook overview Loop.a life

2a

2b

2c

Loop.a life claimed to maintain a strong focus on circularity and environmental sustainability within its business model. Correspondingly, the main theme that was established on their Facebook page is *minimization of environmental impact*. The way in which the brand communicated its environmental efforts included waste reduction, and reuse and recycle processes. They have stated to maintain a zero-waste policy and advocate for its "truly circular movement". Waste reduction and circularity are two highly interrelated concepts and were found to be addressed simultaneously on Facebook. Figure 2a depicts how Loop.a life limits landfill by reusing and recycling garments for the production of new garments. More than this, the brand proposed to change the common definition of waste stating that "waste is only waste when you waste it" and describes it as entirely depleted products that do not hold value in any way. Here, the brand addresses an issue with current consumer society. Due to the abundance of products and purchase availability, we have developed a careless and rather lazy approach towards consumables. As a trend-sensitive good, fashion items are quickly regarded as waste when they can no longer offer their intended service, to wit, being fashionable. In combination with current consumerism society, this issue is based on the idea that a newer, more fashionable substitute is available 'around the corner'. On Facebook, it has become apparent that Loop.a life voices against careless disposal of garments through giving products a second life, i.e. recycling, as well as using materials that are otherwise regarded as waste in a new way, i.e. upcycling.

Additionally, the brand's Truly Circular movement, one of the major environmental efforts through which the brand advocates for waste reduction, was addressed in the example shown in figure 2b. In addition to mentioning the circular feature of the Fryske Sweater in-text, the post includes an interesting visual. Many researchers have concluded the importance of visuals in communication as they can reinforce messages in various ways. Rametsteiner, Pajari and Peck (1999) studied environmental advertising and have established a positive relationship between conveying the message of environmentalism and a visual focus on scenes of nature. Additionally, Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2010) reported that nature visuals evoked more positive emotional responses that enhance ad and brand attitudes as compared to urban scenes. Lastly, within environmental advertising making informative claims were found to most effective in creating a green image, such as compared to a focus on product or production process (Carlson, Grove & Kanghun, 1993). In total 11 posts entailed nature visuals, an informative environmental claim or a combination of the two. With this, it can be argued that Loop.a life demonstrates that they have made well-considered

choices in regard to their CSR communication, rather than including random sustainability terms for example.

Among the six brands Loop.a life was found to be unique in its positively strong focus on the theme *contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies*. In this case referring to the Dutch economy, Loop.a life described partnerships with a variety of Dutch stakeholders and other organizations on Facebook. In figure 2c the brand described how they have used locally produced flax and recycled wool as raw materials for its Fsyske Sweater. In addition, the brand stated that they support the local manufacturing industry and explained their goal of making The Netherlands a leader in circular textiles. Moreover, the brand maintained several collaborations with Dutch designers and organizations such as DSFW and the Dutch Design Week, which are also a form of supporting local economies.

4.1.3 Nudie Jeans

The third sustainability focused brand, Nudie Jeans, showed a remarkable amount of product advertisements on Facebook. Out of the total sample of 25 posts 15 posts, more than half, included a form of product advertising. This number was the highest among the sustainability focused brands.

Figure 3 Facebook overview Nudie Jeans

3a

3b

3c

3d

Nudie Jeans was found to largely address the theme *social equality* on its Facebook page through a fair labour perspective. The brand communicated its value for fair labour by underlining the importance of safe, fair, and ethical working conditions as well as emphasizing its partnerships and memberships with the FWF and the Fairtrade trademark. With this approach Nudie Jeans seemed to focus less on 'Western' issues that evolve around gender and ethnic inequalities, such as racism and discrimination, and instead draw attention to humanitarian inequalities that exist in the industry. Fair labour and, even more so, fair labour violations are still major issues within garment manufacturing and several researchers have criticized the lack of unequivocal authority regarding sustained regulations. As mentioned earlier, even current supervising bodies such as the US Department of Labour (DOL) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have indirectly admitted to the ineffectiveness of the system by releasing statistics on widespread inappropriate practices and violations of current standards for garment manufacturering (Kay & Carnevali, 2017). Nudie Jeans seemed to have at least recognized this issue through a strong focus on communicating their fair labour efforts on their Facebook page. An example is shown in figure 3a, in which the brand gave a face to Indian workers in relation to their successful brand performance check that was conducted by the FWF. Rather than emphasizing the achievement as their own, Nudie Jeans recognized the work conducted by its labourers, referring back to the theme of social equality. While research lacks on social advertising, the findings of Rametsteiner, Pajari and Peck (1999) could arguably be extended to social advertising. It can be posed that similar to the way in which scenes of nature enhance the image of environmentalism, the factory and workers scene is able to enhance an image of social responsibility. The comparison in the next subchapter has determined to what extent this socially responsible image is also reflected in the CSR report.

A second theme that was established on the Facebook page of Nudie Jeans is *organizational transparency*. The brand was found to remain highly transparent on its sustainability achievements through elaboration on the embodiment or referring to internal or external sources that entail more information. Defined as "The degree of visibility and accessibility of information", several researchers have demonstrated the positive influence of organizational transparency on stakeholder trust (Zhu, 2004; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). The most prominent example is the post on the Sustainable Fashion Award as shown in figure 3b. The brand described the criteria they have been evaluated on in order to receive the award, followed by a reference to the blog post containing additional information about

the award. Naturally, this approach conveys a greater sense of credibility than simply stating the achievement of winning the Sustainable Fashion Award.

On the other hand, some findings have shown questionable issues regarding the brands credibility. In addition to establishing greenwashing and bluewashing based on the comparison between Facebook and CSR reports, forms of greenwashing and bluewashing were also investigated within Facebook pages itself. These are comprised in the theme *greenwashing and bluewashing on Facebook*. First of all, several equivocal terms were left unexplained, such as "slow made", and "sustainable and fair" (Figure 3c). As mentioned, the profusion of sustainability terms in combination with unexplained and vague claims lead to both confusion and mistrust on behalf of consumers (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau & Larceneux, 2011). Similarly, the advertisement of the "Green collection" as illustrated in Figure 4c is another example in which Nudie Jeans lacks explanation. In this case the term "green" seems to have a misleading purpose. The notion of something or someone being "green" is often connected to a notion of environmental sustainability. However, within this post no clear reasons are communicated that justify such connection. Although, in most cases a reference to their blog post including detailed information was mentioned, van der Ploeg and Vanclay (2013) argue that in order to avoid greenwashing, claims need to be self-sustainable. The issues lacking transparency as described above indicate a sin of vagueness, entailing poorly defined or broad claims (Terra Choice, 2010).

4.2 Making the comparison: sustainability focused brands

The following section will compare the previously described Facebook images to the CSR reports of the sustainability focused brand. Connections between the two images will be made and interesting findings of the CSR report image will be highlighted.

4.2.1 Armed Angels

The strongest theme that was identified on the Facebook page of Armed Angels was *encouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion*. This was done through expressing critique on and opposing the current industry, advocating for change and educating on sustainability. Coherently, all these factors were addressed in the report as well. For example, Armed Angels critiqued CSR management systems of other organizations stating they are often added as "satellite systems" to conventional management systems rather than implementing them in their core system. (p. 20). Subsequently, two reasons for rejection

of this approach are provided: when separating the social and environmental stakeholders from economic stakeholder, risks that arise from both sides are often recognized too late, resulting in necessary corrections within the system. This relates to the conception of the triple bottom line proposed by Wilson (2015) that stressed the importance of creating a balance between all three stakeholders in order to be sustainable. Secondly, Armed Angels describes that due to the cross-sectional nature of environmental and social aspects, CSR activities can never be fully exploited when regarded as separate from the core business (p. 20). Armed Angels state that due to these reasons CSR systems are the basis of their management system. Among others, this has become visible in the CSR report though the brand's GOTS sourcing strategy (i.e. all partners need to be GOTS certified), and their sustainable pricing with which they take into account the long-term impact on people, planet and profit. Many sales focused brands have an excessive number of fashion seasons, that sometimes goes up to 25 seasons a year. Opposingly, Armed Angels has limited its production to four seasons a year in order to maintain manageable production cycles that limit pressure on manufacturers and its labourers. Visser (2010) has discussed the failures of CSR management systems and makes a similar argument stating that CSR systems are often regarded as an "add on" in business models rather than being fully integrated in the management systems. To summarize, Armed Angels was found to make several statements that were in line with their brand operations and supported by scientific research. This illustrates both sincerity and knowledge on CSR situations, enhancing credibility in regard to CSR practices.

Furthermore, the brand was found to be coherent in addressing its social partnerships across both channels, such as the Fairtrade trademark, FWF and PETA. An example can be found on p. 8 in which Fairtrade is addressed: "Fairtrade's main goal is to address the imbalance in the global trade by supporting small scale farmers and workers worldwide. […] We continuously check and verify our partnerships to make sure that they are still efficient and striving for sustainable development." More than stating a partnership with these organizations, Armed Angels educated the reader on what these organizations stand for and how these partnerships influence their brand operations. In other words, Armed Angels remains largely transparent in its CSR report (Zhu, 2004; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014). The report also included more straightforward statements that indicated the brand's aim for a global movement towards sustainable fashion. For example, whilst discussing its goals and aims the brand mentioned "With a team of around 80 passionate employees we furthermore increased order volumes leading to higher leverage in our partners` factories,

additional and new suppliers, hence leading to more influence to facilitate change!" (p.6) Hence, the strong focus on sustainable industry change that was communicated on Facebook seems to be supported by the brand's CSR report.

A second theme that was identified on Facebook is s*ocial equality,* which was shown through addressing gender and ethnic equality in everyday situations. The CSR report, titled Social Report 2017, consists of 21 pages starting with the brand motto "We make fashion Eco & Fair". Being Fairtrade certified and supported by FWF, Armed Angels has stated to ensure strong partner relationships with its manufacturers and continuously monitor labour situations through setting strict criteria for partnerships. For example, all suppliers must be Fairtrade certified, have a clear labour management system and have a legal history (p. 11, 17-18). Moreover, Armed Angels aims to minimize overtime hours for its workers and prioritizes on-time payments (p.10). Additionally, the brand provides opportunities for Syrian refugee employment (p.15). Facebook and CSR reports generally draw different audiences holding different appeals. To elaborate, readers of the CSR reports are likely to seek detailed information regarding a brands social effort, such as fair labour (Rolland & O'Keefe Bazzoni, 2009) On the other hand, Facebook addresses the general public. When aiming to convey a sense of social equality, an equal gender and ethnic representation is highly relatable (e.g. more than detailed descriptions of their partner monitoring), thus being successful in conveying the intended message (Colleoni, 2013) . In other words, it can be concluded that the theme social equality has been identified and implemented successfully on both channels as Armed Angels found successful ways of tailoring its form to social media and the report respectively, to fulfil the needs of the respective audience of each channel.

While addressing fair labour in the report, the brand described the ways in which they educate manufacturing partners and direct staff on sustainability and fair labour. "We are highly committed in endorsing the trainings sessions as well by FWF. We further inform on and explain our suppliers the Code of Labour Practice […] and we feel that this is an important step to increase awareness in the factories, which ultimately is the key to making improvements" (p.18) This effort shows that in addition to ensuring social sustainability within their direct supply chain, the brand aims to encourage change towards bettering labour situations within the fashion industry. While this is believed to be a valuable competitive advantage, the brand has not addressed this effort on Facebook. Similarly, the brand described several environmental efforts in its philosophy on page 5 that did not receive prominent exposure on Facebook. Rather than trying to encompass all aspects of sustainability, Armed Angels made a selection of focus points that are coherent between their

CSR report and social media. From a CSR perspective, social media can be seen as an extended communication channel of the CSR report. Accordingly, claims made on a social media channel such as Facebook, that is not found in the report leads to the issues of greenwashing and bluewashing. On the other hand, issues that are described in the report but not on social media might point towards sincerity as the brand does not utilizes its marketing advantage. This seems to be the case for Armed Angels.

In conclusion, the sustainability image of Armed Angels on Facebook appears to be largely in line with the CSR report. It seems as if the brand highly values social equality and fair labour and have found suitable means to express this through both channels. Through both channels the brand aims towards being a role model in fair labour, resulting in the establishment of the main theme *Encouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion.* Interestingly, the brand did not address its efforts in educating partners on Facebook while this might be a valuable and rather exclusive competitive advantage of which the brand can benefit by communicating this to its social media audiences. It could be argued that this diminishes suspicions of using CSR as a marketing trait and rather indicates the sincere care for the people and environment.

4.2.2 Loop.a life

The Facebook page of Loop.a life showed a strong focus on environmental sustainability, resulting in the establishment of the main theme *Minimization of environmental impact*. Within this theme the brand specifically focused on two intertwined concepts, namely circularity and waste reduction. The CSR report consisted of 7 pages in which current measures and future ambitions were communicated in a clear and concise way. Among the six brands Loop.a life was found to hold the most condensed and straightforward report. The brand remained successful in communicating the main focus points and provided clear arguments for decision-making regarding brand operations. The brand name "Loop.a life", implying circularity, and explicit brand motto "Truly circular" were found to be in conformity with the rest of the report as well as its Facebook page, as both channels focussed on circularity goals and challenges, textile waste reduction and other eco-friendlier production criteria.

Both channels were found to address the brand's values of circularity, including the ambition of developing quality materials and products with the post-consumer waste pile as main supplier (p. 2). On the other hand, the report has been structured based on the brand's four sustainability ambitions of (1) "Set the industry standard in being a truly circular and

sustainable textile company", (2) "stimulate & facilitate consumers to choose more sustainable clothes and textile products", (3) "facilitate fashion & textile companies in their circular transition", and (4) "stimulate local employment and the closer loop fashion/textile production cycle." (p. 1). It can be observed that the majority of the ambitions i.e. 1-3, focus on environmental sustainability rather than social sustainability. Through the analysis and comparison of both sustainability images it has become clear that a major aim of Loop.a life is to reduce the pre-consumer and post-consumer waste pile, which mirrors the circular 5R model of sustainability as described by Strähle and Müller (2017). According to this model, Loop.a life can be defined as a sustainable fashion brand.

As a Dutch brand, Loop.a life has stated to work with local designers as well as European production and sourcing locations. This led to the coherence between Facebook and the CSR report regarding the second identified main theme; *contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies.* The report explained that this decision was made to limit the transportation footprints as well as to create an international reputation for Dutch fashion design; one that gives equal importance to sustainability and quality (p.7). With its uniquely strong local economy approach, Loop.a life demonstrated an innovative line of thought, seeking for solutions beyond the obvious and often unjustly implemented alternatives. To elaborate, rather than reducing CO_2 footprints through alternative transportation methods, the brand minimized footprints through local production. As argued by Visser (2010) this approach illustrates a full integration of sustainability efforts into management systems, rather than providing CSR as an add-on. Additionally, in its report Loop.a life connected its decision to work with local manufacturers to ensuring fair labour wages according to EU standards, as these are often higher compared to most Asian manufacturing locations such as India, China and Pakistan (ILO, 2015). Moreover, they have stated that regulations for labour environments in the EU are monitored to a greater extent as well (p. 2-3). Visser (2010) also proposed the DNA model of CSR in which economic development, institutional effectiveness, stakeholder orientation and sustainable ecosystems are key goals in a truly sustainable business. First, creating responsible goods, such as no-waste garments is an indicator for economic development and second, taking leadership in sustainability, as is illustrated by the brand's ambitions indicates institutional effectiveness. Third, through local production sites Loop.a life contributes to fair labour practices which indicate stakeholder orientation and last, sustainable ecosystems are integrated into the business through its core focus on circularity.

Within the theme *contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies*, the social and environmental motivations for the focus on this topic as described in the report were found to be absent on Facebook. The aim to create an international Dutch image as leader in sustainability is communicated as the single reason for the brand's focus on a local supply chain. The positive impact this local CSR activity has on the social and environmental stakeholder are powerful assets to the brand which are not used for social media marketing purposes, therefore enhancing the sustainable brand image of Loop.a life.

In conclusion, content on Facebook and the CSR report was found to be largely in line with one another. Having analysed both channels, it has become clear that Loop.a life successfully aims for clear and straightforward CSR communication towards consumers and other stakeholders and no forms of greenwashing or bluewashing have been identified neither within nor between channels. All aspects combined indicate a prioritization of bringing attention to (environmental) sustainability and its current issues, more than selling themselves as a sustainable fashion brand. Based on its sustainability images Loop.a life appears to be a positive example of an organization acting as a servant to the global sustainability movement rather than using CSR communication to serve organizational benefits. Ultimately, Loop.a life appeared to have a genuine interest in limiting environmental impact of the fashion industry on Facebook.

4.2.3 Nudie Jeans

The first main theme that was found on the Facebook page of Nudie Jeans was *social equality* with a focus on fair labour. With 37 pages this brand published the longest report among the sustainability focused brands. The report was found to be structured according to the UN Sustainability Development Goals. The goals that are incorporated in the brand's CSR strategy majorly entail humanitarian issues such as no poverty, gender equality, clean water, and sanitation and reduced inequalities. In coherency with the Facebook image, the report communicated social equality to be a main concern for the brand. Furthermore, brand stated to work according to a living wage program based on ILO conventions which is described as follows: "Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week shall meet at least legal or industry minimum standards and always be sufficient to meet basic needs of workers and their families and to provide some discretionary income. (ILO Conventions 26 and 131)" (p.15). Doing so, the report states that the FWF has confirmed that all payments in 2017 have reached its workers. Moreover, FWF is mentioned numerous times throughout the report, for example in relation to FWF Worker Education Programs Nudie Jeans provides to

its labourers. This education program introduces workers to FWF standards, general communication and grievance and complaints mechanisms (p. 17). Finally, the achievement on the FWF Brand Performance Check as communicated on Facebook (Figure 3a) is confirmed in the report as well. The close partnership with FWF enhances the image conveyed on Facebook regarding its focus on fair labour and complements the brands credibility regarding Facebook communication in general.

Another theme that was found on Facebook is *organizational transparency,* especially on sustainability achievements. Coherently, the report largely elaborates on sustainable production processes and end products, extensive brand history and sustainability achievements (p. 6, 8, 18). Both the DSFW and SDG recognize the importance of transparency in their models for sustainability. Nudie Jeans illustrates the inclusion of goal 17 Partnerships for the goals which is defined as "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development" ("Global Partnerships", n.d.). On page 28-29 a substantial list of partner organizations is provided, including a description of the standpoint of each organization. While this contributes largely to the brand's transparency, the brand was found to partner with the Fur Free Alliance, under which they have signed the agreement Retailer Commitment Against Fur. From 2000 onwards, several laws have been introduced that banned fur in fashion garments within the majority of Western Europe, Sweden included (Surendra, 2019). Accordingly, this partnership can be identified as the greenwashing sin of irrelevance, i.e. a (possibly true) claim that is unimportant to being sustainable. This issue illustrates that being elaborative on sustainability achievement is not unequivocally related to truthful and sincere CSR management.

In conclusion, based on its Facebook page and CSR report it becomes clear that Nudie Jeans partners with a large variety of organizations and works with several guidelines, certifications and sustainable production processes. These are thoroughly elaborated on in the report leading to a strong sense of transparency. However, both social media and CSR report communication of Nudie Jeans was found to be confusing at times. Including a long list of names and organizations as well as leaving terms unexplained, Nudie Jeans seems to be aware of the incentive and competitive advantage of communicating CSR (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Montiel, 2015). Ultimately, this has led to the establishment of several forms of greenwashing on both channels.

4.3 Facebook image: sales focused brands

The following section will address sub question 3, looking at how traditional fashion brands portray their sustainability efforts on Facebook. Similar to the sustainability focused brands, each brand will be addressed separately, starting with an overview of the Facebook image. This is followed by a thorough analysis which will highlight the main findings and address established themes that were found on the Facebook pages of the sales focused brands.

4.3.1 Gap

Remarkably, Gap was found to be the only brand to reach the time limit of 2 years rather than post limit of 25. Within the allocated time scope merely 15 posts were found to satisfy to the sample criteria, of which a relatively large number of 6 were identified as non-sustainability posts, leaving a very minor amount of posts for communicating sustainability efforts. Moreover, half of the posts (7/15) included a form of product advertising. Throughout the analysis advertising posts have been distinguished by its sustainable nature or commercial nature. To illustrate, the brands discussed so far showed a major focus on advertisements addressing sustainable features of its items or brand in general (e.g. "made from organic cotton"). As expected, Gap generally maintained a commercial approach to advertising content, such as through highlighting discounts and limited editions (Figure 4a). An overview of the Facebook image of Gap is depicted in below.

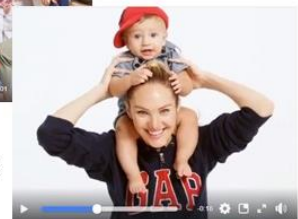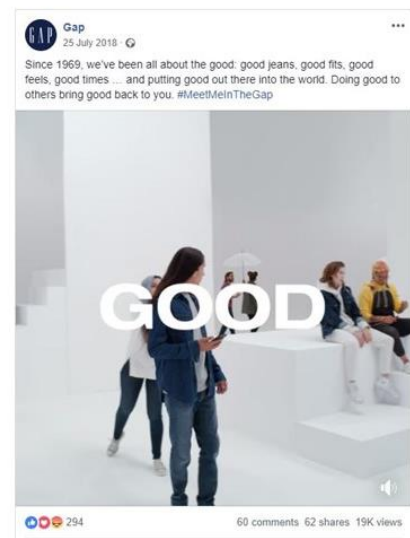*Figure 4 Facebook overview Gap*
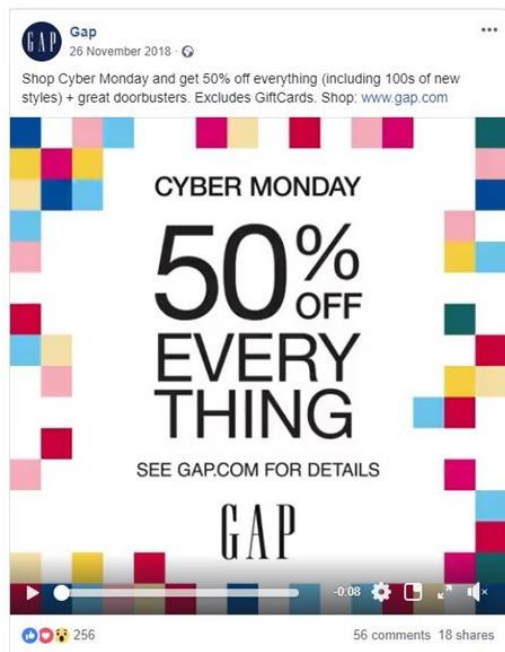
4a

4b.1

4b.2

4b.3

4c

4d

The major themes that have been identified for Gap are *contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies* and *charity donation*. These two themes coincide on the Facebook page of the American sales focused brand as they support local charities and programs, through donation. Specifically, Gap communicated to donate to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and Canada (BGCC), the United Way Harvey Relief Fund (set up to support the aftermath of hurricane Harvey in Texas, USA), Every Mother Counts, and its own Gap foundation. As most of these organizations are identified as local, i.e. North American, organizations, a rather patriotic selection in its donation partners has been established. Loop.a life also focused on the local economy through providing opportunities to local designers and reduced transportation footprints and labour issues through local sourcing. However, Gap shows a different approach towards the local economy. Rather than an actual form of collaboration for sustainability, Gap uses local organizations to communicate their charitable character. Additionally, the caption of Every Mother Counts donation post states "a non-profit making pregnancy and childbirth safer for moms everywhere" (Figure 4b.1). The impression is created that the program is intended to support motherhood globally, such as in developing countries. However, the video contrasted this view as solely Caucasian characters were represented in the video. In combination with the strong depiction of the Gap logo, such as through the character's Gap clothing, the sincerity of the brands support to this cause seems questionable (Figure 4b.2, 4b.3). In contrast with the visuals provided by the previously discussed brands, it can be argued that the donation message served as an 'accessory' to the advertising video rather than the other way around.

Moreover, within Figure 4c Gap addresses the Gap Foundation that was initiated by founder Doris Fisher. While drawing attention to this foundation, the post lacked concrete information on its cause, efforts or aims. A weak statement of "doing more" remained vague and left unexplained and neither a link to the foundation website nor other validating source of information was provided. Together, this indicated a combination of the sin of vagueness, which entails a poorly defined claim and the sin of no proof, in which no accessible supporting information is available (Terra Choice, 2010). Furthermore, Gap has highlighted the broad notion of "good" as one of its values which, again, committed the sin of vagueness. Specifically, Gap used hashtags that implied a relation to sustainability, however these remained banal both as self-contained concepts as well as within context. Examples are #GapForGood and #BeWhatsPossible. Furthermore, the brand expressed a strong value for being and doing "good" in figure 4d, however again, failed majorly to define this into their

own terms, creating a misleading sustainability image. Several researchers have related a sense of vagueness to lack of transparency, therefore diminishing brand's legitimacy (Perks, Farache, Shukla & Berry, 2013). While the aim of this analysis was not to undermine the positive value of charity donation, emphasis is given to the necessity of maintaining a critical approach towards "do-gooder" efforts by businesses, and traditional businesses especially. As Freisleben (2011) argues, multinationals often have large marketing budgets allowing their negative features to come out less negative. However, smart communication strategies do not, in any way, correlate with sustainability and sincere care for people and environment.

A second major theme GAP addressed on Facebook was *social equality*. Similar to Armed Angels, Gap maintained an equal gender and ethnic representation, including both female and male, Asian, coloured and Caucasian models as well as explicitly expressing importance to gender equality in professional and labour situations (e.g. equal pay). However, the connection between being socially responsible and portraying a variety of ethnicities and equal gender on social media is rather weak. This is, with lack of any other substantial evidence for social responsibility. Pope and Wæraas (2015) discuss the use of CSR activities as the basis for marketing campaigns, which leads to overstated and over-exaggerated claims. Analysing Gap's Facebook page, the social equality theme has been merely supported by an ethnical portrayal of models, and lacked additional concrete arguments, such as a voicing against discrimination or focussing on fair labour. Accordingly, it can be a regarded a convenient way in which Gap aims to appear socially responsible, distracting audiences from taking a critical view.

4.3.2 Zara

With 17 out of 25 posts including a form of advertising, Zara showed the highest percentage of product advertisements among all six brands. Additionally, the brand indicated the highest number of non-sustainability posts versus sustainability posts (Table 3). Third, the percentage of sustainability posts relative to the total counted posts throughout the concerned time period was found to be the smallest for Zara. That is, out of a total of 284 posts, merely 18 posts entailed the brand's sustainability efforts. More than confirming the rightful classification of "sales focused brand", with this approach Zara implied the absence of a focus on sustainability and CSR, creating a relatively weak sustainability image on social media. A representation of the Facebook image has been depicted in Figure 5 and will be discussed further below.

Figure 5 Facebook overview Zara

5a

5b

5c

With exception of the greenwashing and bluewashing theme, which uniquely indicates a negative relation to sincerity rather than a positive one, all other themes that were identified on Zara's Facebook page showed a weak presence (Table 4). While the next paragraphs will discuss the 'main' theme that was found on Zara's Facebook page it must be mentioned that compared to other brands its presence remained largely limited.

The Inditex brand Zara has been paired with the sustainability focused brand Loop.a life through a mutual focus on environmental sustainability. Correspondingly, the major theme that has been established on the brand's Facebook page was the *minimization of environmental impact*. Issues relating to circularity and sustainable (raw) material dominated communication around Zara's sustainability efforts. Production processes that limit CO_2 footprints and contribute to waste reduction and soil fertility have been addressed as well as the inclusion of sustainable materials such as organic cotton, linen, and recycled fabrics. While linen is regarded as a sustainable material due to its biodegradable structure, Zara did not allude to its sustainable nature in any way. Conversely, the posts depicted in Figure 5a advertised a selection of denim acid-wash items. It seems to be rather surprising for a brand claiming to focus on minimizing environmental impact to advertise with acid-washed denim, a highly polluting and impactful process (Omotoso, 2018). Taking a critical perspective, the statement of being environmentally friendly can be labelled as the greenwashing sin of fibbing, meaning to provide false claims regarding sustainability efforts (Terra Choice, 2010). Interestingly, the brand does not make any attempts to attenuate the harmful effects of this production process nor attempts to defend the inclusion of acid-wash processes. Another finding relates to the posts shown in Figure 5b, in which the brand stated to maintain *"water friendly farming"* processes while using "natural fertilizers and pesticides". Respectively, these statements can be classified as the sin of vagueness, which refers to providing a broad, poorly defined claim, and the sin of lesser of two evils entailing a claim that distracts from the greater environmental impacts (i.e. fertilizers and pesticides on itself are environmentally harming). In conclusion, within their Facebook image it can be argued that Zara expressed a sense of ignorance towards sustainability in general, both failing in communicating the positive features of sustainable materials as well as excluding unsustainable practices from their brand operations.

Furthermore, analysing the caption and visual depicted in Figure 5b I found myself unable to make a meaningful connection between the two. Whereas based on the caption the post aims to address a sustainable production process, i.e., "natural farming", the image appeared rather commercial, or unfitting at least. Compared to its sustainability opponent

Loop.a life, which published supportive visuals for its textual content, shows their inability to create a meaningful connection between its textual and visual content. In addition, the link that is included in the post in Figure 5b redirected to the web shop rather than to a source of more information about the Join Life label. Doing so, Zara seems both careless towards its sustainability content and seems to oversimplify sustainability communication deeming unsupported statements as sufficient.

Lastly, a significant part of the sample, that is 10 out of 25 posts, addressed the Join Life label which Zara described as "all garments that have been produced using the best processes and the most sustainable raw materials so that they can be identified more easily" ("Labelled Join Life", 2019) (Figure 5c). Rather than integrating CSR practices into their management systems to move towards systemic change, Zara appeared to be a brand that regards sustainability as an "add-on" (Hollender & Breen, 2010). By placing a strong emphasis on the Join Life label and collections on social media, the brand appears to believe that incorporating CSR in the form of a sustainable label justifies or balanced the unsustainable brand operations. In other words, the focus of the brand on Facebook seemed to lie on minimizing the bad, rather than doing good.

4.4.3 G-Star

The last sales focused brand G-Star showed the presence of the least amount of themes on its Facebook page (Table 3). On the other hand, a high ratio of 20/5 for sustainability versus non-sustainability posts has been identified. With this, G-star shows the lowest percentage of non-sustainability posts compared to the other two sales focused brands.

Figure 6 Facebook overview G-Star

6a

6b

6c

6d

G-Star used Facebook to advocate for industry change and educate on sustainability. This is done through discussing the importance of sustainability in fashion and participating in external events, among others to share information and educate on sustainability. An example is shown in Figure 6a, in which the brand explains the concept of eco-friendly laundry. As mentioned earlier, informational environmental claims are most effective in green advertising (Carlson, Grove & Kanghun, 1993). Secondly, the brand participates in external social and environmental events. In addition to drawing attention to internationally themed days such as International Women's Day and World Oceans Day, the brand actively contributes to events such as the Future Fabrics Expo and the LA Study Hall Showcase, such as depicted in Figure 6b. As can be concluded from in the caption of this and other posts, G-Star views sustainability events as additional channels to communicate the importance of sustainability and/or educate on sustainability. Combined, these two focus points have led to the establishment of the first main theme of *Encouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion.* Referring back to the argument made by Pope and Wæraas (2015) regarding CSR activities as foundation of marketing campaigns, G-Star defends itself against this argument. As opposed to other sales focused brands, the aforementioned activities of G-Star do not illustrate forceful forms of advertising nor relate directly to product sales. At most, the information sharing and advocacy for sustainability assist in creating a sustainable brand image that could eventually be beneficial for product sales.

A second major theme that was found on the Facebook page of G-Star is *organizational transparency*. Figure 6a includes the hashtag #whomademyclothes, communicating its value for transparency regarding the supply chain. The caption of the post refers to the webpage with detailed information on "RAW Responsibility". Another example is the elaboration on sustainability achievements such as the Most Sustainable Jeans Ever, which is advertised on the brand's Facebook page. More than explaining the features of the "most sustainable jeans ever", a third-party certification is included (Figure 6d), as well as the depiction of the workplaces and ateliers. As mentioned, transparency contributes to stakeholder trust, therefore creating distance between the brand and greenwashing and bluewashing issues (Zhu, 2004; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Beyond that, transparency was defined as one of the nine features of sustainable fashion provided by DSFW, entailing "open communication about the origins of the materials used, working conditions of labourers and salaries of these labourers". Accordingly, it can be stated that G-

Star's transparent communication on Facebook leads to an increased sense of reliability regarding CSR practices.

To conclude, Table 3 shows that G-Star addresses the least amount of themes on its Facebook page. However, uniquely all themes have shown a strong presence, indicated with '+' in Table 3, with e*ncouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion* and *organizational transparency* as main focus points. Some researchers have stated that in order to be successfully corporate responsible, an all compassing approach is required that evaluates ethical, environmental and economic health as a conjoint. However, it can be argued that a strong and truthful execution of a selection of key issues, such as done by G-Star, is more valuable than extensive CSR communication that is employed to defend itself against critical views (Perks, Farache, Shukla & Berry, 2013). Based on its Facebook page G-Star seems to have credible and sincere motivations for its CSR efforts. The following subchapter will investigate to what extent the brand delivers as promised.

4.4. Making the comparison: sales focused brands

Similar to the sustainability focus brands, this sub-chapter will compare the previously discussed Facebook images of the sales focused brands to its CSR reports. Again, the main themes found on Facebook will be related to the report while interesting findings from the report will be highlighted as well.

4.4.1 GAP

Based on the presence of themes and content relating to sustainability in general, the sustainability image of Gap on Facebook lacked both concrete and comprehensive evaluation of sustainability concepts. Nonetheless, Gap was found to concentrate on a combination of two themes: Contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies and charity donations. This was done through a strong focus on donating to local charities. On the other hand, the Global Sustainability Report 2017 of GAP inc. contained 67 pages. Sections that explicitly concern one of the other GAP inc. brands, such as Banana Republic and Athleta, have been disregarded for the purpose of this research. As these sections remain minor, the GAP specific report still encompasses an elaborate 65 pages, discussing a large variety of sustainability related topics. In line with the Facebook findings, the report shows a decent focus on charity donation. They mention the following: *"We have a responsibility to help prevent global waste in our operations, which can add unnecessary cost to our business"* and *"We have found that encouraging employees to volunteer or donate delivers a social impact*

and business benefits" (p. 50). Looking at the definition of "sustainability" organizational profit, and social and environmental benefits are not mutually exclusive and in an ideal case exist together. However, rather than generating economic profit from social and environmental efforts, the statements provided by Gap suggest organisational profit as prior reason for sustainable implementation. This inversed approach harms the brand's credibility regarding its sustainability efforts. This self-centred view might explain the local focus of the charitable character of the brand. Hofstede (2011) has argued that The United States holds a culture that is highly individualistic that evolves around "I" rather than "we". Drawing this to international perspectives this might result in a self-centred approach towards controversial issues such as sustainability. Accordingly, the American individualistic culture of Gap might be an explanatory factor for the patriotic approach towards charity donation.

Looking at the overall structure of the report, page 24-36 are dedicated to social sustainability regarding suppliers, in which the brand addresses ethnical equality among labourers, women rights, working hours and their Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.) program as their key issues. Additionally, many environmental issues are addressed on page 40-50, including water and waste limitations, climate change, energy and chemicals. The last pages of the report discuss product sustainability with issues such as circular design and sustainable raw materials. Noticeably, the large variety of sustainability matters and sub-topics has resulted in the difficulty of appointing focal points. Furthermore, the report was found to have multiple references to the GAP inc. website such as "Learn more about how we create solutions for woman and water" (p.40). The external reference for "Learn more about This Way Ahead program" (p.24) redirected to an error page (Appendix D1). This does not necessarily have to be the result of a deceitful character and can be explained by an unintended mistake and unawareness. Nevertheless, it is an organizations responsibility to provide and check for sufficient support for their claims and statements. Therefore, this can be identified as the sin of fibbing. Additionally, GAP states to use social media and blog posts to share its efforts to improve sustainability: "This [social media] informs customers about our work, inspires them to consider water use in their daily lives and communicates the urgency of our environmental and social initiatives" (p.10). However, neither the post statistics nor Facebook content are supportive of this claim. While this does not directly relate to the sustainability image of the brand, it shows that Gap makes promises that are not followed up.

Often, commercially successful fashion brands are skilful in recognizing consumer demands and responding to these fast and in extreme ways, as is one of the key features of

the trend-sensitive fast fashion industry. However, besides fashion trends this could also be applied to the trend of sustainability. In other words, looking at the brand profile of GAP the difference between sustainability and sales focused brands becomes clear; whereas sustainability focused brands, besides profit, derived from the need for change providing sustainable alternatives, sales focused brands had to adopt to the sustainability demand by implementing it into their long-standing business models. Subsequently, the challenge for all brands is to clearly communicate all sustainability efforts in an adequate and conclusive report. However, through sourcing external references and the lack of clear focus points, a failure of a strong sustainability image has been established for Gap. The report was found to be unstructured and confusing while the Facebook image remained minimal in addressing sustainability and illustrated signs of insincere motives. This way Gap appears to dodge the question of explaining its CSR strategy by an overload of partially irrelevant and poorly defined information on the one hand (i.e. in the CSR report) and a lack of information on the other hand (i.e. on Facebook). While the brand might benefit from this strategy on the short-term, it may not found to be sustainable for the long-term future. Drawing upon the concept of the triple bottom line as discussed by Wilson (2015), GAP seems to have failed in communicating a balance between creating value for the three stakeholders both through its CSR report as well as on social media. It is obvious that GAP prioritizes the economy stakeholder, with focus on the North American economy and personal profits. While the social stakeholder seems to hold an arguably adequate focus on both platforms, the brand seems to have lopsided and, in some cases, self-centred approaches that include bluewashing in the form of vagueness and fibbing. The environmental stakeholder seems to be of very limited priority to this sales focused brand and are nearly excluded in the Facebook sustainability image.

4.4.2 Zara

Looking back at the Facebook findings, elements relating to sustainable advertising strategies, social equality, longevity perspectives in fashion and charity donations were identified. The main theme of the brand image entailed *minimization of environmental impact*. However, it was concluded that relative to other brands the Facebook image of Zara as a whole showed rather weak connections to all the identified themes. The Annual Report 2017 of Inditex has been used to create the brand profile of Zara. Similar to the case of Gap, sections that explicitly concern one of the other Inditex brands, such as Pull & Bear and

Massimo Duti, have been disregarded. With a remaining 380 pages the report of Zara is clearly the most extensive in comparison to the other brands.

In positive contrast to GAP, Zara provides extensive explanations of their sustainability projects such as their Join life label (p. 119-123) and Green to Wear program. Regardless of the content and impact of the programs, it can be stated that Zara shows transparency that increases their credibility. On page 33 and 117 Zara explains how they contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As opposed to Nudie Jeans, who made a selection of key goals, Zara includes all 17 goals in its CSR strategy. The Join Life label is mentioned for approaches to several goals, such as Goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns: "Through the Green to Wear program and the Join Life labelling standard, we favour environmentally sustainable behaviour in our supply chain, encouraging best production practice" (p.117). Therefore, looking at the content and impact of the program it strongly appears as if Zara uses its Join Life label as a servant to contribute to the SDG's rather than implementing the sustainable practices, that now fall under the Join Life label, into the core of the business and its entire supply chain. This viewpoint is also supported by the brands description of Goal 15, which regards the protection of ecosystems and environments, of "we continued to increase our use of more sustainable raw materials, as well as the promotion of more efficient production techniques, […] grouped under our Join Life label." (p. 117). It shows that the Join Life and Green to Wear label are included as satellite departments, i.e. an additional collection of all sustainable practices, that supposedly should comprise for other unsustainable businesses practices. In other words, Zara seems to exploit its sustainable labels to communicate support to the SDG's rather than actually supporting environmental and social issues.

Furthermore, the brand claims to work to minimize impact on climate change, among others through following Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC 2006) and the World Resources Institute GHG Protocol (2015). However, with exception of the Australian continent the brand sources and manufactures from all continents, contributing largely to transportation footprints. This is in large contrast with its sustainability opponent Loop.a life, which showed a strong locally oriented supply chain, with limiting CO_2 footprints as one of the major motivations.

A critical analysis of the report resulted in some additional controversial findings. Interestingly, the report starts with company details unrelated to sustainability, such as retail formats, innovation in shopping experiences and customer relations and financial risk management. In addition, the sustainability department of the brand consists of 65 employees

worldwide, a negligible amount when comparing this to the total of number of 171,839 employees in 2017 (p. 326). While in the case of sustainability quality outweighs quantity, these numbers indicate a prioritization of brand efforts other than CSR.

From page 24 onwards a variety of social sustainability topics are addressed such as equality and inclusion (p. 49-68) and healthy and safe working environments (p. 96-103). In addition, an explicit statement of prioritizing worker safety is made on page 227. This is done through maintaining a code of conduct for its manufacturers that prohibit forced labour, child labour, and discrimination. By contrast, the same graph shows that only 50% of the factories are in compliance with the code for hygiene at work (p. 111). In regard to the hygiene and health efforts the following was stated: "Guaranteeing access to health services and promoting women's health, in particular reproductive health and feminine hygiene". Moreover, the term "health" and "healthcare" appeared 203 times in the report. Nevertheless, nearly half of the factories and suppliers are located in China, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Pakistan, all developing countries that are known to have had substantial labour issues in garment factories (p.7) (Taplin, 2014; Hodal, 2018). Certainly, this does not apply to all factories that are located in these countries. However, the lack of transparency regarding the factories resulting in the inability for stakeholders to verify Zara's statements regarding labour conditions, indicates the of the bluewashing sin of no proof. While the successful implementation of codes of conducts can be argued for, after all 50% of factories complying with the code is still more than none, the statements regarding taking worker safety were found largely misleading that in one case was identified as bluewashing.

Combining the Facebook image to the CSR report of sales focused brand Zara, it can be concluded that the brand prioritizes many other brand operations over sustainability operations. This can be supported by the limited focus on sustainability on Facebook on the one hand and the controversial and contradicting statements made in the report such as the diminutive size of the sustainability department in comparison to the total numbers of employees on the other hand. Even more, whereas on Facebook Zara appeared to be rather uninformed about the current situation that exists around sustainability, the strikingly extensive CSR report of Zara showed an excess of irrelevant and misleading information that in some cases resulted in bluewashing. Zara seems to defend itself from the critical views regarding sustainability by providing satellite systems, i.e. sustainable labels, to constitute for the other brand operations, an approach that has been critiqued by multiple stakeholders and researchers.

4.4.3 G-Star RAW

While G-Star has not published an official CSR report, the brand communicates its CSR and sustainability efforts through an extensive webpage dedicated to sustainability: www.g-star.com/en_nl/about-us/responsibility. The webpage includes information similar to what was found in reports of other brands, such as the general approach to sustainability, material use, production processes, and partnerships. Additionally, an internal sustainability protocol was obtained including goals and motivations regarding the brand's responsible supply chain, sustainable products and sustainable operations. As this document provides insight in internal CSR communication it can be regarded as a valuable source of information for this research. A combination of the sustainability webpage and internal sustainability protocol have been used in lieu of a CSR report.

The Facebook sustainability image was identified as credible and transparent, holding *organizational transparency* and *encouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion* as main themes. As communicated on their website G-Star signed the transparency pledge (The Apparel and Footwear Supply Chain Transparency Pledge) which entails committing to name all manufacture sites on a regular basis, including name address, parent company, type of products made and worker numbers ("RAW Responsibility - Responsible Supply Chain", 2019). Their value of transparency is reflected in several other brand efforts as well. Similar to other brands G-Star states to follow a supplier code of conduct to monitor social and environmental health and safety issues. Interestingly the code of conduct is translated into six languages of the manufacture locations, namely Vietnamese, Hindi, Bangladesh, Tamil, Chinese and Urdu of which downloads are available on their website ("RAW Responsibility - Responsible Supply Chain", 2019). Accordingly, it can be stated that G-Star's aims for transparency, not only towards consumers but also towards its manufacturing partners.

The brand's value for transparency in their supply chain was identified on Facebook, such as through the hashtag #whomademyclothes. Correspondingly, the brand has developed the manufacturing map on their website, which provides information on the manufacturing location for every product that is sold in the brand's webshop. The interactive map includes factory information such as location, gender division amongst workers and obtained certifications. An example can be found in appendix D2. Moreover, a variety of documents is available on the sustainability webpage that define sustainable materials and explain why they can be regarded as sustainable as well as a social and labour guideline explaining the social and labour standards that constitute the Code of Conduct G-Star operates by (G-Star

RAW, 2018; G-Star RAW, 2019). With these practices G-Star confirms to comply completely with the DSFW feature of transparency.

A second major theme that was identified on the brand's Facebook page is encouraging a global movement for sustainable fashion. Remarkably, G-Star has published several reports on its (testing) methods for environmental production. For example, one of the reports entails a detailed description of the way in which G-Star tested wastewater discharge and ensured it to be free from hazardous chemicals (G-Star RAW, 2018). Another report entails a guide published by G-Star and intended leather manufacturers in which they state "the purpose of this guideline is to provide information to leather (goods) manufacturers to enable them to produce leather according to the latest state of the art science and technology" (G-Star RAW, 2018). Sharing methods for sustainable production was found to be unique among both traditional and sustainability focused brands that have been included in this research. Whereas no academic literature has been found that address this occurrence, perhaps due to its innovative and unfamiliar nature, a brand sharing its discoveries regarding sustainable supply chains can be argued to illustrate sincere care for a sustainable industry. Making production techniques available for all stakeholders, including competition, strongly increases G-Stars credibility regarding its CSR efforts.

It can be concluded that the sustainability image on Facebook is largely in line with their CSR profile in regard to the brand's value of transparency and advocating for industry change towards sustainable fashion. The theme of *transparency* was largely represented on Facebook and the brand published a large number of sustainability documents on their website, including translations to increase transparency towards manufacturers. Even more, the brand provides factories and other stakeholders with their discoveries on sustainable production processes. While combining all this information in a CSR report would contribute to a more structured communication, the brand shows a genuine interest in contributing to sustainability and industry change and, surprisingly, seems to have a sustainability strategy akin to sustainability focused brands in educating and sharing knowledge on sustainable production.

5.   Conclusion and discussion

5.1 Discussion

One must remain careful in drawing conclusions on greenwashing based on one to one comparisons between brands. After all, brands all have different features and their sustainability efforts should be regarded in context. However, putting brands next to each other has been valuable in reporting contrasting approaches to sustainability. Researching the Facebook page and CSR reports of six fashion brands that each claimed to be 'sustainable' in their own ways has provided insights in the sustainability images fashion brands have created through two main channels for communicating sustainability, being Facebook and CSR reports.

The initial approach of the research entailed a division between three sustainability focused brands and three sales focused brands which corresponded to one another in either a social sustainability focus, an environmental sustainability focus, or product focus. It was expected that sustainability focused brands would show a stronger sense of credibility and sincerity in its CSR efforts, whereas sales focused brands were expected to provide disinformation regarding sustainability efforts and show signs of greenwashing and bluewashing. Interestingly, the analysis has led to an alternative segmentation; similarities have been found that enabled pair-forming between the six brands that differs from the original pairs that were created based on sustainability or product focus. Rather, the pairs are based on the brands' extent of coherent, thus credible sustainability communication on social media and CSR reports.

Accordingly, to answer the research question, which examined the extent to which sustainability efforts communicated by fashion brands on social media are in line with CSR reports, two of the six brands have showed a strong coherency between its sustainability efforts communicated on social media and in its CSR report. Armed Angels and Loop.a life illustrated the sincerest motivations for sustainability efforts and neither forms of greenwashing nor bluewashing were identified. On the contrary, Gap and Zara have shown a minimal connection between its Facebook image and CSR report regarding sustainability efforts. Weak sustainability images on Facebook were combined with multiple forms of greenwashing and bluewashing both within and between channels. The remaining two brands, Nudie Jeans and G-Star showed a similar level of coherency between its Facebook and CSR report image, which falls in between the other two pairs. While the brands showed reasonably sincere motivations for their sustainability efforts, some forms of greenwashing

and bluewashing were identified in their CSR communication. While the results of Armed Angels and Loop.a life as sustainability focused brands, and the results of Gap and Zara as sales focused brands are in line with the expectations, Nudie Jeans and G-Star showed the most unexpected results. The six brands will be discussed according to the abovementioned three pairs that have been formed based on the results.

The first pair includes the two sustainability focused brands Armed Angels and Loop.a life. Armed Angels showed a strong focus on social sustainability through promoting social equality. The efforts on Facebook and in its report were identified to being largely in line with one another. On the other hand, Loop.a life emphasizes the environmental side of sustainability through circularity values in both the report and on social media. As a Dutch brand Loop.a life aims to enhance the Dutch sustainability image within the fashion industry, which was communicated in clear, concise and coherent manner through both channels. The strongest feature of both brands is that they provide more than a sustainable alternative to fashion. They propose a perspective towards sustainability issues that stimulates thought and encourages behavioural change. Specifically, Armed Angels posed the question as to why we, as a society desiring sustainable change, tend to focus on reducing the problem rather than creating a solution. This is in line with the argument made by Hollender and Breen (2010) who state that the majority of current CSR strategies are about selective and compartmentalized programs rather than holistic and systemic change. In other words, organizations are often recognized to participate in sustainability efforts to become less bad, rather than good (Visser, 2011). On the other hand, Loop.a life acted as an environmental advocate aiming for a change in the perception of waste in the largely wasteful fashion industry. The 5R model as proposed by Strähle and Müller (2017) favours Loop.a life as the sustainability images demonstrated the inclusion of all 5 R's. In addition, as oftentimes pre- and post-consumer waste still follow a linear life cycle, Loop.a life encourages a shift from this disposal culture to a circular approach and, most importantly, a more critical evaluation of waste. These findings are strong indicators that set them aside from other brands. Armed Angels and Loop.a life surpass the stage of sole exposure of efforts, aiming for industry change. The definition of CSR as proposed by the Commission of the European Communities (2001) is "A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" This research did not include interactions with stakeholders, but it can be concluded with confidence that both brands were found to include social as well as environmental efforts in

their business operations on a voluntary basis, indicating sincere concern for people and planet.

The second pair showed rather opposite signs of sincerity towards CSR practices on Facebook and in CSR reports compared to the previous pair. The sustainability Facebook images of the two sales focused brands Gap and Zara were found to include forms of greenwashing and bluewashing, and were found to be both inconsistent on itself as well as divergent from the CSR report. While CSR efforts have been identified showing interest in social and environmental sustainability among both brands, the motivation behind these efforts and the way they are approached create a clear separation between these and the previous pair of brands. To illustrate, Gap showed a limited amount of Facebook content on sustainability issues, which additionally were identified as untruthful, resulting in several forms of greenwashing and bluewashing. Moreover, a patriotic attitude, that can be related to self-centeredness, was established on both channels (Hofstede, 2011). On the other hand, rather than indirectly admitting to ulterior motives for CSR efforts, the sales focused brand Zara was found to have different priorities all together. The Facebook image depicted an uninformed and somewhat ignorant brand with a lack of focus in regard to sustainability. In comparison to the extremely extensive yet unclear report Zara illustrated a weak sustainability image including several forms of bluewashing. Whereas Gap was found to provide disinformation in its report, the report of Zara entailed an abundance of (irrelevant) information. Referring back to the definition of CSR as established by the Commission of the European Communities (2001), it can be concluded that despite the presence of several social and environmental efforts, these have not been integrated fully in the business operations. Neither do the brands clearly indicate a voluntary basis in regard to these efforts. Even more, the inclusion of a CSR strategy currently seems to be based on and approached as a consumer demand that both brands recognized to fulfil which, as in-depth analysis has pointed out, is done poorly.

The brands Nudie Jeans and G-Star form the last pair and have been grouped together based on its similar extent of coherence in CSR image between the channels, which was found to be somewhere in between the other two pairs. Interestingly, this pair includes a sustainability focused brand as well as a sales focused brand. While the final evaluation might be similar, the two brands show interesting approaches from different starting points. First of all, among the sustainability focused brands, Nudie Jeans showed most signs of using CSR as a competitive advantage as some forms of greenwashing have been identified. However, many truthful brand efforts that corresponded between Facebook and the report

have been recognized as well, especially in regard to the strong focus on social equality and fair labour. On the other hand, G-Star was found to be the most sincere regarding its sustainability efforts among the sales focused brands. The brand is unique in its strong approach to transparency and information sharing, including discoveries and strategies on sustainable manufacturing processes. In other words, Nudie Jeans appears as a sincere sustainability focused brand which possibly took too much example from successful multinationals or somehow has failed in some departments, such as social media and CSR communication, resulting in some forms of greenwashing in its CSR strategy. On the flipside, G-Star, as an initially sales focused brand, seems to have recognized the necessity for sustainable industry change. They show many valuable efforts that support their CSR credibility. As it remains a sales focused brand some minor controversies have been found. However, efforts that oppose this "sales focused" label have been recognized as well and G-Star seems to be successfully on its way in changing its sales focused image. Again, referring back to CSR as defined by the Commission of the European Communities (2001) both brands are found to fully integrate environmental and social practices in their business operations, however lack skills in communicating the voluntary basis of it.

5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The discussion of the three pairs assisted in highlighting the different features that were found for the six brand cases. Rather than being assigned to delineated categories, fashion brands and other industry stakeholders can be regarded to hold a position on a continuous scale of "sincerity", measured by the extent to which the sustainability image on social media harmonizes with the CSR report. In other words, this research proposes the idea of a 'sincerity scale' that can be used to measure credibility of CSR communication among organizations. Two models for sustainable fashion served as a foundation to the research design, being the DSFW features for sustainable fashion and the Sins of Greenwashing proposed by Terra Choice (2010). However, brands were found to repeatedly refer back to a selection of features, such as Fairtrade and Recycled & Reused, while others were excluded entirely, such as the feature Handmade. Additionally, the recurring features Organic and Recycled and Reused, were often inseparable from the feature Responsible. It illustrates the lack of mutual exclusivity of this framework resulting in the combination of all three features into one, rather general theme, namely *minimization of environmental impact*. On the other hand, the framework as provided by Terra Choice (2010) lacks inclusion of the social factor. While certain greenwashing and environmentalism research can be argued to be extended to

bluewashing and social responsibility, scientific research is needed to fully justify this extension as well as to propose alternative, improved models for bluewashing and social responsibility. In other words, this study highlights the lack of both models for sustainability as well as greenwashing and bluewashing frameworks and proposes future research to develop more detailed guidelines for sustainability in the fashion industry. This is, to establish a suitable combination of models in order to create a strong framework that examines sincerity in CSR communication.

Furthermore, it might be valuable to address the difference between brand *identity*, meaning the way in which brands aim to be perceived, and brand *image*, meaning the way in which the public perceives brands (Nandan, 2005). Whereas successful branding can align the two, Rokka and Canniford (2016) have argued that social media can lead to a gap. Through user-generated content consumers have gained the ability to shape a brand image according to their own perceptions of a brand, which might not be conform to the desired image a brand aims for. This research was based on only the researcher's perception of CSR communication, i.e. brand image. Follow up research on this topic including interviews with consumers or extending the research with an inclusion of brand consumer interaction, rather than one-way brand-to-consumer communication, could result in an enhanced brand image. Similarly, follow-up research should include interviews with internals, such as CSR managers, to obtain insights and motivations behind certain efforts and communication strategies, encompassing the brand identity. As this study aimed to examine the sincerity of CSR communication on social media, future research analysing the coherence of brand identity and brand image might provide valuable additional insights. That is, when understanding the identity brands want to convey, the level of sincerity can be evaluated more accurately. Perhaps some brands do not aim to be recognized as 'the most sustainable fashion brand', but rather as the most fashionable brand that is also sustainable. Communicating as such can still be concluded as largely sincere when understanding its identity.

5.3 Strengths and societal implications

Similar to climate sceptics, some stakeholders have remained sceptic regarding greenwashing and bluewashing, and have stressed the rarity of "CSR-washing" (Pope & Waeraas, 2015). However, this research supports the dominant perception that greenwashing and bluewashing issues are, in fact, present in the current global fashion industry. Two sales focused brands have illustrated severe forms of green and bluewashing, while attempting to

communicate an image of sustainability, and even some sustainability focused brands could not be excluded entirely from greenwashing and bluewashing issues. Findings of this research illustrate the necessity to substitute unconditional codes of conduct and inconclusive guidelines around social and environmental brand operations with hard laws and legal regulations. This is, in order to cease major unsustainable business practices as well as to minimize greenwashing and bluewashing. Due to its high impact, the fashion industry especially needs to take responsibility for its environmental and social harm and any form of flexibility should be precluded. As illustrated by this research, failing to do so can lead to organizations misleading its consumers with a false or inaccurate green or blue status that does not only lead to false support to unsustainable organizations, but also holds negative effects for genuinely sustainable brands. For example, through Zara's bluewashing claims in regards to fair labour the value of such term is diminished, therefore creating unjust sceptical views towards other brands that are truly involved in fair labour practices.

This study examined the extent to which fashion brands create a credible and coherent CSR image across two main channels, namely social media and CSR reports. Evolving from a categorization of sustainability versus sales focused brands, the objective of this study was to provide insights in the justification or rejection of this categorization and was reached successfully. The findings shed light on this relatively unexplored topic within the industry, revealing that being sustainability focused or sales focused does not directly correlate to the degree of sincerity in CSR communication. Even more, the cases of Nudie Jeans and G-Star reveal that a sustainability focused brand cannot categorically be regarded as the more sustainable alternative to a sales focused brand with a strong CSR implementation. Moreover, this study confirms the perception that all brands must be regarded as individual cases that are unable to be generalized. Therefore, the inclusion of a case study as well as the focus on multiple brands within each category has complimented the research. Focusing on fewer brands might have resulted in rather opposite findings which would have wrongfully confirmed preconception on sustainability versus sales focused brands in regards to their CSR communication. The extensive amount of posts included in the data sample has enabled this research to identify greenwashing and bluewashing on Facebook. Furthermore, the decision to include both sustainability posts as well as non-sustainability posts has shaped valuable contexts around the posts. Similarly, this has created a balance board drawing the sustainability image into perspective. This research has successfully reached its goals in analysing fashion brand's motivations for, and coherency between CSR communication, which has provided a sense of sincerity regarding CSR efforts. While some brands have

successfully passed the sincerity test, being able to create links with several (scientific) sustainability models, others illustrated stronger links to greenwashing and bluewashing models.

It can be stated that all brands, whether sales focused or sustainability focused, and whether sincere or not, operate based on consumer demands. The difference between brands results from the demands that are employed, i.e. cheap and fashionable versus sustainability. Research conducted by von Wallpach, Hemetsberger and Espersen (2017) concluded that brand identity is not created solely by brands, but is a co-construct between brands and stakeholders, such as consumers. In addition to the earlier mentioned gap between brand identity and brand image though user generated content, this research has, in line with prior studies, highlighted the pivotal role of consumers in the current markets. This draws the question of how consumers can assist shaping the industry towards a sustainable future. Perhaps the consumer's unconscious role in leading businesses can be utilized into an active ringleader for sustainability.

We live in an information-based society in which knowledge, information and technology are main sources of power and control. In combination with high circulation of information and large accessibility to information sharing channels, such as social media, this has assisted organizational transparency. Brands are able to use several channels to create transparency and consumers have become highly knowledgeable of business practices, thus more powerful in shaping the industry. This knowledge and power on the consumer's side has come together with sceptic views and strict approaches in reviewing fashion brands' sincerity. This research has illustrated that brands must be cautious with creating an insincere image for a sensitive concept as sustainability. While for now, brands seem to be able to get away with vague, inconclusive statements regarding CSR practices, our information technology society will only develop further, make it increasingly difficult for businesses to keep up a façade of sustainability. Sooner or later misconducts will come to light and insincere brands will be overthrown.

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Appendix A: Facebook sample sizes

Facebook posts Armed Angels

Netvizz v1.6

Getting posts between 2018-11-18T00:00:00+0000 and 2019-04-01T23:59:59+0000.

pid: 1019484824737399 / until:2018-09-10T15:04:59+0000 (100,2883584)

Retrieved data for 64 posts.

Aggregate Analysis

64 posts covering the period from 2018-11-18 15:01:00 to 2019-03-31 19:00:00
33 comments (0.515625 average)
1167 reactions (18.234375 average)

Facebook posts Loop.a life

Netvizz v1.6

Getting posts between 2018-07-04T00:00:00+0000 and 2019-04-01T23:59:59+0000.

pid: 932960106836417 / until:2017-12-27T09:34:14+0000 (100,2621440)

Retrieved data for 58 posts.

Aggregate Analysis

58 posts covering the period from 2018-07-04 20:00:53 to 2019-03-19 21:38:22
35 comments (0.60344827586207 average)
703 reactions (12.120689655172 average)

Facebook posts Nudie Jeans

Netvizz v1.6

Getting posts between 2018-10-12T00:00:00+0000 and 2019-04-01T23:59:59+0000.

pid: 328743180007 / until:2018-06-24T11:00:30+0000 (100,2621440)

Retrieved data for 64 posts.

Aggregate Analysis

64 posts covering the period from 2018-10-12 16:00:37 to 2019-03-31 13:00:37
1928 comments (30.125 average)
60607 reactions (946.984375 average)

Facebook posts Gap

Netvizz v1.6

Getting posts between 2017-04-01T00:00:00+0000 and 2019-04-01T23:59:59+0000.

pid: 14856729724 / until:2017-06-05T15:59:59+0000 (100,2883584)
pid: 14856729724 / until:2017-02-02T13:52:46+0000 (100,4718592)

Retrieved data for 140 posts.

Aggregate Analysis

140 posts covering the period from 2017-04-01 18:00:00 to 2019-03-08 22:25:58
26688 comments (190.62857142857 average)
367677 reactions (2626.2642857143 average)

Facebook posts Zara

Netvizz v1.6

Getting posts between 2018-05-29T00:00:00+0000 and 2019-04-01T23:59:59+0000.

pid: 33331950906 / until:2019-02-10T09:01:02+0000 (100,2883584)
pid: 33331950906 / until:2018-10-19T08:00:09+0000 (100,4718592)
pid: 33331950906 / until:2018-06-14T19:00:45+0000 (100,5242880)
pid: 33331950906 / until:2018-03-15T14:31:46+0000 (100,5767168)

Retrieved data for 320 posts.

Aggregate Analysis

320 posts covering the period from 2018-05-29 11:40:17 to 2019-03-30 10:00:52
13712 comments (42.85 average)
497494 reactions (1554.66875 average)

Facebook posts G-Star

Netvizz v1.6

Getting posts between 2017-12-21T00:00:00+0000 and 2019-04-01T23:59:59+0000.

pid: 234407620388 / until:2018-09-21T15:00:14+0000 (100,2883584)
pid: 234407620388 / until:2017-11-18T13:59:59+0000 (100,4718592)

Retrieved data for 189 posts.

Aggregate Analysis

189 posts covering the period from 2017-12-21 18:44:00 to 2019-04-01 17:00:15
6563 comments (34.724867724868 average)
670991 reactions (3550.2169312169 average)

Appendix B: Sensitizing concept list

Additional sustainability efforts
Efforts taken by the brand regarding sustainability, other than sustainable products and production processes
E.g. organizing an event to educate on CSR, having an internal staff meeting on waste and landfill.

- **Events**
- **Internal meetings**
- **Media features (TV appearance, book feature etc.)**
- **product launch**

Brand history
addressing the brands history, how they started
e.g. "it started with a pair of dry's" (Nudie Jeans)

Brand representative
anyone depicted on the Facebook page/mentioned in report
ethnicity, gender, body shape etcetera of models and other representators of the brand
e.g. staff, workers and models

Certifications & membership
Addressing the brand's certain star labels or certifications.
Also includes awards
Addressing the brand's membership to certain sustainability organizations
e.g. Fairtrade certified, TM Lenzing, member of FWF

Criticizing industry
expressing critique on current industry practices, organizations, oppositions
e.g. conventional brands, World Economic Forum

Donations & foundations
Donations made or to be made to a certain party
Foundations by the brand
e.g. "we will donate 10% of every purchase made this weekend"

Fair labour
addressing fair labour (issues), health and safety of workers

General information sharing
Sharing general information sustainability matters

- **Sustainability encouragement**
  brand communication that expresses forms of encouragement of advocacy for sustainability matters

- **Material information**

addressing (un)sustainability of certain materials

e.g. dry denim (nudie jeans)

- **Sustainability issues (environmental or social)**

addressing currently existing issues regarding sustainability

e.g. overproduction, labour situations

Does not include anything related to brand efforts so it is different from "providing information"

Does NOT include "Material use" or "production process"

No chemical use

Mentioning the brand does NOT use certain harming chemicals

e.g. pesticides, chlorine, heavy metals

Production process

describing or informing on production processes of the brand

Does not include "general information sharing"

Product advertisements

How many posts include a form of product advertising?

Are products advertised

- Commercially (e.g. 50% discount)
- Through a focus on sustainability (e.g. garment made of organic cotton)

Providing information

Elaborating or explaining a statement that is made by the brand about sustainability efforts. Also includes links to the company website and other external sources.

e.g. explaining what the Sustainable Fashion award stands for after winning it (Nudie Jeans)

Does not include explaining on general sustainability matters so it is different from "general information sharing"

(raw) material use

Mentioning (more) sustainable materials the brand uses

e.g. recycled jeans, organic cotton

Social issues

Addressing social issues such as racism and discrimination

Sustainable collections

addressing a collection or product from a collection that is specifically sustainable

e.g. capsule collection (Armed angels) or Most Sustainable Jeans Ever (G-Star)

Togetherness

creating a sense of togetherness, mutual responsibility

e.g. "together we can make a difference", "community", "our planet"

Verified partners

Working together or give support to verified organizations
e.g. Fashion Revolution Week, DSFW
organizations can overlap with "verified supporters"

Verified supporters

Implying to be supported by certain verified organizations
Fair Wear Foundation, GOTS, PETA
organizations can overlap with "verified partners"

Holidays and (inter)national events

how do brands respond to holidays and (inter)national events
e.g. Black Friday vs Green Friday, Christmas sales vs looking back on sustainability
achievements of the past year.

Appendix C: Codes, categories and themes

Code	Category	Theme
product advertisement: commercial	sustainable vs unsustainable advertising of products	sustainable advertising strategies
product advertisement: sustainability		
Join Life collection	sustainable collections	
Most Sustainable Jeans Ever ...		
Asian female model	equal gender and ethnic representation	social equality
coloured male model ...		
full partner monitoring	fair labour	
equal pay amongst men and women ...		
brand representative: staff	employees and workers	encouraging a global movement towards sustainable fashion
brand representative: workers India ...		
encouraging reuse of garments	durability of clothing	
value: extend lifespan of clothes ...		
Black Friday: advocating against consumerism	oppose commercial holidays and events (to address sustainability instead)	
Green Friday ...		
togetherness: our planet	togetherness	
togetherness: thanking for support ...		
criticizing conventional fashion brands	criticizing current industry	
concern for resource depletion ...		
providing an alternative	advocating for industry change	
value: innovation ...		
general information sharing: overproduction	educating on sustainability	
general information sharing: unsustainability of denim ...		
international event: world water day	external (inter)national social and environmental events	
week for waste reduction ...		
internal meeting on circularity	recycle & reuse	minimization of environmental impact
production process: reuse and recycle ...		
partner: European Week for Waste Reduction	waste reduction	
maintain zero-waste policy ...		
production process: limiting water use	resource saving	

production process: reduce CO2 footprint		
production process: energy saving …		
Touch Nothing Toxic campaign	preclude chemicals	
production process: less chemicals …		
nominated: green fashion talent award	environmental certifications	
certification: tm lyocell …		
material use: organic cotton	using more sustainable raw materials	
material use: linen …		
goals: NL as leader in circular textile …	local leader	contributing to sustainability through supporting local economies
value: stimulate local economy	local material use	
locally produced wool …		
verified partners: local manufacturers	local partnerships	
verified partner: DSFW …		
providing information: production guide	elaborate on supply chain	organizational transparency
#whomademyclothes …		
explain criteria Sustainable Fashion award	elaborate on sustainability achievements	
explain RAW responsibility …		
pay employees' children education	donations to external charities	charity donations
donation: National Garment Workers Federation …		
anniversary Gap Foundation	foundations and programs initiated by brand	
donation: clothes collecting programme …		
addressing vegan lifestyle	veganism	stimulating veganism
material use: no leather		
international event: Black Friday	participate in commercial holidays and events	Greenwashing and bluewashing on Facebook
holiday: Christmas sale		
holiday: Christmas promotion contest …		
"green" collection	sin of vagueness	
#GapForGood		
production process: acid-wash	sin of fibbing	
production process: natural fertilisers and pesticides	sin of lesser of two evils	
water friendly farming	sin of vagueness	
advertising animal fur	opposing veganism	
advertising animal skin		
explaining development of sustainable collection	outliers	

advertising crowdfunding for product	
purchase link to book	
Caucasian child model	

Appendix D: Supportive examples

Appendix D1
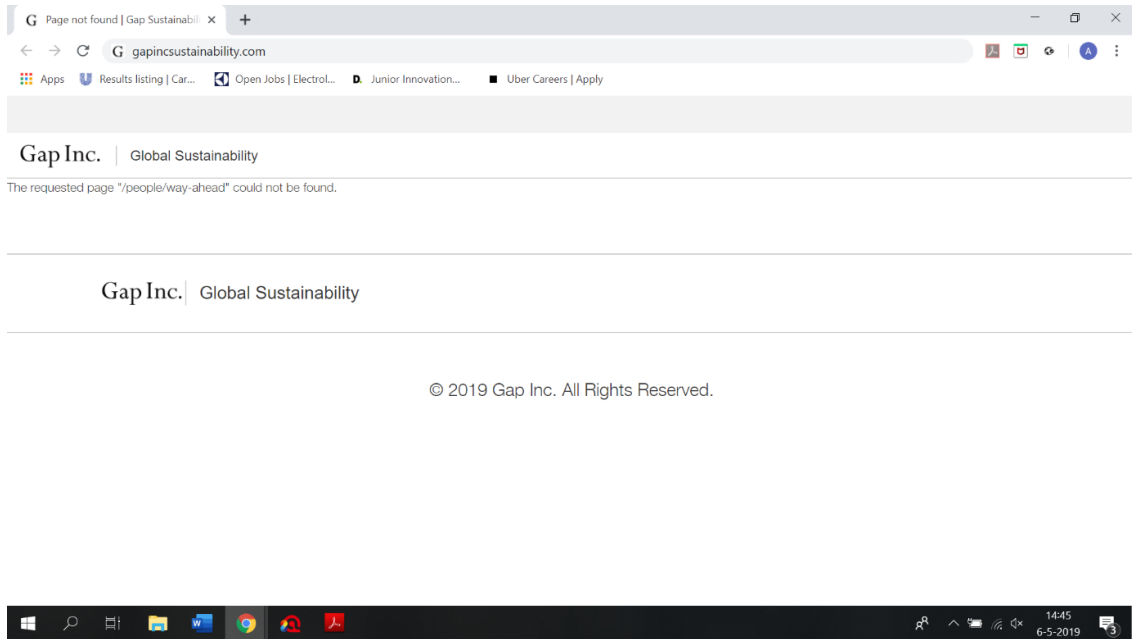
Gap: inaccurate reference from CSR report ("learn more about Way Ahead program")

Appendix D2

G-Star organizational transparency: manufacturing map