Green Threads in Digital Spaces

Investigating Environmental Sustainability Communication by Leading Outdoor Clothing Brands on Instagram

Student Name: Jie Liu

Student Number: 674487

Supervisor: Dr. Yijing Wang

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis

June 2024

Word Count:17119

Green Threads in Digital Spaces:
Investigating Environmental Sustainability Communication by Leading Outdoor Clothing Brands on Instagram

ABSTRACT

This study delves into how leading outdoor clothing brands use Instagram to communicate their environmental sustainability initiatives. The research aims to fill a gap in understanding how these brands, deeply connected with nature and outdoor activities, uniquely utilize Instagram to convey their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts. The primary research question explores how these market-leading brands communicate environmental sustainability through Instagram posts, supported by sub-questions focusing on the predominant themes, use of visual imagery, and commonalities in language and tone. The methodology involved collecting and analyzing 220 Instagram posts from these brands, focusing on content related to environmental sustainability. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify and categorize themes and patterns within the posts. The study adopted an inductive research approach, starting with specific observations and progressing towards broader theories. Findings reveal that the brands effectively use Instagram to highlight their commitment to sustainability through various strategies. Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc' teryx leverage visual storytelling, hashtags, and visual campaigns to engage their audience and promote eco-friendly practices. Visual elements such as natural landscapes, sustainable materials, and outdoor activities are prominently featured, reinforcing the brands' environmental messages. The use of positive and inspiring tones in captions further enhances the impact of their communication, encouraging followers to adopt sustainable lifestyles. The study also discusses the implications of these findings for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of digital CSR communication strategies, particularly in the context of the outdoor clothing industry. Practically, it provides insights for brands on how to effectively use social media to promote sustainability and engage with their audience. In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of Instagram as a platform for CSR communication, highlighting how leading outdoor clothing brands can leverage visual storytelling and strategic content to convey their environmental commitment. The study also suggests areas for future research, including the exploration of audience perceptions and the long-term impact of these communication strategies on brand loyalty and environmental behavior.

KEYWORDS: *Corporate Social Responsibility, brand communication, environmental sustainability, visual storytelling, Instagram*

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank all those who have supported and guided me throughout the completion of this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Wang, for her invaluable and patient guidance, support and feedback during the writing process. I am also deeply grateful for the endless love and support of my family, which has endowed me with relentless power to move forward. Furthermore, I appreciate all the teachers, colleagues, and friends I have known and everyone I have met in my life for their generosity and help.

May I continue to strive to live up to my dreams in the years to come.

Table of Contents

Abstract and keywords

[Preface]

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Background and Context 1

1.2 Rationale and Research Questions 3

1.3 Structure of the Thesis 5

2. Theoretical Framework 7

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) 7

2.1.1 CSR 7

2.1.2 Sustainability 9

2.1.3 Compare CSR and Sustainability 10

2.2 Environmental CSR and Sustainability 11

2.2.1 Environmental Themes in CSR and Sustainability 11

2.2.2 Environmental CSR and Sustainability in Outdoor Clothing Industry 12

2.3 CSR Communication on Social Media 13

2.3.1 CSR Communication 13

2.3.2 CSR Communication on Instagram 14

2.4 Communicating CSR through visuals on social media 15

2.4.1 Visual Storytelling 15

2.4.2 Hashtags and Visual Campaigns 16

3. Method 18

3.1 Research Design 18

3.1.1 Interpretivism Research Philosophy 18

3.1.2 Qualitative Research Methodology 19

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection 20

3.3 Operationalization 22

3.4 Data Analysis 24

3.4.1 Inductive Research Approach 24

3.4.2 Thematic Content Analysis 25

3.5 Reliability, Validity and Ethics 28

4. Results 30

4.1 Sustainability Communication Themes in Social Media 30

4.1.1 Outdoor Sports as a Sustainable Practice 30

4.1.2 Immersion and integration of outdoor enthusiasts in natural environments 32

4.1.3 Green Marketing of Sustainable Products 34

4.2 Visual Imagery of Sustainable Instagram Communication 35

4.2.1 Visual Elements for a Sustainable Lifestyle 36
4.2.2 Symbolizing the Spirit of Sustainability 38
4.2.3 Human presence as imitation 40
4.3 Communication Style of Sustainable Instagram Communication 42
4.3.1 Content: Future generation and earth focused 42
4.3.2 Language: A statement of environmental corporate social responsibility 44
4.3.3 Tone: Inspiring public attitudes towards sustainable living 45
5. Discussion 48
5.1 Theoretical Implications 48
5.2 Practical Implication 51
6. Conclusion 54
6.1 Limitations of the Study 54
6.2 Directions for Future Research 55
References 57
Appendix A: Coding Book 77
Appendix B: Coding Tree 79

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Concern for environmental protection and sustainability has become a modern way of life. The first celebration of Earth Day in the United States on April 22, 1970, marked the beginning of global concern for environmental protection; and the convening of the Paris Agreement in 2015, in which a major agenda item revolved around the environment and aimed to limit the magnitude of global warming, gave further impetus to the global concern for the environment and climate change (Agreement, 2015, p. 1). In a decades-long effort by global citizens, a large number of the public has raised their awareness of environmental protection and actively engaged in participating in sustainable lifestyles, according to Adelman and Gicksman (2020, p. 385). Such evidence shows that as the effects of global climate change become more apparent, many consumers want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting sustainable products. Environmental awareness and action are growing globally, and major international organizations, NGOs, and the media are pushing companies to take on more environmental responsibility. Apparel brands showcasing environmentally friendly initiatives are also a sign of compliance with this global trend.

Relevant apparel brands are taking the associated approaches to seek sustainable transformation. As specifically explained by Van Der Velden et al. (2015, p. 314), sustainable textiles mainly refer to the materials and processes that prioritize human and environmental safety throughout the product life cycle. This includes utilizing renewable or recycled sources for all energy, materials, and processes. Additionally, sustainable textiles ensure that materials can safely return to natural or industrial systems, potentially enhancing social well-being at every stage of production (Lee, 2017, p. 18). By focusing on reducing environmental impact while meeting consumer needs, the textile industry can support the long-term health of both people and the environment, fostering steady growth in sustainable practices (Ghosh & Mohan, 2021, p. 78). As sustainability increasingly influences business decisions, there’s a growing recognition that it's not merely a passing trend but a critical concept for survival. While fabric finishing and garment manufacturing require significant resources such as energy and water, textile producers are increasingly prioritizing sustainable practices from the inception of apparel product production (Ghosh & Mohan, 2021, p. 79). This provides motivation for apparel brands to leverage their sustainable business practices to cope with environmental and market changes.

The rising trend of sustainability in the apparel sector, from one side, is a result of the serious environmental consequences brought by industrial pollution. According to Abbate et al. (2024, p. 2838), the textile, apparel, and fashion (TAF) industries contribute between eight and ten percent of global greenhouse gas emissions recognized as a primary driver of global warming, leading to increased occurrences of natural disasters like floods, droughts, hurricanes, and rising sea levels. In response, governments and organizations convened the Paris Agreement on climate change in December 2015 (p. 2), with 195 nations committing to limiting temperature increases to below 2 °C (Schleussner et al., 2016, p. 332). Furthermore, the production of finished clothing is often outsourced by fashion businesses to developing nations, which has a substantial negative influence on their social sustainability (Schleussner et al., 2016, p. 337). Thus, the exploitation of workers in outsourced production facilities in nations with insecure labor conditions and lower salaries is a key issue in the fashion business that extends beyond issues surrounding carbon emissions, water use, and waste management (Johnson & Jaehrling, 2021, p. 111). Remarkably, only 1% of textile waste gets recycled or utilized into new garments, while 75% of textile waste ends up in landfills around the globe. In addition, the fashion business uses the second most water worldwide (Schleussner et al., 2016, p. 344). The natural environment also faces substantial harm from the release of colored effluents and microplastics during clothing production and disposal phases.

On the other side, modern consumers, especially the younger generation, are increasingly concerned about environmental protection and sustainability issues, and they tend to choose apparel brands that have a sense of responsibility for the environment, Brands displaying environmental strategies and practices can attract this group of environmentally conscious consumers. Apparel brands are competing for a limited group of socially conscious young consumers in the market, forcing themselves to constantly improve the strategies about sustainability (Radzymińska & Garbowska, 2023, p. 11). According to the World Wildlife Fund (2020), the current era requires a change in consumption habits to reduce environmental impacts. The apparel industry, responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions (Muthukumarana et al., 2018, p. 1349), faces criticism for its fast fashion practices that prioritize financial gain over environmental stewardship. As public awareness of these unsustainable practices grows, companies are adjusting their marketing approaches to highlight environmental attributes (Baldridge, 2021, p. 1). This transformation underscores the heightened importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for outdoor apparel brands, which are intrinsically linked to nature and thus view environmental sustainability as

not only ethical but also strategically essential (Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008, p. 55). Enhancing CSR through environmental and sustainable initiatives can contribute significantly to long-term profitability and the sustainability of businesses.

Therefore, the practice of corporate social responsibility emphasizing environmental attributes has become a popular trend today, using this approach not only to demonstrate a company's branding strategy and social image, but also to attract sustainable lifestyle consumers and satisfy their social trendsetting identities, expressing their environmental stance and environmental awareness by purchasing sustainable products. Many companies have begun to realize that the benefits of adopting a sustainability strategy are not only socially and environmentally beneficial, but also have multiple benefits at the organizational level itself, in the form of enhanced reputation, employer branding, increased competitiveness, and reduced operating costs and risks. More and more investors and stakeholders are demanding good environmental, social and governance capabilities from companies, and demonstrating environmental practices can help fulfill these expectations and attract more investment and cooperation opportunities. One of the key choices facing businesses between environmental degradation and economic growth is the need to increase environmental benefits while maintaining economic growth, especially in light of the economic crisis brought about by the post epidemic period in recent years, which has led to a renewed need for businesses to rely on sustainable strategies to survive (Dhanda, Shroitryia, 2021, pp. 1-3). Corporate environmental sustainability strategies are varied, such as maximizing material and energy efficiency, reusing waste, substituting renewable energy sources, etc., and they also commonly use social media to expose information about their environmental sustainability ideals and practices, to transparently demonstrate sustainable contributions to consumers, and to increase consumer trust.

1.2 Rationale and Research Questions

Research and practice have shown that CSR communication on social media has a positive impact on corporate reputation, brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Okazaki, et al., 2020, p. 2). By using social media appropriately, companies can introduce their social responsibility concepts, policies, and specific CSR programs, such as environmental protection programs, community environmental construction projects, and sustainable public welfare activities, to the public and consumers, boosting viral propagation on the network.

There are a number of factors that may increase the effectiveness of CSR posts on social media. These factors relate either to the CSR initiatives and messages themselves or to specific features of social media communication (Fernández et al., 2021, p. 9). Brands use social media to communicate the importance of sustainable development and social responsibility, and to raise the public's awareness of environmental protection and social responsibility, which can significantly enhance their brand influence and market competitiveness, and achieve better business results. Although considerable research has explored the relationship between social media marketing and CSR, there remains a specific gap in understanding how prominent outdoor clothing brands, whose products are intrinsically linked to nature and outdoor activities, uniquely utilize Instagram to communicate sustainability. Corporations have also not yet succeeded in tapping into the inherent potential of social media communication (Fernández, et al., 2021, p. 2). The research conducted by White et al. (2017, p. 389) on the literature review of CSR in the apparel industry highlights the lack of emphasis on the communication of environmental initiatives by companies operating in this sector. This involves not just adopting greener practices but also effectively conveying these efforts to a customer base that values ecological responsibility (Peters & Simaens, 2020, p. 12).

In order to address the gap in the literature, this study took on an in-depth exploration of how Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc'teryx, these three market-leading brands, leverage Instagram, a platform with immense outreach and influence, to communicate their environmental sustainability initiatives, provide psychological empowerment to consumers, activate their moral sentiments for environmental protection, and create social acceptance and norms for sustainable lifestyles, reflecting a growing trend of digital CSR engagement. Thus, the main research question was formulated as follows:

RQ: How do market-leading outdoor clothing brands communicate environmental sustainability through Instagram posts?

Subsequent to the theoretical framework, and in order to provide a comprehensive and thorough answer to the research question, a set of sub-questions has been established:

Sub-RQ1: What are the predominant themes in their Instagram posts related to environmental sustainability?

Sub-RQ2: How is visual imagery used to reinforce messages of sustainability?

Sub-RQ3: What are the focus, language, and tone used in the Instagram posts of these brands to communicate environmental sustainability initiatives?

This study's scientific significance lies in advancing the comprehension of brand-consumer interaction through environmental narratives on social media, as illustrated by He et al. (2016, p. 1320), who emphasize the impact of storytelling in digital CSR communication. Focusing on how outdoor brands employ Instagram for sustainability discourse, this research enriches digital CSR strategies, aligning with findings by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012, p. 344) on the effectiveness of social media for CSR messaging.

Societally, this study contributes to understanding effective public communication of environmental efforts, supporting the role of social media in promoting sustainable behaviors, as discussed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 65). Moreover, the research echoes the importance of effective environmental communication by businesses, as highlighted by Bhattacharya and Sen (2004, p. 17).

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In order to account for consistency and provide depth into the subject matter, the research has been structured in the following manner. First of all, chapter two Provides an in-depth exploration of the concept of CSR, touching upon previous research on the topic. This chapter discusses the components of CSR in relation to one of the most prominent works in current CSR literature, as well as the notions of corporate citizenship, shared value, and competitive advantage. Furthermore, the importance of CSR communication and social media is further discussed through a thorough examination of diverse frameworks and strategies extant in the current body of literature. Chapter three explains the methodology employed for exploring the subject matter. It discusses the relevance of semi-structured interviews for the current research, as well as the techniques used for gathering and analyzing the data. Chapter four presents the main results that emerged from the data analysis related to the notions of CSR and corporate citizenship, as well as CSR communication on social media. This chapter highlights the alignment of the social enterprise identity with their social media strategy, the factors associated with social media adoption, the social media strategies in CSR that the social enterprises employ, and the effectiveness of such a communication approach. Additionally, a direct link is established between the results of this study and previous

research related to the explored concepts. Thereafter, chapter five establishes a discussion on the theoretical and managerial implications of this study, highlighting its value to the academic field, and providing advice for the social enterprise sector in relation to their CSR communication on social media. In conclusion, chapter six draws upon the limitations of the current research and provides suggestions for future research in relation to CSR communication, social media, and the social enterprise sector.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical overview of the research. It discusses key concepts such as corporate social responsibility, sustainability, environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), social media CSR communication, and some key CSR communication strategies such as hashtag usage and visual storytelling. The literature review offers a big picture of the existing scholars' findings about the complexity of CSR communication on social media, which paves the theoretical foundations to explore the outdoor clothing brands' social media tactics in this study. Based on the existing scholars' findings, this chapter also identifies the research gap to be filled, further clarifying the research rationale of the present research.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

2.1.1 CSR

The development of CSR concepts in the existing body of literature began in the 1950s. According to Carroll (1991, p. 39), Howard R. Bowen's work outlined the first approach to defining the relationship between businesses and society, with CSR initially referred to as the idea of the responsibility businesses have in upholding practices and decisions made to be responsible for wider responsibilities (Carroll, 2015, p. 87). Likewise, since the 1970s, there has been a strong emphasis on CSR as a practice that addresses "the interests of both society and economic value" (Bani-Khalid & Ahmed, 2017, p. 204). This period has also provided a distinct image of socially responsible business, resulting in more differentiation among groups of stakeholders internally, such as employees and suppliers, and externally, pointing to the communities at large (Carroll, 1991, p. 39). According to Dahlsrud (2008, p. 4), the Commission of the European Communities proposed one of the most widely used definitions of CSR, stating that CSR is "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their voluntary interaction with their stakeholders." Recent literature, such as Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 64), has proposed the concept of creating shared value (CSV), which holds that corporations can gain a competitive edge and profitability by addressing social issues. This viewpoint contends that CSR initiatives, when strategically aligned with a company's core business, can contribute to

both societal advancement and business success, demonstrating a mutually beneficial relationship between corporate and community well-being (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 64).

Concerning the definition of CSR, according to Du et al. (2010, p. 9), in a general sense, CSR refers to some kinds of business practices that serve social or environmental objectives, and are undertaken voluntarily rather than mandated by law. Furthermore, CSR is often differentiated from philanthropy by its focus on aligning with the core business activities of the company and enhancing its profitability. This understanding frames CSR as a three-pillar framework that integrates social, environmental, and profit-driven concerns into business practices (Du et al., 2010, p.10). To understand the meaning of CSR, it is important to have a theoretical overview of relevant CSR theoretical models. One of the earliest models produced is Carroll's (1991, p. 45) pyramid of corporate social responsibility, which emphasizes the business's "economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic" duties. This is the most prominent framework found in current CSR literature. The author presents a clear model that demonstrates what is at the heart of firms that embrace CSR and provides implications for how this model might be implemented in their decision-making processes. According to Carroll (2016, p. 2), the pyramid was designed to emphasize the defining aspect of CSR and to demonstrate the fundamental nature of its four-part framework. Its selection as a geometric representation was based on its simplicity, intuitiveness, and enduring nature. Consequently, economic responsibility was positioned at the base of the pyramid, reflecting its foundational importance in business operations. Just as the foundation of a building must be robust to support the entire structure, sustained profitability serves as a cornerstone for meeting society's broader expectations from enterprises (Carroll, 2016, p. 7). The underlying premise here is that CSR's framework is constructed upon the foundation of a financially viable and sustainable business model. Simultaneously, society communicates to businesses the expectation of adherence to laws and regulations, as these legal frameworks represent society's establishment of fundamental rules for business conduct within a civil context (Carroll, 2016, p. 3). The present study utilized Carroll's (2016) CSR pyramid to analyze the practices of the selected outdoor clothing brands' CSR communication tactics on Instagram, and adopts the definition of CSR by referring it as some voluntary business practices meeting with environmental and social objectives beyond economic profits sake. It synthesizes the scholars' concepts of CSR and portrays it as the business practices of moving beyond economic profits but tries to take on wider social responsibilities to benefit wider stakeholders.

2.1.2 Sustainability

Extensive research have worked to explore and synthesize the scope of sustainability. While some studies adopt a narrower perspective in scope by focusing on single dimension of environmental sustainability, others show that understanding sustainability necessitates considering various interconnected facets that collectively define its essence. For instance, the operations management domain often views sustainability primarily through an ecological lens, neglecting its social dimensions (Sodhi, 2015, p. 1376). Conversely, studies like those by Kolk (2008, p. 3) have examined sustainability from economic, social, and environmental angles while integrating business elements such as risk management, transparency, strategy, and culture.

Chams and Garcia-Blandon (2019, p. 110) define sustainability for a business enterprise as adopting strategies and activities that meet present needs while safeguarding and enhancing human and natural resources for the future. On the other hand, Yin et al. (2024, p. 2) portray sustainability as offering the potential to mitigate long-term risks associated with resource depletion, energy cost fluctuations, product liabilities, pollution, and waste management. However, perhaps the most widely recognized sustainability definition stems from the Brundtland World Commission report (1987), which defines it as development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Consequently, sustainability definitions vary depending on the aspects the authors aim to investigate.

While there is a noticeable amount of literature digging into the conceptualization of "sustainability" and "sustainable development", one prevalent conceptualization, known as the "three pillar" model encompassing environmental, economic, and social dimensions, has gained widespread acceptance (Purvis et al., 2019, p. 682). This model typically involves balancing trade-offs among goals within these three categories, though its interpretations vary. However, a significant issue with this conceptualization is its lack of theoretical underpinning; it seems to have emerged in the literature without a clear original source and is often accepted without question (Singh et al., 2019, p. 238). The "three pillars" model, while widely adopted in literature, does not enjoy universal acceptance. Some studies propose additional pillars, such as institutional, cultural, and technical aspects. Alternatively, certain frameworks reject sustainability compartmentalization altogether. For instance, Milbrath envisions a "sustainable society" based on predefined values, while the "Natural Step" framework relies

on four guiding principles, and Giddings et al.'s conceptualization incorporates principles of equity. Moreover, the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the UN adopt an "integrated" approach, encompassing 17 broad goals across a smaller number of categories (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017, p. 913). This study adopted the three-pillar framework for the research to characterize the associated media strategies adopted by apparel brands from environmental, economic, and social dimensions.

2.1.3 Compare CSR and Sustainability

When comparing the concepts of CSR and sustainability, it becomes clear that while sustainability stems from scientific principles, CSR typically aligns with ethical principles, addressing ethical duties and claims (Sanchez-Teba et al., 2021, p. 8). Over time, companies and researchers have increasingly blurred the distinctions between sustainability and CSR in the corporate sphere, often using these terms interchangeably (Sanchez-Teba et al., 2021, p. 10). According to Arowoshegbe et al. (2016, p. 89), sustainability and CSR are overarching concepts that include ideas such as developing sustainably and triple bottom line (TBL), among others. Whereas isolated CSR practices were prevalent in the past, companies now tend to adopt a more comprehensive and strategic method, integrating all dimensions of sustainability and CSR into their strategy and seeking support through alliances with stakeholders (Arowoshegbe, 2016, p. 89). These scholars' opinions on CSR and Sustainability indicated a theoretical trend that in practical situations, CSR and Sustainability have usually been both applied in their businesses, so do the scholars. Hence, to cope with this trend, this research adopted the concept that CSR and sustainability have blurred lines between the two, and in most cases, this research used CSR and sustainability as interchangeable concepts in the analysis when analyzing the social media contents of the three selected outdoor sports brands' online information on Instagram. This study portrayed sustainability as the practice of sacrificing the current generation's needs without sacrificing the next generation's benefits from multiple perspectives, including energy consumption, environmental protection, and so on.

2.2 Environmental CSR and Sustainability

2.2.1 Environmental Themes in CSR and Sustainability

Over time, various perspectives on environmental sustainability have emerged. While the environmental literature views the theory of sustainability through the lens of implementing resource management strategies in an efficient manner (Ullah et al., 2023, p. 10), the managerial literature presents it as a means to bolster competence while safeguarding natural reserves for generations in the future (Kwarteng et al., 2016, p. 113). These two perspectives of research indicate that integrating sustainability into corporate strategy, product development, and business operations offers benefits such as increased sales, market expansion, enhanced corporate reputation, product differentiation, and a higher return on investment (Peters & Simaens, 2020, p. 12). Therefore, sustainable business practices have far-reaching implications for various facets of a company's business model (Peters & Simaens, 2020, p. 13), and the pursuit of environmental sustainability is intertwined with organizational identity. Examining the roles of managerial agency and organizational identity in integrating sustainability into organizational practices within a corporate ecosystem is critical to developing a thorough understanding of environmental sustainability (Fenwick, 2007, p. 640). The widely reported environmental sustainability practices include sourcing green energies to reduce or minimize the impacts on climates, recycling more and reducing waste, adopting clean production to reduce pollution, and so on (Fenwick, 2007, p. 633). Environmental sustainability and environmental responsibility have been contributing to business practices and upgrading both business and environmental protection performance from a long-term perspective.

According to DesJardins (1998, p. 826), corporate environmental responsibility can contribute to a company's sustainable growth and development. Thus, environmental themes have increasingly been a feature of corporate advertising (Davis, 1994, p. 34). Many companies have recently made greater efforts to promote their pro-environmental activities through CSR advertising campaigns (Schaefer et al., 2020, p. 195). In particular, for advocacy messages (Haley, 1996, p. 20), pro-environmental advertising can indeed be interpreted as a signal of added social value, which is likely to be associated with social benefits (Ku et al., 2012, p. 43). In a similar vein, environmental advertising can be used to improve their environmental image (Banerjee et al., 1995, p. 22). This is because it includes advertising messages to advocate for companies' environmental actions (Zinkhan & Carlson,

1995, p. 3). For example, with growing awareness of climate change, more and more companies are trying to address climate change issues through their CSR activities, promotional advertising, or other promotional campaigns (Allen & Craig, 2016, p. 2). That is, in the context of environmental CSR advertising campaigns, this is the case for greater emphasis on their environmental activities against climate change aligned with social expectations and values (Lerner & Fryxell, 1988, p. 954). Also, CSR and environmental issues are becoming more important to companies in the competitive market (Matthes, 2019, p. 93). Therefore, companies not only engage in pro-environmental activities but also advocate their corporate environmental responsibility to promote themselves (Taylor, 2015, p. 573). This research, against the concepts of environmental sustainability and CSR, critically analyzed the environmental approaches and information exhibitions on the social media platform Instagram adopted by the selected clothing brands. These frameworks guide the overall theoretical perspective on businesses' media communication strategies.

2.2.2 Environmental CSR and Sustainability in Outdoor Clothing Industry

Outdoor clothing refers to garments specifically designed for use during outdoor activities or sports such as skiing, climbing, snowboarding, hiking, camping, fishing, and more (Donaldson et al., 2001, p. 46). These clothing items are crafted to offer enhanced durability and comfort compared to regular clothing (Arumugam et al., 2023, p. 4). There has been a universal shift in emphasis towards staying healthy and maintaining a slim physique, prompting consumers to opt for outdoor attire. The evolving lifestyle, which prioritizes fitness and enjoyment in adventure sports and activities, is driving new market trends in the outdoor clothing industry (François et al., 2021, p. 314). Sports and fitness apparel has become indispensable for health-conscious consumers worldwide, leading to a surge in demand for outdoor clothing (François et al., 2021, p. 315). Alongside the trend of health consciousness, there is another trend of environmental consciousness in this sector, following the large trend in the clothing sector. The clothing industry, in connection with sustainability, has attracted the attention of various researchers in the past (e.g., Goworek, 2011, p. 75), particularly focusing on industry-specific sustainable consumption behavior and sustainable supply chain implementation (Oelze, 2017, p. 1435). There has been a growing trend among clothing companies to incorporate sustainability into their corporate strategy and value chains (Abbate et al., 2024, p. 2838). For example, sourcing green, sustainable raw materials, such

as cotton, is an example of a sustainable value chain. However, despite these advancements, the industry's sustainability remains questionable, as many companies are either just beginning to adopt sustainable approaches or are still in the process of integrating sustainability into their corporate strategy (Abbate et al., 2024, p. 2837).

In the outdoor clothing industry, environmental CSR transcends the role of a strategic option to become a necessity. This industry, where products are designed for use in natural settings, must ensure that its operations and offerings do not detrimentally impact the very environments they encourage consumers to explore. Integrating environmental CSR into their core business strategy allows these brands to not only mitigate potential negative impacts but also actively contribute to environmental conservation (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 78). Scholars (e.g., François et al., 2021, p. 314) have explored different phases of environmental CSR strategies in the outdoor clothing sector from brands' perspectives to consider both business operations and consumers' consumption modes. According to Harris et al. (2016, p. 310), brands can encourage avoiding excessive consumption and planned obsolescence, minimize material and resource usage during both production and consumption phases, and promote product reuse over time or among multiple users. Such a goal is to improve the business's operational efficiency. Implementing sufficiency strategies in businesses necessitates not only lean and sustainable production processes but also active efforts by companies to support sufficiency-oriented consumption changes among consumers (Lewis, 2000, p. 960). Such strategies may involve prioritizing durability, repairability, and longevity in product design as well as offering additional services to extend product lifespan and usage (Lewis, 2000, p. 961). Sufficiency-oriented business models require organizational boundary adjustments and alignment within the value network (Gossen & Kropfeld, 2022, p. 721).

2.3 CSR Communication on Social Media

2.3.1 CSR Communication

The notion that CSR communication is a component of stakeholder management is widely established in the CSR literature (Crane & Glozer, 2016, p. 1232). Although CSR encompasses a wide range of company operations, efforts must be made to educate stakeholders about them (Austin & Gaither, 2016, p. 291). The rise of online communication tools, such as social media, has provided stakeholders and the general public with

unprecedented insights and access to businesses and their social behavior. Austin and Gaither (2016, p. 292) went on to say that stakeholders are no longer passive recipients of organizational communication but instead have the ability to engage with and review material in a way that other users can see. Thus, social media empowers stakeholders by allowing them to actively participate in the creation and delivery of information, as well as share their knowledge with others (Rim & Song, 2016, p. 476).

Specifically, there are studies examining the utilization of social media for CSR communication. Lyon and Montgomery (2013, p. 748) contend that the emergence of social media has transformed how companies convey their environmental performance, enhancing the quality of CSR communication and mitigating greenwashing. Stohl et al. (2017, p. 414) propose that social media platforms facilitate the dissemination of CSR communication, allowing Internet users to express their opinions on issues without requiring consent from companies. Moreover, Dunn and Harness (2018, p. 1504) advocate for leveraging social media in CSR communication to alleviate public skepticism toward CSR initiatives. These findings suggest that social media can serve as an effective channel for CSR communication, enabling consumers to share their perspectives on companies' CSR endeavors and fostering interactive dialogue between companies and stakeholders (Chu et al., 2020, p. 261).

The literature highlights the significance of examining how sustainability is portrayed on social media, given its potential as a platform with significant transformative influence on society, thus shaping attitudes and behaviors towards a sustainable future (Stohl et al., 2017, p. 414). Moreover, Loukianov et al. (2020, p. 2) have observed a prevalent use of the term "sustainability" across activities, products, and lifestyles on Instagram, indicating its growing presence on social media platforms. Despite the increasing focus on sustainability communication on social media and its acknowledged impact on sustainable behavior and development, there remains a lack of research on the representation of sustainability on social media platforms like Instagram.

2.3.2 CSR Communication on Instagram

As notified by Khan (2018, p. 126), while Instagram is rapidly becoming one of the most popular social media platforms, academic study is increasingly focused on Instagram marketing. This is unsurprising given the platform's ubiquity. According to Clement (2019),

more than one billion people use Instagram on a monthly basis. As users were more engaged on the site, marketers had more opportunities to communicate with them via this media channel, and Instagram began to emerge as a key advertising tool for businesses (Clement, 2020). Instagram, in particular, is one of the most effective platforms for influencing a customer's knowledge of a brand, as Instagram users frequently utilize the program to find inspiration, information on items, or the company as a whole (Roth & Zawadzki, 2018, p. 102). Visuals increase a brand's significance in the eyes of consumers. According to Roth and Zawadzki (2018, p. 104), another benefit for marketers using Instagram is the ability to quickly update and adapt material to current events or festivities.

As reviewed above, CSR communication on social media and the role of Instagram in enhancing CSR communication have been emphasized in the existing scholarly work. However, there is a lack of research into the three top sports clothing brands in terms of sustainability and CSR communication on Instagram. This study fills up this gap by analyzing the key themes presented on their social media websites.

2.4 Communicating CSR through visuals on social media

2.4.1 Visual Storytelling

Visuals play a crucial role in communicating CSR initiatives on social media platforms (Islam et al., 2021, p. 124). As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 66) suggest, the richness of visual media offers a unique opportunity for organizations to convey complex CSR messages in an engaging and accessible manner. Visual storytelling allows companies to humanize their CSR efforts, showcasing the tangible impact of their initiatives on communities and the environment (Islam et al., 2021, p. 125). This approach not only enhances the authenticity of the message but also fosters an emotional connection with the audience, a crucial factor in building trust and loyalty (Raman et al., 2012, p. 2). The use of social media visuals for CSR communication aligns with the concept of social media as a participatory platform, where stakeholders are not mere recipients but active participants in dialogues around CSR (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 324). This participatory engagement not only amplifies the company's CSR message but also provides valuable feedback and insights from stakeholders, enabling a more responsive and inclusive CSR strategy (Etter, 2014, p. 323).

According to Peng et al. (2023, p. 167), the significance of visuals in shaping comprehension and sensitivities has long been acknowledged in understanding how visual culture reinforces values, attitudes, and modes of perception. However, recent research on visual environmental communication has indicated a growing trend toward the abstraction or decontextualization of images, which can obscure the associated concerns, desires, and preferences regarding what should be visualized from the perspectives of various stakeholders (Ståhl & Kaihovirta, 2019, p. 251). Photography, while capable of empowering, can also serve as a tool for stigmatization or victimization, leading to considerable concern over its use in imagery and visual interventions, giving rise to what some critical scholars have termed "crises of representation" in the area of environmental sustainability and CSR expression in the business domain (Seelig, 2015, p. 46). Through the review, it can be found that visuals are indeed significant in social media communication regarding CSR. But how visual imagery is used to reinforce messages of sustainability among the three selected top outdoor clothing brands is still under investigation, which is another focus of this study.

2.4.2 Hashtags and Visual Campaigns

Furthermore, the strategic use of hashtags and visual campaigns on platforms like Instagram and Twitter can galvanize public support for CSR initiatives, creating a sense of community and shared purpose among users (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009, p. 318). For example, Ben and Jerry's climate justice campaign utilized compelling visuals and targeted hashtags to spread awareness and mobilize action among its followers (Visser, 2014), exemplifying how visuals can be leveraged to advocate for social and environmental causes effectively. Geboers and Van de Wiele (2020, p. 8) emphasize the role of hashtags in connecting media content, such as posted images, to relevant keywords and broader thematic contexts. Smith and Taylor (2017, p. 158) underscore the significance of studying hashtags on social media, considering them as unique yet underexplored tools. Additionally, Dadas (2017, p. 18) suggests that hashtags primarily serve to attract attention, while Leonhardt (2015, p. 173) argues for their potential to enhance content virality and audience reach. Furthermore, Goodwin et al. (2020, p. 4) identify various motivations for incorporating hashtags into posts, including amusement, trend engagement, inspiration, outreach, and endorsement.

These motivations reflect two overarching patterns: contextualizing posts with meaningful hashtags to connect with specific themes or societal issues, and using hashtags for

attention-seeking, trend engagement, or leveraging their viral potential. The latter include hashtags such as #instagood or #picoftheday. Scholarly discourse highlights Instagram as a platform characterized by the pursuit of maximizing followers and likes per post (Cotter, 2019, p. 896). This trend is evident in the rising prevalence of influencers and the growing commercial significance of likes per post, as well as the emergence of illicit businesses that offer likes and followers on Instagram for monetary gain (Cotter, 2019, p. 897).

The concept of visual campaigns facilitated by the Internet explains the growing prominence and significance of images and videos in online contexts. Consequently, corporations leverage visuals as essential instruments to shape their agenda with various stakeholders, including the media, consumers, and non-governmental organizations (Chung & Lee, 2020, p. 261). Utilizing visuals in corporate communication captures individuals' attention more effectively than text, as the brain processes images much faster (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022, p. 1455). Images serve as a means to cut through the clutter of online information (Tench & Jones, 2015, p. 291), making them a crucial medium for companies to engage with stakeholders. Beyond attracting readers to websites or media content, images also produce specific effects: enhancing comprehension, eliciting emotions (Images serve as a means to cut through the clutter of online information), and improving memory and recall of information (Lock & Araujo, 2020, p. 2632).

Given the importance of comprehensibility in CSR exploration, facilitating memory and recall of CSR communication could help positive CSR information resonate with stakeholders, who often scrutinize such content for negative or scandalous elements, appealing to emotions (Saxton et al., 2019, p. 360). Recent studies have also indicated that visual CSR communication significantly influences stakeholders' intentions to engage with the company and shapes their perceptions of corporate motives (Jiang & Luo, 2024, p. 293). Thus, companies must ensure that their visual representations accurately reflect their CSR commitments and actions, avoiding misleading or exaggerated claims that could lead to skepticism and backlash (Jiang & Luo, 2024, p. 294). To investigate whether the three selected outdoor clothing brands have adhered to these rules, this study also collected data from the three brands on their Instagram social media platforms for further analysis.

3. Method

This chapter mainly follows Saunders' research onion framework, as shown in Figure 3.1. According to the figure, there are several layers of research methodology, including research philosophy, research approaches, research strategies, time horizons, and data collection methods. This study mainly relied on secondary data, and the data analysis methods were mainly qualitative. The specifics and details of how the research was carried out were clarified in this chapter.

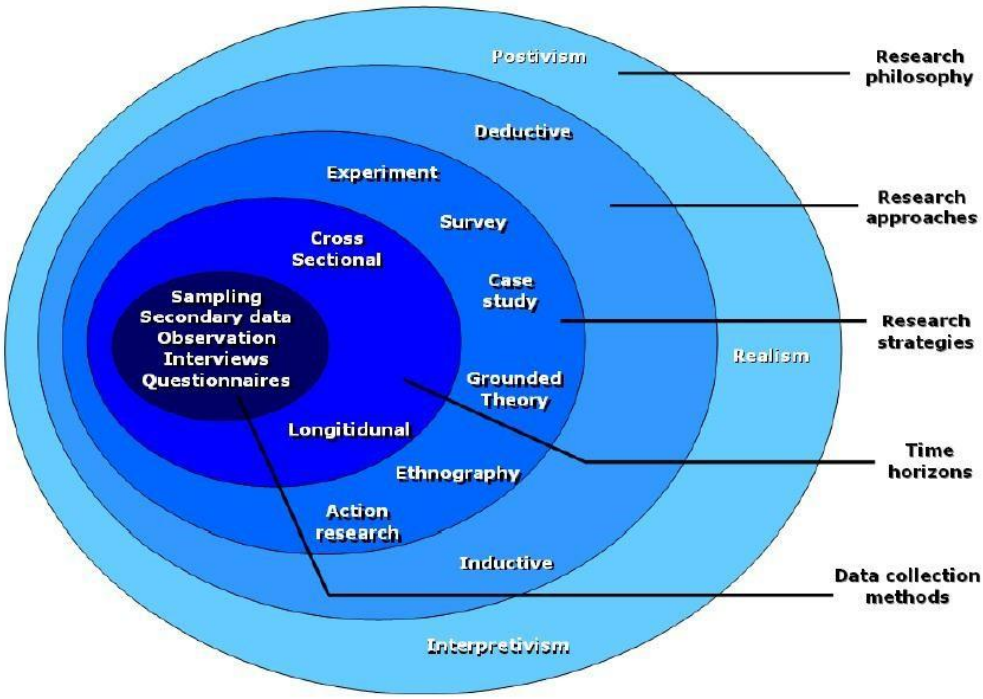


Figure 3.1. Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009)

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Interpretivism Research Philosophy

Interpretivism emerged as a response to the limitations of positivism, prioritizing a subjective viewpoint. It delves deeply into contextual variables and factors, recognizing humans' unique capacity to understand meanings in depth (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 40). Unlike physical phenomena, humans cannot be studied in the same manner, necessitating a

distinct approach for social sciences research. Interpretivism acknowledges the influence of cultural, situational, and temporal factors in shaping various social realities (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 41). In contrast to positivism's pursuit of universal laws, interpretivism emphasizes the richness of insights gathered, accommodating key variables and factors. Key tenets of the interpretivist perspective include a relativist ontology, which views reality as constructed through intersubjective understandings, and a subjective epistemology that acknowledges the inseparability of humans from their knowledge, fostering a direct link between researcher and subject (Schwandt, 1994, p. 120).

Interpretivism research philosophy was followed in this study mainly for the fitness between research nature and the research approach. This study aims to explore how different brands exhibit CSR information on social media platforms, which is mainly based on human interpretation of the key media messages. The researcher, following the interpretivism philosophy, interprets the meanings of different signifiers, such as symbols, texts, and images, to characterize the meanings behind the superficial message delivered to the audiences. By linking the theory of CSR and the brand performance of the selected outdoor brands, the researcher is able to interpret the findings in an in-depth manner for the three brands of Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc'teyx. Interpreting the commonalities between them about CSR communication on Instagram helps the researcher better understand the branding strategies. Therefore, the interepretivism research philosophy is suitable for the present study.

3.1.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research constitutes an extensive category involving research methodologies focused on examining experiences, behaviors, and relationships (Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011, p. 432). The qualitative approach typically addresses research queries related to "what," "how," "when," and "where," characterizing it as a verbally oriented research method (Jensen, 2013, p. 248). As a result, qualitative research methodology has the advantage of assisting researchers in gaining more in-depth knowledge about certain phenomena. Further, Saunder et al. (2009) emphasize that quality research follows a naturalistic approach and involves a multifaceted

method of focus. According to Saunders et al. (2009), qualitative research offers advantages such as: (a) aiding the researcher in comprehending the nature and intricacy of the phenomenon under investigation; (b) facilitating research in relatively novel areas; and (c) enabling the examination of a phenomenon within its authentic setting. Proponents of qualitative research argue that quantifying texts significantly diminishes the quality of recording, understanding, and analyzing a phenomenon (Tracy, 2019, p. 7).

This study, which aims to investigate how market-leading outdoor clothing brands communicate environmental sustainability through Instagram posts, will primarily answer the "what" and "how" issues, which suits the qualitative research methodology. Besides, the study is exploratory by nature, trying to interpret the social and business phenomenon of brand CSR communication on social media. The qualitative research approach fits in with such research features, helping to portray, decipher, and articulate the phenomena, prioritizing further understanding (Brennen, 2021, p. 5). Thus, a qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study. However, one issue with qualitative research is the researcher's subjectivity. It means that as qualitative research is more researcher-oriented based on one's interpretation, it is hard for the researcher to avoid being influenced by one's subjective status, like bias resulting from personal attitudes, values, culture, and ethos (Brennen, 2021, p. 6). This is the area that is worthy of attention in the present study.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The study focused on Instagram posts from three brands, naming Paragonia, The North Face, and Arc'teryx, as they play leading roles in the outdoor clothing sector due to their outstanding sales performance and brand performance (Gilmour, 2023, para. 15). The study followed a purposive sampling method by setting up appropriate criteria for selecting suitable Instagram posts. According to Sibona et al. (2020, p. 22), purposive sampling means selecting a specific group of individuals or units for analysis meeting certain criteria to fulfill some specific intent. So this method is also referred to as judgmental sampling or selective sampling. Note that the comparable randomness in determining the purposive selection criteria limits purposive sampling, leading to bias in sample selection (Etikan et al., 2016, p.

3). The criteria selection and determination should be based on critical evaluation and measurements of the research goal and research contexts.

Specifically, as shown in Table 3.1, the researcher has calculated the Instagram posts for the three brands with the details shown in the table. The following table explains the key information about the three case brands, including their Instagram accounts, number of followers, number of posts, and post frequency. It compares three outdoor clothing brands—Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc'teryx—based on their Instagram presence. Patagonia has 5.31 million followers with 2524 posts, posting once every day. The North Face has 5.46 million followers and 2225 posts, averaging about four per week. Arc'teryx has 1.4 million followers, 3443 posts, and posts approximately four times per week.

Table 3.1: Details of Instagram Pages of the three Brands

Outdoor clothing brand	Patagonia	The North Face	Arc'teryx
Instagram account	@patagonia	@thenorthface	@arcteryx
Number of followers	5.31 million	5.46 million	1.4 million
Number of posts	2524	2225	3443
Post frequency	1 post every day	about 4 posts every week	about 4 posts every week

The dataset targeted Instagram posts from the aforementioned brands that aligned with specific environmental sustainability criteria. This method ensured that the collected data was relevant to the research questions, focusing on posts that communicated anti-pollution messages, showcased natural and sustainable materials, promoted a green value chain, highlighted recyclable business models, and encouraged engagement with nature. Based on post-selection criteria: (1) outdoor sports; (2) environmental protection activism or campaigns; (3) natural landscapes; (4) getting close to nature; (5) using environmentally friendly or recycled materials. Specifically, the data for this study was sourced from Instagram posts published by three outdoor apparel brands: @patagonia, @thenorthface, and @arcteryx. The emphasis was on both the visual content and the accompanying text of these posts. Data collection spanned from October 1, 2023, to February 29, 2024, encompassing eligible posts within this timeframe. In total, 220 posts were collected, with Patagonia

contributing 128 posts, The North Face 26 posts, and Arc'teryx 66 posts.

3.3 Operationalization

The study characterized how the three brands utilize Instagram posts to showcase and reinforce their environmental sustainability brand image. This study processed initiatives involving data collection and pattern recognition, resulting in the formulation of new theories with the primary goal of developing novel thoughts and theories through an open data coding process (Azungah, 2018, p. 392). Specifically, the researcher explored the content on the Instagram profiles of the three brands by analyzing the associated CSR messages. This analysis facilitated an inductive investigation into the brands' social media CSR branding strategies via Instagram posts. The study approached the analysis of Instagram posts with a relatively open mindset to identify the environmental CSR themes of the three brands, which suits an inductive approach and will contribute to understanding and addressing the pertinent research questions. The sample operational coding process was carried out as shown below with three phases of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Step1: Open coding

The open codes derive from the notes of step one and are organized into potential and overarching themes by sorting and combining them (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In this step, the researcher will have to code the associated topics in relation to environmental sustainability, such as environmentally friendly raw materials, anti-pollution, and so on. The coding process should consider both the textual information and the messages conveyed through images or videos. For example, as shown in Figure 3.2, the textual message "durable waxed fabric" indicates its environmental friendly materials by being durable to minimize environmental pollution, so the notes will be taken. The coding message will be taken notes in the format of Excel with the form "images+notes" first to make it more convenient for the next steps of axial coding and selective coding.

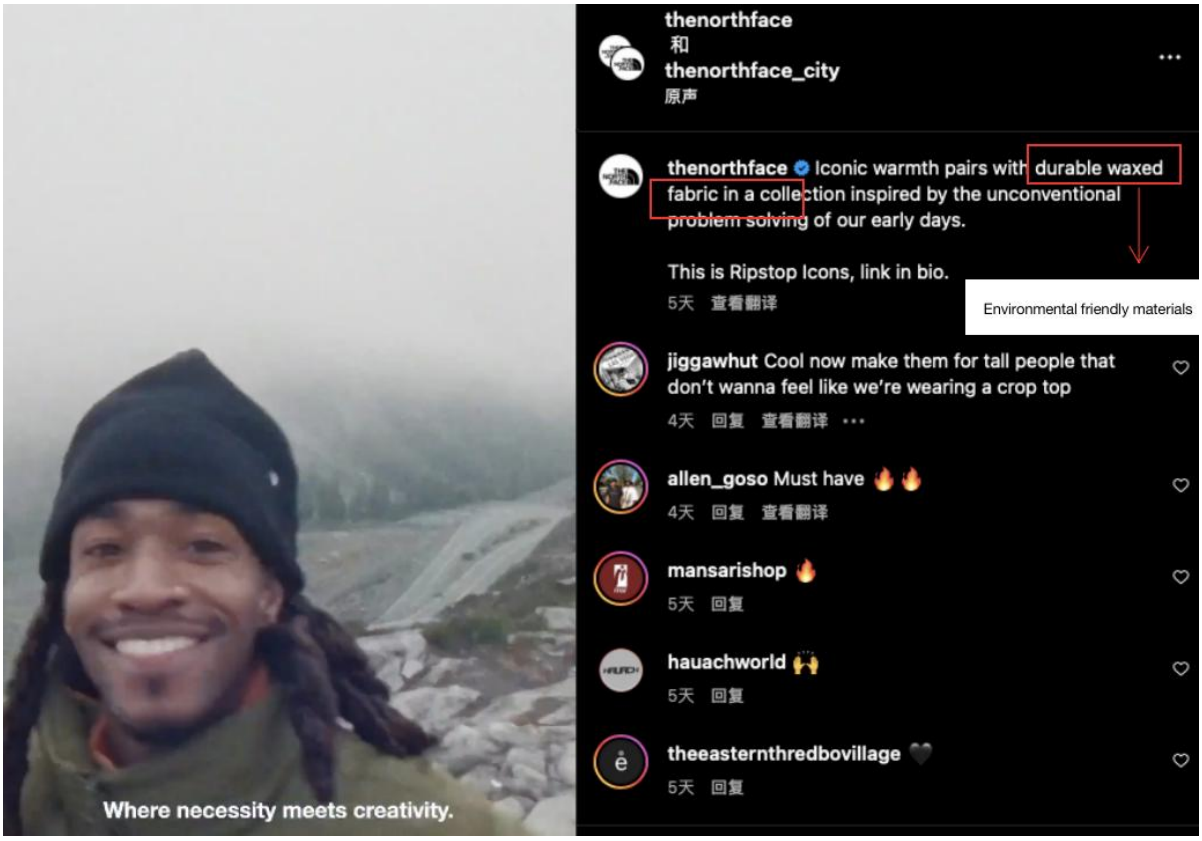


Figure 3.2. One of the posts of The North Face on Instagram

Step 2: Axial coding

Subsequently, relationships between the codes and overarching themes and sub-themes arose. After sorting the coding into themes, the themes are reviewed. For instance, some themes overlap and merge into one theme, and other themes are split up into multiple themes. Like those mentioned above, themes like "durable materials" and other similar themes like "eco cottons" that emerged in open coding can be classified into the larger theme category of "environmental friendly materials." Specifically, this phase consists of two levels of review. On the first level, the researcher will read the codes within a theme to look for patterns. On the second level, the researcher will look at the themes in relation to each other and the overall dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). For example, the researcher can compare the different themes between "durable materials" and "eco cottons" to find out their different emphasis as revealed in imagery and texts, so that the characteristics in areas of focus, language, and tone while communicating brand CSR through Instagram can be found.

Step 3: Selective coding

In the concluding phase, the generated themes will undergo further refinement and selection. The researcher will elucidate the intriguing facets of each theme, providing the reader with a cohesive understanding of how these themes interconnect (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). During this stage, the primary task for the researcher involves coding the fundamental sustainability themes that the three brands aim to convey on Instagram. This may encompass the important areas where the brands share common concerns. Specifically, the researcher will identify the environmental CSR domains that all three brands focus on intensively on Instagram. This step sets the foundation for subsequent analysis concerning their CSR communication strategy on social media, making it more valid for the researcher to understand their commonalities in social media CSR communication strategy.

Time horizons explain the temporal scope of the research processes. This may entail a cross-sectional or short-term study, where data is gathered at a singular point in time, or a longitudinal study, which involves the repeated collection of data over an extended duration to facilitate comparison over time (Rindfleisch et al., 2008, p. 265). This study adhered to short-term study time horizons, as it collected secondary information about the CSR message communication on social media platforms of the selected case brands over several months, instead of using a cross-sectional format. These time-horizon settings were suitable for this research because of time constraints. Specifically, this study spanned several months from topic initiation to data collection, data analysis, and final report writing. It is based primarily on recent data and brand activities that have already occurred. The research does not intend to compare the current approaches of brands with their future marketing communication practices, so it does not need to set a longitudinal time horizon.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Inductive Research Approach

This study adopted inductive research approaches. It used this research approach to identify and define concepts for the proposed study. Inductive research involves deriving theories or generalizations from specific observations or data (Azungah, 2018, p. 385).

Inductive research involves gathering and analyzing data to formulate theories and concepts based on observed patterns and phenomena within the data (Azungah, 2018, p. 384). It employs a "bottom-up" approach, beginning with specific observations and gradually progressing towards broader theories or ideas. This method is commonly employed and suitable in exploratory studies (Azungah, 2018, p. 386). The inductive research process consists of three key steps: (1) observation of phenomena; (2) pattern recognition by sorting out themes based on data observation; and (3) theory developments to develop concepts on a certain phenomenon in relation to a particular issue (Saunders et al., 2009).

Because of its exploratory nature, this study used an inductive approach to characterize the predominant themes in the Instagram posts related to environmental sustainability. Besides, it also explored the patterns of how visual imagery contributed to messages of sustainability. After these explorations based on observation of data and also pattern characterization, the study finally concluded the commonalities of CSR communication between brands. According to Zalaghi and Khazaei (2016, p. 25), induction serves as a method of reasoning where a law or general principle is deduced from the observation of specific instances. This approach emphasizes the significance of observation in drawing conclusions. Typically, it proceeds from the specific to the general, as researchers can explore from their limited observations of particular circumstances to broader conditions. In the area of market communication, the inductive approach commences with the examination of companies' media data and advances toward formulating associated media message codes and principles based on recurring patterns and relationships observed therein (Saunder et al., 2009). This is the task to do, particularly in the present study.

3.4.2 Thematic Content Analysis

The analysis was conducted by means of the steps of a thematic content analysis that Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) distinguish. Thematic analysis is commonly used for analyzing qualitative data and is commonly employed in the analysis of textual sets like interviews or transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). The researcher scrutinizes the data to identify recurrent themes, which include subjects, concepts, and recurring patterns of

significance. As this study intends to explore textual sets, such as texts and images on Instagram, thematic analysis is suitable not only for its flexibility but also for its fitness. Thematic analysis offers researchers the advantages of convenience and flexibility because they can adjust it for the research's purpose according to specific research contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 95).

In order to carry out thematic analysis, several steps were followed. The first step is to familiarize the researcher with the collected data. In order to become familiar with the data, it is important to repeatedly and actively read the selected Instagram posts. This should be done while taking notes, which yield an initial list of open codes, which are recurring topics in the data. This is a manual process in which as many themes and patterns as possible are identified, which are relevant again in step three (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). After this, the written data will be transcribed, which is the second step. This step adds to the process of getting familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90). After becoming familiar with the data, the third step is the manual generation of open codes.

In this study, the researcher first collected and organized the data in Excel. The dataset consists of several columns with specific Instagram post attributes. "Date," one of these columns, displays the date of each post in the format YYYY-MM-DD. Another column titled "Link" provides URLs leading directly to the respective Instagram posts, enabling access to various forms of media shared within them. Additionally, the dataset includes a column labeled "Post screenshot," which contains screenshots of each individual post for reference. Another important attribute is "Visual type," which categorizes the type of media shared in the post, distinguishing between formats such as "video" or "picture." Finally, the "Content" column offers brief descriptions or categorizations of the subject matter of each post. Examples of content categories include "climbing," "anti-gas pollution," "protect coastal ecosystem," "hiking trail surfaces," and "mountain scenery," suggesting a predominant focus on environmental issues and outdoor activities within the dataset.

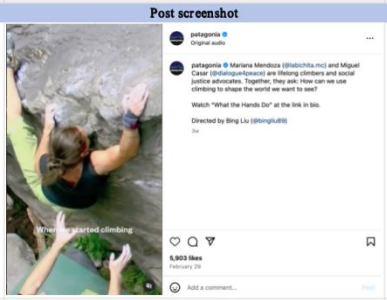
	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Date	Link	Post screenshot	Visual type	Content	Met criteria
2	2024/2/29	https://www.instagram.com/p/C38Ie4wR3n4/		video	climbing	1
3	2024/2/28	https://www.instagram.com/p/C35gps1sVdo/?img_index=1		picture	anti- gas pollution	2
4	2024/2/27	https://www.instagram.com/p/C33CRp4reqH/?img_index=1		picture	protect coastal ecosystem	2

Figure 3.3. Data organized in Excel

Then, these data were imported and analyzed in Atlas.ti. The examples of coding processes in Atlas.ti are shown in Figures 3.4 and Figure 3.5. The dataset is organized to facilitate a detailed analysis of the sustainability themes and communication strategies employed by the brands. A visual typology of each post and an initial thematic categorization of the content were carried out so that it was easier to produce the codebook with a comprehensive understanding of the data already in place and to help with the initial analysis that was about to begin.

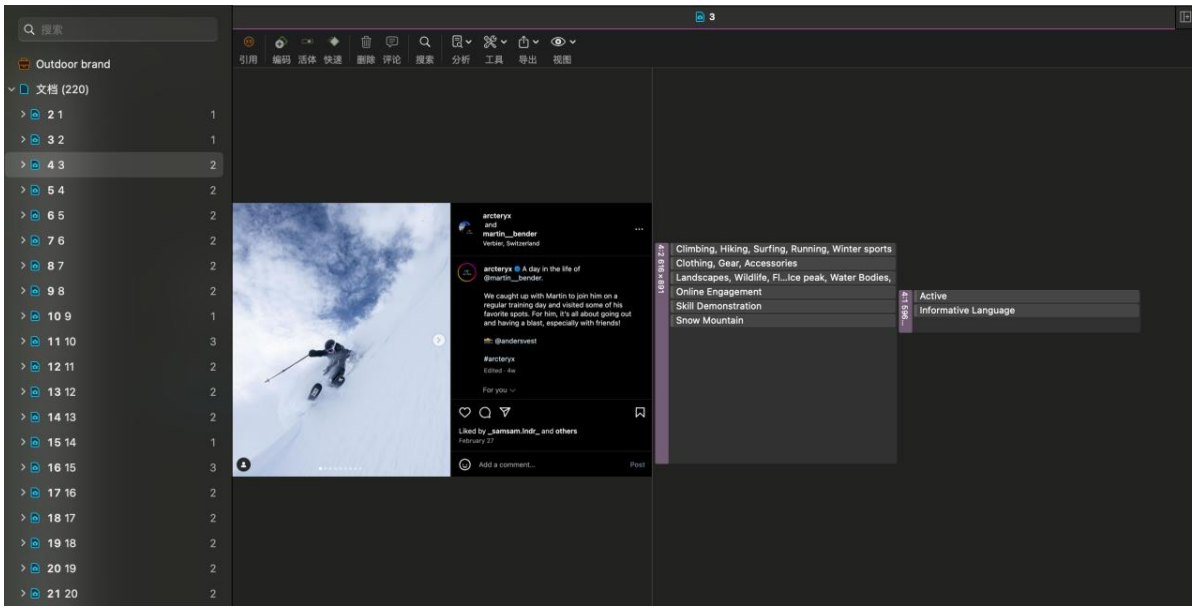


Figure 3.4. Coding process page in Atlas.ti

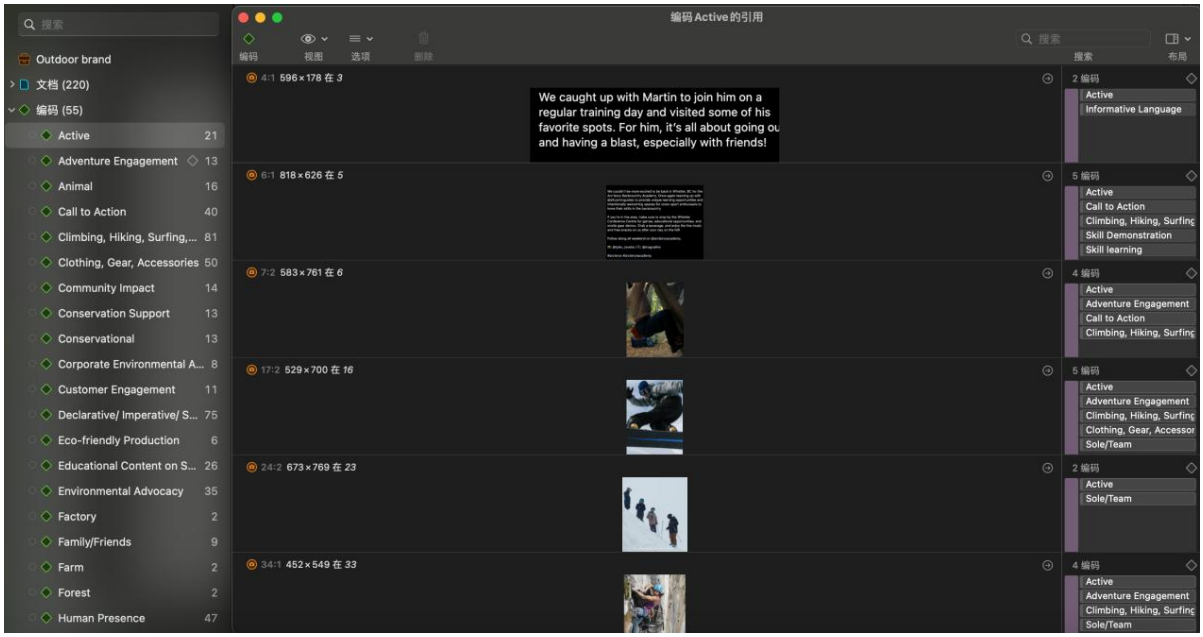


Figure 3.5. Coding categories page in Atlas.ti

3.5 Reliability, Validity and Ethics

To establish the credibility of the research, the researcher has to take care of research validity and reliability. According to Braun and Clark (2006, p. 96), thematic analysis requires a comprehensive disclosure of the data analysis process to establish its credibility. This is particularly crucial, as it is contended that during data analysis, the researcher bears

full responsibility for interpreting the data and determining the codes assigned to it (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). First, the researcher would immerse herself in the data by fully familiarizing herself with it by reading it repetitively in the open data coding process. Furthermore, she would have to focus on certain aspects of the data in order to create codes in the second stage of axial coding, but she should take care to create clear distinctions to prevent codes from overlapping (Douglas, 2003, p. 50).

Furthermore, the researcher would have to consider self-reflexibility when interpreting data to minimize subjectivity-based bias (Pezalla et al., 2012, p. 167). In order to achieve this, she would also have to leverage the transparency of the overall data coding process. Furthermore, this study seeks comprehensive data treatment (Silverman, 2011), taking into account all types of data, even if the analysis yields incoherent results. There are no unique ethical concerns that need to be addressed because the study will focus on publicly accessible promotional materials on Instagram. The nature of these materials, being promotional and intended for public view, mitigates many potential ethical concerns, especially regarding privacy and consent. In addition, the purpose of this research is to conduct thorough data treatment (Silverman, 2011), which includes respecting the context of the data and ensuring that the analysis is sensitive to the nuances of public versus private information. This approach underscores the commitment to ethical research practices, acknowledging the distinctions between different types of content on social media platforms.

4. Results

4.1 Sustainability Communication Themes in Social Media

This section explores the common themes that three outdoor sports apparel brands communicate to customers on the social media platform Instagram. There is a convergence of communication themes across the three outdoor platforms for sustainability, all of which can be categorized into Outdoor Sports, Environmental Advocacy, Nature Immersion, and Sustainable Products. Sports-related content inspires customers to participate in the spirit of sports by displaying a variety of outdoor sports scenes; Environmental Advocacy appeals to brand fans to participate in sustainable activities organized by the brand, increasing the adhesion between the brand image and customers; Nature Immersion and Sustainable Products increase the adhesion between the brand image and customers through spiritual participation in sustainable activities, and promote the sustainable attitude of loving life, living, enjoying nature and protecting nature to fans through different ways of spiritual participation and material participation. In the process of brand Instagram communication, the brand and the customer are in an inter-subjective coexistence relationship, where the customer uses the brand's environmentally friendly products to participate in active outdoor sports that are good for the body and mind; and the brand provides the customer with a community meaning of participation in outdoor sustainable sports channels and lifestyles.

4.1.1 Outdoor Sports as a Sustainable Practice

Outdoor sports represent a healthy, low-carbon lifestyle, and these clothing brands are complaisant in showing their audience active outdoor sports activities on social media, such as rock climbing, bouldering, mountaineering, snowboarding, surfing, etc. Nature experience is one central foundation for the development of knowledge and values in relation to the environment (Bögeholz, 2006, p. 65). Therefore, all three outdoor brands promote vigorous outdoor activities to their audiences. Mountaineering and rock climbing photos and videos are the most popular community content used by the leading outdoor brands, representing a great way for outdoor enthusiasts to challenge themselves and explore nature, often in remote

or mountainous areas. Hence, these postings help people learn to appreciate and protect the natural environment more and also emphasize the importance of exercising a healthy body, which can lead to an increase in an individual's physical fitness. Hiking and running are zero-carbon sports that do not require any mechanical equipment but only human power and are simple and easy to practice outdoor sports that have almost no negative impact on the environment. Hiking and running not only allow outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy the beauty of nature but also reduce environmental impact. In addition to this, surfing has also become a popular favorite content, as have boating and kayaking, which are very enjoyable outdoor activities in appropriate waters. They do not require fuel and only rely on human power to feel the serenity and beauty of nature in lakes and rivers, while the Instagram content of sea surfing will make viewers feel the charm of the ocean and the beauty of the individual movement.

In the social media posts of these outdoor sports brands, some convey to people the challenges of overcoming hardships in nature, the spirit of individual adventure, and sports skills and ways of overcoming difficulties, some show the ways of social interaction in outdoor sports with family members, friends, and groups, and some output the beauty of the earth, triggering the viewers to think about the relationship between the individual and nature. Undoubtedly, these outdoor brand promotional contents with rich content forms will function as propaganda, guidance and education for the public's sustainable behaviors, and active learning and teaching of outdoor sports will increase people's understanding of sustainability (Prince, 2017, p. 166). In particular, when brands release some of their sharing about outdoor sports movies and personal stories, the protagonist's positive participatory behaviors and exciting adventures will greatly stimulate the audience's interest in the outdoors. For instance, The North Face aimed to disseminate information encouraging viewers to witness athletes collaborating with seasoned veterinarians to surmount their fear of the ocean on Instagram, via their official account in Majorca (2024/2/13, The North Face). Through the movie story and the athlete's personal experience, the brand enables outdoor enthusiasts to learn and understand relevant outdoor sports skills and techniques, acquire indirect second-hand experience, and create positive behaviors for environmental sustainability through modelling and mentoring.

4.1.2 Immersion and integration of outdoor enthusiasts in natural environments

Outdoor clothing brands call for a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. In their Instagram releases, customers can see the integration between the natural environment and outdoor sports enthusiasts, whose interplay of scenes creates a good online interactive platform and community influence for outdoor sports enthusiasts, as well as members of adventure groups or clubs, such as mountaineering tours, hiking clubs, and so on. In Instagram communication, brand fan users can share their love of nature with other enthusiasts among themselves, and in these brand-centered aggregated groups, they can meet like-minded people, explore unknown territories together, and share experiences and knowledge. For example, Arc'teryx is urging fans to get involved in skiing activities:

"*Dive into the slopes with @chrisbenchetler at the Arc'teryx Backcountry Academy! Terrain, this clinic wasn't just about skiing; it was about turning mountains into your playground!"* (2024/2/27, Arc'teryx)

Understanding and experiencing nature's outdoor experiences can change behaviors and attitudes, which is a key attribute of sustainable development (Bögeholz, 2006, p. 79). Brands regularly publish and disseminate outdoor activities to their users, urging them to actively participate in outdoor sports and to integrate with and learn about nature, which not only facilitates the participation of fans of the brand in activities with other volunteers, getting to know the local residents, and contributing to the improvement of the environment and public resources in the community. It also enables outdoor enthusiasts to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of nature, enhance their awareness of the reverence for and protection of nature, and enjoy the fun and benefits of integrating into nature. At the same time, the brand's use of online and offline, team participation and other activities organized also strengthens the brand and the fan community to establish good contact opportunities. It can be said that the head of outdoor clothing brands provides users with a platform to communicate with other outdoor enthusiasts in the online activities of the

brand's Instagram posts, to find nearby sports partners, to participate in outdoor activities organized by the brand, and to share their own sports experience and results.

In addition to team participation, there is also individual adventure experience and spiritual comprehension that have become the communication content of these head outdoor clothing brands, who internalize individual outdoor participation as the expression of individual will. Whether it is through challenging oneself, connecting with nature, or exploring the unknown personalized equipment, outdoor sports can be an important way for people to show their personal qualities and attitudes towards life, which is not only a healthy lifestyle but also a kind of fusion of the individual with nature, the expression of the will of the individual in nature, and the embodiment of the attitude towards life. Being outdoors is widely recognized as important for improving human health and well-being, enhancing social interaction, and connecting people with their natural and cultural heritage (Winter et al., 2019, p. 2). In the following Instagram post (Figure 4.1), the viewer can feel the positive spillover effects. The image of the young boy sitting alone in a tree meditating shows a connection between nature and mental health, where the individual is not only physically interacting with nature but is also mentally connecting with nature. By meditating, contemplating, and communicating with nature, an individual can feel the power and wisdom of nature and thus gain spiritual fulfilment and balance. The boy in meditation becomes part of the tree, highlighting the interconnected relationship between human and environmental sustainability.

Figure 4.1. Instagram post of Patagonia on 2024/2/18

4.1.3 Green Marketing of Sustainable Products

Technologies such as eco-innovations, product innovations, and changes in outdoor sports equipment increase the experience options for participants (Winter et al., 2019, p. 4), with high fit and comfort, functionality, safety, and innovations in sustainable products that can appeal to different types and young people with curious minds. Leading outdoor clothing brands in Instagram content dissemination use graphics for the purpose of product marketing in these introductions to highlight the environmental features and advantages of the product, such as the environmentally friendly materials, energy-saving design, recyclable packaging, and so on, to emphasize the product's friendliness to the environment. Arc'teryx in the Instagram to explain to the customer that the corporate brand uses "lighter, thinner, lighter, thinner, more eco-friendly fabrics. Always our first choice to stay dry (2024/2/8, Arc'teryx)" By using these eco-friendly materials to manufacture outdoor gear, outdoor apparel brands can reduce their consumption of natural resources, minimize environmental pollution, and promote environmental protection and sustainability. At the same time, these materials are typically healthier and safer, in line with people's demand for healthy living and green consumption. When advertising, outdoor apparel brands usually emphasize the advantages and features of their products or services, such as superior performance, reliable quality, and functionality, demonstrating the importance of sustainable outdoor practices and equipping their products to encourage the resilience of ecosystems, including human communities, in order to attract consumers' attention and interest.

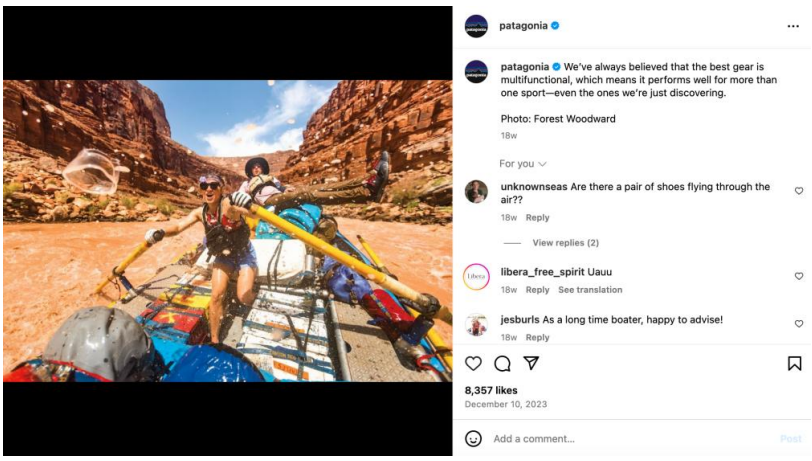


Figure 4.2. Instagram post of Patagonia on 2023/12/10

In recent years, sustainable fashion has become a hot topic in the global fashion industry. Head Outdoor Clothing brand enjoys a high reputation and influence in the fashion field, offering a wide range of high-quality, functional and stylish outdoor apparel and equipment, which is popular among outdoor enthusiasts and fashion seekers. They ensure that the materials and technologies used to manufacture their products comply with all global sustainability standards, and they rigorously monitor the entire supply chain, from raw material sourcing to garment manufacturers adapting sustainability to save the environment and present ethical practices (Nayak et al., 2020, p. 239). Through social media, these outdoor apparel fashion brands can promote the fact that environmentally sustainable products can serve a green marketing purpose, such as Patagonia's December 2023 posting stating that its crews traveled from the East Coast to the West Coast through multiple U.S. states, restoring 322 wetsuits back to life, preventing wetsuits with an average weight of 4 pounds from going into landfills (2023/12/14, Patagonia) and from the garbage Patagonia's restoration of wetsuits exemplifies the importance of using the environmentally friendly technology of upcycling. Upcycling is the process of converting end-of-life clothing (EOL) into new products that can be used again (Nayak et al., 2020, p. 242). Green eco-product marketing for outdoor apparel brands takes environmental protection and sustainability as the core value and communication focus of the brand, builds a green brand image, attracts and retains environmentally conscious consumers, and increases users' understanding of the brand, favorability of the brand's sustainable practices, and willingness to buy.

4.2 Visual Imagery of Sustainable Instagram Communication

The study divides the sustainable communication strategy of outdoor sportswear brands using visual images into three themes: Visual Elements, Symbolism &Iconography, and Human Presence, which have different communication values and meanings. The Visual Elements section provides audiences with richer channels to receive information to help them understand and decode; Symbolism & Iconography uses elements such as Snow Mountain, Animal, Ocean, etc. with different symbolic meanings, guiding audiences to understand the coexistence of biological diversity, and the harmonious and organic relationship between

human and nature; Human Presence Human Presence implies how modern human values and individual rationality can coexist with nature, challenge the difficulties and realize the sustainability of human beings.

4.2.1 Visual Elements for a Sustainable Lifestyle

The visual medium is the most expressive in fashion communication, with more comprehensive expression of line, movement, sound and color than any other medium. The three leading outdoor sportswear brands, Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc'teryx, on social media platforms have more visual content, not satisfied with the use of static images, but in pictures, videos, and movies, a variety of visual media are used, and interactive features are added so as to enhance the interaction with the user. Visual image content can bring infinite imagination to readers, giving them more opportunities for self-interpretation, but if brands need to qualify the content of posts, stating the intention and purpose of posting to achieve communication and marketing, they need to use the means of textual descriptors or contextual information. In this case, readers can refer to the accompanying text or labels to understand exactly the context of the content, so leading outdoor apparel brands need to use introductory language in their Instagram to support the graphic visual elements, and purely pictorial images are limited to what is reasonably interpretable.

For example, in the following release, the photo content of Figure 4.3 is a selfie of a young adult wearing an outdoor punching jacket, a warm woollen cap of the brand's products, and carrying a hiking bag on a snowy mountain. These visual elements allow readers to feel the charm of the outdoors as a timeless record of a certain moment in time for the sportsman's life, but the accompanying text informs readers that the content of this article calls on fans to raise money.

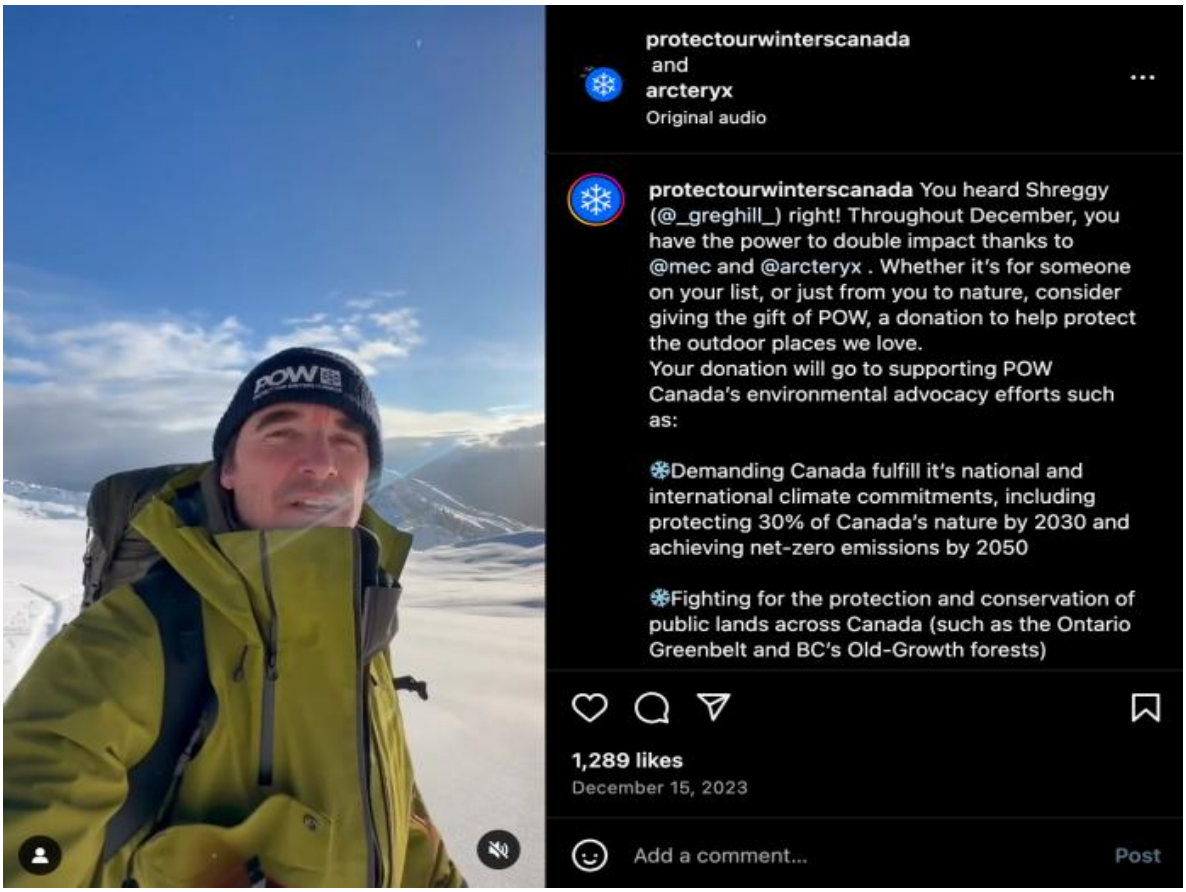


Figure 4.3. Instagram post of Arc'teryx on 2023/12/15

For the conservation of the earth's energy and the sustainability of Figure 4.4 information, the picture of the yellow and blue defocus background visual content reminiscent of some kind of stained glass, the picture of the brand Logo and text do not provide more information, but the text of the content of the introductory tells readers that the artist Michelle Parker and others use 137 pieces of unrepairable jackets, clothing scrap waste assembly, design, and utilize them into a kaleidoscope of colorful tents. In the combination of these visual elements, the value of recycling resources is disseminated, waste generation is minimized, the service life of objects is extended, and resource consumption and environmental pollution are reduced. The reprocessing of waste and the combination of art and practicality contribute to a more sustainable society and environment.

Figure 4.4. Instagram post of Arc'teryx on 2024/1/8

4.2.2 Symbolizing the Spirit of Sustainability

Symbols are commonly used in brand marketing and advertising. They can help brands convey appropriate emotions, meanings, brand images and stories, enhance the attractiveness and influence of communication, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of content. In outdoor clothing brands, common symbolic elements include snowy mountains, light, animals, and so on, among which snowy mountains are the most important and frequently used symbols. These symbols can be divided into two categories: one represents the exploration and awareness of the human spirit, and the other symbolizes the earth's homeland, on which we depend for survival. The use of the two symbol systems advocates the humanistic values and environmental social responsibility of current outdoor sports brands.

Sustainability inherently embraces the human spirit of exploration and adventure. The official media of outdoor brands in Instagram often use snowy mountains as an important natural environment. Snowy mountains appear in the code a total of 75 times, with no

characters appearing in the snowy mountain scenery as the intention and metaphor, symbolizing the challenges and difficulties in life. Climbing snowy mountains requires courage, perseverance and determination, so outdoor sports brands with snowy mountain images of the marketing content are intended to show viewers the psychological process of overcoming the difficulties and overcoming the challenges. In addition to this, growth and development are also derived from the human spirit's instinct and motivation to explore and seek knowledge, to explore the mysteries of the earth, nature and the universe through action and practice, and to pursue the mastery of truth and knowledge. The process of climbing a snow-covered mountain is a journey of growth and development. In the process of climbing, people continue to overcome their limitations and become stronger and more mature; solitude and meditation: At the top of a snowy mountain, one can often enjoy a sense of peace and solitude. This solitude is not loneliness but a state of introspection, reflection and meditation; it is the pursuit of excellence. The peaks of the snowy mountains represent excellence and ambitious goals. The climber's dream of reaching the summit symbolizes confidence in the pursuit of excellence and the relentless effort to succeed. These benefits of outdoor recreation exemplify the contribution of nature-based experiences to the resilience and sustainability of individuals, communities, and societies.

The land, lakes, oceans, and forests on which humans depend for survival have become visual symbols in the content impact of outdoor apparel brands, highlighting the vastness and expanse of nature, often giving people a sense of the greatness of life and the vastness of the universe, inspiring curiosity and a desire to explore the unknown, and triggering the public's thinking about environmental protection and sustainability. Some visual symbols, such as the rainbow, aurora borealis, meteor shower, and other natural phenomena, often make people feel the mystery and wonder of nature and stimulate people's imagination about the laws of nature and the mystery of the universe. Light and shadow and pure scenery symbolize beauty and grandeur, and the beauty and grandeur of nature often inspire people's emotions and imagination, representing human participation in natural life and becoming part of the beauty and grandeur. However, there are also symbols related to animals and creatures that are meant to remind people of climate warming and the urgency of environmental protection, climate change, and the migration and introduction of invasive

species, as well as other risks, such as Patagonia, which has been advocating to its fans against the overpopulation of salmon, emphasizing the damage it does to the marine environment. The use of these visual symbols spreads the sustainable strategies of the outdoor brand and inspires love, respect, and protection of the natural world.

4.2.3 Human presence as imitation

The head outdoor brands aggressively target viewers with images of outdoor sports that are highly integrated into the natural environment, often wearing branded hats, clothing, and gear, and present them to Instagram users in large close-ups of people who project a sense of outdoor imitation. These role models, with their sunny, healthy complexions and physiques, are seen as "deemed worthy of emulation." The outdoor clothing brands use these unusual sportsmen to signal to their fans and users that "you are him (the person in the picture)" and "you are just like them," transforming and connecting the protagonists and viewers of the graphic posts through an online connection. Through a kind of Internet connection, the protagonist and the audience in the graphic posts are transformed and connected, so that the sportsman in the posters becomes a "model" in the minds of the audience in experiential outdoor sports, as if the image in the posters is within reach of the audience, and the fans in front of the screen are motivated to become "embodiments of ideas" by the contact and relationship between the graphic posters and the people in the group. The posters serve as "embodiments of ideas" and symbols of principles.

Outdoor sports is a cozy lifestyle and attitude of life between fans and their families and friends, and it also reflects their healthy outlook on life and fashion. Head outdoor clothing brand Instagram content dissemination fully meets the user's outdoor sports consumer concept and consumer interest in the outdoor activities with nature, snow, rivers, sunshine intertwined between family, friends, home parties, these scenes with people and things, to people to declare that the outdoor sports are to meet the people's health and leisure recreation, get together to enjoy the outdoors, a good way to have fun. Outdoor clothing brands, through these content pictures, attempt to tell people that outdoor activities can deepen friendships with friends, deepen the intimacy between relatives, but also allow them

to know friends of friends and expand social circles. Sustainable nature experiences can lead to an array of positive emotions, including awe, happiness, joy, and the ability to enjoy the outdoors. Sustainable nature experiences can lead to an array of positive emotions, including awe, happiness, joy, and contentment, shaping the spirit of outdoor sports for individuals in youth or young adult groups, and forming the spirit of individual thought and contemplative experience. The human-oriented outdoor sports lifestyle represents people in sustainable development coexisting with nature, constantly accepting all kinds of challenges, growing up, and pursuing a beautiful natural life and healthy state in companionship and social interaction. The brand constantly reminds people to keep courage, patience, and confidence to move forward in the journey of life in its content communication. In Instagram, it utilizes lenses between people and people, and people and scenery to amplify positive images and scenes, such as beautiful landscapes, happy families, and successes, in order to create positive outdoor atmospheres and emotions, and to pursue higher goals and a better future in sustainable development.

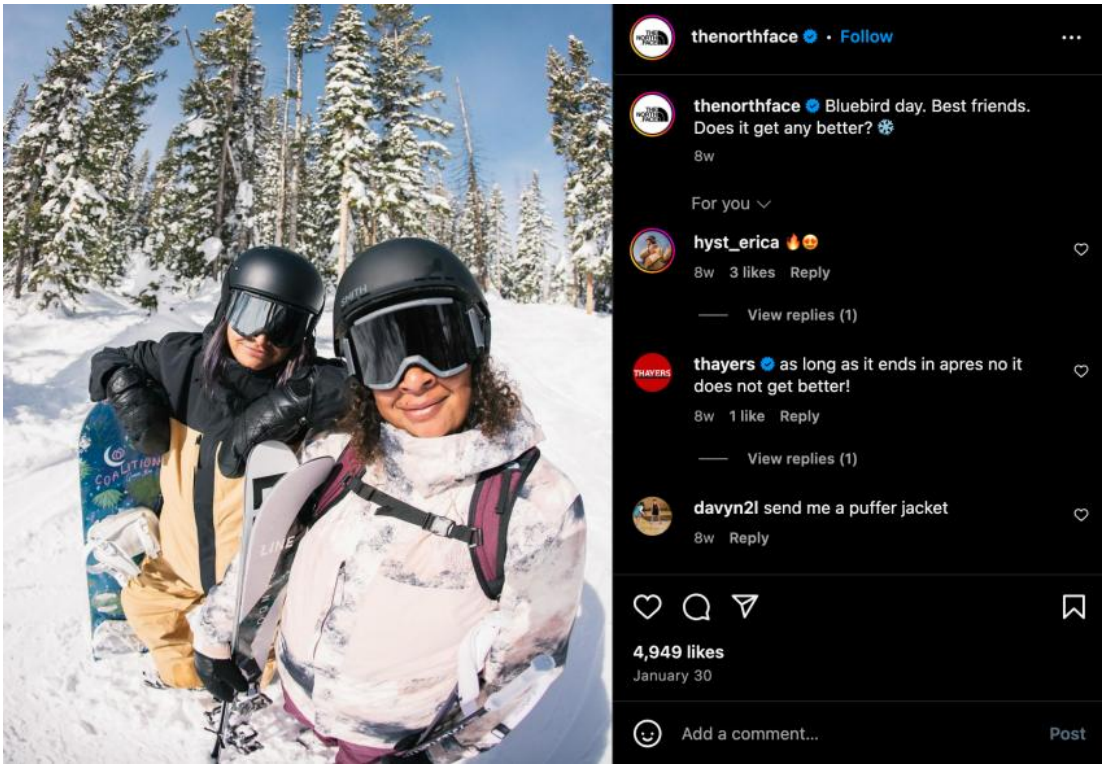


Figure 4.5. Instagram post of The North Face on 2024/1/30

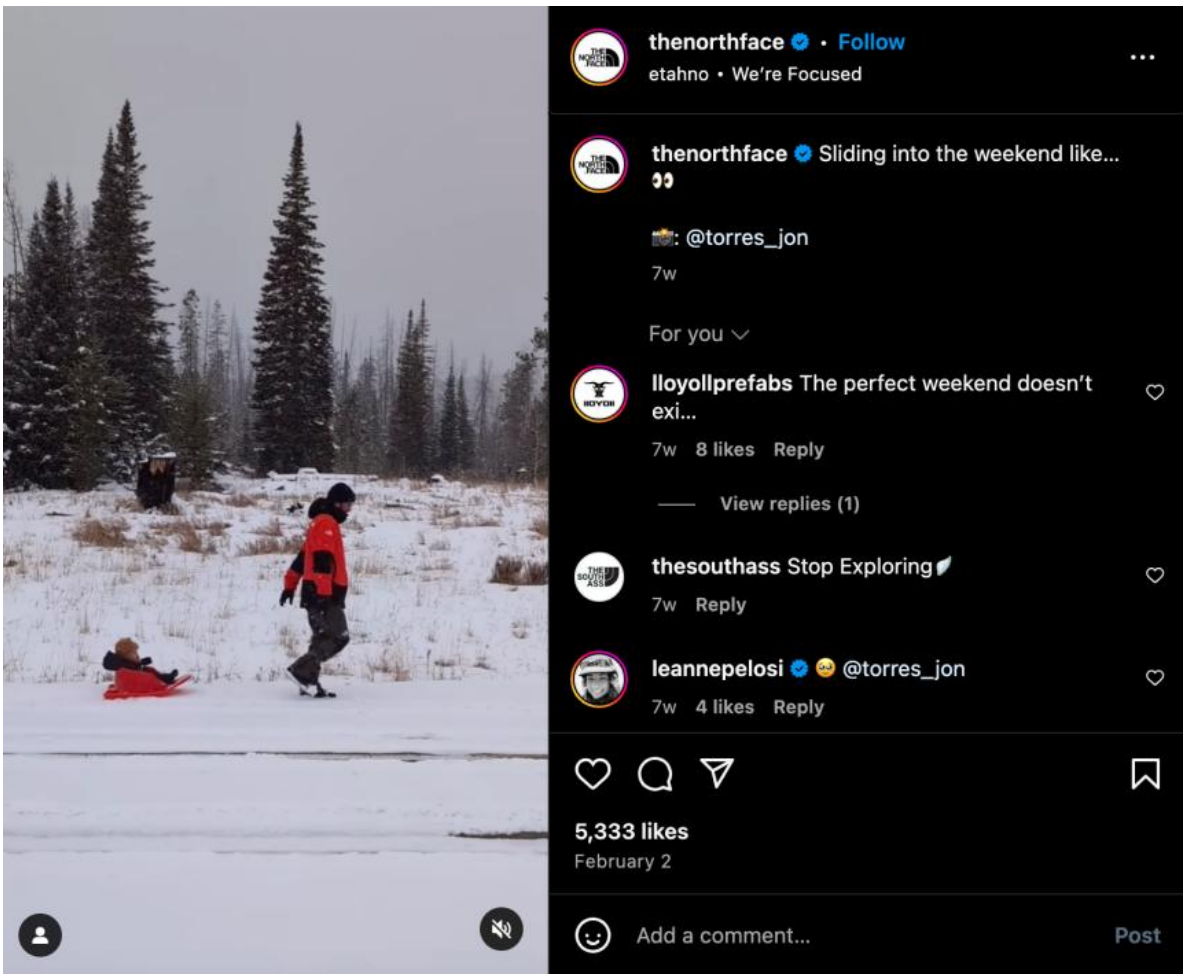


Figure 4.6. Instagram post of The North Face on 2024/2/2

4.3 Communication Style of Sustainable Instagram Communication

Outdoor sports brands show the brand's sustainability concept through the Communication Style of Content, Language and Tone. The combination of Content, Language and Tone enables brand fans to understand the contribution of products to environmental protection, and persuades and inspires audiences to participate in sustainable development. This communication style uses verbal means to influence the audience in a soft and subtle way.

4.3.1 Content: Future generation and earth focused

"Our design philosophy has always revolved around the notion that the less you buy, the better it is for the planet. That's why we build gear to withstand lifetimes of bumps, bruises and fashion trends. To us, quality is more than a matter of safety in the wild. It's a

matter of sustainability, and of our planet's future. Click the link in our bio to find gifts that will live to tell the tales they'll pass on to the next generation. (2023/12/13, Patagonia)*"* This Instagram content from Patagonia can be a good indication of the head outdoor sports brand's future-oriented, earth-friendly, eco-concept of leaving a green planet for future generations through sustainable products. The head outdoor apparel brands demonstrate environmental CSR and build a green corporate image, enhancing their green competitive capacity in their Instagram.

Arc'teryx published a donation campaign to protect forests and reduce emissions in December 2023. In the short text, the brand urges the public to help protect beloved outdoor places. Donations to inform audiences will be used to support POW Canada's environmental advocacy efforts, such as Canada's fulfilment of its national and international climate commitments, including protecting 30% of Canada's natural environment by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050; and striving to protect and conserve green spaces across Canada and BC's pristine forested public lands. These advertisements are not related to the company's main business, but this seemingly unrelated advertisement is a great demonstration of social responsibility and forward-thinking environmental awareness to protect the next generation's land legacy, solidifying its image as an environmental pioneer in the minds of consumers.

Patagonia released in February 2024 Ozane suspends new U.S. LNG permit applications, blocking fossil fuel expansion; Punta Conejo port expansion plans could devastate Mexico's world-class port of Oaxaca and the surrounding coast, open-net salmon farming could contribute to wild salmon extinction, is polluting Iceland's pristine coasts and is responsible for the mistreatment of farmed animals. The company has been working to protect the environment, fight against excessive or illegal oil extraction, protect the planet's ecosystems and species, and stop the warming of the climate, and has called on its fans to submit petitions. Introducing these contents spreads corporate green social responsibility, introducing the concept of environmental protection on the basis of traditional product or outdoor sports marketing, linking individual public responsibility and corporate social responsibility, with a view to correctly dealing with the relationship between consumer demand, corporate interests, and environmental protection, and meeting consumer and social

requirements in an environmentally affordable way. It is observed that the development of new environmentally sustainable products and business operations results in sustained competitive advantages (Alam & Islam, 2021, p. 1).

4.3.2 Language: A statement of environmental corporate social responsibility

In Instagram social media communication, the leading outdoor clothing brands play the role of an educator who informs the audience what kind of outdoor sports is good, they keep encouraging consumers/enthusiasts to learn about the outdoor sports lifestyle as well as cultivating their concept of sustainability, provide consumers with education and information about environmental protection and sustainability, release the company's continuous contribution to the earth's ecology. To enhance their environmental awareness and sense of responsibility, and to motivate consumers to choose the brand's environmentally friendly products and services. Sustainable action plans, i.e., plans to establish and develop new business models that go beyond economic concentration and seek to integrate ecological, social and economic values through the actions of the organization, have become a necessity for companies to determine their future stability.

Outdoor experiences can provide an opportunity to value our relationship with and empathy towards the environment. Instead of using celebrities as spokespeople, the three headline outdoor apparel brands have partnered with outstanding explorers in the outdoor sports field. Instead of using celebrities as spokespersons, the three leading outdoor apparel brands collaborate with outstanding explorers in the field of outdoor sports to inspire people to go outdoors, enjoy the natural environment, and develop a sense of sustainability. The brands use informative language in their introductions to make audiences understand that outdoor sports do not only represent a certain kind of sport but, more importantly, the value of sustainability in them. Sustainability is intrinsic to programs involving the understanding of environmental concepts and the acquisition of knowledge. Brands use persuasive language, quotes from the protagonists of stories about outdoor sports, quotations to teach the target audience how to do it, mandatory soft propaganda to instill a certain kind of compliance,

rationalization of lifestyle, sustainable lifestyle presentation, enhance their environmental conceptions, test the audience's attitudes and beliefs about outdoor sports, and test the audience's knowledge of sustainability. The three headline brands promote sustainability and implement green advertising strategies in their Instagram communications. Adding environmental concepts to the content, promoting the green consumption concepts of ecological protection, resource conservation, and moderate consumption, and implementing green advertising strategies can establish the green image of the enterprise, guide green consumption, and enhance the differential competitiveness of products.

4.3.3 Tone: Inspiring public attitudes towards sustainable living

Positive tone in textual content campaigns for outdoor clothing brands on Instagram often refers to the style of language used to express positive feelings, attitudes, or effects. This tone of voice is often used in advertising campaigns to attract attention, create a pleasant atmosphere, and inspire users to take an interest in the outdoors, participate in sustainable environmental programs, and develop a desire for a natural experience. A positive tone allows the viewer to feel the power of the outdoors and conveys exciting athletic moments through the use of language, such as the Arc'teryx, This social media content was published in "*Practice makes perfect. Warming up for our clinics with a little snow safety refresher ahead of the Arc'teryx Freeride Academy in St. Anton am Arlberg. Festivities get underway today* (2023/10/26, Arc'teryx)*!* ". The outdoor brand is adept at using positive words and phrases in its advertising campaigns, such as "quality," "perfect," "unique," "delightful," etc., which can enhance the attractiveness and persuasiveness of the content; affirmations and exclamations are often used in issue-based campaigns to express praise and wonder for participation in a sustainable lifestyle and enhance the impact of communication. The use of affirmations and exclamations in issue campaigns often expresses praise and admiration for participation in sustainable lifestyles and enhances the infectiousness and influence of the communication. Brands utilize emotions and feelings, such as joy, satisfaction and happiness, in their campaigns to attract consumers' empathy and emotional resonance and to stimulate their desire to participate in the campaigns.

The brand's declarative, imperative, and subjunctive tone of voice is more often used to implement recommendations to users, to appeal, to popularize, and to inform: "Please join us in welcoming Philipp Reiter." "Costs $3,000 to $6,000 USD to save a wave in Peru", "After years of campaigning, Gulf Coast frontline activists and allies have successfully pushed the Biden administration to pause the largest expansion of fossil fuels on earth: US-based liquefied natural gas." These phrases are simple and straightforward, avoiding the use of overly complex vocabulary or jargon, ensuring that the user absorbs and understands the message and remembers the brand's call for sustainable content or programs, a direct call to action for the masses, or highlighting the focus of an event. The suggested, informative language style has a persuasive and promotional tone, sometimes with a certain sense of humor (Bazarova et al., 2013, p. 125). In this poster, the brand uses tongue-in-cheek sarcasm to express the importance of informing the Earth about the conservation of the planet with a photo poster, and in the description of the language, it promotes an upcoming marine conservation event, calls for active participation in a presentation by the head of an indigenous conservation organization, and calls for people to learn how to engage in climate protection practices, which change practices, develop learning communities, and influence organizational transformation.

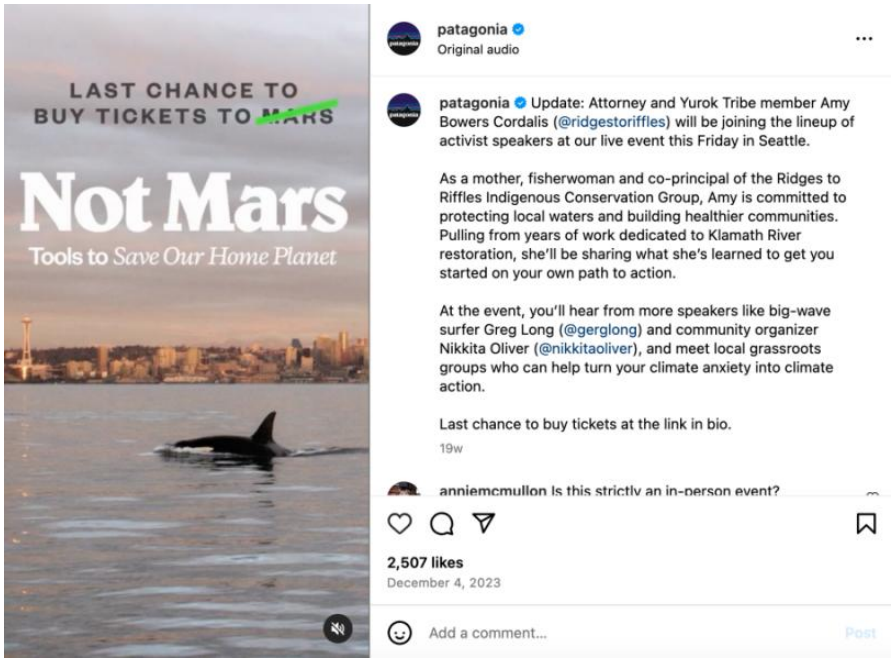


Figure 4.7. Instagram post of Patagonia on the date of 2023/12/4

“Reflective Tone” refers to a tone of voice that expresses thoughtfulness, consideration and reflection in communication. This tone of voice is often used by brands to express in-depth thinking and analysis of environmental causes, sustainability perspectives, corporate social responsibility and emotions, as well as explore possibilities for the future of sustainability, energy conservation and reuse. The brand’s tone of voice is calm and cool, revealing in-depth thinking and rational analysis of the topic under discussion, e.g. *“His photography is an embodiment of his passion for the uncharted, the hidden trails, and the enigmatic corners of the globe*(2023/11/3, Arc’teryx)*”*. The reflective tone is often illuminating, conveying philosophical insights into life, values, and human experience through deep thought and reflection and enlightening readers on the significance of the earth and the universe to human beings and life. The reflective tone used by the brand is often poetic in its narrative, for example, *“The dream of man. The long, impossible dream to reach out to the moon. Fly along with Sam Kuch as he explores the parallels between skiing and space travel* (2023/10/30, Arc’teryx)*”*. The wording and content of these expressions are often deep and complex, using metaphors that reflect a holistic and multifaceted consideration of the value of the human being as a creature of the universe, reflecting on the inner feelings and beliefs of outdoor enthusiasts, and exploring the importance of personal growth, development, and change.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The results of this study contribute to understanding the importance of outdoor sports and related activities in promoting a healthier and more sustainable society, which enriches the existing theory of sustainability：Triple Bottom Line. The present study finds that outdoor sports guide people towards healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. The extensive variety of natural settings, including forests, coastal areas, rural landscapes, parks, local green spaces, and even gardens, brings to light the discussion on how the environment benefits human health. Natural or green spaces have been recognized for their positive effects on health, and health, in turn, also poses positive implications for environmental sustainability. Pretty et al. (2007, p. 211) found that green exercise enhances mental well-being and physiological health indicators. There is emerging evidence across physiological, psychological, biochemical, and social dimensions suggesting that green exercise could play a significant role in both preventing and managing diseases. Additionally, green exercise appears to be beneficial in rehabilitation programs and could effectively encourage sedentary people to stick to exercise routines (Lucini & Pagani, 2021, p. 968). The present study further demonstrates how green practices, such as outdoor exercising, pose positive impacts on environmental sustainability. A deeper understanding of the positive interactions between nature and human socio-biology has been demonstrated in this study, further enriching the theory of environmental sustainability from the angle of green sports and a healthy lifestyle.

Secondly, this study helps bridge the theoretical gap in CSR and the three-pillar CSR model. Traditionally, in the CSR framework, companies aim to achieve balanced development in three areas: profits, planet, and people (Fontaine, 2013, p. 111). These dimensions primarily concern corporate profits, environmental protection, and the welfare of people, which includes the impact on local communities, employees, and customers from a macro perspective. This study supplements the model at a more micro level by examining how communication messages related to outdoor sports on social media influence public health and lifestyle and subsequently bring benefits to businesses. For instance, promoting a healthy, outdoor lifestyle can enhance a brand's green brand equity and reputation, thereby

indirectly increasing its profitable performance. From the perspective of outdoor clothing brands, the study also found that outdoor clothing brands regularly publish and disseminate outdoor activities to their users, encouraging them to actively participate in outdoor sports, integrate with nature, and learn from it. This not only facilitates brand fans' participation in activities with other volunteers, but also helps them get to know local residents and contributes to the improvement of the environment and public resources in the community.

Furthermore, despite its popularity, the previously proposed three-pillar CSR model, or triple bottom line model, lacks more detailed theoretical application. The findings of the present study fill up the gap by providing new insights into how outdoor brands use media communication strategies to promote brand sustainability. Outdoor activities not only connect people to nature, but they also promote communication and interaction among people. This connection improves brand recognition and loyalty through fan effects (Underwood et al., 2001, p. 3). It helps achieve the three objectives: profits, people, and the planet. Being outdoors is widely recognized as important for improving human health and well-being, enhancing social interaction, and connecting people with their natural and cultural heritage (Winter et al., 2019, p. 2). Not only do these outdoor brands promote a green lifestyle, but they also advocate for sustainable products. This study finds that leading outdoor clothing brands use graphics in their Instagram content to market their products, emphasizing environmental features such as eco-friendly materials, energy-saving designs, and recyclable packaging. This approach highlights the products' environmental benefits. The study reveals how outdoor clothing brands implement practical measures to reduce environmental costs and promote environmental protection. This contributes to the theory of environmental sustainability by showing that influencing people to adopt healthier and more sustainable lifestyles can reduce everyday environmental pollution. Additionally, these brands themselves adopt specific strategies to minimize environmental impact. This approach enhances positive interactions between the brand and consumers (the target audience for their communications). From this perspective, the study adds to the understanding of how outdoor brands use sustainable practices in their communications to bridge the gap with consumers and improve the resilience of sustainable outdoor practices. As a result, this study illustrates

how outdoor brands can implement socially responsible strategies by disseminating environmental sustainability messages.

Further, this study adds new insights on media communication in the domain of CSR and sustainability from the lens of outdoor businesses, enriching theories of the functions of visual storytelling and visual campaigns. Existing literature portrays that the richness of visual media offers a unique opportunity for organizations to convey complex CSR messages in an engaging and more dynamic manner. Visual storytelling allows companies to humanize their CSR efforts, showcasing the tangible impact of their initiatives on communities and the environment (Islam et al., 2021, p. 125). The usage of hashtags, as reviewed in the existing literature, contextualizes posts with meaningful hashtags to connect with specific themes or societal issues, using hashtags for attention-seeking, trend engagement, or leveraging their viral potential. This study supplements the existing scholar findings regarding the role of visual storytelling in stimulating the interpretation of brand messages (eg. Lim & Childs, 2020, p. 34; Megehee & Woodside, 2010, p. 604). For example, this study finds that visual image content can bring infinite imagination to readers, giving them more opportunities for self-interpretation, but if brands need to qualify the content of posts, stating the intention and purpose of posting to achieve communication and marketing, they need to use the means of textual descriptors or contextual information. In this case, readers can refer to the accompanying text or labels to understand exactly the context of the content, so leading outdoor apparel brands need to use introductory language in their Instagram to support the graphic visual elements, and purely pictorial images are limited to what is reasonably interpretable.

This study, as a key source of visual messaging, enhances theoretical insights by highlighting the importance of symbols in sustainability and CSR brand communication. For instance, the research shows that elements like land, lakes, oceans, and forests, which are essential for human survival, have become prominent visual symbols in the content of outdoor apparel brands. These images emphasize the vastness of nature, evoking a sense of life's grandeur and the universe's expansiveness, thereby inspiring curiosity and a desire to explore the unknown while also prompting thoughts about environmental protection and sustainability. Additionally, visual symbols such as rainbows, the aurora borealis, meteor

showers, and other natural phenomena often evoke feelings of wonder and awe, stimulating people's imaginations about the laws of nature and the mysteries of the universe. These visual elements convey the brand's message more effectively than text alone, engaging audiences emotionally by eliciting positive emotions like happiness, joy, and awe. This emotional engagement complements the recognition of CSR through the visual and media communication strategies of outdoor brands (Milanesi et al., 2022, p. 109). Rather than using celebrities as spokespersons, the three leading outdoor apparel brands partner with notable explorers in outdoor sports to inspire people to enjoy nature and develop a sense of sustainability. They use informative language in their presentations to convey that outdoor sports represent not just physical activity but also embody the values of sustainability. This approach augments the emotional dimensions of CSR recognition through outdoor brands' visual and media communications.

5.2 Practical Implication

Besides theoretical implications, the study also offers some practical implications. Firstly, for those outdoor sports fashion brands, they can take advantage of social media marketing strategies to brand themselves via solid and various visual presentation strategies together with textual explanations around the theme of sustainability. This study's findings reveal that brands may employ persuasive language and quotes from the protagonists of outdoor sports stories to educate their target audience on these practices. They use subtle, obligatory promotion to foster compliance, present rationalized and sustainable lifestyles, and aim to enhance environmental awareness. This approach also evaluates the audience's attitudes and beliefs about outdoor sports, as well as their understanding of sustainability. Therefore, involving people in a company's CSR efforts is crucial. It should be noted that when brands take advantage of CSR social media marketing campaigns, beyond simply raising awareness of an organization's initiatives, the relevant brands should also boost participation, amplify the impact, and shape public discourse to be more consumer-focused, thereby increasing credibility (Russell et al., 2016, p. 760). Among the various strategies, storytelling should be a central element of an organisation's communication strategy,

particularly for CSR campaigns. The core of social responsibility lies in the altruistic acts the company undertakes (Sodhi, 2015, p.1375). When a brand simplifies its content to highlight these efforts, it often resonates more strongly with its followers.

Second, the study provides insights to audiences, like individual consumers, about the importance of healthy outdoor exercises to maintain sustainable health status. It should be known that one threat to modern society is the decline in physical activity, which is leading to significant increases in physical disabilities and diseases, as well as a rising number of mental health issues (Siedentop & Van der Mars, 2022, p. 3). Therefore, it is crucial to find ways to engage individuals in improving their health and preventing further increases in non-communicable diseases. Utilizing outdoor natural environments for physical activity and health benefits is not a new concept. This study's findings reveal that people have not only relied on nature for health but also for enjoyment and physical activity. Outdoor activities, such as climbing, hillwalking, mountain biking, and endurance sports, have been popular ways to enjoy the outdoors and green spaces (Huddart & Stott, 2019). These activities may not only enhance enjoyment and improve adherence but also promote positive physical activity behaviors, leading to greater health benefits. Since people are perhaps still genetically predisposed to be hunter-gatherers in natural environments, the lack of similar physical and mental stimulation today might be harmful to health. Humans are born with an emotional connection to other living organisms, indicating a natural affinity for nature (Vining et al., 2008, p. 2). This implies that their genetic makeup may inherently drive them to seek contact with nature, suggesting that green exercise should be encouraged to boost physical activity and improve health for people in their daily lives.

Besides, the practitioners should also convey narratives effectively through the extensive use of photos and videos, sharing testimonials from those who benefited from the initiatives, creating calls to action with input from volunteers and service providers, and showcasing the challenges faced and how the organization is addressing them. Communicators should connect their brand's CSR efforts to their mission and corporate values, emphasize the company's dedication to social responsibility, and share details about the resources or funds allocated to these efforts. Social media managers should highlight these aspects. However, it should be noted that during the process of CSR communication in

the social media marketing campaign, brands should make it clear about the specific initiatives they have taken, thus enhancing the brand's credibility. Failing to highlight the actual work can weaken the message and diminish the posts' reach and impact. Through this study, brand practitioners should also be fully aware of the importance of the tone used in CSR social media campaigns. A positive tone should be employed in advertising campaigns to grab attention, foster a welcoming atmosphere, and encourage users to engage with nature, participate in sustainability initiatives, and cultivate an appreciation for natural experiences.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delves deeply into how three market-leading brands — Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc'teryx — utilize Instagram, a platform with vast reach and influence, to communicate their environmental sustainability initiatives, reflecting the growing trend of digital CSR engagement. It aims to investigate how market-leading outdoor clothing brands communicate environmental sustainability through Instagram posts, the predominant themes in these posts, how visual imagery reinforces sustainability messages, and how these brands use focus, language, and tone regarding environmental initiatives. The study reveals rich findings through a thematic analysis of selected social media campaigns focused on CSR. Leading outdoor brands like The North Face, Patagonia, and Arc'teryx promote activities such as rock climbing, mountaineering, and surfing to highlight a healthy, low-carbon lifestyle that fosters environmental awareness and a deeper appreciation of nature. These brands immerse enthusiasts in natural settings, create online communities for sharing experiences and organizing activities, and emphasize eco-innovations and sustainable practices in their products, such as using environmentally friendly materials and recyclable packaging. Visual content on social media, showcasing natural landscapes, plays a crucial role in encouraging sustainable outdoor practices. Their Instagram communication focuses on future generations and environmental sustainability, using informative, persuasive language and a positive tone to inspire engagement in outdoor activities and sustainable living. Through these strategies, they effectively promote environmental sustainability and foster a deeper connection with their audience.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

Despite the comparable richness of the present study, this study also has its limitations. The first is the small sample size. In this study, the data collected was the social media posts from October 1, 2023, to February 29, 2024. A total of 220 posts were compiled, with Patagonia contributing 128 posts, The North Face 26 posts, and Arc'teryx 66 posts. This sampling marked a short time period, and the number of posts selected is also limited. The comparable smaller sample size within the shorter time periods may lack representatives for

the extended sportswear brands. Future research might enlarge the sample size by expanding the time horizons and periods of the posts so that a greater number of posts can be selected. A larger sample size can help improve the representative significance.

The second limitation of this study is its focus primarily on the three chosen sports fashion brands. While these brands hold significant market positions, they alone cannot represent all outdoor sports apparel brands. There are lesser-known brands, as well as brands from other countries, that have their own distinct characteristics. Future research could consider increasing diversity by expanding the sample size to represent a wider range of brands, thus collecting diverse sample data. This approach could enhance the credibility of the data, thereby increasing the reliability and dependability of the research findings.

In addition to the limitation of sample size, another limitation comes from the subjectivity of the thematic analysis processes. Subjectivity means that the research process and interpretation of the results are mainly based on the researcher's interpretations against a certain knowledge base and cognitive judgmental status (Drapeau, 2002, p. 2). Thematic analysis methods, although benefiting from the merits of research flexibility, may trap the research into bias or subjective judgmental limitation. To address this limitation, future studies may add quantitative statistical data into the analysis, combining both qualitative data analysis and quantitative data to achieve both the depth and width of research results.

6.2 Directions for Future Research

This study has conducted a thematic analysis of the selected three outdoor sportswear brands regarding their CSR message presentation on social media. Rich findings have been reported, offering strategic insights to brands and audiences. Based on this, in order to improve the research depth, it will be interesting and meaningful to further explore the social media message on the CSR theme and how audiences perceive the message. Future researchers may recruit a number of participants as social media content viewers and ask them to respond to sustainability messaging from outdoor apparel brands. The viewers' feedback, such as perceptions, feelings, and even behavioral mode changes, can be collected as evidence to inform the policy-making and strategic decision-making of brands. The

rationale behind perceptions, feelings, and behavioral modes can be collected and investigated to gain a deeper understanding of how these CSR social media communication messages may shape audiences' views and actions in their practical real-world situations. This can add depth and insights into the wider effectiveness of CSR social media marketing campaigns adopted by outdoor sportswear apparel brands.

Besides, this research has found that such a social media campaign can help leverage positive brand associations among consumers who tend to link the associated healthy outdoor exercising style with the brand characteristics. But such has not been supported by empirical data yet, so future research may develop and utilize methods to quantitatively measure the impacts of sustainable marketing campaigns on brand loyalty, sales, and environmental outcomes. For example, establishing a quantitative research model and calculating the correlation metrics between different variables will work to fulfill the research target. This will help deliver more accurate results concerning the CSR social media communication strategies in helping to construct brand equity.

To conclude, this thesis has explored how three market-leading brands—Patagonia, The North Face, and Arc'teryx—utilize Instagram, a platform with vast reach and influence, to communicate their environmental sustainability initiatives, reflecting the growing trend of digital CSR engagement. The findings were rich, revealing the profound results that these selected brands had all immersed enthusiasts in natural settings, created online communities for sharing experiences and organizing activities, and emphasized eco-innovations and sustainable practices in their products, such as using environmentally friendly materials and recyclable packaging. These social media posts also generated huge impacts on audiences regarding the balance in life via healthy outdoor exercises and activities. The thesis also discussed the theoretical and real-world practical implications. The limitations of the research design and future research directions were also included in this thesis.

References

Abbate, S., Centobelli, P., Cerchione, R., Nadeem, S. P., & Riccio, E. (2024). Sustainability trends and gaps in the textile, apparel and fashion industries. *Environment, Development and Sustainability, 26*(2), 2837-2864. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-022-02887-2

Adelman, D. E., & Glicksman, R. L. (2020). Reevaluating environmental citizen suits in theory and practice. *U. Colo. L. Rev., 91*, 385. https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/ucollr91&i=419

Alam, S.M.S., & Islam, K.M.Z. (2021). Examining the role of environmental corporate social responsibility in building green corporate image and green competitive advantage. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility 6(*8). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-021-00062-w

Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2*(3), 39-43. https://gajrc.com/media/articles/GAJHSS_23_39-43_VMGJbOK.pdf

Allen, M. W., & Craig, C. A. (2016). Rethinking corporate social responsibility in the age of climate change: A communication perspective. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility, 1*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-016-0002-8

Arowoshegbe, A. O., Emmanuel, U., & Gina, A. (2016). Sustainability and triple bottom line: An overview of two interrelated concepts. *Igbinedion University Journal of Accounting, 2*(16), 88-126.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322367106_SUSTAINABILITY_AND_TRIPLE_BOTTOM_LINE_AN_OVERVIEW_OF_TWO_INTERRELATED_CONCEPTS

Arumugam, V., Tok, A. I. Y., & Lipik, V. (2023). A novel method to produce sustainable wind resistant and water repellant fabric for outdoor sport clothing. *Journal of Industrial Textiles, 53*, 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/15280837231184256

Austin, L., & Gaither, B. (2016). Examining Public Response to Corporate Social Initiative Types: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Coca-Cola's Social Media. *Social Marketing Quarterly, 22*(4), 290–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524500416642441

Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative research journal, 18*(4), 383-400. https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035

Badenes-Rocha, A., Bigne, E., & Ruiz-Mafé, C. (2022). Visual attention paid to negative comments in cause-related posts: visual style and emotionality matter. *International Journal of Advertising, 41*(8), 1454-1476. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2071394

Baldridge, R. (2021). 'Sustainable' ESG investing isn't just the right thing to do, it's now paying real financial dividends. Robb Repport.

Banerjee, S., Gulas, C. S., & Iyer, E. (1995). Shades of green: A multidimensional analysis of environmental advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 24*(2), 21-31. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1995.10673473

Bani-Khalid, T. O., & Ahmed, A. H. (2017). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): A conceptual and theoretical shift. *International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences, 7*(1), 203-212. http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARAFMS/v7-i1/2626

Bazarova, N. N., Taft, J. G., Choi, Y. H., & Cosley, D. (2013). Managing impressions and relationships on Facebook: Self-presentational and relational concerns revealed through the analysis of language style. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *32*(2), 121-141. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X12456384

Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2004). Doing better at doing good: When, why, and how consumers respond to corporate social initiatives. *California Management Review, 47*(1), 9-24. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166284

Bortree, D. S., & Seltzer, T. (2009). Dialogic strategies and outcomes: An analysis of environmental advocacy groups' Facebook profiles. *Public relations review, 35*(3), 317-319. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.05.002

Branthwaite, A., & Patterson, S. (2011). The power of qualitative research in the era of social media. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *14*(4), 430-440. https://doi.org/10.1108/13522751111163245

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brennen, B. S. (2021). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. Routledge.

Brundtland World Commission report (1987). *Our Common Future (Brundtland Report)*. https://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/home/media/publications/sustainable-development/brundtland-report.html

Bögeholz, S. (2006). Nature experience and its importance for environmental knowledge, values and action: Recent German empirical contributions. *Environmental Education Research, 12*(1), 65–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620500526529

Carroll, A. B. (1991). The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: Toward the moral management of organizational stakeholders. *Business Horizons, 34*(4), 39-48. https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813(91)90005-G

Carroll, A. B. (2015). Corporate social responsibility: The centerpiece of competing and complementary frameworks. *Organizational Dynamics, 44*(2), 87-96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2015.02.002

Carroll, A.B. (2016). Carroll's pyramid of CSR: taking another look. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility, 1*(3), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-016-0004-6

Chams, N., & García-Blandón, J. (2019). On the importance of sustainable human resource management for the adoption of sustainable development goals. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling, 141*, 109-122. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2018.10.006

Chu, S. C., Chen, H. T., & Gan, C. (2020). Consumers' engagement with corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication in social media: Evidence from China and the

United States. *Journal of Business Research, 110*, 260-271. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.01.036

Chung, S., & Lee, S. Y. (2020). Cognitive processing of corporate social responsibility campaign messages: the effects of emotional visuals on memory. *Media Psychology, 23*(2), 244-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1591999

Clement, J. (2019). Number of monthly active Instagram users 2013-2018. https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagramusers/

Clement, J. (2020). Instagram Stories daily active users 2019. https://www.statista.com/statistics/730315/instagram-stories-dau/

Cotter, K. (2019). Playing the visibility game: How digital influencers and algorithms negotiate influence on Instagram. *New media & society, 21*(4), 895-913. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818815684

Crane, A., & Glozer, S. (2016). Researching corporate social responsibility communication: Themes, opportunities and challenges. *Journal of management studies, 53*(7), 1223-1252. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12196

Dadas, C. (2017). Hashtag activism: The promise and risk of "attention.". *Social writing/social media: Publics, presentations, pedagogies,* 17-36. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2017.0063.2.01

Dahlsrud, A. (2008). How corporate social responsibility is defined: an analysis of 37 definitions. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 15*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.132

Davis, J. J. (1994). Consumer response to corporate environmental advertising. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 11*(2), 25-37. https://doi.org/10.1108/07363769410058902

DesJardins, J. (1998). Corporate environmental responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics, 17*, 825-838. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005719707880

Donaldson, G. C., Rintamäki, H., & Näyhä, S. (2001). Outdoor clothing: its relationship to geography, climate, behaviour and cold-related mortality in Europe. *International Journal of Biometeorology, 45*, 45-51. https://doi.org/10.1007/s004840000072

Douglas, D. (2003). Inductive theory generation: A grounded approach to business inquiry. *Electronic journal of business research methods, 2*(1), 47-54. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=b6cded554bf1ccb6077835003a7aa2ee2aa60b85

Drapeau, M. (2002). Subjectivity in research: Why not? But…. *The Qualitative Report, 7*(3), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2002.1972

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International journal of management reviews, 12*(1), 8-19. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00276.x

Dunn, K., & Harness, D. (2018). Communicating corporate social responsibility in a social world: The effects of company-generated and user-generated social media content on

CSR attributions and scepticism. *Journal of marketing management, 34*(17-18), 1503-1529. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2018.1536675

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics, 5*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.6224/JN.61.3.105

Etter, M. (2014). Broadcasting, reacting, engaging–three strategies for CSR communication in Twitter. *Journal of communication management, 18*(4), 322-342. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-01-2013-0007

Fenwick, T. (2007). Developing organizational practices of ecological sustainability: A learning perspective. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 28*(7), 632-645. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730710823888

Fontaine, M. (2013). Corporate social responsibility and sustainability: the new bottom line?. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 4*(4), 110-119. https://www.mktgsensei.com/AMAE/Vision%20and%20Mission/Corproate%20Social%20Responsibility%20Fontaine.pdf

François, A., Harant, B., & Heutte, N. (2021). CSR communication in the outdoor sports industry: a content analysis of CSR disclosures by seven international corporate brands. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing, 21*(5-6), 313-335. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSMM.2021.120184

Geboers, M. A., & Van De Wiele, C. T. (2020). Machine vision and social media images: Why hashtags matter. *Social Media+ Society, 6*(2), 2056305120928485. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120928485

Ghosh, B., & Mohan, A.P. (2021). Recent trends in sustainable textiles and apparel production. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 4*(2), 78-81. https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V4-i2-02

Gilmour, L. (2023). North Face vs Arcteryx Jackets: Which brand is better? https://www.caminoadventures.com/blog/north-face-vs-arcteryx-jackets/

Goodwin, A. M., Joseff, K., & Woolley, S. C. (2020). Social media influencers and the 2020 US election: Paying 'regular people' for digital campaign communication. *Center for Media Engagement. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/2fa6ff00-f939-40af-b326-3b5c2de16490/content*

Gossen, M. & Kropfeld, M.I. (2022). "Choose nature. Buy less." Exploring efficiency-oriented marketing and consumption practices in the outdoor industry. *Sustainable Production and Consumption, 30,* 720-736. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2022.01.005

Goworek, H. (2011). Social and environmental sustainability in the clothing industry: a case study of a fair trade retailer. *Social Responsibility Journal, 7*(1), 74-86. https://doi.org/10.1108/17471111111114558

Haley, E. (1996). Organization as source: Consumers' understandings of organizational sponsorship of advocacy advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 25*(2), 19-36. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4189000

Harris, F., Roby, H., & Dibb, S. (2016). Sustainable clothing: challenges, barriers and interventions for encouraging more sustainable consumer behaviour. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 40*(3), 309-318. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12257

He, H., Harris, L. C., Wang, W., & Haider, K. (2016). Brand identity and online self-customisation usefulness perception. *Journal of Marketing Management, 32*(13-14), 1308-1332. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2016.1170720

Huddart, D., & Stott, T. (2019). *Outdoor recreation: Environmental impacts and management.* Springer Nature. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-97758-4

Islam, T., Islam, R., Pitafi, A. H., Xiaobei, L., Rehmani, M., Irfan, M., & Mubarak, M. S. (2021). The impact of corporate social responsibility on customer loyalty: The mediating role of corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and trust. *Sustainable Production and Consumption, 25*, 123-135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2020.07.019

Jensen, K. B. (2013). The qualitative research process. *A handbook of media and communication research*, 247-265. London: SAGE.

Jiang, H., & Luo, Y. (2024). Driving employee engagement through CSR communication and employee perceived motives: The role of CSR-related social media engagement and

job engagement. *International Journal of Business Communication, 61*(2), 287-313. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488420960528

Johnson, M., & Jaehrling, K. (2021). Wages and working conditions in outsourced services in Europe. In *The Living Wage* (pp. 107-119). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003054078-11

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons, 53*(1), 59-68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Khan, S. (2018). Instagram as a marketing tool for luxury brand. *International Journal of Management, Business and Research, 8*(2), 126. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-38541-4_2

Kolk, A. (2008). Sustainability, accountability and corporate governance: exploring multinationals' reporting practices. *Business strategy and the environment, 17*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.511

Ku, H-H., Kuo, C-C., Wu, C-L., & Wu, C-Y. (2012). Communicating green marketing appeals effectively: The role of consumers' motivational orientation to promotion versus prevention. *Journal of Advertising, 41*(4), 41-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2012.10672456

Kwarteng, A., Dadzie, S. A., & Famiyeh, S. (2016). Sustainability and competitive advantage from a developing economy. *Journal of Global Responsibility, 7*(1), 110-125. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGR-02-2016-0003

Lee, K. E. (2017). Environmental sustainability in the textile industry. *Sustainability in the textile industry,* 17-55. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2639-3_3

Leonhardt, J. M. (2015). Tweets, hashtags and virality: Marketing the Affordable Care Act in social media. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice, 16,* 172-180. https://doi.org/10.1057/dddmp.2015.4

Lerner, L. D., & Fryxell, G. E. (1988). An empirical study of the predictors of corporate social performance: A multi-dimensional analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics, 7*(12), 951-959. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25071858

Lewis, M. A. (2000). Lean production and sustainable competitive advantage. *International journal of operations & production management, 20*(8), 959-978. https://doi.org/10.1108/01443570010332971

Lim, H., & Childs, M. (2020). Visual storytelling on Instagram: branded photo narrative and the role of telepresence. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 14*(1), 33-50. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-09-2018-0115

Lock, I., & Araujo, T. (2020). Visualizing the triple bottom line: A large-scale automated visual content analysis of European corporations' website and social media images. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 27*(6), 2631-2641. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1988

Loukianov, A., Burningham, K., & Jackson, T. (2020). Young people, good life narratives, and sustainable futures: the case of Instagram. *Sustainable Earth, 3,* 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1186/s42055-020-00033-2

Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17*(3), 337-353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x

Lucini, D., & Pagani, M. (2021). Exercise prescription to foster health and well-being: a behavioral approach to transform barriers into opportunities. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 18*(3), 968. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030968

Lyon, T. P., & Montgomery, A. W. (2013). Tweetjacked: The impact of social media on corporate greenwash. *Journal of business ethics, 118*, 747-757. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-013-1958-x

Matthes, J. (2019). Uncharted territory in research on environmental advertising: Toward an organizing framework. *Journal of Advertising, 48*, 91-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1579687

Megehee, C. M., & Woodside, A. G. (2010). Creating visual narrative art for decoding stories that consumers and brands tell. *Psychology & Marketing, 27*(6), 603-622. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20347

Milanesi, M., Kyrdoda, Y., & Runfola, A. (2022). How do you depict sustainability? An analysis of images posted on Instagram by sustainable fashion companies. *Journal of*

Global Fashion Marketing, 13(2), 101-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2021.1998789

Morsing, M., & Schultz, M. (2006). Corporate social responsibility communication: stakeholder information, response and involvement strategies. *Business ethics: A European review, 15*(4), 323-338. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8608.2006.00460.x

Muthukumarana, T. T., Karunathilake, H. P., Punchihewa, H. K. G., Manthilake, M. M. I. D., & Hewage, K. N. (2018). Life cycle environmental impacts of the apparel industry in Sri Lanka: Analysis of the energy sources. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 172*, 1346-1357. https://www.nature.com/articles/s43017-020-0039-9

Nayak, R., Nguyen, L. V. T., Panwar, T., & Jajpura, L. (2020). Sustainable technologies and processes adapted by fashion brands. In *Sustainable technologies for fashion and textiles* (pp. 233-248). https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102867-4.00011-6

Oelze, N. (2017). Sustainable supply chain management implementation–enablers and barriers in the textile industry. *Sustainability, 9*(8), 1435. https://doi.org/10.3390/su9081435

Peng, Y., Lock, I., & Ali Salah, A. (2023). Automated visual analysis for the study of social media effects: Opportunities, approaches, and challenges. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 163-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2023.2277956

Peters, J., & Simaens, A. (2020). Integrating sustainability into corporate strategy: A case study of the textile and clothing industry. *Sustainability, 12*(15), 6125. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12156125

Pezalla, A. E., Pettigrew, J., & Miller-Day, M. (2012). Researching the researcher-as-instrument: An exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity. *Qualitative research, 12*(2), 165-185. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111422107

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2006). The link between competitive advantage and corporate social responsibility. *Harvard business review, 84*(12), 78-92. IGI Global.

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2011). Creating shared value. *Harvard Business Review, 89*(1/2), 62-77. https://hbr.org/2011/01/the-big-idea-creating-shared-value

Pretty, J., Peacock, J., Hine, R., Sellens, M., South, N., & Griffin, M. (2007). Green exercise in the UK countryside: Effects on health and psychological well-being, and implications for policy and planning. *Journal of environmental planning and management, 50*(2), 211-231. https://doi.org/10.1080/09640560601156466

Prince, H. E. (2017). Outdoor experiences and sustainability. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, *17*(2), 161–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2016.1244645

Purvis, B., Mao, Y., & Robinson, D. (2019). Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability science, 14*, 681-695. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0627-5

Raman, M., Lim, W., & Nair, S. (2012). The impact of corporate social responsibility on consumer loyalty. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies, 30*(2). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2022.2025675

Reynolds, M., & Yuthas, K. (2008). Moral discourse and corporate social responsibility reporting. *Journal of business ethics, 78*, 47-64. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9316-x

Rim, H., & Song, D. (2016). "How negative becomes less negative": Understanding the effects of comment valence and response sidedness in social media. *Journal of Communication, 66*(3), 475 – 495. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12205

Rindfleisch, A., Malter, A. J., Ganesan, S., & Moorman, C. (2008). Cross-sectional versus longitudinal survey research: Concepts, findings, and guidelines. *Journal of marketing research, 45*(3), 261-279. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1509/jmkr.45.3.261

Roth, A., & Zawadzki, T. (2018). Instagram as a tool for promoting superfood products. *Annals of Marketing Management & Economics, 4*(1), 101 – 113. https://doi.org/10.22630/AMME.2018.4.1.8

Russell, C. A., Russell, D. W., & Honea, H. (2016). Corporate social responsibility failures: How do consumers respond to corporate violations of implied social contracts?. *Journal of Business Ethics, 136,* 759-773. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s10551-015-2868-x

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). Research methods for business students. London: SAGE.

Saxton, G. D., Gómez, L., Ngoh, Z., Lin, Y. P., & Dietrich, S. (2019). Do CSR messages resonate? Examining public reactions to firms' CSR efforts on social media. *Journal of business ethics, 155,* 359-377. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3464-z

Schaefer, S. D., Terlutter, R., & Diehl, S. (2020). Talking about CSR matters: Employees' perception of and reaction to their company's CSR communication in four different CSR domains. *International Journal of Advertising, 39*(2), 191-212. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1593736

Schleussner, C. F., Lissner, T. K., Fischer, E. M., Wohland, J., Perrette, M., Golly, A., ... & Schaeffer, M. (2016). Differential climate impacts for policy-relevant limits to global warming: the case of 1.5 C and 2 C. *Earth system dynamics, 7*(2), 327-351. https://doi.org/10.5194/esd-7-327-2016

Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118–137). Sage Publications, Inc.

Seelig, M. I. (2015). Advocating environmental issues beyond photography. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 16*(1), 46-55. https://doi.org/10.1080/17459435.2015.1086420

Sibona, C., Walczak, S., & White Baker, E. (2020). A guide for purposive sampling on twitter. *Communications of the association for information systems*, *46*(1), 22. https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.04622

Siedentop, D., & Van der Mars, H. (2022). *Introduction to physical education, fitness, and sport.* Human kinetics.

Silverman, D. (2011). *A guide to the principles of qualitative research*. London: SAGE.

Singh, B., Keitsch, M. M., & Shrestha, M. (2019). Scaling up sustainability: Concepts and practices of the ecovillage approach. *Sustainable Development, 27*(2), 237-244. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1882

Smith, B. G., & Taylor, M. (2017). Empowering engagement: Understanding social media user sense of influence. *International Journal of strategic communication, 11*(2), 148-164. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2017.1284072

Sodhi, M. S. (2015). Conceptualizing social responsibility in operations via stakeholder resource-based view. *Production and Operations Management, 24*(9), 1375-1389. https://doi.org/10.1111/poms.12393

Stafford-Smith, M., Griggs, D., Gaffney, O., Ullah, F., Reyers, B., Kanie, N., ... & O'Connell, D. (2017). Integration: the key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustainability science, 12*, 911-919. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-016-0383-3

Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research, 17*(10), 1372-1380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307307031

Stohl, C., Etter, M., Banghart, S., & Woo, D. (2017). Social media policies: Implications for contemporary notions of corporate social responsibility. *Journal of business ethics, 142*, 413-436. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2743-9

Ståhl, M., & Kaihovirta, H. (2019). Exploring visual communication and competencies through interaction with images in social media. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 21*, 250-266. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.03.003

Sánchez-Teba, E. M., Benítez-Márquez, M. D., Bermúdez-González, G., & Luna-Pereira, M. D. M. (2021). Mapping the Knowledge of CSR and Sustainability. *Sustainability, 13*(18), 10106. https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810106

Taylor, C. R. (2015). A call for more research on 'green' or environmental advertising. *International Journal of Advertising, 34*(4), 573-575. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2015.1077572

Tench, R., & Jones, B. (2015). Social media: the Wild West of CSR communications. *Social Responsibility Journal, 11*(2), 290-305. https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-12-2012-0157

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. John Wiley & Sons.

Ullah, S., Luo, R., Nadeem, M., & Cifuentes-Faura, J. (2023). Advancing sustainable growth and energy transition in the United States through the lens of green energy innovations, natural resources and environmental policy. *Resources Policy, 85,* 103848. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2023.103848

Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building service brands via social identity: Lessons from the sports marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 9*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2001.11501881

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2015). Paris Agreement. *In Report of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (21st session). https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09.pdf

Van der Velden, N. M., Kuusk, K., & Köhler, A. R. (2015). Life cycle assessment and eco-design of smart textiles: The importance of material selection demonstrated through e-textile product redesign. *Materials & Design, 84,* 313-324. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.matdes.2015.06.129

Vining, J., Merrick, M. S., & Price, E. A. (2008). The distinction between humans and nature: Human perceptions of connectedness to nature and elements of the natural and unnatural. *Human Ecology Review,* 1-11. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24707479

Visser, W. (2014). *CSR 2.0: Transforming corporate sustainability and responsibility.* New York, NY: Springer.

White, C., Nielsen, A., & Valentini, C. (2017). CSR research in the apparel industry: A quantitative and qualitative review of existing literature. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 24*(5), 382-394. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1413

Winter, P. L., Selin, S., Cerveny, L., & Bricker, K. (2019). Outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, and sustainability. *Sustainability*, *12*(1), 81. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010081

Zalaghi, H., & Khazaei, M. (2016). The role of deductive and inductive reasoning in accounting research and standard setting. *Asian Journal of Finance & Accounting, 8*(1), 23-37. https://doi.org/10.5296/ajfa.v8i1.8148

Zinkhan, G. M., & Carlson, L. (1995). Green advertising and the reluctant consumer. *Journal of Advertising, 24*(2), 1-6. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4188967

Appendix A: Coding Book

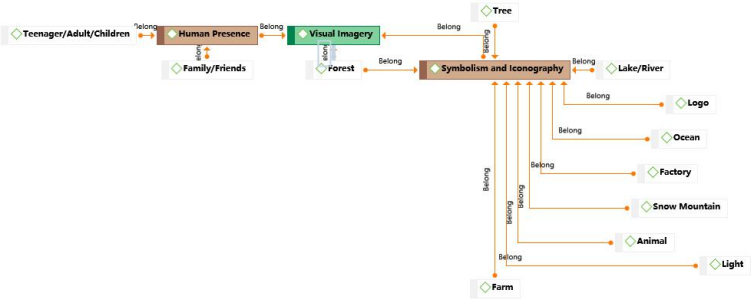
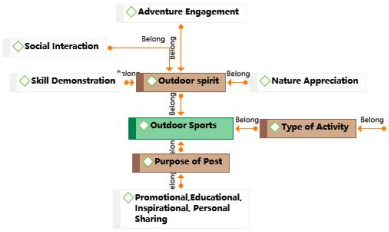
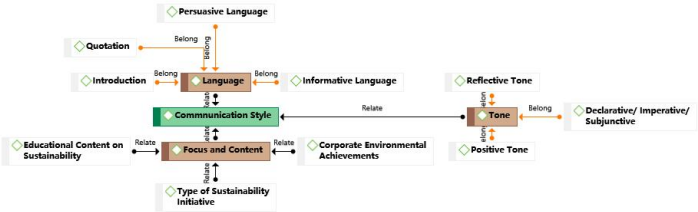
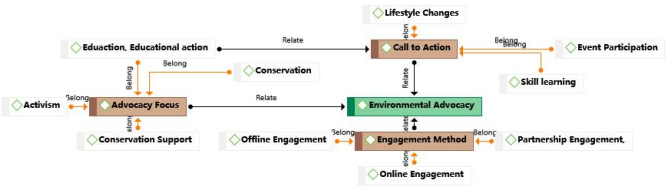
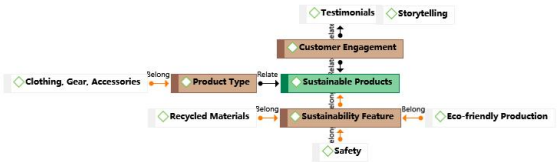
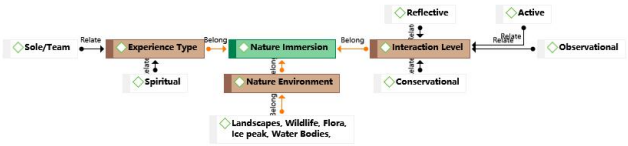
Table A1: Coding results of communication themes

Selective code	Axial code	Opening code
Outdoor Sports	Type of Activity	Climbing, Hiking, Running, Surfing, Winter sports
	Outdoor spirit	Nature Appreciation, Adventure Engagement, Skill Demonstration, Social Interaction
	Purpose of Post	Promotional, Educational, Inspirational, Personal Sharing
Environmental Advocacy	Advocacy Focus	Campaigns, Conservation, Education, Activism
	Call to Action	Skill learning, Event Participation, Educational Action, Lifestyle Changes
	Engagement Method	Online Engagement, Offline Engagement, Partnership Engagement, Direct Action
Nature Immersion	Nature Environment	Landscapes, Wildlife, Ice peak, Flora, Water Bodies
	Experience Type	Eco-Tourism, Adventure, Spiritual, Sole/Team
	Interaction Level	Active, Reflective, Observational, Conservational
Sustainable Products	Product Type	Clothing, Gear, Accessories
	Sustainability Feature	Recycled Materials, Eco-friendly Production, Safety, Conservation Support
	Purpose of Post	Promotion, Education, Customer Engagement, Community Impact
	Consumer Interaction	Call to Action, Storytelling, Testimonials

Table A2: Coding results of communication visual imagery

Selective code	Axial code	Opening code
Visual Imagery	Visual Elements	Textual Descriptors, Contextual Information
	Symbolism &Iconography	Snow Mountain, Animal, Forest, Light, Ocean, Farm
	Human Presence	Adult/Teenager/Children, Family/Friends, Sole/Team

Table A3: Coding results of communication style

Selective code	Axial code	Opening code
Communication Style	Focus and Content	Type of Sustainability Initiative Corporate Environmental Achievements Educational Content on Sustainability
	Language	Informative Language, Introduction Persuasive Language, Quotation
	Tone	Declarative/ Imperative/ Subjunctive Reflective Tone, Positive Tone

Appendix B: Coding Tree