Sustainability as Identity

A qualitative analysis of Patagonia's presentation of sustainability in brand identity work on LinkedIn

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable fashion has gained prominence due to growing concerns about waste production and excessive clothing consumption. A new market segment called sustainable fashion has emerged emphasizes incorporating fair trading principles, ethical labor practices, and organic materials to minimize environmental harm. Fashion companies have recognized the increasing interest in green and sustainable products, leading them to manufacture more environmentally friendly collections, while other companies, like Patagonia, have made sustainability a core objective and built their business and marketing strategies around it, focusing their branding efforts on sustainability. Brand identity is crucial for brands to stand out in a crowded market. In the past, physical marketing channels like billboards and printed magazines were used, but with the digitalization of the fashion industry, social media has become a powerful tool for brand establishment and reputation building. Social media branding has emerged as a relevant topic, offering online platforms for creating, sharing, and interacting with information.

This shift offered consumers the ability to make informed, selective, and autonomous purchasing decisions by relying on recommendations from peers and brands on social media. However, that also made it harder for brands to keep the interest of customers and distinguish themselves from the rest. Despite the growing interest in sustainable fashion, academic research on how slow fashion companies succeed in constructing their brand identity on platforms like LinkedIn remains limited. LinkedIn, initially a job-hunting and recruitment platform, has evolved into an identity facilitator for companies. It offers an opportunity for businesses to not only recruit top talent but also build their brands. Furthermore, this project presents an external view of the brand identity and social media strategy of Patagonia in relation to sustainability that could guide other brands in implementing a similar approach on LinkedIn.

The study establishes that the brand is strategically utilizing LinkedIn as a platform to illustrate its social and corporate responsibility by highlighting its sustainability actions through political discussions, leading to expanding its brand community. Patagonia possesses a strong connection with its audience by putting a face to the brand and offering a space where users can experience both activism and fashion.

KEYWORDS: Patagonia, Sustainability, Fashion, Brand Identity, LinkedIn, Social media

1.Introduction

Sustainable fashion has gained significant attention in recent years due to the growing recognition of environmental issues such as waste production and clothing over-consumption, and the fashion industry has identified this as a market opportunity and developed a new sector called sustainable fashion, also known as eco-fashion or slow fashion, to address these concerns (Sailer et al., 2022; Busalim et al., 2022). Sustainable fashion goes beyond being a trend; it encompasses ethical practices, incorporating fair trading principles, labor rights, and a commitment to minimizing environmental harm by using organic materials (Mukendi et al., 2020). With an increasing interest in green and sustainable products, fashion companies have started manufacturing more environmentally friendly collections, utilizing natural garments or recycled materials, in response to consumer demands. However, some companies, such as Patagonia, have gone even further by making sustainability a core objective and building their entire business and marketing strategies around it. Patagonia's brand identity is strongly associated with sustainability, distinguishing it from other fashion labels and attracting like-minded consumers who value ethical and eco-conscious practices. Brand identity is a crucial aspect of communication studies as it defines a brand's unique features and establishes its market advantage over competitors (Nandan, 2005). In the past, marketers relied on physical marketing channels like billboards, printed magazines, and newspapers to promote brands and gain recognition. However, with the transition to digitalization in the fashion industry, marketing activities have been influenced by economic and social factors, leading to a greater reliance on digital platforms to reach broader audiences, increase purchases, and engage customers (Portela et al., 2021).

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses to establish their presence and build brand reputation. It plays a significant role in contemporary society, with social media branding being a highly relevant and growing topic (Horst and Hitters, 2020). Social media platforms provide a diverse and evolving technological infrastructure that enables businesses to communicate and collaborate with their target audience in novel ways (Kane, 2017). Celebrities, just like brands, also use social media to connect directly with their fans and maintain a strong presence (Yan, 2011). In today's digital age, consumers heavily rely on social media to gather information, resulting in a shift from traditional media. This shift has made it crucial for businesses to leverage social media effectively (Schivinski & Dabrowski,

2014). It has revolutionized the way businesses operate and has become an essential tool for achieving success. By strategically utilizing social media, businesses can not only increase customer engagement and connection but also strengthen their brand identity (Kadam & Ayarekar, 2014; Baptista et al., 2017).

Fashion companies, aiming to boost profits, have invested in digital marketing strategies to tap into the immense potential of social media. They can now reach thousands, if not millions, of users online through their social media accounts, facilitating the stimulation of consumer activities and driving sales (Walker, 2006). In an effort to boost profits, fashion companies began investing in digital marketing strategies. As a result, the fashion industry now contributes 2% of the global GDP and is projected to reach $3 trillion by 2030 (Ariella, 2022). Sustainable fashion has emerged as a response to environmental concerns and clothing over-consumption. It encompasses ethical practices and the use of organic materials, with some fashion companies prioritizing sustainability in their core objectives and branding strategies. The shift to digitalization has prompted the fashion industry to rely on social media as a vital tool for brand promotion, engagement, and identity formation. Successful utilization of social media platforms allows businesses to reach wider audiences and establish stronger connections with consumers. As a result, the fashion industry continues to thrive, contributing significantly to the global economy. Therefore, this project aims to focus on investigating the following research question:

How sustainability is presented in the brand identity construction of Patagonia on LinkedIn?

This project applies qualitative content analysis as a methodological approach to a dataset of 250 LinkedIn posts, gathered in the form of screenshots. Qualitative content analysis has been used before in similar research focusing on breast cancer narratives in social media (Foley et al., 2015). Additionally, this research has social significance since many fashion companies want to profit from the portrayal of circular companies without implying it in practice. Similar to any other enterprise, fashion companies must establish a robust brand to differentiate themselves and endure in the market. A brand encompasses not just the name assigned to a product, service, or corporation, but a complete range of tangible and intangible qualities and convictions (Ahonen, 2008) that sets it apart from rivals. As a result, crafting a brand is a multifaceted and laborious undertaking. Moreover, sustainable fashion is not just limited to the tangible product being sold but also conveys a message about the potential positive impact and advancements that can be made. Therefore, social media can

serve as a useful tool for sharing information on sustainable fashion, allowing consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions by relying on recommendations from both peers and brands (Michaela & Orna, 2015).

Similarly, this research is theoretically relevant because brand identity work via social media has been a topic of academic investigation (Horst & Hitters, 2020). However, there is little academic research on how slow fashion companies are succeeding in this particularly on LinkedIn as a platform. The research of Marin and Nila (2021) discovered that social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn have become dominant channels for business growth since they facilitate recruitment processes and attract the best employees suitable for the job. However, LinkedIn, from a job-hunting and recruitment platform, began transforming into an identity facilitator with companies using their profiles not only to scout for people but to build their brands. Moreover, over the years, sustainability as an ideology in business has been abused by marketers as a competitive advantage to generate financial gain and brand loyalty but also brought more confusion in customers' minds (Morelli, 2011). A further investigation into the usage of sustainability from environmentally friendly fashion brands in their branding on LinkedIn possesses academic relevance.

1.1. Thesis Overview

The following section will present an overview of the thesis structure. Beginning with Section 2, a relevant theoretical framework is built, that is used as a base for this project, including a literature review on sustainability, social media marketing, brand image, and personality which are key terms in brand identity. A brand identity was also investigated as a concept on its own, as well as in relation to the brand identity of Patagonia.

Section 3 discusses the methodology used in the research, including the choice of qualitative research method and purposive sampling. The study's main concepts and data collection and analysis processes are described, along with ethical principles and the overall credibility and reliability of the research.

Section 4 presents the results of the analysis, which focused on Patagonia's LinkedIn content, including the types of content published, the purpose of the content, the emotions communicated, and other elements used. The analysis is compared to the theoretical

framework created for this research, and the emerging categories contribute to answering the research question.

Finally, Section 5 provides a discussion of the findings aiming to answer the research question. The study's overall conclusion is presented as well as a part dedicated to possible limitations and suggestions for future research concerning sustainability as a brand identity factor on social media.

2.Theoretical Framework

To explore Patagonia's incorporation of sustainability into its brand identity on LinkedIn, the following section will build a theoretical framework on brand identity and social media as a branding tool. Moreover, the section examines the literature on addressing the effect of sustainable fashion on consumer behavior and includes a theoretical examination of the concept of brand identity, and how brands nowadays are catching customers' attraction. The following chapter includes a literature review on the concept of sustainability, an analysis of what brand identity, image, and loyalty consist of as well as how LinkedIn is used as a platform by businesses.

2.1. Sustainable Fashion and Consumer behavior

Sustainable fashion emerged as a response to the increasing awareness of the fashion industry's detrimental impact on the environment (Jung & Jin, 2014). The term became closely associated with fair working conditions in production factories and the use of organic and environmentally friendly materials, transparency, and certifications (Joergens, 2006; Henninger, 2015). Although sustainable fashion initially faced negative perceptions, the anti-fur campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s contributed to a shift in attitudes (Joergens, 2006). Sustainable fashion, also known as slow fashion, prioritizes ethical manufacturing practices and consumption patterns that reduce the associated impacts (Mandaric et al., 2022). It emphasizes quality over quantity, focusing on the production and consumption of high-quality products rather than large quantities of items (Mandaric et al., 2022). The fashion industry has long been criticized as a major environmental polluter, particularly due to intensive chemical processes involved in dyeing and drying garments (De Brito et al., 2008). This highlights the potential conflict between sustainability and an industry that promotes trends and constantly dictates what is in or out of fashion (Walker, 2006).

Fast fashion, which dominates the market, stands in contrast to the principles of slow fashion. Fast fashion has a negative environmental impact due to practices such as the

production of clothing containing plastic fibers (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Additionally, the relatively low prices of fast fashion items have led to increased consumption and shorter lifespans of garments (Jackson & Shaw, 2009). However, there is a growing interest among consumers in green and sustainable products. In response to this demand, fashion companies have begun manufacturing more environmentally friendly collections using natural fabrics or recycled materials. Sustainable fashion arose as a term to address the negative environmental impact of the fashion industry. It is associated with fair working conditions, the use of organic materials, transparency, and certifications. While sustainable fashion initially faced skepticism, it gained traction through campaigns against fur. Slow fashion focuses on ethical manufacturing practices, reduced consumption, and the production and consumption of high-quality products. Fast fashion, on the other hand, dominates the market but has negative environmental consequences. The growing interest in sustainable products has prompted fashion companies to adapt and offer more environmentally friendly options.

Consumer behavior encompasses a wide range of actions, from purchasing a few items to satisfying desires through thousands of purchases. According to Solomon and Rabot (2004), consumers are individuals who acquire goods to meet their needs and eventually dispose of them, constituting the complete consumption process. Consumer involvement, driven by internal feelings, plays a crucial role in shaping interest in specific fields or products (Mandaric et al., 2022). As noted by Caniato et al. (2012), this has led established fashion brands to position themselves in the green market segment by transforming their business models and supply chain structures. Kong et al. (2021) also found that customers exhibit a greater inclination to purchase items from brands that demonstrate social responsibility. Yunus and Michalisin (2016) suggest that companies have incorporated sustainable needs into the concept of "Green Supply Chain Management" as a competitive advantage, which involves integrating environmental considerations into supply chain management. This particular type of fashion is often referred to as eco-fashion or green fashion, as it encompasses the production and sale of clothes with sustainability-oriented objectives (Shen et al., 2013). However, according to Caniato et al. (2012), the adoption of green practices by fashion organizations is driven by corporate values, personal goals of management, or market requirements.

Market needs are influenced by customer needs, as highlighted in Paulins and Hillery's (2009) book on ethics in fashion, cited by Shen et al. (2013). For consumers who

prioritize responsible purchasing habits, sustainable fashion becomes a means to fulfill their basic psychological needs. This argument is supported by Kong et al. (2021), who found that 70 percent of customers are more inclined to buy from environmentally conscious companies rather than environmentally irresponsible ones. However, Saicheua et al. (2012) suggest that there is insufficient evidence to conclusively state that consumers prioritize sustainability in their shopping habits. Nonetheless, this research supports the notion that retailers often lack transparency, resulting in a lack of trust among customers. This could be attributed to the challenges faced by fashion companies in implementing sustainable fashion practices, including disagreements on the meaning of sustainability, perceived trade-offs, and limitations of sustainable fashion strategies (Hur & Cassidy, 2019). To reshape consumers' purchasing habits, it is crucial to employ consumer-focused marketing strategies that demonstrate an understanding of customers' needs and address the obstacles that influence their buying decisions (Mandaric et al., 2022).

2.2. Sustainability and Patagonia

Sustainability, even though perceived as multidimensional and complex, could serve as an advantage for businesses when implemented in the business core of companies, as well as lead to both social and economic impact (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Patagonia, the fashion brand, is recognized for its ability to use sustainability as a catalyst for a multinational corporation, making it a leading example of a socially responsible company worldwide (Reinhardt, 2000). Patagonia was founded back in 1973 in Ventura, California by Yvon Chouinard, who was a climber and spent his time in nature, which lead to the company's environmental approach from the beginning (Patagonia, 2023). The American retailer grew globally since then with more than 10 stores operating internationally and factories in 16 countries gaining commercial success with its innovative essence (Patagonia, 2023).

Patagonia's passion for sustainability is visible in multiple ways such as being integrated into the company's mission statement which is the following: "Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis" (Gasperini, 2013). Moreover, the company's core values are the following:

"Quality – built the best product, provide the best service and constantly improve everything we do; integrity – examine our practices openly and honestly, learn from our mistakes, and meet our commitments; environmentalism – protect our home planet; justice – be just, equitable and antiracist as a company and in our community; not bound by convention – do it our way" (Patagonia, 2022).

In his book 'Let My People Go Surfing', Chouinard, frames Patagonia's philosophy as living a life that sets an example without causing damage to anyone's life either, and by supporting civil democracy and other companies, as well (Chouinard, 2005). Throughout time, Patagonia has undertaken multiple endeavors focused on sustainability. The majority of these can be aligned with Lacy et al.'s (2014) five models for circular business, mentioned in the research of Rattalino (2018). The remaining initiatives fit into a broader category of charitable endeavors that strive to uphold and reinforce the circular business model (Rattalino, 2018). Some of these initiatives include the switch to organic cotton, even though even in 1991 was more expensive than the traditional one, Patagonia adopted new innovative strategies compared to their previous ones for its product lines and prices which lead to lower profit margins and an 8% increase in sales, thus the distribution margins stayed the same (Rattalino, 2018). However, more interesting is the fact that the risk the company took with this transition paid off and the company generated 25% more sales, and opened a completely new cotton industry in California, positively affecting the unemployment rate.

Another initiative of Patagonia was to create footprint chronicles that aimed to showcase the negative impact on some of their product. Instead of causing a loss of customers and sales, the initiative establishes transparency and trustworthiness in the public by simply pointing out the facts (Rattalino, 2018). Furthermore, in an interview, the founder Chouinard stated: "You do not have to be worried about telling everybody about the bad things that you are doing. As long as you say that you are working on these things. But if you try to be dishonest, try to hide it, it is going to come back and bite you..." (Rattalino, 2018). However, one of the most important actions taken by Patagonia is called 'Common Threads' announced in 2011 consisting of a mutual contract between the company that could be signed online, through which customers commit to reducing, repair, reuse, and recycle any apparel bought from Patagonia (Rattalino, 2018). By reducing, Patagonia is referring to their company mission and their quality core value. By being meticulous in selecting materials and designing its products, Patagonia was able to enhance its product quality while also upholding the most rigorous environmental regulations. This has resulted in higher customer

satisfaction as the products are more long-lasting, resulting in less waste. Additionally, the simplicity of the product design has allowed for increased versatility, which means that fewer customers will seek out various clothing items for different occasions, as a single item can be utilized in multiple settings. Consequently, Patagonia's approach helps reduce the necessity to purchase diverse apparel for distinct purposes (Rattalino, 2018).

2.2.1. 'Don't Buy This Jacket Campaign' and Anti-Consumerism

In 2011, Patagonia put emphasis on addressing the adverse environmental effects caused by one of its most popular products - the micro-fleece jacket. As soon as Patagonia became aware of the potentially harmful consequences of this best-selling item, they started conducting extensive research on the matter. Given that most outdoor companies heavily rely on synthetic materials in their production processes, Patagonia acknowledged that this issue may extend throughout the entire market, resulting in widespread pollution. Following comprehensive research, Patagonia boldly launched an advertisement advising consumers against purchasing their product on the busiest shopping day of the year - Black Friday. The ad, named "Don't Buy This Jacket," showcased one of their top-selling synthetic fleece jackets. Research revealed that the production of this specific jacket necessitated enough water to fulfill the daily requirements of 45 people, which amounts to around 135 liters of water. In addition, Patagonia's ad also highlighted the negative effects of its product by stating that "this jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste" (Combs, 2019). Furthermore, the campaign gained success by being featured in New York Times in the same year.

Based on Rattalino's (2018) research, the promotional material urged patrons to "envision a universe where we consume only what the environment can replenish." Essentially, Patagonia supplemented the conventional four R's - reduce, repair, reuse, and recycle - with a fifth R, 'reimagine'. The intent of this drive was to sway customer purchasing habits as a component of the corporation's overall objective. it bolstered customer allegiance to the Patagonia label, as evidenced by the fact that, despite the "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign, sales numbers climbed (Rattalino, 2018). According to Lowitt's (2011) paper, Patagonia wanted to focus on three goals with the campaign: increase prices, sell more of its products, and expand its categories. Customers should invest in durable, high-quality

clothing, according to Patagonia's marketing messages. Customers were aware that such garments would cost more than alternatives of lower quality. Two sets of customers saw an increase in sales as a result of this marketing campaign: those who could trade in their used Patagonia clothing for cash and purchase new clothing, and those who gave sustainability a higher priority when making purchases. John Donahue, CEO of eBay, says that customers are probably selling unused items and using the money to buy new Patagonia products. Enter new product categories to diversify. Lastly, Patagonia focused on upstream suppliers to grow its customer base. According to Rattalino (2018), the business recycled clothing that was too worn to be resold and then resold the used materials to suppliers at a lower cost than comparable virgin materials.

However, it is interesting the type of advertisement used by the company, which is a form of an anti-consumerism ad. Based on Eckhardt et al. (2010) investigation, anti-consumption is an innovative impetus for sustainable development, but it is not thoroughly understood because of social, cultural, and identity barriers. There is an extensive body of research on advertising, but only a limited number of studies have explored the impact of advertisements promoting anti-consumption on consumer purchasing behavior (Hwang et al., 2014). Patagonia, as a global outdoor clothing retailer known for encouraging customers to refrain from buying its products unless they truly need them, raised many inquiries about the motives and effects on consumers through its anti-consumption advertisement (Patagonia, 2020). Nevertheless, according to Penhollow (2015), Patagonia's anti-consumerism marketing strategy encourages customers to think before buying. This approach has helped the company build brand awareness among both its existing community of followers and those outside it, resulting in double-digit annual growth. The success of Patagonia's Worn Wear campaign led to the creation of a website where customers can purchase thrifted Patagonia clothing, as explained by Lozada (2020). In addition, customers can share their experiences on the website through a section called "The Stories We Wear." Baillargeon (2016), noted in the research of Lozada (2020), states that this provides customers with an opportunity to share memorable experiences and moments while wearing Patagonia garments, as well as how Worn Wear has given their clothing a second chance.

2.3. Brand Identity

Brand identity is regarded as a strong element of the success of a brand as it aims to point to the way a company identifies itself. This is particularly important for sustainable labels as it is a vital element for gaining a competitive advantage over the rest of the market (Reinhardt, 2000). However, brand identity has been defined in various ways in academic research. Thus, brand identity refers to the added value of brands through their unique features, and thus possess advantages over similar products in the market (Nandan, 2005). Additionally, Nandan (2005) also concludes that companies rely on brand identity as a tool to communicate their value to stakeholders and customers. With the growing role of fashion labels in the fashion industry, consumer behavior has changed related to value fashion (Bruce & Daly, 2006). However, brand identity has a strong connection with an image that is the reflection of consumers' perceptions of a brand by memory associations and is shared with a subjective mental picture (Ross & Harradine, 2010). Moreover, companies possess different aspects from others, making their products unique, and these differences aim to satisfy a need that could be symbolic, emotional, rational, tangible, and intangible (Keller, 2008).

As Keller (1993) argues, brand favorability results in customer-based brand equity that influences the response of the consumer to the marketing of the brand. According to the Kapferer (2012) model, brand identity is composed of six factors which are physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image, and together they construct brand value. The physical element is meant what the brand does and what it is, while the personality is subconsciously ascribing human characteristics to brands. The relationship factor is defined as the mode of conduct that mainly identifies the brand such as friendliness and love whereas culture is regarded as the values that evoke the brand's inspiration with corporate culture trying to reduce the brand's freedom (Ross & Harradine, 2010). The reflection is addressing the image of the buyer that the brand is aiming to get attention to, while self-image is framed as the internal image of the identity prism (Ross & Harradine, 2010). Therefore, the construction of brand identity requires work on all of the above-mentioned facets in order to build on the brand prism or unique features that are causing brand associations in the mind of consumers. If the link between them is established, as Ghodeswar (2008) stated, a strong brand identity is created that could facilitate trust between the brand and consumer, and thus a source of differentiation.

2.3.1. Brand Image

Brand image refers to how consumers perceive a brand based on its presentation and overall identity (Okonkwo, 2007). According to Maciariello (2008), branding lies at the core of marketing, enabling seamless sales flow and creating brand desire. In other words, a strong brand has the power to sell products effortlessly, without relying heavily on marketing tactics to persuade customers. This is why branding plays a vital role in marketing strategies, with significant attention given to the concept of brand equity, as argued by Keller (1993). Brand equity refers to the perceived value that customers associate with a product beyond its functional or practical benefits. It serves as a crucial factor in fostering customer loyalty (Hayes, 2023). Loyal customers tend to repeatedly choose their preferred brand and are less likely to consider alternatives. This reduced sensitivity to price makes them more willing to pay a premium, generating higher profitability. By focusing on building brand loyalty, companies can effectively retain existing customers, which is more cost-effective compared to acquiring new ones. Consequently, business leaders strive to develop a strong brand equity to drive increased revenue (Hayes, 2023; Biel, 1992).

To achieve this, marketers concentrate on creating a positive brand image, as emphasized by Biel (1992), recognizing its significant role in shaping brand equity. A well-crafted brand image helps shape consumers' perceptions, influencing their attitudes and behaviors towards the brand. It encompasses various elements such as brand personality, values, positioning, and visual identity. By strategically managing these components, marketers can cultivate a desired brand image that resonates with their target audience, fostering positive associations and emotional connections. A compelling brand image can differentiate a brand from its competitors, allowing it to stand out in the marketplace. It communicates the brand's unique value proposition and establishes a consistent brand identity that consumers can identify with and trust. Through effective branding, companies can shape the narrative around their products or services, build brand loyalty, and ultimately drive sustainable business growth . Therefore, brand image plays a critical role in the realm of marketing and brand equity. It encompasses consumers' perceptions of a brand based on its presentation and overall identity. By building a strong brand image, marketers can cultivate positive associations, shape consumer attitudes, and foster brand loyalty (Biel, 1992). This, in turn, leads to increased customer retention, reduced price sensitivity, and higher profitability.

Thus, investing in brand image is an essential strategy for companies aiming to enhance their brand equity and generate long-term success in the marketplace.

In order to ascertain the perception of their brand, marketers must conduct research to understand the beliefs customers hold about their brand (Lee et al., 2014). However, if there is no consensus on what defines the brand's image, any attempt at positioning the brand will be unstable. The goal is to position the brand in the minds of consumers on the product category ladder. A business that occupies the top rung of the ladder in the minds of its target customers will have an advantage (Ries & Trout, 2000). Companies should differentiate their brands and communicate why their brand should be preferred over their competitors. By positioning their brand in a strategic and influential manner to shape customer beliefs, companies can maximize their profits. Therefore, a brand must project a clear and well-defined image to the consumer. By establishing a correlation between a fashion label's brand image and its perception and understanding by consumers, it becomes possible to position a sustainable brand more effectively within its target market (Choi, 2014). Fashion goods are a well-known vehicle of nonverbal communication, providing individuals with an opportunity to express themselves (Choi, 2014). When a fashion company's brand image aligns with consumer expectations, it leads to improved performance and increased consumer loyalty (Choi, 2014). In other words, once the brand image is successfully aligned with the consumer's perception and expectation, the likelihood of consumers purchasing the products increases, thus enhancing the brand's performance.

Moreover, a concept known as trading-up might occur that is mainly associated with luxury fashion, however, it is applicable to sustainable fashion, as well. As Cabigiosu (2020) explains, trading up is a purchasing behavior that is becoming increasingly popular among middle-class consumers, who are willing to pay a higher price for luxury goods that offer a higher level of quality and emotional content. In the context of the sustainable fashion industry, trading up is a phenomenon that can have a significant impact on a brand's performance and financial success. Therefore, understanding the concept of trading up and its impact on consumer behavior is vital for environmentally-friendly brands to remain competitive and thrive in the market.

Brand image is closely intertwined with brand identity as it represents the perception and reputation that a brand holds in the minds of consumers and the general public. Brand image is the external manifestation of that identity, shaped by consumers' experiences,

interactions, and perceptions of the brand (Hayes, 2023; Keller 1993). The connection between brand image and brand identity is crucial because it determines how consumers perceive and relate to the brand. A strong and consistent brand identity helps shape a positive brand image by effectively communicating the brand's values, positioning, and promise to the target audience. Thus, when consumers consistently encounter a brand that aligns with their expectations, they develop trust, loyalty, and positive associations with the brand. However, it's important to note that brand image can also be influenced by external factors such as marketing campaigns, public relations, customer reviews, and word-of-mouth. Therefore, it is essential for brands to actively manage and monitor their brand image to ensure alignment with their intended brand identity. By maintaining a strong connection between brand image and brand identity, brands can foster positive perceptions, differentiate themselves from competitors, and build lasting relationships with consumers.

2.3.2. Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty

The concept of brand personality is a new topic of investigation among academics and researchers. According to the study of Freling and Forbes (2005), brand personality is associating a brand with human traits. As physical features of labels on their own are not enough for customers to draw the line between different brands. Thus, a brand's personality is necessary for effective branding through marketing. When consumers relate brands to human characteristics, it helps differentiate them and allows consumers to identify the needs the brand satisfies. However, not all brands have brand personality as it is formed through direct or indirect consumer experiences, and it's important for consumers to experience the brand before forming perceptions about its personality (Sung & Kim, 2010).

Marketing communication variables like advertising, user imagery, price, packaging, and logos create a brand's personality over time, and the personality is strongest when these elements are coordinated, distinctive, and consistent. Brand personality benefits both marketers and consumers (Sung & Kim, 2010). Moreover, based on consumer research, possessing brand personality has a positive effect on brands as it would lead to an increase in customers' favorability and purchasing activities (Freling & Forbes, 2005). Consumers tend to rely on brands' personalities as a form of expressing themselves, while brands use them as a safety measure from mistakes on the market (Freling & Forbes, 2005). Furthermore,

consumers value the psychological benefits of associating with brands, which can increase preference and patronage, as well as enhance trust and loyalty (Sung & Kim, 2010).

Brand personality is commonly connected with brand loyalty as one of the factors forming consumers' trust is the personality of the brand. Brand loyalty is fuel for businesses as research confirms that brands with a high percentage of loyal customers possess a market advantage over other companies, as well as increasing the ability to attract new customers easier (Mellens et al., 1996). Moreover, in Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2002) research, brand loyalty was identified as an influencing variable in brand commitment. Brand personality is an idea created and stored in the mind of the customer as it reflects their perception of the brand. A study conducted by Aaker and Biel (1993) discovered that brand personality can positively affect the emotional levels of customers, as well as their loyalty, and thus positively impact the relationship of the brand with the consumers. However, Aaker and Biel (1993) also state that this relationship, between the brand and the consumer, is not directly related to either brand image or personality, but rather it is based on "the interaction between consumer's attitudes towards the brand and the brand's attitudes toward the consumer."

Brand personality is intricately connected with brand identity as it humanizes the brand and shapes consumer perceptions. Just as individuals have distinct personalities, brands develop unique traits, values, and characteristics that resonate with their target audience. Brand personality enhances brand identity by creating an emotional connection and fostering relatability. Consumers are more likely to engage with and form attachments to brands that exhibit a personality that aligns with their own values and aspirations. By infusing brand identity with a well-defined personality, brands can establish a distinct and memorable image in the minds of consumers, ultimately leading to stronger brand associations and customer loyalty (Pechtl, 2019).

2.3.3. Brand Awareness

For brand identity creation, brand awareness needs to be considered as an element for establishing such in the mind of consumer. Brand awareness represents the level of recognition and familiarly that consumers have with a brand (Silva, 2018). A part of brand awareness are the so-called brand symbols that serve as a communication tools with the customers (MacInnis et al., 1999). Moreover, the research of Keller (1993), cited in MacInnis et al. (1999) indicates that for the creation of brand knowledge and attitudes, brand awareness

is necessary. However, on itself, brand awareness could be an important part of influencing brand decisions (MacInnis et al., 1999). Additionally, Brand identity plays a crucial role in shaping brand awareness. A strong and well-defined brand identity helps create a distinct and memorable brand image in the minds of consumers (Pechtl, 2019). Consistency in brand elements, such as visual design and brand messaging, reinforces the brand identity and enhances recognition (MacInnis et al., 1999). When consumers encounter consistent brand elements across various touchpoints, they are more likely to remember the brand and develop a sense of familiarity and trust.

Brand awareness, in turn, helps reinforce and amplify brand identity. As consumers become more aware of a brand, their recognition and recall of the brand increase. This heightened awareness reinforces the brand's identity in the minds of consumers and strengthens their associations and perceptions. Positive experiences and interactions with the brand contribute to building brand loyalty and advocacy. The connection between brand identity and brand awareness is circular since a strong brand identity helps drive brand awareness by creating a distinctive and consistent brand image that resonates with consumers (MacInnis et al., 1999). On the other hand, increased brand awareness reinforces and strengthens the brand identity, as consumers become more familiar with the brand and its unique characteristics. Therefore, by effectively managing the connection between brand identity and brand awareness, companies can establish a strong brand presence in the market. Consistency, authenticity, and differentiation in brand identity contribute to increased brand awareness, while heightened brand awareness reinforces and amplifies the brand identity. This symbiotic relationship is crucial in building brand equity, fostering brand loyalty, and ultimately driving business success.

2.3.4. Brand Community

Brand community is tightly related to the concept of brand loyalty as high customer trust leads to the establishment of a community, where by community is understood a group of individuals that share common identification (McAlexander et al., 2002). Brand community is defined as a social collection of brand users and the connections they have to the brand as a source of meaning (McAlexander et al., 2002). Zhang and Luo (2015) characterize brand community as socially networked groups of customers who share an interest in a brand, and leads to the brand becoming stronger a result of these friendly

relationships between the brand and its customers. Thus, brand communities play a vital role in today's business landscape, offering numerous benefits for both brands and customers. These communities create a space where individuals with shared interests and affinities can connect, interact, and engage with a brand on a deeper level (McAlexander et al., 2002). One key reason why brand communities are important is their ability to foster a sense of belonging and emotional connection among customers. By bringing together like-minded individuals who resonate with the brand's values and offerings, a strong community is formed. This sense of belonging constitutes loyalty, as community members feel a sense of ownership and pride in being part of something larger than themselves. Brand communities also serve as powerful platforms for brand advocacy (McAlexander, 2002). Satisfied customers within the community become brand ambassadors, sharing positive experiences, and recommending the brand to their peers. These genuine word-of-mouth recommendations hold significant influence and can drive new customer acquisition.

Furthermore, brand communities offer valuable insights and feedback. Customers within the community provide real-time feedback, suggestions, and ideas, giving brands a direct line of communication with their most passionate and engaged customers. This direct feedback loop enables brands to make informed decisions, improve products or services, and tailor their offerings to meet customer needs and preferences. In addition, brand communities facilitate co-creation and collaboration as brands can involve their community members in the development of new products, campaigns, or initiatives, leveraging their collective wisdom and creativity. This collaborative approach strengthens the relationship between the brand and its community, fostering a sense of ownership and shared success (McAlexander et al, 2002). By nurturing and investing in these communities, brands can create a vibrant ecosystem of engaged customers who not only support the brand but actively contribute to its growth and success.

The place where brand communities are facilitated is mainly on social media. Social media has evolved into a powerful tool for businesses in the digital age to build communities and deepen connections with their target audience. (Zhang & Luo, 2015). Through strategic engagement and content creation, brands can cultivate vibrant communities that foster loyalty, advocacy, and customer interaction (McAlexander et al, 2002; Zhang & Luo, 2015). One way brands form communities on social media is by creating and sharing valuable

content. By providing informative, entertaining, or inspirational content that aligns with their brand values and target audience's interests, brands can attract and engage like-minded individuals. This content serves as a catalyst for conversations and discussions, encouraging community members to actively participate and share their opinions. Social media platforms also offer various features that facilitate community building. Brands can create dedicated groups or communities where members can come together to discuss specific topics, share experiences, and provide support. These groups foster a sense of belonging and create a space for customers to connect with both the brand and fellow community members. Ultimately, brands form communities on social media by providing valuable content, utilizing platform features, engaging with their audience, collaborating with influencers, and offering unique incentives. These strategies help create a thriving community where customers feel connected, valued, and inspired to actively engage with the brand and fellow community members (Zhang & Luo, 2002).

Even though LinkedIn as a platform is not known for building brand communities but rather professional networks, networking with other people could foster a community building. In the case of Patagonia, the brand's page could serve as a discussion board as it has its own values guiding the content published, and users can engage with posts, as well as respond to it. Investigating the concept of brand community is an important element of analyzing Patagonia's brand identity since creating such in a successful manner, should naturally lead to a community.

2.4. Social Media Marketing

As important to frame how brand identity is built, it is as crucial to define the place where brands facilitate it, which is mainly on social media. Social media technologies are described as channels and platforms, built on the foundations of Web 2.0, that sustain businesses and accelerate growth (Horst & Hitters, 2020). Social media marketing is the first choice of brands to invest in as it is not only financially smarter as it requires less effort than traditional marketing to provide two-way communication but also can support businesses to fill the gap between brands and their audiences (Kong et al., 2021). Moreover, as Chu and Chen (2019) argue, the social media activities of companies have a positive effect on customers' beliefs and attitudes toward the brand. Thus, they are able to explore the needs of

the audiences and coordinate their strategy for engagement accordingly to increase customer loyalty. Interactions with the brand significantly influence and shape the consumer's perception of it (Bacik et al., 2018). Social media strategies typically developed by brands incorporate a variety of platforms. Web 2.0, the second generation of internet-based applications, has revolutionized audience engagement, encouraged viral marketing, broadened reach, and provided consumers with a platform to experience the brand's identity, form an opinion, and share it with others (O'Reilly, 2007; Thackeray et al., 2008). This practice aims to generate a 'social media-based brand community' and stimulate the customers in co-creation value (Hoang et al., 2019).

Incorporating social media platform like LinkedIn in promotional campaigns is advantageous due to their cost-effectiveness and ability to reach a larger audience (Thackeray et al., 2008). Patagonia focuses on publishing content on social media that focuses on environmental news with educational purposes, activists, or the brand's impact on waste. The goal is to illustrate how important the planet is to the company. This could show Patagonia's strategy of developing para-social relationships with consumers with the idea of engaging them with content and figures connected to their core values (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Furthermore, as noted through the investigation of Patagonia's LinkedIn account, the brand engages with its audience through political discussions on environmental topics and sharing of various resources. They aim to educate people on what is the current state of nature in different parts of the world as well as to showcase that living a more conscious lifestyle, in terms of fashion, is possible, and they are an example of it. As noted by Tuskej and Podnar (2018), companies need to change their views on consumers as 'targets' that they need to hit, but instead allow them to facilitate the engagement as Patagonia aims to do by co-creating an account in the form of discussion page rather than a brand-specific account through sharing news, blogs articles, newspapers, etc. However, this particular structure acts as a branding tool at the same time.

According to Drawbridge (2018), Patagonia's non-traditional green marketing strategy revolves around its brand purpose and storytelling, which helps in establishing brand loyalty among its customers. The company leverages user-generated content such as images, videos, landscapes, and stories to promote its products and gain more attention, as noted by Engagement Labs Patagonia (Briggs, 2016), cited in Lozada (2020). Instead of advertising their garments, Patagonia campaigns aim to educate the audience about environmental and social issues, encouraging them to reduce their carbon footprint and increase awareness of

consumerism, while staying true to the company's core values and mission, as Sonsev (2019) argues, cited in Lozada (2020). Moreover, Boniface (2019) highlights that Patagonia uses social media platforms to share information on new innovations, which provides them with an edge in marketing to customers without being pushy. While some people may dislike seeing ads on social media, those who support the environment and related causes are more likely to appreciate learning about ecological and social issues through Patagonia's campaigns. Thangavelu (2020) suggests that this approach allows Patagonia to market its products to clients effectively while maintaining a non-restrictive and inclusive image.

2.4.1. LinkedIn

LinkedIn has emerged as a thriving professional social network, attracting business professionals from across the globe and posing as a rival to Facebook and Twitter in terms of content sharing and engagement. Its significance as a career website was recognized in studies dedicated to career orientation through the use of SNS (Davis et al., 2020) and its value it professional relationships building, as well (Zide et al., 2014). Through LinkedIn, users can connect with other professionals, share experiences, and showcase their skills to plan and advance their career paths (LinkedIn, n.d.). With a membership base of over 300 million worldwide, LinkedIn aims to unite professionals globally, fostering productivity and success (LinkedIn, n.d.). In today's competitive job market, college students and recent graduates often struggle to stand out among other job seekers (Cooper & Naatus, 2014). This is where networking tools like LinkedIn play a crucial role in building professional networks, enhancing credentials, and increasing social capital (Cooper & Naatus, 2014). The platform allows individuals to differentiate themselves, connect with industry peers, and expand their opportunities.

LinkedIn, however, has evolved beyond a networking tool for individuals; it has become a valuable platform for businesses to build their brand identity and grow their enterprises. Business owners can create dedicated business pages to present their company and connect with employees. Unlike many other social media platforms, LinkedIn offers a transparent algorithm accessible to users, ensuring greater visibility for content and profiles within the wider community (LinkedIn, n.d.). As a result, LinkedIn has become a powerful platform for networking, widely utilized by businesses and professionals worldwide.

Irrespective of industry or job position, it presents an excellent opportunity to expand professional connections, which can enhance job prospects and create avenues for collaborations and service offerings. In essence, LinkedIn serves as a valuable tool for businesses to scale their operations and establish a strong brand identity. Overall, LinkedIn's influence extends beyond being a career website or a mere networking platform. It has become an integral part of professional life, offering individuals the means to shape their careers and businesses the opportunity to build their brand presence. By leveraging LinkedIn's features and engaging with the global professional community, individuals and businesses can unlock a world of opportunities and create pathways for success in the competitive landscape of today's professional world.

3. Methodology

The methodology section is presented with a detailed explanation of how the qualitative content analysis was conducted in order to answer the research questions by identifying how Patagonia incorporated sustainability in their LinkedIn content for branding. Section 3.1. focuses on the research design and the reason why it was selected as appropriate for this study. Following sub-section 3.1.1., the qualitative research design is explained as well as why qualitative content analysis is chosen as a method. Section 3.2. focuses on the sampling processes, while sub-section 3.2.1. describes the analyzed entities of the research. The chapter continues with an explanation of the operationalization process and the necessary steps taken during the data collection and analysis. Finally, a short discussion on credibility and ethical considerations will be presented.

3.1. Research Design

The research plan and its underlying reasoning behind is presented in this section. It delves into the fundamentals of content analysis as the preferred research approach and clarifies its application. Additionally, it presents the logic for selecting this method and justifies its use. The primary objective of this investigation is to respond to the research query "How sustainability is presented in the brand identity construction of Patagonia on LinkedIn". The nature of this project indicates the utilization of a qualitative methodology, specifically by utilizing qualitative content analysis. In qualitative research, the investigators analyze the available information and attempt to extract significance from it. Once the research question is formulated, the researchers scrutinize the data present on LinkedIn and ascertain its implications for Patagonia. As the project focuses on analyzing qualitative elements such as screenshot content disseminated on LinkedIn and the branding strategy adopted by Patagonia on the platform, the chosen research technique is an appropriate option.

3.1.1. Qualitative Research as a Method

The qualitative research approach is chosen due to its valuable application in investigating exploratory questions and comprehending particular phenomena (Neuman, 2011). Through the use of a qualitative approach, data focusing on answering questions regarding experiences, perspectives, and behaviors are used (Hammarberg et al., 2015). This particular method requires analytical analysis of data and comparison of articles, websites, media posts, documents, etc. to gain an understanding of the phenomena (Hammarberg et al., 2015). The study focuses on analyzing the communication strategy of an established media-service provider on a rapidly-evolving social media platform. Thus, the research question is pertinent and warrants exploration. Another benefit of the method is the abundance of abundant content available for examination (Silverman, 2011). By analyzing the content choices made by Patagonia, an answer to the research question is discovered. Due to the dynamic nature of social media platforms, this research approach can provide insightful findings as Patagonia's activity on the platform provides enough data to be gathered and examined by means of qualitative content analysis.

3.1.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis has a wide range of applications in researching exploratory questions and specifically in analyzing textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Research applying qualitative content analysis is selected when language characteristics such as communication are the focus of analysis within the contextual meaning of a text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is also a preferred method for breaking down large volumes of data into small coding entities (Neuman, 2011). Thus, this method has been selected as appropriate for the study because it enables filtering the data collected from Patagonia's LinkedIn account into segments and identifying its significance in the context of Patagonia's branding approach. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis is a research method that is suitable for investigating questions without the direct involvement of people such as interactions, or as in this study, online content. Codes are formed based on the data and sorted into categories based on the relationship between them after which are organized into meaningful clusters (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The codes, also called themes, contribute to understanding the subject of investigation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Identifying themes in Patagonia's communication strategy provides insight into the manner in which the brand identity is being presented and the essence of the messages being conveyed to platform users.

3.2. Sampling

Justification of the way the LinkedIn posts were sampled and additional information on the collection procedure is presented in this section. It further clarifies the choice of purposive sampling of this dataset and its meaning.

3.2.1. Analyzed Entities

The analyzed entities in this research consist of LinkedIn posts, collected as screenshots from Patagonia's US LinkedIn account, which is also the main profile of the brand as the label is based in America. Taking into consideration the feasibility of the project, the final dataset included 250 LinkedIn posts gathered from the period February 2016 to February 2023. Purposive sampling has been applied to the data selection whereas the publications included in the analysis are chosen based on the publishing date. The justification behind it is to capture the most recent actives on the platform of Patagonia with the idea of determining their communication and branding objectives. Through the following selection, biases, and subjectivity are aimed to be prevented from occurring as the entities are not randomly collected from different timeframes.

Moreover, the data analysis includes visual elements such as images, short articles and personal reflections, external links to news and websites, and post descriptions. As the primary focus of the study is to establish how Patagonia incorporates sustainability in its brand identity, excluding customers' personal responses to it, likes and comments of the published posts are not considered and included in the analysis of this research.

3.3. Operationalization

To address the primary research question, the researcher has defined and applied operational definitions to several key concepts: sustainability, the nature of the content posted on LinkedIn, the overall emotional tone conveyed in the posts, and supplementary elements included in the messages. This section provides an overview of the categories that have been

developed during the analysis of the data and explains how they relate to the theoretical framework.

3.3.1. Operationalization of sustainability

Sustainability is observed through direct stimuli, where the direct stimuli were identified through the language usage in the text descriptions with words such as 'sustainable', 'responsible', 'ethical', etc. Another direct stimulus is the usage of the word 'green' as a sustainability factor. The usage of green as a color or in context has been purposefully used as a symbol by brands as "the color green has been widely used for messages of sustainability both in visual and verbal formats" (DeLong et al., 2012). Moreover, color is a powerful tool that aims to communicate complex information through sensational responses and has been used by both designers and marketers to create brand personality and promotion of trends (DeLong et al., 2012). Finally, overall meaning refers to environmental appeals through sentences or whole paragraphs since Patagonia often uses long descriptions in its posts.

3.3.2. Operationalization of content type

Regarding the entities of analysis in terms of the type of content shared on the LinkedIn page of Patagonia US, the following distinctions were made:

1. Internally or externally generated type of content
2. The general topic of the publication is based on textual information. The created themes are 'environmental', 'social', 'political', and 'fashion'

Firstly, the 'the type of content generated' category provides supplementary details on how Patagonia communicates on the platform and what sources it uses when it comes to content coming outside the brand. It also offers valuable insights for addressing the primary research question by investigating factors such as whether Patagonia promotes more context produced by them or context produced from external sources. The codes here are "Internal" and "External".

The other perspective is analyzing the type of posts published and their meaning as sub-subcategory, whether self-generated or external. Table 1 presents the different sub-categories made ad hoc.

Codes	Meaning
Environment	Post referring to nature, impact on the nature, and changes concerning the nature.
Political/social	Posts referring to democracy statements or laws regarding aspects concerning fashion, environment, and society.
Fashion	Posts featuring their fashion products or informing about changes in the industry.

3.3.4. Operationalization of emotional appeal

As per Lee and Hong's (2016) research, entertainment plays a vital role in making advertising more persuasive by increasing its impact. However, they have stated that the concept of emotional appeal includes a broad range of emotions. Emotional appeal plays a crucial role in shaping the brand voice and influencing users, making it an essential aspect to consider.

The code 'Neutral' encompasses the aspect of informativeness, which is defined as the ability to provide users with product alternatives that result in the highest value, based on rational appeal (Lee & Hong, 2016). Unlike an emotional appeal, this factor helps users make informed decisions, and it is aimed at assisting them in making choices that align with their preferences (Lee & Hong, 2016). Informative messages on social media platforms can enhance the positive image of a brand, as they assist consumers in making purchasing decisions, leading to a sense of gratitude for the assistance provided (Lee & Hong, 2016).

The study's thematic code, "Provoking," does not always indicate the presence of provocative feelings. Rather, it refers to the inclusion of a call to action that prompts users to answer a question, express their opinion, or take some other form of action. Such calls to

action have been shown to positively impact user engagement levels (Stephen et al., 2015). People are more likely to respond to questions and express their opinions and preferences when it is brought to their attention, according to research (Stephen et al., 2015), whereas competition-based initiatives typically receive lower levels of engagement. In the case of Patagonia, the company often shares articles regarding the environment or in relation to the negative impact of the fashion industry asks questions, and encourages users to share their personal experiences and beliefs. This approach may indicate that Patagonia understands its audience and incorporates their preferences into its communication strategy, which could be a factor contributing to the brand's success.

In contrast, the code 'Positive' pertains to personal relationships, one's inner self, and overall outlook on life. This category emphasizes self-care, assisting others, and embracing emotions, among other things. Typically, it is represented by content that showcases a change caused by the brand in an environmental aspect or an improvement in the fashion industry as a whole. On the other hand, 'Exciting' pertains to captions that convey enthusiasm about certain information. This code is often utilized when announcing new details about products with a focus on the fashion aspect of the matter.

3.3.5. Operationalization of other elements

According to Goldsborough (2015), emojis are a unique feature of online communication. They are small images that can depict a range of objects, faces, animals, and more. Emojis are used to convey emotions or reinforce the meaning of a message (Goldsborough, 2015). This use of emojis is consistent with the concept of emotional marketing. Given the theoretical framework, it is reasonable to suggest that Patagonia is employing emotional marketing strategies. Therefore, the presence of emojis is a relevant factor in assessing whether the content Patagonia uses aligns with the emotional states and desires of its viewers.

The hashtag is a notable factor that warrants discussion. As argued by Saxton et al. (2015), it is a participatory activity, but also user-generated, decentralized tagging, organizing, and classification system is the hashtag system. The hashtag allows the organization to link messages to existing knowledge and action communities, improves searchability, and categorizes messages (Saxton et al., 2015). As argued by Moorley and

Chinn (2013), hashtags are a crucial element in building an online community online as it maximizes engagement. The popularity of hashtags has been confirmed by their wide usage in public and the popularization of social and political movements (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). Therefore, the number of posts that contain hashtags is a crucial piece of information for evaluating the extent to which Patagonia employs this strategy on LinkedIn.

The research question in this study is connected with the idea of brand identity building online, whereas branding is meant the promotional activities of a product or service in relation to a core characteristic of a brand. For the purpose of analyzing it, the categories 'type of content published and generated' and 'other elements' have been established to frame the content shared by Patagonia. Moreover, 'Overall emotion' as a category investigated the emotion and tone included in the posts by the brand as a method to determine Patagonia's voice.

3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

This section provides an explanation of the research method's implementation as well as the procedure of data collection and analysis.

3.4.1. Data Collection

Qualitative content analysis was employed in this research to analyze the data. The posts shared on Patagonia's LinkedIn account were collected and compiled in a .doc file and then categorized based on their content. The file included screenshots of the images as well as their accompanying descriptions that were posted on the platform, as illustrated below. While conducting the analysis and simultaneously coding the data, the researcher took note of the various shows referenced, advertised, or connected to the posted content. Additionally, the researcher recorded the number of likes and comments for images in their notes.

3.4.2. Data Analysis

The qualitative content analysis used in this study is a data reduction technique that involves the process of coding, which enables the researcher to extract meaningful themes and patterns from the data (Patton, 1999). The analysis was conducted by the researcher only by establishing themes consisting of categories from the dataset. The categories were created by generally defining the overall context of the examples in order to ensure the consistency of the code. The initial stage of the analysis involved familiarizing with the data and writing down initial thoughts, followed by the development of a theoretical framework based on the researcher's previous knowledge and the guidance of the literature. This framework helped to sensitize the researcher to the concepts related to emotional marketing and the aspirations of consumers. The coding process allowed the researcher to keep track of the different content shared on Patagonia's account, the various methods of incorporating sustainability, the topic of the content, and the emotion embedded in them.

The next stage of the analysis involved data organization and summary, followed by interpretation of the codes and identifying patterns across them that would be analyzed based on the theoretical framework. By following the clues and using a data-driven approach within the textual data, the primary issue of the investigation was established. The codes were afterward categorized, leading to the conclusion of certain results.

The coding process was checked for consistency and validity, and modifications were made to the coding frame where necessary. The final stage of the analysis consisted of the presentation of the results, which provided insights into the different types of content and their purpose within Patagonia's posts. The research findings showed that Patagonia uses emotional marketing strategies to appeal to the aspirations of consumers and build a connection with them. The use of emojis was also identified as an important aspect in the evaluation of Patagonia's emotional marketing strategies. However, the overall emotions in the posts were identified as the main contributor to their emotional strategy. The qualitative content analysis used in this study provided a comprehensive and systematic approach to the evaluation of Patagonia's emotional marketing strategies. The findings highlighted the importance of understanding consumers' emotions and aspirations in developing effective marketing strategies.

In order to discover significant data clusters and their respective degrees of importance, the aforementioned study employs qualitative content analysis as a methodology. As a result, it takes both a deductive and an inductive approach. While the deductive

approach entails establishing the relationship between the categories and the theoretical framework, the inductive approach refers to linking the data analysis with textual and non-written data and identifying latent meanings (Julien, 2012). This mixed approach necessitates the use of both pre-existing codes from the theoretical framework and newly emergent codes from the LinkedIn posts analyzed. The coding process of the entities and their categorization has been done with great care, and the comprehensiveness of the groupings is subsequently assessed to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings (Julien, 2012). The final evaluation of the research findings is based on the existing theory of sustainability in the fashion industry and brand identity.

3.5. Credibility, Validity, and Reliability

This research applies a qualitative to answer the research question of how Patagonia incorporates sustainability in their branding on their LinkedIn account. The process of uncovering the meaning and significance of the dataset includes steps such as identifying, coding and categorizing the data gathered from the brand's page. The findings could serve as a theoretical base for future research or be used by other brands in the field to improve their communication strategy on the platform (Boeije, 2010). Also, it should be mentioned that the results of the project contribute to viewing LinkedIn as a platform in a new light, not only for recruitment purposes but also for branding. Even though the research question in this thesis was answered, there are limitations that require further discussion. The data scope measured is limited (250 posts in the final dataset) as well as the time frame applied (from February 2016 to February 2023).

Credibility was firstly taken into account as credibility issues could arise if the data was not carefully collected and analyzed and if the researcher's credibility is placed under dough by not understanding the techniques and methods required for qualitative research (Patton, 1999). Therefore, to ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher aimed to familiarize himself with the data as deeply as possible as well as avoid any assumptions caused by the researcher's own belief system. Moreover, credibility is connected with validity and reliability; thus, they have been considered, as well. Reliability is assessed by whether the findings of the research are appropriate in relation to the topic (Patton, 1999). In this project, the theoretical framework is serving as a reliability factor in aligning the results

with the literature. Furthermore, validity refers to the accuracy of the method applied to the findings that are ensured by providing an answer to the research question (Patton, 1999). However, it must be mentioned that these results are considered and applicable only in the case of Patagonia's branding on LinkedIn, but they could be used as a guideline by others, as well.

3.6. Ethical Principles

Ethical principles are a crucial part of any research, but specifically considered in qualitative research because of the deep analysis required of the data (Mohd Arifin, 2018). Informed consent and voluntary participation are mandatory elements of every project in terms of obtaining and informing the participants about the nature of the project. However, in this research, no ethical principles were violated as the data consisted of screenshots and performed an analysis of publicly available data such as brands' posts description, images, and links shared, without including private information of other users such as names, addresses, gender, etc. Moreover, ethical issues regarding the topics were not identified either as research focuses on investigating a theme that is not sensitive and does not pose harm to other individuals.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the qualitative content analysis are presented and discussed related to theory. The dataset consists of 250 LinkedIn posts published by Patagonia US from February 2016 to February 2023.

The coding frame consists of 4 categories:

a. Sustainability as a marked detected across the posts made by Patagonia on LinkedIn

b. Type of content published by them separated on internal sources or external sources used to be made and sub-categories based on the context

c. Emotional appeal looks at the tone of a post based on the caption to figure out what kind of feeling it is trying to get across.

d. Other elements referring to emoji or external links (hashtags)

According to the data analysis procedure outlined in section 3.4, the data was subsequently transferred to Excel in order to determine the frequency of each code, explore various relationships between the codes, and perform additional calculations using the supplementary information collected earlier. The summarized results of these calculations and the findings of the research are presented in Table 1 below. Each segment is comprehensively discussed in this chapter.

Table 1	
Sustainability	Direct 52% (n=131)
	Overall 28% (n=72)
	Green 6% (n=15)
Type of content	Internal 58% (n=147)
	External 42 (n=103)
Emotional appeal	Neutral 2% (n=5)
	Provoking 52% (n=132)

	Positive 32% (n=78)
	Exciting 14% (n=35)
Other elements	Emoji 0% (n=0)
	Hashtags 16% (n=40)

Table 1

4.1. Sustainability

The category 'Sustainability' was formed in order to define the specific methods of Patagonia for presenting itself as a sustainability brand, whether through directly using words that imply environmental care or through sentences the context refers to that. This category is interconnected with answering the question 'How Patagonia incorporates sustainability in its brand identity on LinkedIn?' as well as further establishing an overall understanding of Patagonia's sustainability strategy as a fashion brand on social media. As it was established by Kong et al. (2021) that customers are willing to purchase from brands that emphasize social responsibility, it is a primary focus of the project to determine whether Patagonia is able to achieve this and how. While analyzing the data, the following subcategories 'Direct', 'Overall', and 'Green' emerged. Throughout the analysis, it was established that 52% (n=130) of those posts contain direct implications of sustainability through the usage of words such as 'responsible', 'ethical', 'sustainable', and 'environmental' (see Figure 1 as an example of the code 'Direct'); while 28% (n=72) contain the context of portraying sustainable actions and efforts of the brand through whole sentences or paragraphs (see Figure 2 as an example of the code 'Overall'); and finally only 6% (n=15) of the LinkedIn posts of Patagonia contain the usage of the word 'green' as a sustainability factor, however, mainly in the context of green lands or greenwashing (see Figure 3 as an example of the code 'Green').

The observed findings can be explained by referencing Reinhardt's (2000) assertion that Patagonia, as a renowned fashion brand, is widely acknowledged for its passionate commitment to sustainability and corresponding actions. Consequently, the company places significant emphasis on these actions by employing repetition as a means of reinforcement. However, as pointed out by Morelli (2011), the utilization of the term 'sustainability' in any

form or context may lead to customer confusion regarding its precise connotations. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that Patagonia's LinkedIn publications frequently provide a more detailed explanation of sustainability rather than treating it as a nebulous concept (refer to Figure 1). In these publications, sustainability is presented alongside supplementary information, aiming to dispel any ambiguity.

Patagonia's strong association with sustainability and its dedicated efforts in this realm contribute to the outcomes. Reinhardt's (2000) assertion suggests that the brand's reputation as a champion of sustainability is a significant contributing factor. The company recognizes the importance of continuously highlighting its sustainability initiatives to reinforce its commitment to the cause. However, Morelli's (2011) study states that potential confusion that may arise from the broad usage of the term 'sustainability,' emphasizing the need for clarity in communication. Despite that, Patagonia aims to provide clarity to its audience by offering in-depth explanations of sustainability in its LinkedIn publications. This strategic approach aims to eliminate any vagueness surrounding the concept and demonstrate the brand's concrete actions in pursuit of sustainability. Figure 1 serves as evidence of this practice, showcasing the company's commitment to transparently communicating its sustainability efforts.
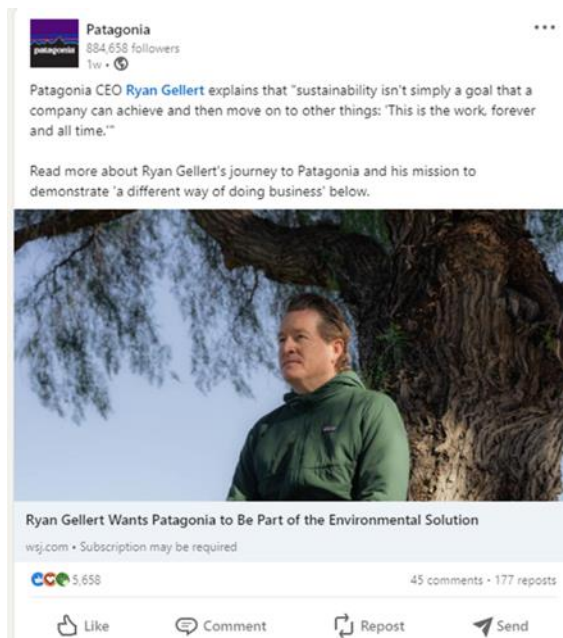
Figure 1. Link to post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_ryan-gellert-wants-patagonia-to-be-part-of-activity-7029556670125002752-xkiC?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
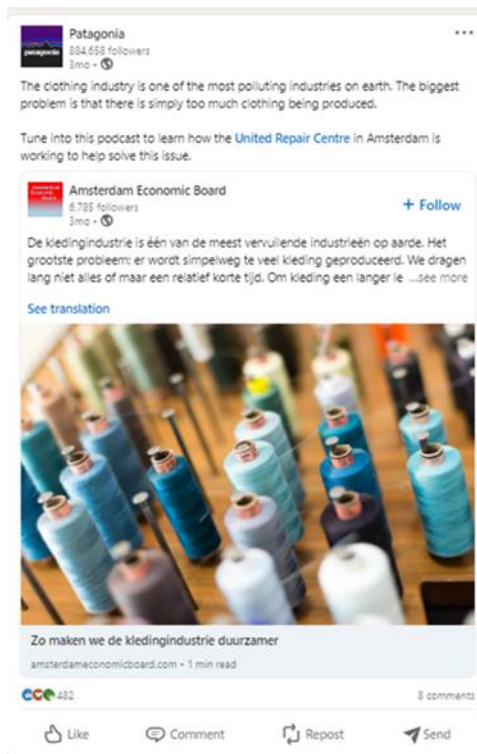
Figure 2. Link to post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_zo-maken-we-de-kledingindustrie-duurzamer-activity-6996040255782932480-RVCA?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Figure 3. Link to post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_resale-is-not-changing-our-relationship-with-activity-6926950753026682881-bxrI?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

4.2. Type of content

This category was created to establish the type of content Patagonia is building its brand identity on the platform. Additionally, it aids in the development of a broader comprehension of Patagonia's social media strategy and the particular manner in which the company makes use of LinkedIn as a marketing tool. Two subcategories emerged during the analysis – 'Internal' and 'External' – referring to the source used for their creation. After analyzing the two subcategories, three themes as sub-subcategories were identified based on topics – 'Political/Social', 'Environmental', and 'Fashion'. The sub-subcategories shed light on the context of the content published on LinkedIn. Firstly, the analysis reveals that 58% (n=147) of the posts from Patagonia are belonging to the category 'Internal', meaning that the content's source is coming directly from them or their website. However, 42% (n=103) of the publications are using external sources, whether through sharing a link to an external website or reshaping the posts steaming from other accounts. The results represent a strategy of higher focus on internal content as a method to show originality that could bring higher customer loyalty. However, it is not surprising that nearly half of the content published on LinkedIn by Patagonia is coming from external sources since external resources for content provide numerous advantages. It broadens perspectives, enriches research, and enhances credibility. Access to diverse viewpoints, expert opinions, and reliable data strengthens the quality of content. Additionally, it fosters collaboration and encourages the exploration of new ideas, ultimately resulting in more comprehensive and insightful content.

4.2.1. Type of context: Sub-subcategories

Table 2	
Internal/External content	Environment 34% (n=87)
	Political/social 46% (n=116)
	Fashion 20% (n=54)

Table 2 above presents the three codes for context that were created and the frequency of them appearing across the whole dataset. The data shows that the main context of posts belongs to the 'Political/Social' category with 46% (n=116), where posts referring to voting, elections, political figures, human rights, and protests (see Figure 4 as an example of code

'Political/Social'). America is known as one of the pure examples of democracy, and thus the role of politics across the nation is significant. An example of that is the pick of fake news on social related to the American elections in 2016 (Allcott & Gentzkw, 2017). Since this is Patagonia's LinkedIn profile of the headquarters that are based in America, the result could be easily explained. However, what is more intriguing is the fact that neither posts related to environment nor fashion are having a higher percentage - 'Environment' with 34% (n=87) and 'Fashion' with 20% (n=54). After all, Patagonia is a fashion label known for its sustainability (Reinhardt, 2000), but that is not the dominant content on the page.

Figure 4. Link to post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_patagonia-ceo-why-business-leaders-should-activity-6985380496755093504-aONE?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Even though politics, fashion, and sustainability are three seemingly distinct spheres that are intrinsically interconnected in today's world. The relationship between these domains is crucial as it shapes the trajectory of our society, economy, and environment. Politics plays a central role in setting policies, regulations, and standards that influence the fashion industry's practices. Governments can enact legislation to promote sustainable fashion, such as implementing eco-friendly production methods, encouraging recycling and reducing

waste, and supporting ethical labor practices. Political decisions also affect the availability and affordability of sustainable fashion options through taxation, subsidies, or import/export regulations. Fashion, on the other hand, is a powerful medium for political expression. Clothing choices can be a form of activism, conveying messages and advocating for social, environmental, or cultural causes. Fashion designers and brands increasingly embrace sustainability, incorporating eco-friendly materials, promoting fair trade, and raising awareness about environmental issues. By leveraging their influence, fashion industry leaders can shape public opinion and drive political change.

Sustainability serves as the common ground bridging politics and fashion. The fashion industry is known for its significant environmental impact, including resource depletion, pollution, and waste generation (De Brito et al., 2008). Embracing sustainability means adopting practices that minimize harm to the environment, prioritize social responsibility, and ensure long-term viability. Sustainable fashion promotes ethical sourcing, fair wages, cruelty-free practices, and the use of organic or recycled materials. By aligning political and fashion efforts towards sustainability, we can mitigate the negative environmental and social consequences of the industry, fostering a more equitable and eco-conscious future. The connection between politics, fashion, and sustainability is undeniable. Political decisions shape the fashion industry's practices and accessibility, while fashion serves as a vehicle for political expression and activism, which it seems that Patagonia was able to recognize and promote social responsibility.

4.3. Emotional Appeal

Understanding the type of content that resonates with the target audience and effectively engaging them is crucial for brands. This engagement is essential for cultivating desired online consumer behavior, including content sharing, interaction, and generating word-of-mouth effects that demonstrate support for the brand (Lee & Hong, 2016). The impact of emotions in advertising and marketing has garnered significant attention, as they play a vital role in shaping consumer attitudes (Panda et al., 2013). Various studies have indicated that emotions like love, humor, fear, and eroticism, when incorporated across different platforms, elicit feelings and influence brand attitudes (Panda et al., 2013).

In this context, it becomes imperative to investigate the inclusion of emotional appeals in Patagonia's LinkedIn posts to determine the presence and effectiveness of such effects. By understanding the emotional responses generated by their content, Patagonia can gain insights into its impact on audience engagement and brand perception. Analyzing the emotional appeal of Patagonia's LinkedIn posts can reveal whether specific emotions, such as love, humor, fear, or even eroticism, are being employed deliberately to capture the attention and interest of their target audience. By evaluating the emotional impact of these posts, Patagonia can gauge whether they align with their brand identity and resonate with their followers. Furthermore, understanding the emotional responses to Patagonia's content on LinkedIn can help identify patterns and trends that contribute to increased engagement and positive brand attitudes. By leveraging these findings, Patagonia can refine their content strategy and create more compelling and impactful posts that strengthen their brand-consumer relationship. Finally, investigating the inclusion of emotional appeals in Patagonia's LinkedIn posts is essential for understanding the effects they have on audience engagement and brand perception. By analyzing the emotional responses generated by their content, Patagonia can optimize their approach and create more effective strategies to connect with their target audience and cultivate desired consumer behavior.

Throughout the analysis of the category, several emotions have been established. The codes created to group the emerged elements are "Neutral" 2% (n=5), "Provoking" 52% (n=132), "Positive" (n=78), and "Exciting" 14% (n=35). The dataset analyzed in this study revealed that a significant portion of the captions could be categorized as provoking. Figure 5 provides an illustrative example of a caption from Patagonia that falls under the "Provoking" category. The description contains information about a group of people who block the access of private investors to river Rupska, located in Serbia, on which they want to build a hydroelectric plant. The construction of the plant would lead to polluting the river that is their source of clean water. The post was an element of admiration by praising the people for staying there for 60 days. However, it ends with the words: "Show your solidarity with the protestors – share this story and send a message…" that aims to provoke action in the reader (Patagonia, 2023). As a result, an emotional appeal is used to get people to do something, which is consistent with what Lee and Hong (2016) found in their research.
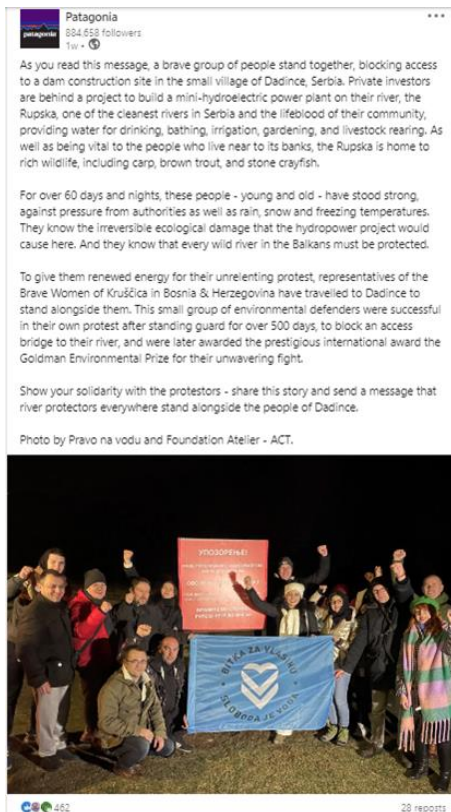
Figure 5. Link to post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_as-you-read-this-message-a-brave-group-of-activity-7030831586103160832-2TGz?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

To delve deeper into the content strategy of Patagonia, the correlation between emotion and the context of content was investigated for further analysis and reflection. The following patterns were identified, leading to the conclusion that certain emotions are connected with the context of the posts. The established relationship is that publications under the topic of political or social content have mainly 'Provoking' emotion embedded with 62.93% (n=73); the environmental posts were high with "Positive" emotions with 52.87% (n=46); fashion context was "Exciting" 61.11% (n=33). This further indicates Patagonia's strategy for incorporating sustainability in their brand identity on LinkedIn as all posts of the dataset are expressed with one of two positively related emotions. Also, it should be highlighted that the posts related to human rights, voting, and protests are aiming to create an emotion in the viewer to act. One reason behind those choices might be an attempt of Patagonia to align their engagement activities with customers and emotional appeal accordingly as a way to positively affect customers' beliefs and attitudes toward the organization, and thus increase brand awareness (Chu & Chen, 2019). As politics and action are intrinsically linked to driving sustainability in the realm of fashion, it is beneficial to be able to make that instant brand perception in the mind of the consumer on a subconscious level. Fashion becomes a powerful tool, intertwining style, and sustainability. As awareness

grows, optimism prevails, fostering a collective desire for greener choices. The transformative power of fashion and politics, empowered by positive emotions, is creating a world where fashion and sustainability coexist.

Attention needs to be brought on that during the data coding process, it is important to highlight that when a post exhibited a combination of two distinct tones, only the primary tone was assigned a code. Secondary tones were not considered in the coding process.

4.4. Other elements

This section focuses on the use of 'other elements' in the communication strategy of Patagonia on LinkedIn such as emojis and hashtags. A tendency for the incorporation or absence of those elements was established in the caption of the posts, thus a category called "Other elements" was established. It shall be noted that only hashtags were considered in the analysis and external tags such as links to other social media accounts or platforms were not included. The discoveries presented in this segment make a valuable contribution towards addressing the primary research inquiry and establishing the communication tactics employed by Patagonia on LinkedIn.

As argued by Saxton et al. (2015), using hashtags on social media can bring numerous benefits to individuals, businesses, and brands alike. Hashtags help increase discoverability and expand your reach. By incorporating relevant and popular hashtags into your posts, you can tap into existing conversations and trends, making it easier for users who are searching or following those hashtags to discover your content. This can expose you to a wider audience, potentially attracting new followers, customers, or clients.

Also, hashtags facilitate engagement and community building (Saxton et al., 2015). They serve as a unifying factor, connecting people who share similar interests or passions. When users click on a hashtag, they are presented with a feed of posts related to that topic, allowing them to explore and interact with like-minded individuals. By using hashtags strategically, you can join conversations, participate in discussions, and build relationships with your audience. This can foster a sense of community and loyalty around your brand or personal brand. Hashtags are powerful tools that enhance discoverability, engagement, tracking, branding, targeted marketing, and cultural relevance on social media platforms

(Saxton et al., 2015). By leveraging hashtags effectively, individuals, businesses, and brands can amplify their online presence, foster communities, and achieve their social media goals.

However, the strategy of Patagonia for incorporating hashtags in their LinkedIn posts is rather interesting since from the dataset analyzed, only 16% (n=40) of posts had hashtags included. Moreover, all of the posts with hashtags are belonging to the 'Political/social' content category (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Link to post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_timetovote-activity-6635975803630956545-VwVc?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

This strategic decision could be explained as it allows Patagonia to align with and show support for specific social and political causes, reflecting their values and engaging with socially conscious consumers. By using relevant hashtags, Patagonia can position itself as an advocate for change and increase its brand visibility within relevant communities. Political hashtags could enable Patagonia to join larger conversations, addressing important societal issues and fostering a sense of inclusivity. This engagement can attract a diverse and engaged audience, fostering brand loyalty. Lastly, using political hashtags can spark discussions, encouraging dialogue and creating opportunities for brands to share their perspectives on important topics, promoting thought leadership and generating meaningful engagement.

In terms of including emojis in captions, as stated by Harn (2017), adds a vibrant and expressive touch to your content. Emojis convey emotions, enhance readability, and make your captions visually appealing. They help capture attention, evoke positive responses, and create a relatable and engaging connection with your audience in a concise and playful

manner. However, after analyzing the data, there was not even one post that had emojis included. This could be explained as Patagonia's intentional choice not to include emojis in their content, because they may prefer a more professional or formal tone, aiming to maintain a certain level of sophistication and professionalism. Emojis can be seen as casual or informal, which may not align with their brand image. Furthermore, Patagonia might prioritize inclusivity, as emojis can have different interpretations and cultural connotations. By avoiding emojis, Patagonia can ensure its messages are universally understood. Lastly, Patagonia may want to avoid potential miscommunication or misinterpretation, as emojis can be subjective and open to different interpretations, which could lead to unintended consequences.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to examine how Patagonia, a leading sustainable fashion label, incorporates sustainability as a strategic tool for branding purposes on LinkedIn. This chapter delves into the findings that address this research question. By addressing these inquiries, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Patagonia's branding strategies on LinkedIn is obtained. The analysis conducted in this section sheds light on the specific communication tactics and approaches employed by Patagonia to engage its audience and establish a strong brand presence on the social media platform.

5.1. Answering the Research Question

The results obtained from this inquiry demonstrate that Patagonia incorporates sustainability into its communication approach and branding on LinkedIn through various means. Primarily, it acts as a feature to display Patagonia's unique identity. Nonetheless, by leveraging the business capabilities of LinkedIn, Patagonia effectively combines a sustainable portrayal of the brand with promotional objectives. Patagonia's brand messages are aiming at taking a unique voice and becoming a virtual domain on the social media platform, promoting their social activism, sustainable fashion, and corporate responsibility.

Two things stood out when looking into the kind of content that Patagonia posts on LinkedIn. Firstly, the type of content shared, namely the source used for the creation of it, is either internal work, meaning coming from the brand itself, or it is using external sources by resharing. Secondly, the type of content has been divided into three major categories – political/social, environmental, and fashion. The analysis reveals that Patagonia posts more internal content 58% (n=147). However, the percentage is not that significant between the two which could be explained as due to applying external sources as a way to broaden perspectives, enriches research, and enhances credibility. It also offers diverse viewpoints, expert opinions, and reliable data strengthening the quality of content. In terms of the topics of content, the most frequently published content is "Political/social" 46% (n=116), followed by "Environment" 34% (n=87) and "Fashion" 20% (n=54). The interconnection of politics, fashion, and sustainability is vital in today's world, influencing society, economy, and the

environment. Politics determines policies and standards for the fashion industry, including eco-friendly production methods, recycling, ethical labor, and the availability of sustainable options. Fashion acts as a medium for political expression, advocating social and environmental causes, while embracing sustainability through eco-friendly materials and fair trade. Sustainability serves as a bridge between politics and fashion, minimizing environmental harm and promoting social responsibility. By aligning efforts, we can create a more equitable and eco-conscious future, as exemplified by Patagonia's recognition and promotion of social responsibility.

The effective cultivation of desired online consumer behavior, such as content sharing and interaction, relies on brands understanding what resonates with their target audience and how to engage them effectively. Emotional appeal, informativeness, and creativity are key factors influencing social media marketing effectiveness, with particular emphasis on emotional appeals and their influence on consumer responses, as argued by Lee and Hong (2016). Research shows that positive and negative emotions play distinct roles in shaping consumer behavior (Panda et al., 2013). An analysis of the dataset revealed that a significant portion of the captions from Patagonia could be categorized as provoking, aiming to provoke action in the reader. This aligns with the findings of previous research on the importance of emotional appeals. The correlation between emotion and content context was further examined, indicating that Patagonia strategically incorporates sustainability into its brand identity on LinkedIn, with posts expressing positive emotions related to environmental and fashion contexts. By creating emotional connections and provoking action through their content, Patagonia aims to positively influence customer beliefs, attitudes, and loyalty. The alignment of politics, action, and sustainability in the realm of fashion is crucial, as fashion becomes a powerful tool to intertwine style and sustainability. As awareness grows and optimism prevails, there is a collective desire for greener choices. The transformative power of fashion and politics, fuelled by positive emotions, paves the way for a world where fashion and sustainability coexist harmoniously.

After examining the use of "Other elements" in Patagonia's communication strategy on LinkedIn, specifically focusing on emojis and hashtags. Hashtags are known to enhance discoverability, expand reach, and facilitate engagement and community building. They connect individuals with similar interests and allow for participation in discussions and relationship-building. Patagonia strategically incorporates hashtags in their LinkedIn posts, particularly in the "political/social content" category, to align with specific causes, reflect

their values, and engage socially conscious consumers. This decision helps position Patagonia as an advocate for change and increases brand visibility within relevant communities. On the other hand, while emojis add vibrancy and expressiveness to content, Patagonia deliberately chooses not to include them in their captions. This decision may be driven by a preference for a more professional and formal tone, aligning with their brand image of sophistication and professionalism. Patagonia may also prioritize inclusivity, as emojis can be culturally subjective and open to different interpretations. By avoiding emojis, Patagonia ensures its messages are universally understood and minimizes the risk of miscommunication or misinterpretation. Overall, the strategic use of hashtags allows Patagonia to join important conversations, address societal issues, foster inclusivity, and generate meaningful engagement. Conversely, the absence of emojis in their content aligns with a more professional tone, maintains brand image and consistency, and ensures a universal understanding of their messages.

To answer the research question, Patagonia uses LinkedIn as a platform to showcase its brand identity, promote corporate responsibility, and connect with like-minded customers. By using the business essence of LinkedIn, Patagonia is establishing a voice of emphasizing its sustainability efforts in fashion but also full company support on political and social related discussions as a strategic tool to expand its brand community. The common appearance of "sustainability" as a term, activism, and legislation related to social change and the environment, as well, could further establish a stronger relationship with their community and serve not only as a brand account but also as an online space for people who would like to expand their knowledge in social and political activism and fashion.

5.2. Scientific and Social Implications

This project poses scientific relevance as it uses a literature review on sustainable fashion, brand identity, and social media marketing as a base to guide the direction of the research and compare its findings to it. Additionally, it investigates Patagonia's sustainability actions and previous research on the brand's branding strategy to reveal similar patterns and uncover new ones (Drawbridge, 2018; Lowitt, 2011; Mclaughlin, 2018; Patagonia, 2020). Through this research, detailed knowledge on the type of content Patagonia publishes on their LinkedIn account has been revealed that contributes to new findings related to the brand's

social media marketing strategy and branding approach. For example, previous research shows that brand equity which is tightly connected with brand image, is crucial for achieving loyal customers and successful brand identity (Biel, 1992; Keller, 1993). However, in the case of Patagonia, this is partly true as the brand focuses more on its own brand values and followers, rather than investigating the belief system of its customers and creating their branding accordingly. The sustainable actions taken by the brand through thought campaigns and longer terms brand initiatives illustrate their desire to change the environmental perspective of their customers for the better rather than navigating the brand based on the customer's vision. The study also highlights the significance of emotional appeal, drawing upon existing literature (Lee & Hong, 2016), and establishes Patagonia's level of incorporation of it.

The project also contributes to understanding LinkedIn as a platform and how brands can utilize it for brand identity and business purposes. Previous research has established LinkedIn as an ideal online platform for people scouting for a job or recruiters (Cooper & Naatus, 2014; Marin & Nila, 2021). However, LinkedIn is a social media platform far more than that, as the findings of this research have discovered. It explores LinkedIn as an alternative and additional platform for brands to consider and what its features can offer. These results could be applied by other fashion labels to incorporate LinkedIn as a social media tool in their marketing plan for both branding and community building. Lastly, these projects possess significance in recognizing LinkedIn as a potential branding tool to gain a competitive advantage in the industry.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This research study is subject to limitations primarily attributed to the volume of data and the exclusive analysis of a single social media account. While social media platforms offer a vast amount of user-generated content, conducting research solely based on a single account restricts the generalizability and validity of the findings. Firstly, the volume of data available on social media platforms is enormous, comprising diverse perspectives, demographics, and geographic locations. By relying on a single account, the study fails to capture the full breadth of experiences, opinions, and behaviors that exist within the larger population. The findings may not be representative of the wider social media landscape,

limiting the ability to draw comprehensive conclusions. Secondly, focusing on a single account disregards the inherent variability and complexity of social media interactions. Each account operates within a unique network of connections, followers, and interests, which can significantly influence the content shared and received. By examining just one account, the research overlooks the interplay between different accounts and fails to account for the dynamic nature of social media ecosystems.

To enhance the robustness of future research, it is crucial to consider larger samples that encompass a diverse range of social media accounts. By incorporating multiple accounts and a larger dataset, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of social media phenomena and ensure that the findings are more representative and generalizable. Moreover, the research is based on qualitative content analysis which as a method requires the application of techniques to reveal the meaning of the data analyzed. The researcher's theoretical knowledge provides the basis for the data's interpretation and; thus is important to be mentioned that the researcher's assumptions and biases could have influenced the study (Patton, 1999). The sampling procedure could also pose limitations as it was based entirely on the researcher's decision. This subjective decision-making process can introduce bias and limit the representativeness of the findings.

Additionally, the coding procedure is the most vulnerable to alterations. During coding, the researcher's personal opinions, beliefs, and theoretical backgrounds can affect their objectivity, resulting in skewed results. It may be beneficial to involve multiple researchers in order to mitigate these issues. Bias can be reduced by independently developing a coding framework and then comparing and finalizing it together. Additionally, ensuring objectivity can be made easier by independently coding the data and working together to agree on the final codes. As a result, taking such measures would establish supervision and reduce the likelihood of erroneous decisions. Furthermore, the project's objectivity and lack of bias could be gauged by measuring intercoder reliability (Lombard et al., 2002).

This research study primarily focuses on analyzing the strategic choices and platform utilization of Patagonia rather than investigating the responses of Patagonia users to the published posts. Numeric factors like emojis and hashtags were analyzed to gain insights into building a sustainable brand image. However, to develop a more comprehensive understanding, future research could explore the engagement levels achieved by Patagonia's

marketing communication on LinkedIn. Instead of solely counting comments and likes as engagement metrics, future studies could consider the content of these interactions. This approach would enable a deeper understanding of users' perceptions and reactions to the communicated messages. Moreover, to gain further insights into how Patagonia utilizes LinkedIn as a branding tool, this project and its findings could serve as an interview guide for future research. Conducting interviews with Patagonia's social media managers would provide an opportunity for research based on internal observation. This additional perspective and depth of analysis would contribute to a more comprehensive examination of Patagonia's online activities on LinkedIn.

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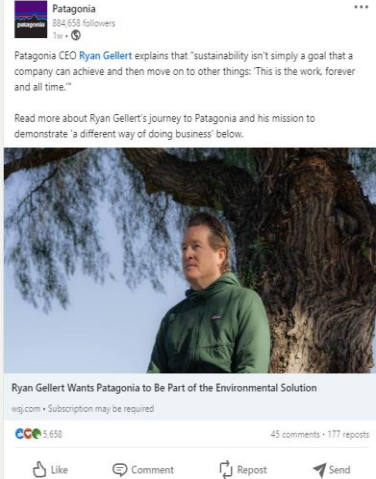
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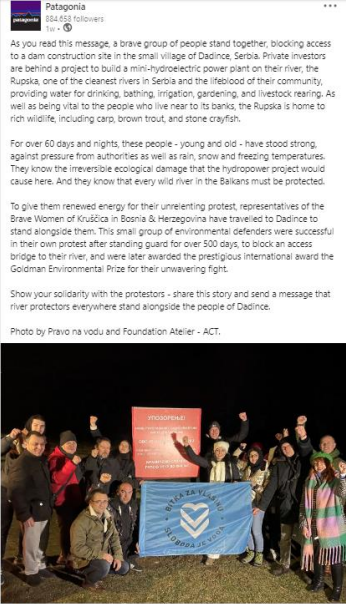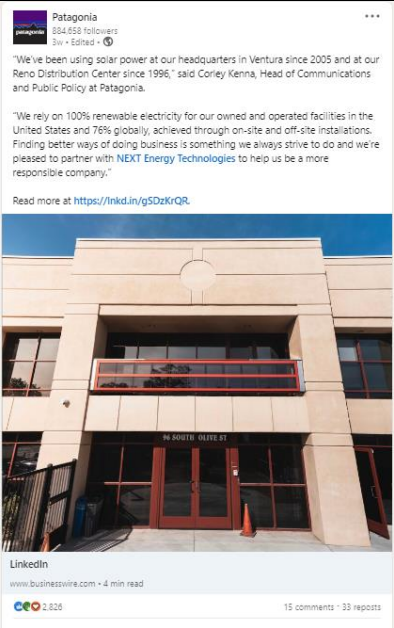
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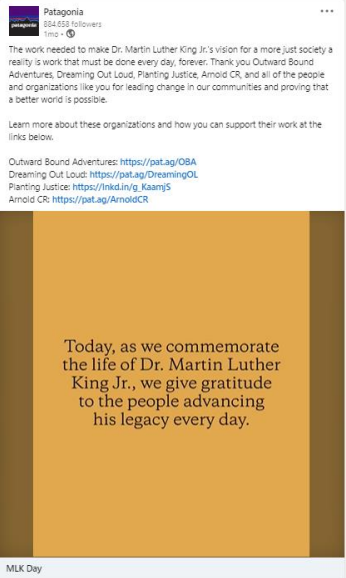
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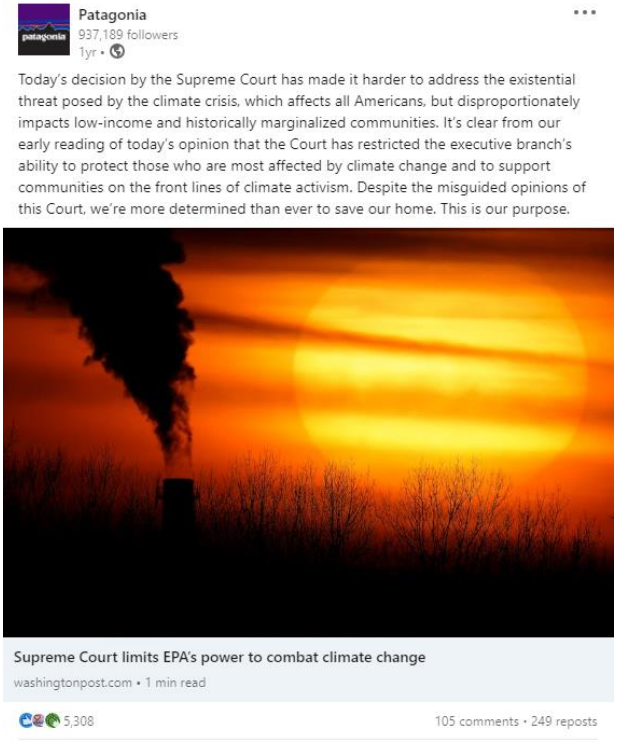
Appendix A: Coding frame

Category	Subcategories	Codes	Based on	Example
Sustainability	`	Overall	Showcasing care for the environment through appraisal	Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_why-patagonia-yes-that-patagonia-is-activity-7033115408056401921-8DRU?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
		Direct	Direct usage of the word	Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_ryan-gellert-wants-patagonia-to-be-part-of-activity-7029556670125002752-xkiC?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Type of content	Internal	Environment and political/ social	The context refers to environmental activism mixed with the social aspect of gathering	Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_as-you-read-this-message-a-brave-group-of-activity-7030831586103160832-2TGz?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
	External	Environment	Implying sustainability through the usage of renewable energy	Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_linkedin-activity-7025185579168403456-A6wg?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Emotional appeal		Positive	Expressing gratitude and appraisal	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_mlk-day-activity-7020742589532278784-R3Ua?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
		Positive	Sentiment of appraisal towards environmental accomplishment	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_vote-activity-6995515714128277504-HdoW?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
Other elements		Hashtags	Using of the symbol "#" on social media	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_timetovote-activity-6635975803630956545-VwVc?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Type of content	External	Fashion and Environment	Discussing the fashion industry as a polluter and sustainable changes	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_zo-maken-we-de-kledingindustrie-duurzamer-activity-6996040255782932480-RVCA?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
	External	Political/ social & Environment	Discussing a law suit on climate crisis	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_supreme-court-limits-epas-power-to-combat-activity-6948306130120970240-60U4?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

| Emotion al appeal | | Provokin g | Call for action to inform employers for employees position |
Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_if-youre-a-business-leader-and-a-member-activity-6960688839401086976-kwc4?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Emotion al appeal | | Positive | Informs about positive change in relation to climate |
Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_analysis-alaska-native-group-protects-land-activity-7012122532925362176-yMH3?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop |

Type of content	Internal	Political/ social	Speaks about reproducti ve rights	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_in-post-roe-america-businesses-can-and-activity-6946122372458438656-Nc16?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
Type of content	External	Political/ social & Environ mental	Speaks about a lawsuit concernin g environme ntal topic	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6970093899461644289?utm_s ource=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Emotional appeal		Neutral	It is an informative post that is neither calling for an action, nor expressing emotions	
				"Anybody that knows Yvon Chouinard, who is the founder and former owner of Patagonia, knows that he's a pretty reluctant businessman. And so you'd probably would find it as no surprise that for decades he's really asked himself the question, you know, what's the end game with Patagonia for me, for my family? "Over the last couple of years it became very clear that this was now the time for them to answer this question." -Ryan Gellert, Patagonia CEO In the latest This is Working, Ryan sits down with Daniel Roth, Editor in Chief, at LinkedIn, to talk about the role of business in solving the climate crisis. Listen or read at https://lnkd.in/gtEcwuxm
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_anybody-that-knows-yvon-chouinard-who-is-activity-7008571520587358208-6Uj4?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
Emotional appeal		Provoking	It is using language words "dead" and "mouth" as triggers	
				We've always been dead serious about saving our home planet—and now we're putting the entire business where our mouth is. Billionaire No More: Patagonia Founder Gives Away the Company nytimes.com • 9 min read
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_billionaire-no-more-patagonia-founder-gives-activity-6975911644623187968-onuR?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Other elements		Hashtags	Reposting a post containing the symbol "#"	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_the-power-of-community-energy-activity-6918190060357963776-is58?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
Emotional appeal		Exciting	Informs about an upcoming event	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_join-patagonia-ceo-ryan-gellert-and-linkedin-activity-6997957135565230080-9fVA?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Other elements		Hashtags	Using of the symbol "#"; used on social media to identify a topic.	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_vote-activity-6995515714128277504-HdoW?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
Other elements		Hashtags	Using # as a symbol to open communication for an event	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_sxsw-activity-7039752752624738305-c7sb?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Type of content	Internal	Fashion	Referring to brand's initiative in garments	
				Link: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patagonia_2_makers-uniteamsterdam-economic-boardand-activity-6950777431821590528-ddGv?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop