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Fast Fashion Brands' Corporate Social Responsibility Communication on Instagram

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Master's Thesis

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences

Global Politics and Communication /
Governance, Organisations and
Communication track

March 2022



Abstract

Faculty: Faculty of Social Sciences

Degree Programme: Master's Programme in Global Politics and Communication

Study Track: Governance, Organisations and Communication

Author: Maria Anita Simula

Title: Fast Fashion Brands' Corporate Social Responsibility Communication on Instagram

Level: Master's Thesis

Month and Year: March 2022

Number of Pages: 52

Keywords: CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility Communication, Instagram, Fashion Industry

Where Deposited: Helsinki University Library: Helda

Abstract:

Companies are facing increasing pressure to communicate more transparently of their social and environmental impacts. People expect companies to improve the social and environmental wellbeing of the societies they operate in. This way companies can gain acceptance and legitimacy, which is important for their survival. Because of the normative pressure, companies have started to incorporate corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication into their communication strategies.

The thesis will study what kind of CSR communication are fast fashion brands doing on Instagram and what kind of sustainability themes are the brands bringing up. The chosen brands are H&M, The North Face, Timberland, C&A, and Vans, who are the forerunners of transparent CSR communication on their websites. Thus, it will be interesting to study the level of their CSR communication on social media. The time frame of the study is one month, and the method of the research is qualitative content analysis. The data will be analysed with the help of the concept of CSR.

While CSR is a highly researched topic, the CSR communication on social media has not been studied extensively. Brands' CSR communication can be considered controversial, since the demand for more transparent communication is increasing but brands that bring up their CSR activity get easily criticized. The results of the study show that fast fashion brands are not doing CSR communication extensively on Instagram. The sustainability themes of the five fast fashion brands' CSR communication on Instagram are 1. Reuse, Repair, and Recycling, 2. Sustainable Materials, and 3. Equality. Brands are eager to share sustainability issues but not linking it to their own operation, and thus it is not considered CSR communication.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis I will be examining how fast fashion brands do corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication on Instagram. My research is data oriented since I will be focusing on analysing Instagram content of five fast fashion brands. I will be analysing the data by mirroring it to the concept and definition of CSR. The focus of my study will be to use CSR as a tool to find and analyse Instagram content of the five fast fashion brands. By examining Instagram and the ways brands use it to do CSR communication, I can shed more light on how brands use social media to bring up sustainability themes. The popularity of social media is increasing constantly, which makes it an interesting and fruitful platform to examine. CSR and sustainability are also themes that have gained more attention in the past decades. They are topics that get constantly more visibility in media, politics, as well as in research. This trend is something that will most certainly increase in the future.

Because of globalization, big international corporations have a considerable amount of power, and with power comes responsibility. Companies are not only expected to make profit but also generate wellbeing for the societies they are operating in and work towards a more sustainable world. Companies need acceptance from society in order to survive and continue making profit (Wood, 1991, p. 67), and thus they need to be seen as actors who not only take but also give back to the society and people. Companies are required to be more transparent and communicate more widely of their economic, social, and environmental impacts. Consumers as well as other stakeholders are becoming more aware of sustainability and ethical issues and thus demanding companies to operate in a responsible way towards the environment and people and communicate about it. Stakeholders have the power to either support or boycott companies, which makes it important for companies to respond to the demands of the society.

People want companies to participate in solving societal problems (Milton, 2017, p. 8), and especially young people have high expectations when it comes to companies' work towards better societies (Milton, 2017, p. 12). 62% of consumers want companies to take a stand on issues like sustainability, transparency, and fair employment practises (Accenture Strategy, 2018, p. 2), and 66% of consumers think transparency is one of most attractive qualities of a brand (Accenture Strategy,

2018, p. 11). People get information about companies' societal stands and advocacy often through social media (Miltton, 2017, p. 17), which is why one thinks it to be important for companies to bring up sustainability issues on social media and to be active communicators (Miltton, 2017, p. 16). Because young people are active users of social media and have high expectations of companies' sustainability content, companies have a good opportunity to utilize this and incorporate sustainability topics into their social media communication.

In this thesis I am examining how fast fashion brands do CSR communication on Instagram. I am examining what sustainability topics and issues related to their own operation brands are bringing up in their Instagram communication. I am not examining if the facts and issues companies bring up are true or not, but rather what kind of sustainability themes they are presenting and promoting. CSR can mean many things, but I am going to be focusing on the ways companies bring up sustainability and CSR related content on their Instagram accounts focusing on the social and environmental aspects of their own operation. I am interested to find out which themes are companies incorporating to their social media communication and what similarities and differences are there between different companies. I am going to examine the Instagram posts and stories of five fashion brands: H&M, The North Face, Timberland, C&A, and Vans. I chose to examine fashion brands, because their operation influences people and the environment around the world, and because the environmental and social problems within the industry have gained enormous amounts of media attention. The examination period is one month in January 2022.

My thesis is strongly driven by the data. I put a lot of emphasis on the data that I will be collecting from the Instagram accounts of the five fashion brands. I will be searching for themes that come up repeatedly in the data and form categories based on that. With the help of the concept of CSR I will find the relevant content to analyse. Instagram is an interesting and important platform to study for many reasons. Companies have incorporated it into their communication strategies and view it as one of the most important communication channels especially when it comes to reaching young consumers interest. Instagram is strongly based on pictures and short text which makes it easy for the users to browse more content in a shorter time. Because the popularity of Instagram is increasing constantly, companies have started to utilize the platform more in their own communication. While Instagram has not been studied widely, it has a massive potential in revealing new phenomena and results when we start to examine it further.

My assumption is that it is not that common yet for companies to be bringing up sustainability and ethical issues on their social media accounts. Though, I am aware that it varies between different companies and is evolving constantly. Rather than doing CSR communication on social media, it is more common for companies to have wide CSR reports on their websites, which is why it is interesting to research the volume of CSR communication on social media and especially on Instagram that has been growing fast and is one of the most popular social media channels. Currently climate change and climate crisis are getting a lot of media space and are widely discussed topics. Because of this, it is interesting to examine if the environmental aspects get more visibility in communication compared to the social aspects, such as workers' rights and wellbeing for example. I would imagine that communicating about environmental sustainability plays a bigger role today in CSR communication.

My research questions are:

- What kind of CSR communication are fast fashion brands doing on Instagram?
- What kind of sustainability themes, values, and concrete actions are the brands bringing up in their CSR communication on Instagram?

Corporate social responsibility is an important factor in the business world which is why several companies have chosen to incorporate it into their core operation as well as into their communication strategies. It is not enough for companies to act in a sustainable way, they also need to communicate their CSR activities transparently. In the current online world information flows fast and people receive and find information about companies quickly. Thus, it is more important than ever for companies to keep their image clean and to show their customers and other stakeholders that they are sustainable and responsible actors. Stakeholder groups such as investors, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), different activist groups, media, governments, local communities, customers, and employees are demanding companies to incorporate responsibility practises into their operation (Melé, 2008, p. 51), and the amount of groups that expect companies to take more responsibility for their actions has been increasing and will continue to increase in the future (Melé, 2008, p. 51).

Companies have accepted that they responsibilities towards the society and environment. By doing CSR communication companies can gain legitimacy for their CSR actions and present themselves as good corporate citizens that take responsibility of the world and its wellbeing. Instagram is an important platform for companies to try to convince their customers that they are responsible actors. Therefore, it is interesting and important to examine in which extent companies do CSR communication on Instagram.

The topic of CSR is highly relevant currently when the EU is outlining a new mandatory due diligence legal framework for companies operating in Europe to take more responsibility for their supply chains. The new legislation will have great importance, because till this day CSR has been mainly voluntary for companies in the EU. There are several international guidelines and agreements encouraging companies to respect the environment and human rights in their operation and in their supply chains, but these guidelines are in most cases voluntary. Regulations and legal frameworks are becoming more common concerning the CSR, and with the new EU legislation the role of companies is changing. Companies have already started to take on responsibilities that have traditionally been states' responsibilities (Schmeltz, 2012, p. 29), and this development will most certainly continue in the future.

Even though CSR is a highly researched topic, the CSR communication research has mainly been focusing on examining CSR reporting rather than sustainability communication on social media platforms (Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2016, p. 56). It is interesting and important to examine the ways in which companies communicate their sustainability on social media. When examining companies' communication, one needs to take account of the context. One needs to ask questions such as who is speaking, to whom, how, why, and with what aim. Also, all the countries have different legislation and culture when it comes to communicating about sustainability issues and companies' responsibilities. Companies have varying regulation and value environments where they operate, which influences how they communicate and what topics they bring up.

In the second chapter I am going to define CSR and CSR communication and discuss the different guidelines and legislation initiatives of CSR. I will also explain why CSR has standardized and what kind of effects does the standardization has on companies' organisations and strategies. In the end of

the second chapter I will discuss social media and the ways companies are utilizing it to do CSR communication. In the second chapter I will be building a base that I will be my tool to analyse the data. The concept and definition of CSR guides me to examine the brands' Instagram content, and it helps me to define what kind of CSR communication brands do in Instagram. In the third chapter I am going to explain the method and data of my research. I will also present the brands and their Instagram accounts briefly. In the fourth chapter I am going to discuss fast fashion industry and its impacts and problematic practises. In the fifth chapter I am going to analyse the Instagram communication and present the results of the study. Lastly, I will draw the conclusions.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility

When examining brands' CSR communication, first one needs to define CSR and its practises. In this chapter I am going to open the concept of CSR and its past and future developments. When I have established the concept of CSR, I will harness it to analyse the Instagram content that will be my data. By mirroring the Instagram content to the concept of CSR, I can establish what kind of CSR communication the brands are doing. I will be able to recognize different sustainability themes that brands bring up in their communication.

First of all, there is no one definition of CSR (Crane et al., 2008, p. 2). For example, Dahlsrud (2008) introduces 37 different definitions of CSR comparing them and looking for differences and similarities. CSR is usually understood as voluntary actions companies do to address social and environmental issues within their operation (Panwar, Nawani, & Pandey, 2018, p. 134). The definitions and concepts of CSR are evolving constantly because the research of CSR is developing perpetually (Crane et al., 2008, p. 4). There are many ways to call the concept of responsibility of companies: corporate social responsibility, corporate responsibility, corporate sustainability, corporate citizenship, and much more. In this thesis I am going to be using corporate social responsibility, because in most of the research and international guidelines the responsibility of companies is called that.

The European Commission defines CSR to be a concept where companies have responsibilities for their impacts on society. Companies need to integrate social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human right concerns into their operation and follow the law. (European Commission.) CSR means that companies take more responsibility on social and environmental aspects in their operation (Ketola, 2005, p. 10) and that companies consciously work to improve those whose lives are affected by the company's operation (Frederick, 2018, p. 4). Because there is no uniform definition of CSR and how companies should practice it, companies can define CSR in their own way (Ketola, 2005, p. 10). CSR started to become more important in the 1950s, and in the 21st century it has become a global concept and a trend that plays an essential role in the business world (Carroll, 2008, pp. 19-20, 41). CSR can be seen as the result of globalization and the freedom of markets. While the expansion of markets and national deregulation have created economic benefits, the development has also

resulted in people getting dissatisfied with globalization and with the fact that companies have more power than ever. (Vogel, 2007, p. 8.) More power means more responsibilities and possibilities to generate positive changes in the world, which is something companies are expected to act on.

Several researchers mention corporate citizenship that is tightly linked to the concept of CSR. Global corporate citizenship means that companies operating globally in several countries take account the cultural, economic, and legal differences of societies and respect them (Waddock & Smith, 2000, p. 52). Being a good corporate citizen means having an honest dialogue with stakeholders, treating stakeholders well and developing good relationships with them (Waddock & Smith, 2000, p. 48). Stakeholders are groups and individuals that have a stake in the operation or decision making of a company (Carroll, 1991, p. 43), and they are influenced by the actions of a company (Melé, 2008, p. 62). Stakeholders can be divided as primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are for example owners, investors, customers, employees, and suppliers who constitute the company. Secondary stakeholders are for example governments, media, and NGOs who supply infrastructure and other resources for the company to survive. (Waddock & Smith, 2000, p. 49.) The management of a company needs to evaluate which stakeholder groups to consider and include in the decision making to prevent any operational or imago damage (Carroll, 1991, p. 43). Companies can create a good relationship with their stakeholders by being fair, open, and transparent (Waddock & Smith, 2000, p. 50), and in the context of customers and communicating to customers, it is important to communicate transparently and honestly to create a good relationship that is based on trust.

Carroll (1991, p. 40) introduces four different social responsibility categories that constitute and help define CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Economic responsibility means maximising profit making and maintaining a good competition position, while legal responsibility means that companies need to operate in a way expected by governments and law (Carroll, 1991, pp. 40-41). Ethical responsibility means that companies operate in a manner that meets the moral and ethical expectations of the society, and that the companies prevent any unethical action within their operation (Carroll, 1991, p. 41). Philanthropic responsibility means that companies actively engage in charity and help to increase the wellbeing of local communities (Carroll, 1991, pp. 41-42). From these four areas of responsibility Carroll forms a pyramid where the economic responsibility is at the bottom followed by the legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Companies usually move from the economic responsibility to the legal, ethical, and finally to philanthropic in this order. Economic and

legal responsibilities are the basic structures of CSR and are followed by the ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. (Carroll, 1991, p. 42.) It is not enough for the company to have economic and legal responsibilities but also engage actively in the ethical and philanthropic activities. The responsibilities can be seen as the expectations stakeholders have towards a company. CSR refers to the voluntary ethical and philanthropic obligations of a company (Carroll, & Shabana, 2010, pp. 90, 95) which are not at the immediate financial interest of a company the same way as economic and legal responsibilities are (Carroll, & Shabana, 2010, p. 95).

2.1. Practises of CSR

There are no standardised measurements for CSR (Vogel, 2005, p. 70), but Elkington (1998) introduces a triple bottom line of social, economic, and environmental responsibilities and impacts of companies, which is actively referred to in the CSR literature. The economic responsibility is the most important one, because the main goal of a business is to produce profit for owners and investors. Economic responsibilities include for example employing people directly and indirectly (for example subcontractors) and paying taxes. (Ketola, 2005, pp. 32-33.) Though, companies can't pursue profit at any cost, and they can't be seen greedy (Ketola, 2005, p. 33). For example, in some cases companies might take advantage of corruption that can be deeply rooted in some societies, and while corruption might result in higher profits for the company, it usually increases poverty and strengthens the development of unequal societies (Ketola, 2005, p. 36). Even though profit making is the main purpose of companies in order to survive, companies also need to respect people, societies and the environment (Ketola, 2005, p. 37), which is why CSR consists of social and environmental responsibilities that can be seen as the voluntary CSR actions of a company.

Social responsibility means respecting human rights and taking care of the safety and health of people (Ketola, 2005, p. 40), while environmental responsibility means that companies should minimise all the negative environmental effects that their operation causes (Ketola, 2005, pp. 46-48). Companies should take responsibility of the environmental effects of their whole operation (Ketola, 2005, pp. 46-47), because even though they would transfer their operation to low-cost countries and buy their products from subcontractors, the social and environmental effects of the subcontractor are still the company's responsibility. Charity can be seen as one way of being socially responsible, and this way

a company can seem responsible even if its operation would be harmful for the environment or societies (Ketola, 2005, p. 41). For example, in the case of the clothing industry, a brand can donate to the protection of the environment while at the same time the production of the brand results in major greenhouse gas emissions. Environmental responsibility is something companies have started actively to incorporate into their operation because it is good for their image and thus to their profitability (Ketola, 2005, p. 47).

Most of the CSR activities companies engage in are voluntary, which is why companies can choose what CSR activities to incorporate and in which ways to engage in them. Though, when companies change their operation to a more sustainable direction, it is because of the demand coming from stakeholders like customers and because of the pursuit of increasing the profit making (Rohweder, 2004, p. 82). Being seen as a responsible actor can attract investors, customers, and employees and improve the company image and thus sales (Vogel, 2005, pp. 19-20, 23). Even though there are mixed results on whether engaging in CSR activities influences corporate financial performance (Dodd & Supa, 2014, pp. 3-4), more responsible companies perform better in the longer run (Vogel, 2005, p. 38). Because of the intense global competition, CSR will be popular as long as it continues to add value and profit for companies (Carroll, 2008, p. 42). Companies will engage in CSR only to the extent that makes sense for them business wise (Vogel, 2007, p. 4), and while CSR activities are defined to go beyond profit making, several companies engage in them with the aim of improving their image and thus profit making. The definition of CSR being voluntary but beneficial for companies to engage in more in the future creates a controversy in the CSR literature. One can ask, if CSR is these days considered voluntary or not. While there is a strong consensus that companies should engage in CSR activities, there are also opinions against it. For example, Milton Friedman (1970) famously stated that companies should not engage in social issues but only try to maximise profit making.

2.2. Sustainability and Sustainable Development

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs” (European Commission, 2019). As well as in CSR, there are three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and

environmental. The United Nations has declared 17 sustainable development goals in The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to build a more sustainable world by 2030, and these goals are meant to promote actions to prosper people and protect the environment. The agenda includes for example goals to end poverty, hunger, and inequality, to promote responsible consumption and production as well as climate actions. (United Nations, 2022.)

Because of the climate change and climate crises, governments are pressured to make decisions to tackle climate change and its negative effects. In the Paris agreement that was reached in 2015 states promised to cut down global greenhouse gas emissions and limit the temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius and pursue to limit it to 1,5 degree Celsius (United Nations, 2015). States have made promises to engage in climate actions and this way create a more sustainable world, which is something one could also see companies to engage more actively in the future. Governments need to make new legislation to tackle climate change, and this will have an effect on the companies' operation.

2.3. International guidelines

There has been an expansion in CSR standards, guidelines and rankings aiming at making CSR practises coherent globally. States and non-state actors have tried to encourage companies to invest in CSR and to report more transparently on their social impacts. (Crane et al., 2008, p. 2.) Though, states have not been able to regulate CSR sufficiently, and thus different organizations have been forming guidelines and tools for companies to follow and incorporate into their operation (Moon & Vogel, 2008, pp. 309-310). Several international organisations address the importance of CSR with different guidelines and declarations, such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Global Compact, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights on Work, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct.

The United Nations Global Compact and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights address the importance of respecting human and labour rights as well as the environment (United

Nations Global Compact, 2022; United Nations Global Compact, 2011). The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights points out that states and companies have the obligation to respect and protect human rights and freedoms and offer remedies if the companies violate the obligation. States should make sure that companies operating in their area meet these obligations that should be stated by the national law. (United Nations Global Compact, 2011.)

Additional to the international guidelines, different CSR standards and indexes have also increased. For example, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is an independent organization that offers companies guidelines and frameworks for sustainability reporting (GRI, 2022). Because several companies use GRI to report their governmental, social, and environmental matters, it has become a global standard for reporting (Waddock & Googins, 2011, p. 36). Another example is the ISO 14000 standard that offers companies tools to manage their environmental responsibilities (ISO, 2022). Other indexes include for example The Fashion Checker, the Sustainable Brand Index, and the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. Different guidelines and standards have been seen as soft regulation (Crane et al., 2008, p. 2), and among many countries and organizations like the EU there has started to rise demands for legislation that would obligate the companies to take more responsibility for their supply chains.

2.4. Legislation of CSR

Even though CSR is mainly voluntary for companies, several states require companies to report their CSR engagement by law (Panwar, Nawani, & Pandey, 2018, p. 135). But, because in many cases countries can't regulate international companies that operate beyond borders, there are bound to be governance gaps. Several companies also use subcontractors which makes it even harder to regulate their operation and measure their impacts. For example, the EU can regulate its member countries, but EU member states cannot regulate countries outside the EU where for example Finnish corporations produce clothes. Different countries have different levels of legislation when it comes to working rights and conditions, and when a certain country has weak legislation it is more important to have companies that take responsibility for making the society more sustainable.

The EU states that voluntary CSR is not enough, and it has started to shape a mandatory due diligence legislation (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, p. 1). The new legislation would concentrate specifically on human rights and environment (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, p. 1), because the voluntary guidelines and tools have not been sufficient enough to obligate companies to take responsibility for the human rights and environment violations in their supply chains (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, pp. 6-7). The new mandatory due diligence framework would require companies to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for current or potential human rights and environmental impacts in its own operation and in its supply chains (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, p. 8). The proposal for the new EU directive was approved on March 10 in 2021 by the European Parliament and the new legislation was supposed to be accepted in 2021. However, it was pushed to 2022 and so it is yet to be accepted. The proposal is called “corporate due diligence and corporate accountability” and it states that companies need to “identify, assess, prevent, cease, mitigate, monitor, communicate, account for, address and remediate potential and/or actual adverse impacts on human rights, the environment and good governance in their value chain” (European Parliament, 2021). The proposal states that companies need to be held accountable if their actions violate human rights, the environment, or good governance and they need to ensure that the victims have access to legal remedies (European Parliament, 2021).

The only EU member state that has adopted similar legislation to the one EU is shaping is France where in 2017 a law was adopted that requires all large French companies to undertake due diligence with the companies they are operating with, such as contractors and suppliers. Companies who don't fulfil their due diligence obligations get sanctioned and need to pay for the damages. (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, p. 5) There are several initiatives and legislative proposals also in other EU member states calling for mandatory due diligence (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, p. 6). For example, in Finland the current government has included three corporate sustainability objectives related to due diligence into the Governmental Programme (Valtioneuvosto, 2019).

2.5. Standardization of CSR

As discussed in the section “International guidelines”, different CSR standards and rankings have become a global phenomenon and trend in the business world. The CSR has become more legalised and thus standardized, and there are hundreds of different standards that address corporate behaviour and responsibility (Koerber, 2010, p. 461). This regulative and normative pressure pushes companies to change their organizations and the ways they operate. Companies must earn their acceptance and licence to operate from the society and thus act in accordance with social norms and expectations (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011, p. 7). The reason why companies engage in CSR standards is the aim to obtain and maintain legitimacy (Koerber, 2010, p. 466). The pressure of international CSR guidelines, standards and indexes create a global governance of CSR where companies imitate and follow each other. These isomorphic processes such as mimicking lead to organisations in a same field becoming similar with each other (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 147).

Companies have started to create different forms of self-reporting and self-regulation (Moon & Vogel, 2008, p. 303). Companies are establishing codes of conducts, certifications and standards for CSR, and these tools have become international over the past decades (LeBaron & Lister, 2015, p. 906). In many cases companies also engage in voluntary CSR because if they wouldn't, there could be a danger of future governmental regulation which would hurt the profit making even more than engaging in the voluntary regulation (Panwar, Nawani, & Pandey, 2018, p. 134). Few examples of organizations that companies engage with are Business for Social Responsibility and World Business Council for Sustainable Development. These organizations help companies to develop their organizations towards a more sustainable direction with the help of different reporting tools and consulting. It gets harder for companies not to incorporate CSR into their operation because it has become standardized and expected by stakeholders. When CSR is integrated into the company's organization and it gets a high visibility on the agenda, it becomes a part of the company's identity (Berger et al., 2007, p. 134).

The global governance of CSR can also be seen as the result of the worldwide models. The models are constructed by the global culture and associations processes, and they legitimate and define our actions and shape the structures and policies of companies (Meyer et al., 1997, pp. 144-145). The

global models that are constructed by culture shape our values and conception of for example human rights and nature (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 147). States define different global standards like GDP and human rights coherently with other states (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 153), and this development can also be seen in the business field, where companies have similar goals of environmental and social achievements with each other (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 156). This can also be applied to values that are constructed by the global models of world society, and when companies share the values and demands with the surrounding societies, they do better in competition (Meyer et al., 1997, pp. 169-170).

The current organizational frame was created after the Second World War, when the UN and coherent global guidelines and values were created (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 163). International corporations need to adjust their organizations to meet these international but also national regulations and standards (Drori et al., 2014, p. 3), and thus several companies have developed their management, reporting and communication to meet the demand (Carroll, 2008, p. 20). The pressure coming from world society also means that states need to create legislation that obligates companies to favour, for example, new environment and human rights legislation. Otherwise international and local actors within the state would call for the state to take action. As discussed in the section “Legislation of CSR”, we can see a development where the EU and member states are creating due diligence legislation because of the pressure coming from the society.

When CSR becomes standardized, stakeholders might start taking it for granted. When companies are incorporating CSR standards and using different CSR tools and reporting, they might want to make it seem like they are aiming to work towards a more sustainable future. With the help of the standardization of CSR, companies can be seen as responsible actors and thus gain legitimacy, but are companies actually building a pretty picture for themselves to hide behind. If stakeholders start to take it for granted that companies engage in CSR activities, the companies do not need to prove it constantly and thus companies might think that the active CSR engagement and communication are not needed anymore. Also, if several standards and organizations measuring CSR are built by companies themselves, they are not being objective and thus they do not measure the real responsibility of companies.

2.6. CSR Communication

While CSR is a widely researched topic, CSR communication has not been studied extensively (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011, p. 3). When CSR focuses on the ways companies address economic, social and environmental issues within their operation, CSR communication means the ways companies communicate about these issues (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011, p. 8). CSR communication should be based on mutual understanding and shared values between the company and its stakeholders, and with the CSR communication companies can create either positive or negative impact on the stakeholder engagement (Tench, Sun, & Jones, 2014, p. 6). Companies are evaluating possible demands coming from stakeholders and developing responses to them (Ihlen, May, and Bartlett, 2014, p. 26). It is important that the CSR communication is dialogue, not just one-way communication (Ihlen, May, and Bartlett, 2014, p. 30), because while it is vital for companies to communicate to their stakeholders, they also need to get feedback in order to get acceptance and credibility but also to develop their CSR strategies and operation. Different stakeholders might have different demands and expectations, so it might be hard for companies to communicate and thus answer according to all demands. One important factor of CSR communication is transparency. Communicating transparently about the CSR activities increases a company's credibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2015, p. 134).

Morsing and Schultz (2006) introduce three CSR communication strategies: the stakeholder information strategy, the stakeholder response strategy, and the stakeholder involvement strategy. In the stakeholder information strategy companies communicate to their stakeholders in a one-way manner, where the stakeholders listen and don't interact (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 326). In the stakeholder response strategy, communication flows to both directions but the aim of the company is to change the stakeholders' attitudes by trying to get them to engage in the communication. This way the company can get valuable information and feedback from the stakeholders and thus develop their operation. (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327.) This strategy can be a tool for companies to reinforce their actions and identity but not to have a genuine two-way communication. In the stakeholder involvement strategy communication is dialogue between the stakeholders and the company, and both parties try to persuade the other to change their minds, and in this strategy both parties can change their attitudes. (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328.) Ideally communication on social media would mean involving stakeholders such as customers, but it can also be seen as a response strategy where

companies are not interacting with the stakeholders to have a genuine dialogue but with the aim to change the stakeholders' attitudes.

Companies communicate through different platforms, and one of the most important ways for companies to communicate their CSR activity is through CSR reports that can usually be found on companies' websites. CSR reporting is a vital tool for communicating about CSR activities to companies' stakeholders (Golob & Bartlett, 2007, p. 1). Reporting has become mainstream among big international corporations, because in order to maintain a good reputation, companies feel obligated to report regularly on their governmental, social and environmental matters. Though, several companies feel like reporting is not enough anymore, and thus they have started to incorporate other channels to their CSR communication, like social media platforms. (Waddock & Googins, 2011, p. 36.) Companies can decide what to include in reporting and what to leave out, which makes the reporting incoherent between different companies (Vogel, 2005, p. 68). Though, there are global reporting tools like the GRI that several companies use which makes the reporting of these companies uniform and easier to compare. For customers it can be hard to find CSR information on a company's website because there is usually an overwhelming amount of information. Sustainability reporting can be highly technical and/or hard to find from a company's website. Also, the reports are usually long and going through them might feel too overwhelming for a regular consumer.

Companies' CSR initiatives influence the attitudes and purchasing behaviour of consumers when they are aware of the initiatives (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009, p. 285). Consumers want to hear about the company's CSR initiatives, and they are willing to support companies that engage in CSR activities (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009, p. 285). Though, consumers usually lack the information about companies' social and environmental issues and initiatives (Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009, p. 431). Consumers are actively co-creating value and interacting with the companies, and because of this, the companies' dialogue and transparency play an important role (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 5). The dialogue does not work if the customers do not have access to transparent information (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 9), and thus for the company to be able to engage in dialogue, they need to start with transparency (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 13). In the longer run this may require the company to change its structures and way of operation and communication.

Big corporations are more vulnerable when doing CSR communication because they get the most visibility and because it is easier than before for the consumers and NGOs on social media to target and shame the companies for not acting responsible (Vogel, 2007, p. 9). Companies that are acting more responsibly than others and communicating their CSR engagement actively get more criticism (Vogel, 2005, pp. 54-55). When a company is communicating about their CSR practices, people might get sceptical towards the told information and think that the company might be misleading or even lying. Companies might be afraid of being accused of greenwashing if they bring up CSR topics in their communication (Peattie & Crane, 2005, pp. 357-358). Because of this, companies might try to share a minimum amount of topics related to CSR (Vogel, 2005, p. 68). This can lead to the situation where companies are engaging in CSR activities but not communicating about it actively. CSR communication is more trustworthy if there is a third-party involvement in the communication, and this way the public criticism towards a company decreases (Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2016, p. 57).

According to an EU survey, almost half of the companies' environmental sustainability claims related to products are exaggerated or untrue (EU ympäristömerkki, 2021). Consumers are demanding greener products and services, and companies have started to notice the benefits of marketing themselves and their products as green. Many of the companies' environmental claims are vague, and if a claim made by a company promises more environmental benefits than it actually delivers, it is greenwashing. (Dahl, 2010, p. A247.) The distrust of stakeholders is partly the result of the marketing companies have been doing for a while, where they claim their products or services to be sustainable even though they are not (Peattie & Crane, 2005, p. 359). So, communicating about CSR is controversial: customers want to be informed about social and environmental issues and initiatives and want companies to engage in them but easily criticise them and are sceptical towards companies' CSR communication.

Companies only share information that is good for their image and thus profit making, and they do not bring up information that would harm their image. The communication does not give a full picture of the company's operation or sustainability, which is something to keep in mind when examining corporate communication. Even though a company would be communicating transparently, it does not mean that the company's operation is sustainable and responsible, it only means that the company brings up sustainability topics in their communication. When researching companies' communication, one needs to be aware that the information is made for marketing purposes and to

get people to buy companies' products or services. Companies' main purpose is to make more profit and thus they do not want to bring up any harmful information within their operation. CSR communication on social media is advertising, and it can be seen to be targeted towards customers.

Advertising is aimed at improving companies' public image (Berens & Popma, 2014, p. 388), and the function of ads is to persuade people to buy a product or a service and to give information that's purpose is to make more profit (Cook, 1992, p. 5). Sustainability can be seen as a business opportunity for companies to make more profit (Brønn, 2011, p. 112), and thus companies have started to incorporate sustainability themes to their marketing (Brønn, 2011, p. 113). Perks, Farache, Shukla & Berry (2013, p. 1882) define CSR advertisement to be a technique that reflects a company's CSR image and their social and environmental program, actions and stances and can be linked to a product or service.

Fashion brands utilize emotional branding where they try to appeal to customers' feelings and thus convince them to be loyal to the brand (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p. 2). Emotionally connected customers are more valuable to a fashion brand compared to customers who are just satisfied (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p. 2). Consumers want to express themselves through brands and share the same values with them (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p. 3), and because of this fashion brands market their products as a way for the customer to become a better and ideal self (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p. 4). Brands try to appeal to the feeling of togetherness and how people enjoy helping each other by donating money or doing charity (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p. 5). Brands also utilize the concept of co-creation where they can hire an influencer to tell of their feelings and experiences of a product and this way creates a feeling of authenticity (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p. 6).

There are concepts like corporate social advocacy and corporate activism that collide with CSR communication and share similar nuances. Corporate social advocacy means a company's public stance on social-political issues (Dodd and Supa, 2014, p. 5), which can be seen to span boundaries with CSR (Dodd and Supa, 2014, p. 1). Thus, they are not completely different concepts. Companies engage in corporate social advocacy with the aim and expectation to make profit (Dodd and Supa, 2014, p. 5), which can also be traced from the concept of CSR communication, though in CSR communication the focus is on the impacts of the company's own operation. Corporate activism

means a company's willingness to take a stance on social, political, economic, and environmental issues in order to make a societal change and influence the behaviour and attitudes of organizations and individuals (Eilert & Cherup, 2020, p. 465). The focus in corporate activism is on taking a stance and making a change in society, while in corporate social advocacy the focus is on making more profit by taking a stance. Corporate activism is riskier than CSR, because companies might be taking a stance on highly controversial issues (Eilert & Cherup, 2020, p. 465).

2.7. Social Media

The use of social media has expanded worldwide, and the use of social media has dramatically changed the ways individuals and organizations communicate. People are using social media daily and following brands and companies through different social media platforms. On social media and specifically on Instagram the information flow is fast, and people can follow companies and brands more effortlessly and easily. During the last decade companies have started to include social media platforms to their CSR communication tools (ElAlfy et al., 2020, p. 1419), and companies use social media to supplement their other communication (Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2016, p. 63). Social media is interactive and enables stakeholders to respond by commenting and sharing content (ElAlfy et al., 2020, p. 1419), and thus social media is a good platform to engage stakeholders and have dialogue and interaction instead of the one-way communication that is usually the case on companies' websites. On social media it is easier than ever for customers and other stakeholders to scrutinise companies' CSR engagement constantly, and because social media is interactive, stakeholders can comment and give feedback to companies. Dialogue with stakeholders on social media can help companies to build their CSR and CSR communication strategies and thus strengthen the trust with their stakeholders.

While CSR reports are mainly read by researchers and investors, the social media accounts are important channels when communicating sustainability topics to customers. Because the communication and information on companies' websites can be overwhelming, social media is an important platform for companies to communicate in a way that is easier for consumers to approach and understand. Thus, it would be beneficial for the companies to bring up their sustainability values and actions on their social media accounts. Companies have noticed that it is not enough anymore to produce CSR reports on their websites, they also need to start incorporating CSR communication to

their whole communication strategy that social media is a part. Though, unlike on companies' websites, on social media stakeholders need to like or follow the company in order to see their communication. Companies need to attract people to follow or like them to get a wider audience for their communication.

Using social media is a rather low-cost way of communicating, which is why companies can reach a wide range of stakeholders on social media fast and with minimal cost. Companies' social media communication can be seen to be targeted towards customers and it does not address the core social responsibility issues of companies (ElAlfy et al., 2020, p. 1418). When compared to CSR reporting that is the core activity of most of the companies' CSR activity, CSR communication on social media is not regulated and standardised in the same way. On social media people can receive CSR communication from various sources and not just from the company, and thus companies can't control the flow of information (Capriotti, 2011, pp. 360-361).

2.8. Fashion Industry

In 2013 a garment factory Rana Plaza in Bangladesh collapsed (ILO, 2022). There were cracks found on the walls of the building and it was evacuated, but later the same day the owner of the building reassured that the building was safe and that the workers must return to work. On the next day the building collapsed killing over a thousand workers and injuring over two thousand. During the rescue work it was discovered that there were several children working in the factory against the official industry agreements. The collapsed factory manufactured clothes for brands like Benetton, Mango, Primark, and Walmart. (Aula & Heinonen, 2016, pp. 70-71.) The Rana Plaza accident was a wakeup call for the fast fashion brands who supply their products from countries where working conditions and regulation are not sufficient to guarantee safe work. There are several organizations and initiatives that work together with companies to develop more social and environmental business models, for example The Fashion Pact, the United Nation's Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, the amfori BSCI, and the WRAP with its Textiles 2030 initiative. Though, some of the organizations' boards are composed of corporate leaders who have the power to influence how the organizations work, which decreases their objectivity.

The global fashion industry produces 4 % of the total greenhouse gas emissions in the world (McKinsey & Company, 2020, p. 3), and the fashion industry pollutes more than air and maritime transport put together (European Parliament, 2020). Also, there are severe human and working rights violations within the clothing industry (Boström & Micheletti, 2016, p. 368). Fast fashion aims to shorten the process of manufacturing and buying clothes in order to serve the fast-changing needs of the customers (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 259). Fast fashion brands change collections fast and thus the pace of manufacturing clothes is getting faster (Boström & Micheletti, 2016, p. 368). The emphasis is on increasing the efficiency of the production and thus keeping the price of the product low (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011, p. 1876). Clothes are cheap and thus consumers can afford to buy more of them, but because of the low quality of clothes, they are being used less than before and thrown away faster, which results in a huge amount of textile waste (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011, p. 1878).

Not all the effect is negative. The fashion industry has been influencing positively to the economic development of several countries. The industry creates employment and infrastructure, which can be vital for the economic growth of the countries where clothes are being manufactured. Though, this might result in the situation where some countries rely strongly on the fashion industry, which can generate problems for the country and workers in the longer run. (Parker & Maher, 2012, p. 140.) Also, because the brands can transfer their production quickly to countries where the production is cheaper, usually the problems like pollution and harmful working conditions influence locally to the poorest people in the world.

The development where companies can transfer their operation freely to locations where it is most profitable is the result of globalized economy. Globalization has made it easier to move goods, investments, and people because the cost of transportation has decreased. Globalization has been seen to benefit the wellbeing of people because it increases economic growth, but it has also been seen to increase inequality. (Rohweder, 2004, p. 33.) Several companies have transferred their production to countries where they can get the working staff and resources most cheap (Rohweder, 2004, pp. 33-36), and because the textile industry requires high labour input, it is mostly located in low-cost countries where the labour is cheaper (Rohweder, 2004, p. 36). Changing suppliers in the fashion sector is relatively cheap, which means that there is an intense competition between suppliers who

try to minimise all the costs to attract the brands to supply their product. Because of this, workers get paid less and the working conditions can get unbearable. (Vogel, 2005, p. 94.)

There used to be two to four fashion seasons in a year, then it changed to be six or eight, and currently the amount is even bigger. Because the fashion seasons have increased, new collections are made constantly and at a fast pace, which makes the deadlines and working schedules tight for the suppliers. The supplier factories need to push their workers to work more in order to beat the other suppliers and get the brand to buy from them. (Vogel, 2005, pp. 95-96.) In many cases workers do not receive the wages that they are entitled to have (Vogel, 2005, p. 100), and in many countries workers are not able to organize themselves because independent unions are illegal (Vogel, 2005, p. 101). Important factor in the CSR is to improve the welfare of the people who are working for the brands' suppliers in the lower-cost countries (Vogel, 2005, p. 139), and while globalization has made it easier for companies to supply products and services more affordably, companies are also expected to take more responsibility in creating a more equal economic growth and wellbeing in the world. Big corporations have a lot of power developing societies by investing and making charity (Ketola, 2015, p. 45), and while the development cooperation that countries do has decreased, the companies have started to take more responsibility for it (Rohweder, 2004, p. 41).

Because the supply chains are long and complex, several corporations do not have the whole picture of their production. There is no government or international organization that can comprehensively regulate companies' global supply chains (Boström & Micheletti, 2016, p. 369). In order to map and monitor the possible social and environmental problems within a company's supply chains, the companies have started doing audits in the factories. Audits are a way for companies to improve their image and control the criticism towards their low-cost and outsourced production (LeBaron & Lister, 2015, p. 913). The audits are mostly based on written policies, on-site interviews, and the conditions of the factory during the audit. Factories can be noted beforehand about the inspections and they are able to prepare for them, which can make the audits misleading. (Vogel, 2005, p. 90.) Retailers do audits only in a few factories and preferably in locations where the labour and environmental problems are not likely to take place (LeBaron & Lister, 2015, p. 908). The retailers can control what information to report, and the information is usually shared to the supplier firms but not to the wider audience, such as consumers and media. Retailers can decide if they want to communicate the results or keep it to themselves. (LeBaron & Lister, 2015, p. 915.)

3. Method and Data

The five fashion brands that I will be examining are H&M, The North Face, Timberland, C&A, and Vans. My aim is to examine fast fashion brands that are the pioneers of communicating transparently of their social and environmental impact. This way I will get a good picture of how the forerunners in the fashion industry are communicating on social media and what kind of example they are showing to the rest of the industry. I have chosen the five fashion brands to examine from the Fashion Transparency Index that ranks big fashion brands and retailers based on their communication of human rights and environmental practises and impacts in their operation and in their supply chains (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, cover page). I will be going through the companies' Instagram accounts searching for CSR related content and comparing them with each other. I will be using the concept of CSR to examine how the brands are bringing up sustainability themes in their Instagram communication.

The time frame of the research is one month in January 2022, and during this one month I will be examining and following the Instagram accounts on daily basis, both the posts on their feed as well as stories. Even though the time period is short, the results have potential to shed more light on how companies do CSR communication on Instagram and how it could be examined in the future. When examining the five brands' Instagram communication for longer than one month, one can see that the same sustainability themes rise up in their CSR communication, which can be seen to justify the selection of one month examination period.

I am going to be using qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is an empirical and observational tool (Bell, 2001, p. 13), and it means making generalizations and classifications of the data (Bell, 2001, p. 10). Content analysis is a good method when dealing with large amounts of data (Rose, 2016, p. 86), and it can show what topics are given priority compared to other topics (Bell, 2001, p. 26). The method of content analysis is very flexible and there is no one right way to do it (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 133), which gives the researcher space to analyse the data in the best way suited for the research practises. Qualitative content analysis helps to describe the meaning for qualitative material (Schreier, 2012, p. 1).

I chose the biggest and most profitable fashion brands for the same reason as the Fashion Transparency Index chose to rank them; because they have the biggest impact and thus responsibility. When one examines the forerunners of transparent communication, one gets to see what kind of example they are showing to the rest of the fashion field. The Fashion Transparency Index is based on website information, while I am looking at social media and only Instagram out of all social media platforms. The North Face, Timberland, and Vans are American companies, H&M is a Swedish company and C&A is a Dutch company. The companies that I am examining are from the United States and Europe, which means that they will be presenting an American and European way to do CSR communication. The origin and ownership of companies determines the atmosphere where companies are operating and what values they bring up in their communication. The North Face, Timberland, and Vans are divisions of VF Corporation (VF Corporation, Brands), which means that these three companies might have a similar value base and a similar way of doing CSR communication and communication in general. It would have been interesting to incorporate brands from other countries and continents as well, which would have made comparing them more fruitful. But, because I wanted to choose the brands from the Fashion Transparency Index, they ended up being American and European companies.

3.1. Case selection: Fashion Transparency Index

I will be choosing five fast fashion brands to examine from The Fashion Transparency Index. I am using the Index because I want to examine how brands who are ranked to be the best in doing CSR communication on their websites do CSR communication on social media and especially on Instagram. “The Fashion Transparency Index analyses and ranks 250 of the world’s biggest fashion brands and retailers based on their public disclosure of human rights and environmental policies, practices and impacts, in their operations and in their supply chains” (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, cover page). The index measures what brands communicate about their human rights and environmental impacts within their supply chains. It does not measure impacts, instead it measures public disclosure. (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 29.) The Index is made annually by the world's biggest fashion activist movement Fashion Revolution that was founded after the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013. Fashion Revolution offers research, education and advocacy work in order to get the fashion industry to value the environment and people over growth and profit. The aim of the movement is to make a structural change in the global fashion industry and get the brands to

provide better working conditions and respect the environment. (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 1.)

The focus of the index is on the biggest and most profitable brands and retailers because they have the biggest impact and thus responsibility when it comes to workers and environment (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 3). The Fashion Revolution wants to promote transparency and accountability within the supply chain and brands to take responsibility for their environmental and social impacts (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 19). The focus is on transparency, because while transparency does not mean the same as sustainability, it is the first step towards it (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 3). The Index states that “Major brands have a clear responsibility to look at their supply chain, identify human rights and environmental risks and impacts and address them. A lack of visibility of supply chains can allow exploitative, unsafe working conditions and environmental damage to thrive –.” (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 6.)

The index uses 239 indicators in 5 key areas to review brands’ public disclosure on environment and human rights. The 5 key areas are 1. Policies & Commitments, 2. Governance, 3. Supply Chain Traceability, 4. Know, Show & Fix, and 5. Spotlight Issues that cover for example decent work, equality, and climate change. (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 3.) The brands have been selected on the basis that their annual turnover is over 400 million US dollars and that they represent different market sectors such as high street, luxury, sportswear, accessories, footwear, and denim and that the brands are from across Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Africa (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 27). The data is taken from the brand’s or parent company’s website (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 29). The methodology has been designed in 2017 through a four-month consultative process with the help of different industry experts and stakeholders from academia, the trade union movement, civil society organizations, socially responsible investments, business consulting, and journalism (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 32). The methodology is aligned with the existing international standards like GRI, UN Guiding Principles, and OECD Due Diligence Guidelines (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 32).

The overall average score across the 250 brands was 23% in 2021 (Fashion Transparency Index 2021, p. 14). The overall points are 250, and the final scores are converted into percentages (Fashion

Transparency Index 2021, p. 35). The six brands that have received the biggest scores are OVS (78%), H&M (68%), The North Face (66%), Timberland (66%), C&A (65%), and Vans (65%). From these I chose to examine H&M, The North Face, Timberland, C&A, and Vans. I am excluding OVS, because their Instagram communication is in Italian, which would make the research harder to execute. The OVS also markets several brands, not just their own.

3.2. Instagram

This research is data oriented since I am examining brands' Instagram content. I will be going through the brands Instagram accounts and choosing the content that is related to sustainability and CSR. This will be my data to examine. I will be examining the data with the help of the concept of CSR. I will be searching for topics that come up repeatedly from the data after which I will form themes that explain how the brands are doing CSR communication. The themes are presented and analysed in the next chapter, where I will be connecting the data to the concept of CSR.

I have chosen to examine CSR communication on Instagram, because it is one of the most popular social media channels. Users encounter a massive amount of information on Instagram, and thus it is a fruitful platform for brands to bring up their CSR activity. Instagram was founded in 2010 (Omnicores, 2022), and it has been growing fast. Instagram is focused on sharing pictures, and it is an easy platform for people to follow companies and thus get information about them. Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020, p 11), and in 2016 Instagram launched the stories tool after which the popularity of Instagram increased and people started to use the platform more actively (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020, p. 27). Instagram has hundreds of millions of active users every day, and over 200 million businesses use the platform (Omnicores, 2022). Over 200 million Instagram users visit at least one company's Instagram feed every day (Omnicores, 2022).

Instagram is based on users sharing pictures and short texts alongside the pictures. The emphasis on pictures makes Instagram easy and fast to browse. Users are able to view a massive amount of data in a short period of time. This function makes Instagram light and easy to approach to. Companies have noticed this potential and started to do more communication on Instagram. Because I am

examining the brands that are the pioneers in transparent communication on sustainability topics on their websites, it will be interesting to find out if they have incorporated CSR communication into their Instagram communication as well.

The Instagram channels I have chosen to examine are the companies' official channels. They are linked on the bottom of the companies' websites together with the other social media channels companies have. From Timberland and Vans, I chose to examine two accounts, the official and the accounts focusing on Europe, because if you choose your location to be Europe from their websites, they will guide you to the European Instagram accounts. Timberland, Vans, and The North Face also have country related accounts. For example, The North Face has accounts like @thenorthfaceuk (UK) and @thenorthfacefr (France), but not an account focusing on the whole of Europe. From Timberland and Vans, I wanted to choose the European accounts because they cover and reach a large audience. In addition to the country related accounts, the companies have other Instagram accounts, usually focused on certain product categories or sports. For example, H&M has accounts such as @hm_kids and @hmhome, The North Face and Vans have accounts such as @thenorthface_snow and @vansskate.

In the bio on Instagram where the owner of the account can write about themselves, many out of the five companies have sustainability related content. In the bio almost all out of the five companies also have links that guide the customers to the brand's online shops and website, and the link is usually at the bottom of the bio text. When comparing the posts and stories of a brand on Instagram, the content is generally the same in both of them, usually just in a different format. When the stories on Instagram only last for 24 hours, users can save stories on the top of their feed so that their followers can see them even after the 24 hours. Many of the companies have sustainability related stories saved on their feed. In this thesis I am not including the saved stories, only the ones that are published during the month of examination. Next I will be shortly introducing the chosen fashion brands' Instagram accounts afterwards which I will start analysing the collected data.

3.2.1. H&M

H&M offers a line of clothes, shoes, and accessories. H&M is part of the H&M Group that describes itself to be a family of brands and businesses in the field of fashion and design. The group markets itself to be offering a sustainable lifestyle and creating value for people and society. (H&M Group, About us.) H&M is a Swedish company that was founded in Sweden in 1947 (H&M Group, History). H&M's official Instagram account is @hm, and it has about 38 million followers and almost 7 000 posts (Instagram, H&M, 20.1.2022). In the bio H&M has the following text:

“🌀 Positive vibes only. Wear.Care.Recycle.
❤️ @hm_man @hm_kids @hmbeauty @hmhome
⚡ We love your style! Mention @hm & #HMxME for a chance to be featured”

(Instagram, H&M, 20.1.2022.)

In addition to the official account, H&M also has accounts such as @hm_man, @hm_kids, @hmhome, and @hmfoundation. The H&M foundation is a non-profit foundation that aims to guard humanity and the planet and follow the UN Sustainable Development goals by 2030 (H&M Foundation, About us).

3.2.2. The North Face

The North Face offers a line of performance clothes, equipment, and footwear. They describe to be pushing boundaries of innovation and design so that the customers can push the boundaries outdoors while exploring. The North Face is an American company that was founded in San Francisco in 1966. (The North Face, Our Story.) The official Instagram account of The North Face is @thenorthface, and it has about 5 million followers and about 650 posts (Instagram, The North Face, 20.1.2022). In the bio The North Face has the following text:

“The North Face
#NeverStopExploring
like2b.uy/thenorthface”

(Instagram, The North Face, 20.1.2022.)

In addition to the official account, The North Face also has country and sports related accounts such as @thenorthface_snow, @thenorthface_city, @thenorthfaceuk (UK), and @thenorthfacefr (France).

3.2.3. Timberland

Timberland offers a line of footwear but also clothes and accessories. They describe their mission to be inspiring people to step outside and making the products better with less impact on the environment. Timberland is most known for the yellow boots that define the brand these days. Timberland is an American company that was founded in the United States in 1952. The company was first called Abington Shoe Company, but it changed its name to Timberland in 1978. (Timberland, Our Story.) The official Instagram account of Timberland is @timberland, and it has about 3 million followers and about 4 000 posts (Instagram, Timberland, 20.1.2022). In the bio Timberland has the following text:

“@timberland - in everything we do + make, we focus on building better products, stronger communities + a greener world. #NatureNeedsHeroes
spr.ly/6180KDluu”

(Instagram, Timberland, 20.1.2022.)

Timberland has an Instagram account focused on Europe: @timberland_eu, and it has about 300 000 followers and about 2 500 posts (Instagram, Timberland Europe, 20.1.2022). In the bio it has the following text:

“Timberland Europe

We are committed to creating better products, stronger communities and a greener world. Join our #NatureNeedsHeroes movement.
linktr.ee/Timberland_EU”

(Instagram, Timberland Europe, 20.1.2022.)

In addition to the official and Europe accounts, Timberland also has country related accounts such as @timberlandarg (Argentina) and @timberland_ru (Russia).

3.2.4. C&A

C&A offers a line of clothes, shoes, and accessories. They describe themselves to be a family company that dates back to the 1600s. C&A was founded in The Netherlands in 1841. (C&A, History.) The official Instagram account of C&A is @ca, and it has about 700 000 followers and about 2 300 posts (Instagram, C&A, 20.1.2022). In the bio C&A has the following text:

“C&A

Welcome to the official C&A Instagram account.
#wearthechange
clickthe.bio/ca”

(Instagram, C&A, 20.1.2022.)

3.2.5. Vans

Vans offers a line of footwear but also clothes and accessories. They describe themselves to be the original skate shoe manufacturer, and different action sports are at the core of their concept (Vans, Affiliates). Vans is an American company that was founded in California in 1966 (Vans, History). The official Instagram account of Vans is @vans, and it has about 17 million followers and about 4 400 posts (Instagram, Vans, 20.1.2022). In the bio Vans has the following text:

“vans

Off The Wall Since 1966 🏳️ @vansskate @vanssurf
@vansbmx66 @vanssnow @vansgirls @vansvault
@houseofvans
vans.com”

(Instagram, Vans, 20.1.2022.)

Similar to Timberland, Vans also has an Instagram account focused on Europe: @vans_europe, and it has about one million followers and about 4 600 posts (Instagram, Vans Europe, 20.1.2022). In the bio it has the following text:

“Vans Europe

The official Instagram of VANS Europe. Skate, Bmx, Snow,
Surf and Street Culture
vans.eu”

(Instagram, Vans Europe, 20.1.2022.)

In addition to the official and Europe accounts, Vans also has country and sports related accounts such as @vans.indo (Indonesia), @vans_india (India), @vansskate and @vanssnow, but also an account @vansgirls.

4. The Analysis and Results

Here I will be presenting the collected data and answering the research questions that I set out in the beginning of this thesis. The questions are:

- What kind of CSR communication are fast fashion brands doing on Instagram?
- What kind of sustainability themes, values, and concrete actions are the brands bringing up in their CSR communication on Instagram?

CSR communication means the ways that companies communicate their social and environmental issues within their operation. I am not including the economic responsibility aspect, because it is mainly based on the aim of profit making. In the analysis I have not included social and environmental topics that are not within the companies' own operation, because they are not CSR communication according to the definition I am using of CSR. CSR communication means that companies communicate their own social and environmental impacts that occur within their own operation. During my examination period out of the five brands Timberland did more CSR communication than the other companies on Instagram. The CSR communication of the other brands on Instagram is minimal or non-existing. The North Face, H&M, and Vans are doing less CSR communication than Timberland and only posting a few CSR related posts. C&A is not doing any CSR communication on its Instagram account during the examination period.

In general, H&M and C&A have similar styles of communicating on Instagram, while the communication of The North Face, Timberland and Vans resemble each other. The fact that The North Face, Timberland, and Vans are divisions of VF Corporation might explain why their content resemble each other. H&M and C&A are showcasing their clothes and linking them to encouraging messages of for example taking care of yourself and acting and looking the way you want. For example, C&A is posting content that is meant to empower their customers to do more sports and to take care of their physical and mental health. The North Face, Timberland and Vans are also posting encouraging messages, but the purpose is more to push the customers to explore for example nature and have an adventure and to overcome one's fears. H&M is showcasing their products in a more straightforward manner, while the others are presenting their products through different stories and

topics like sports and arts. H&M always describes the clothes seen in the pictures, while the other companies might be talking about some topic like sports and linking their products to this topic.

When describing the overall content of the North Face, Timberland, and Vans, they post sport related topics regularly. The sports vary from skiing to climbing and surfing. They also bring up nature and the outdoors frequently in their posts. For example, they have pictures of people walking in nature or doing sports wearing their products, and the posts don't always even mention their products. Pictures of nature play an important role in brands' communication in general but also in their CSR communication. The brands present pictures of people in forest or climbing a mountain, and the presentation of nature is green and enjoyable. This gives the impression that they value nature and the planet, which indicates that they want to keep good care of the environment and cherish the relationship we have to nature. They encourage the customers to do outdoor activities and thus value nature so that all of us could enjoy it. They bring up the beauty of nature and all the possibilities we have to enjoy it and use it. The North Face, Timberland, and Vans link their brands to different sports, for example Vans is most known for making shoes for skateboarding that is something they are focusing on communicating about on their accounts. Thus, the sports become a vital part of the image and brand. They are bringing up stories and achievements of athletes and artists and tagging them to their posts. H&M is also cooperating with different influencers and celebrities and tagging them to their posts. H&M does this the most frequently of all the five brands. As discussed here, the brands do bring up different sustainability themes but not linking them to their own operation that would be CSR communication.

4.1. The Sustainability Themes

The sustainability themes of the five fast fashion brands' CSR communication on Instagram are:

1. Reuse, Repair, and Recycling
2. Sustainable Materials
3. Equality

These themes go hand in hand and are intertwined with each other. There are more posts on reuse, repair, and recycling and sustainable materials than equality, and thus the emphasis of the CSR communication is on environmental issues rather than social ones. This might be a result of the active public discussion that has been focusing on climate change and on the actions needed to slow it down. It is understandable that companies are bringing up topics that are widely discussed in the media and politics in order to build a responsible image of themselves. The brands might also feel it to be easier for them to improve their environmental responsibility compared to the social ones. A lot of content is focusing on encouraging the brands' customers to repair and recycle their clothes, footwear, and accessories so that the products and materials can be reused. There is a strong emphasis on the consumers' actions in a way that they are the ones to take the products to be recycled or repaired. The companies are putting effort into trying to get their customers to recycle, and for example Timberland is offering a service where their customers can bring their clothes, footwear, and accessories to be recycled by the company. The values brands are presenting through their CSR communication are both environmental and social. Brands' CSR communication gives an image that they are valuing and respecting the environment and people and that they want to protect nature and improve the wellbeing of communities. This is the picture brands want to present to their customers, because it can help them to be seen as taking responsibility of their actions.

Timberland brings up recycling and reuse regularly in their posts (Picture 1). They are encouraging their customers to recycle and this way to protect the environment. Timberland's customers can send their worn-out shoes to Timberland or bring them to stores where the shoes are being recycled. For bringing the products to be recycled the customers can get a discount when purchasing new items from Timberland. This way they are aiming to make recycling easier and more attractive for their customers and at the same time improve their image as a responsible brand. Timberland is connecting consuming more products and recycling in order to make consumerism to look more accepting. The posts that bring up recycling have pictures demonstrating how the materials can be reused and recycled to make new products. There are pictures of worn footwear and other waste (Picture 1). H&M is also bringing up repair and reuse in a few of their posts. They bring up tips on how to repair clothes and thus encourage their customers to reuse their clothes and use them longer. They have pictures of repairing situations and texts that give instructions on how to fix clothes. They guide you to their website where they have more tips for repairing. The brands' encouragement to recycle and fix clothes can be seen as a way to push the responsibility to customers instead of taking the

responsibility themselves and making more concrete actions to protect the environment within the brands' own operation.



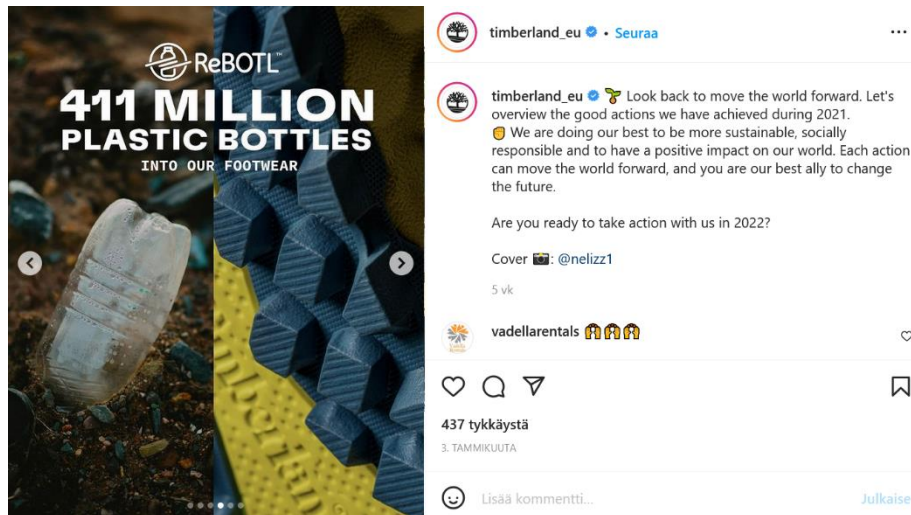
Picture 1. Timberland promoting reuse of their products (Instagram, Timberland, 23.2.2022).

Timberland is bringing up the use of sustainable materials such as recycled plastic/materials, renewable natural materials, responsible natural rubber from trees, sugar cane, and organically grown cotton that they use in some of their shoes. Timberland states that some of their shoes are made of sustainably or responsibly sourced materials and that they are using conscious materials. The terms they use of the materials are in most cases vague, which makes it hard to know what the materials actually are and if they can be considered to be sustainable or responsible. H&M is bringing up in one post that a certain product is made from recycled polyester. Vans brings up in one post that one of their shoes are made from renewable materials and that the shoes are made in a way that reduces waste (Picture 2). They state that they are committed to a more sustainable future and that they are proud to do their part. In the post they guide you to read more about Vans' sustainability on their website. In the post they have a picture of a surfer on the beach with Vans' shoes and a video where they showcase the shoes and show a clip where the surfer is cleaning the beach and this way keeping the beach clean from waste. The cleanliness of the beach has nothing to do with the shoes themselves, but in the post Vans is trying to connect the shoes that are made with less waste to the idea of a clean environment and nature. The mention of a more sustainable future and Vans doing their part are vague promises and do not include any further concrete actions that could help to evaluate the statement.



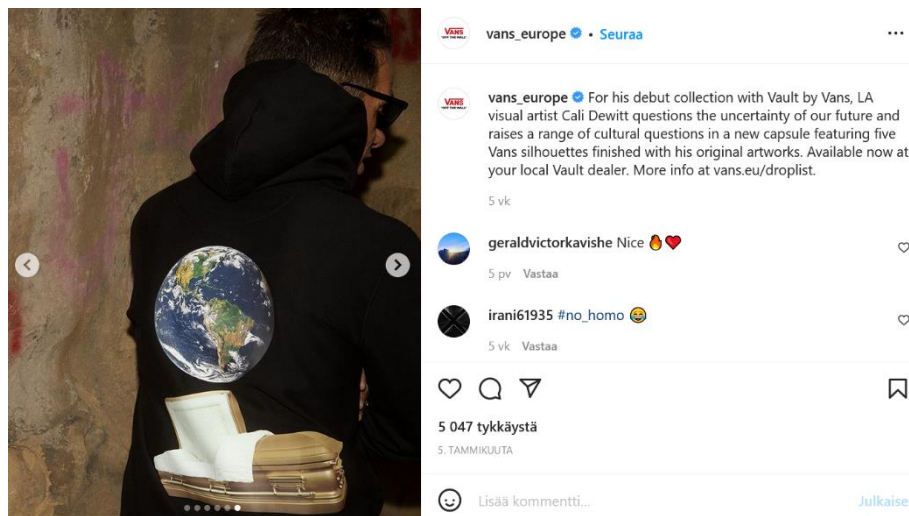
Picture 2. Vans shoes made from renewable materials (Instagram, Vans Europe, 23.2.2022a).

Even though most of the CSR communication is vague, the brands do also present concrete actions. For example, Timberland is cooperating with other organizations to do climate actions and to protect the environment. Timberland is supporting Redress which is the biggest sustainable fashion design competition and cooperating with the award winner designer from the competition. Timberland is also bringing up concrete climate actions they have been engaging in (Picture 3). For example, since 2001 they have planted 12.5 million trees, and their aim is to plant 500 million trees by 2025. They have worked more than 6 000 hours doing environmental work, used 411 million plastic bottles in their footwear, and collected 2 500 kilos of used shoes in Europe.



Picture 3. Timberland telling their achievements towards a more sustainable future (Instagram, Timberland Europe, 23.2.2022).

The brands are making several promises regarding a more sustainable future. Timberland, for example, states that they aim to plant 500 million trees by 2025 and that they will be working towards a circular structure where the products would be recycled and reused. Timberland is also promising that in the future all their products are designed to “circularity” meaning that the materials can be reused. The brands are using different sustainability related words and hashtags in their posts, and in most cases they remain vague and do not contain concreteness. Timberland is using hashtags like #NatureNeedsHeroes and #BuildForward and stating to be working towards a greener world and that their aim is to be more sustainable and socially responsible in order to have a positive impact on the world. They mention Mother Nature and that they are keeping nature in mind. Vans is bringing up in one of their posts the issues of an unsure future and cultural questions (Picture 4). Again, the text is very vague, and in the picture there are Vans shoes as well as people in nature wearing clothes and shoes that have pictures of earth and a coffin and a text “global warning”. The post is presenting a new collection of Vans shoes and the aim is to take a stand on climate change and how it will affect humans’ lives in the future. Because sustainability and responsibility towards the environment and communities are vague concepts, brands can define them in ways that best suit them. Different ideas of sustainability can be seen in brands’ CSR communication, when the brands are using different ways to discuss sustainability. It might be easy for companies to bring up sustainability themes into their communication as a response to the stakeholder demand but then not to define the meaning of sustainability. There is very little coherent in the ways the brands use sustainability terms.



Picture 4. Vans bringing up global warming in their products (Instagram, Vans Europe, 23.2.2022b).

Timberland is bringing up racial equality and Dr. Martin Luther King’s vision of it. They mention that they have held service events to forward racial justice in communities and that in the future their aim is to focus on urban greening, education, entrepreneurship in Black communities, and building an equitable world. Timberland is also introducing a program to advance BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) talent within the footwear industry. The post includes a video where people identifying themselves as BIPOC are talking about the program. The program is offering apprenticeship at three VF brands: Timberland, Vans, and The North Face. Only Timberland is bringing the opportunity up on Instagram during the examination period. Timberland states that the aim of the program is to create a more equitable future and to build better communities. The North Face is bringing up a Explore Fund Council that is a group of BIPOC and that the aim of the group is to create spaces for more equitable outdoors exploring. They bring up different practices on how this can be achieved, for example acknowledging power dynamics and aiming to change them. In the pictures there are people in nature doing different kinds of sports. In one of their posts The North Face is introducing one of their employees as a one-of-a-kind “teammate” (Picture 5). In the text they bring up that the employee is a community builder and a champion of all voices because the employee has won an award that is given every year to a person who elevates the company’s values. The winner gets to design their own jacket for The North Face. In the pictures the employee is in nature wearing the design jacket. The employee has also been tagged to the post. With this post The North Face brings up that they value their employees and engage them to the building of a better working community.



Picture 5. The North Face bringing up the importance of communities (Instagram, The North Face, 23.2.2022).

4.2. CSR on Instagram

In this chapter I will be mirroring the concept of CSR to the collected data and analyse the ways the five brands do CSR communication. I will be presenting here concepts that I introduced in the section “Corporate Social Communication” and analyse the data with the help of them. Here I will be discussing the differences between CSR communication, corporate social advocacy, and corporate activism, dialogue in Instagram communication, and standardization and legislation of CSR. These are all topics that I defined and introduced in the second chapter, and they help me to analyse the data and draw conclusions on the ways the brands do CSR communication.

As discussed in the section “CSR Communication”, there is a thin line between CSR communication and corporate social advocacy and corporate activism, which can make it tricky to determine what posts to include in this research. The difference between these concepts is that CSR communication is focused on reporting companies’ own impact on social and environmental issues, while corporate social advocacy and corporate activism are communication beyond the companies’ own operation. They can include issues that are for example gaining media or political attention at the current time and thus bringing them up can make the company seem more responsible. When going through companies’ Instagram accounts, there are several themes related to corporate social advocacy and

social activism. C&A and H&M are for example promoting wellness and the importance of taking care of your mental and physical wellbeing and encouraging their customers to exercise and to listen to their bodies for example with the help of yoga. All the five brands are eager to share sustainability issues, some more than others, but it seems they are more enthusiastic to take a stand on some topic than bringing up the impact their own operation has on the issue. This is understandable, because if the companies link the issues to their operation, they might need to admit the need to improve their own actions. When taking a stand on some issue, the companies can at the same time promote themselves and their products in a non-direct way. When examining the CSR communication of the five brands, there is a strong emphasis on the environmental issues over the social ones. But, if you consider corporate social advocacy and corporate activism, you can find a lot of social issues as well. This might imply that the brands are more eager to present their own influence on the environment rather than on social issues. As discussed in the beginning of this thesis, climate change is a current topic and gets visibility in media and in political discussions. Companies want to have a part in this conversation and thus improve their image and increase their profit making.

As discussed in the section “CSR communication”, dialogue plays an important role in the CSR communication. Ideally CSR communication is a two-way street where the company tries to activate their stakeholders and this way create a dialogue where both parties can share their views but also influence the other or even change attitudes. When making comparisons between the brands’ CSR communication and other communication on Instagram, one can notice that the CSR communication is not as interactive and engaging as other communication. In many cases the brands’ CSR communication consists of them telling facts and information of their CSR activities or future plans. In some posts they are encouraging customers to for example recycle or repair their clothes, and in a few posts they are introducing their employees or people from minority groups that they work with towards better communities. If brands are not communicating transparently of their CSR activities and their social and environmental impacts, people cannot be aware of the brands’ CSR engagement. Thus, there can not be genuine dialogue between the company and its customers. Social media is a good tool to have a genuine dialogue with customers, which is something the brands could utilize more and benefit from. When compared to website communication, social media is one of the most important platforms to get feedback from customers.

Brands are using emotional branding in their CSR communication on Instagram. They are appealing to customers' feelings of togetherness and to the willingness to help other people. The brands are bringing up the importance of communities and charity as well as the connection to nature and how it is important to cherish our environment. Brands' showcase pictures where people and nature meet and work together. Brands also cooperate with other organizations in order to improve communities and the wellbeing of the environment. Cooperation with an organization legitimises the company's actions and decreases the criticism towards the company. When utilising emotional branding and cooperation with a third party, the brands can build more trust between them and their customers and try to build better relationships.

When brands are incorporating more CSR communication on their social media channels, they are answering to the normative pressure coming from the society around them but also mimicking what other companies are doing. When companies integrate CSR communication into their strategy and operation, it becomes a part of their identity and values, and when companies hold similar values with each other, a certain kind of value base can be formed where eventually the CSR communication of different companies starts to resemble each other. CSR communication is not that common as CSR reporting on companies' websites, but because CSR is standardised in the business world, we can expect companies to incorporate CSR communication on social media more in the future.

Because communication on Instagram is considered light and strongly focused on pictures, companies might feel the CSR issues to be too heavy to post there. But, as stated above, companies are making environmental and social statements, and when the normative pressure grows bigger, the companies need to start incorporating statements of their own environmental and social impacts on social media. Because all the brands examined are big international companies, they might be more careful of bringing up CSR issues on social media in the fear of getting criticised. Because social media is interactive, meaning that people can comment on companies negatively, the brands might think twice about what content to post. Feedback in general is important for companies, and on social media they get data of whether their customers want to have more information about the company's CSR activities. This way the company can develop their communication to the direction that pleases their customers and thus improve their profit making.

There are big differences between the five brands in how much they do CSR communication. Timberland is doing more CSR communication compared to the other brands who are doing little or non-existing CSR communication. With all the brands there is an emphasis on environmental topics over social ones. The environmental themes brands are focusing on are recycling, repair, and sustainable and reusable materials. The social theme brands are bringing up is equality. The brands want to contribute to building more equal communities. The CSR communication can be difficult to separate from the communication where brands take a stand on sustainability issues but do not build a link to their own operation. CSR communication means that companies bring up their own operation and the social and environmental impacts of it. When building good relationships with stakeholders it is important for companies to bring up the impact of their own operation. This way there can be dialogue and interaction between the company and its stakeholders and get valuable feedback to develop their operation. In their CSR communication the brands are bringing up different achievements and future plans how to develop their operation to be more sustainable. They are not bringing up any negative effects of their operation, only positive ones, which is understandable when brands' CSR communication is advertisement at the same time. Because the tone of brands' CSR communication is positive, one can interpret that the brands are valuing the protection of the environment and the improvement of the wellbeing of communities.

All in all, one can see that the brands are doing CSR communication on Instagram in a coherent way but in different volume when it comes to bringing up sustainability themes. When comparing to the way brands do CSR reporting on their websites, the Instagram communication is not as standardized. This means that brands can bring up their social and environmental responsibilities in a way that best suits them. As stated before, brands' communication is marketing and advertising, which has an influence on how they do CSR communication on social media. The brands can frame the topics as they wish and communicate in a way that they think pleases their customers and other stakeholders. When communicating on social media, the brands do not have CSR standards to consider in a same way as in CSR reporting. Because CSR has been strongly standardized and will be legalised more in the future, it is interesting to see how CSR communication on social media remains unstandardized.

5. Conclusions

CSR has become a global trend and a factor that has been changing companies' organizations. Brands have been incorporating CSR to their communication strategies because of the normative pressure coming from their stakeholders. Companies are communicating more transparently, but it doesn't mean that their operation is more sustainable or ethical than before. They have realised that bringing up CSR themes is something that they are required to do to improve their image, but it does not give a truthful description of the companies' CSR activities. While CSR has been studied widely, in this thesis I wanted to examine how companies do CSR communication on social media, which is a topic that has not been studied extensively.

In this thesis I have examined how five fast fashion brands do CSR communication on Instagram. My research questions were: What kind of CSR communication are fast fashion brands doing on Instagram? What kind of sustainability themes, values, and concrete actions are the brands bringing up in their CSR communication on Instagram? I used to concept of CSR as a tool to help me to analyse my data. I followed the Instagram communication of five fast fashion brands for one month and found three sustainability themes: 1. Reuse, Repair, and Recycling, 2. Sustainable Materials, and 3. Equality. I wanted to examine brands that are forerunners in CSR communication based on their website communication and find out what kind of example are they giving to other brands on social media. The results show that if brands do transparent CSR communication on their websites, it does not mean that they do CSR communication on social media. The CSR reporting is highly standardized and coherent while CSR communication on social media is not. Companies can choose what topics to bring up and what kind of stories to share on social media. This way they can build an image of them as good corporate citizens.

Fast fashion brands are not doing much CSR communication on Instagram yet. When we reflect the literature on CSR communication, it is no wonder. The fact that companies that do CSR communication get more criticism must have an influence on their willingness to incorporate CSR communication into their social media strategies. Even though brands usually have a comprehensive sustainability section on their websites, they have not yet started to do CSR communication on

Instagram. The brands might think that Instagram is not the platform to do CSR communication and discuss the sustainability issues within the company. One reason might be that the brands think CSR topics to be too heavy for Instagram and that the CSR communication should be done through other channels.

When it comes to the future research on this topic, there are endless possibilities and fascinating topics to examine. For example, it would be interesting to examine how people react to the sustainability related content in the comments of the posts. Also, because companies have extensive sustainability sections on their websites, it would be interesting to examine if the companies bring up similar themes on social media and if the social media posts are in line with the CSR communication on the companies' websites. It would be interesting to examine what kind of ratio of CSR communication and corporate social advocacy do companies have on their social media; how much companies bring up social and environmental issues within their own operation versus in general? Also, because social media is an interactive platform, it would be interesting to examine the ways companies try to get customers to engage and interact on social media.

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