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EXAMINING GREENWASHING IN H&M´S ENVIRONMENTAL GREEN ADVERTISING ON INSTAGRAM

ABSTRACT

The fast fashion industry has experienced great growth over the past few decades, simultaneously increasing environmental and social concerns among stakeholders. As consumer awareness raises, fast fashion companies are increasing their Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainability efforts by adopting green marketing strategies to promote more environmentally friendly practices. However, these marketing efforts are often accompanied by deceptive practices known as greenwashing, which involve the manipulation of consumers through different marketing strategies and exaggerated claims about a company's sustainability initiatives.

This single qualitative case study focuses on H&M, one of the biggest companies in the fast fashion scenario, aiming to shed light on the strategies and tactics utilized by the company to promote its sustainability efforts by analyzing the claims, tone, and visuals employed in its Instagram posts. With the examination of H&M's green advertisements on Instagram, this research assesses the degree to which H&M's green marketing strategies correlate with its actual sustainability practices, thereby determining whether the company's promotional efforts constitute greenwashing or not. The theoretical framework of this research is divided into different parts. First, a presentation of the fast fashion industry and the main CSR and sustainability initiatives used within the industry is made. Furthermore, a more extensive presentation of the concepts of green marketing and green advertising is provided, paying special attention to greenwashing and its different types.

The research analyzes H&M's official Instagram posts through content analysis from January 2021 to December 2022, with a focus on company collaborations, own campaigns, and influencer marketing. By examining executional greenwashing and greenwashing claims, the study provides insights into the deceptive marketing tactics employed by the company. The findings reveal a complex relationship between H&M's green advertising efforts and greenwashing strategies. Further, the analysis suggests a close relationship between accusations of the company's unsustainable practices and its green advertising efforts. In addition, across the analyzed data, the results indicate the presence of greenwashing claims in H&M's marketing materials and executional greenwashing. These findings raise skepticism about the company's commitment to environmental sustainability and the veracity of its sustainability promotions, as the findings presented in this research expose that the company's advertisements still include aspects of greenwashing. The insights derived from this research highlight the importance of transparent, authentic, and consistent green advertising practices for fashion brands. By addressing criticism from stakeholders, avoiding executional greenwashing, and educating consumers, companies can enhance their brand image and credibility while promoting environmental sustainability. Further, directions for future research are provided, as well as a remark on the study's limitations.

Keywords: fast fashion, sustainability, H&M, green marketing, green advertising, greenwashing, content analysis, environmental, social media, Instagram, claims.
The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The fast fashion industry has been severely criticized for its negative environmental impact due to its extensive use of nonrenewable resources and enormous waste production (Farra, 2016). In response, businesses such as H&M have adopted green marketing strategies and increased their efforts towards sustainability and corporate sustainability strategies, highlighting the environmental benefits of their products and operations.

Globally, the fashion industry produces around 150 billion clothes annually, with a significant portion going unsold or being discarded within a year of use due to different reasons (Farra, 2016). The European Union's Joint Research Center (JRC) estimated that each European purchased approximately 26 kilograms of clothing per year, with about 11 kilograms being thrown away (European Environment Agency, 2020). Fast fashion's rapid design, production, and distribution cycles have made it possible for brands to capitalize on the latest trends and offer them to consumers at affordable prices (Anguelov, 2016). However, this approach has also led to numerous environmental and social issues, such as resource exploitation, reliance on cheap labor, and ecosystem contamination (Claudio, 2007).

As a response to these issues, stakeholders have demanded that the fast fashion industry adopt more sustainable practices, resulting in alternative economic models like slow fashion, circular fashion, and secondhand goods marketing (Fletcher, 2010). Companies have turned to green marketing strategies to address consumer expectations and public scrutiny, highlighting environmentally friendly materials, sustainable production processes, and recycling initiatives in their marketing campaigns (Peattie, 2001).

With the rise of social media networks, channels such as Instagram have become more popular for fast fashion firms to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and engage at the same time with customers. However, this increased reliance on social media advertising raises concerns about the veracity of green marketing claims, with some experts and watchdog groups accusing companies of greenwashing (Shacklett, 2011).

The concept of greenwashing acknowledges the act of misleading consumers and stakeholders about a company's environmental performance, through marketing tools and strategies that present a distorted, positive version of reality (Shacklett, 2011). Social media platforms play a crucial role in facilitating public access to the diverse corporate sustainability initiatives of organizations and providing citizens with the tools they need to make these businesses accountable for their actions. Consequently, the importance of studying the chosen research phenomenon lies in analyzing the different environmental claims made by fast fashion companies in their marketing efforts, highlighting any discrepancies between their marketing claims and their actual sustainability policies.

Previous research has explored the general sustainability policies of fast fashion firms (Farra, 2016). However, there has been less focus on the specifics of their green marketing efforts on social media platforms. By analyzing different social media content, a deeper understanding of the effectiveness and authenticity of green marketing strategies can be achieved. This knowledge is essential for identifying potential greenwashing practices and promoting better-informed decision-making among consumers, stakeholders, and companies.

1.2. Research Objective and Question

This research aims to shed light on the strategies and tactics utilized by H&M to promote its sustainability efforts by analyzing the claims, tone, and visuals employed in its Instagram advertisements. By conducting a qualitative content analysis on the company's Instagram posts, it is intended to assess the degree to which H&M's green marketing strategies correlate with its actual sustainability practices, thereby determining whether the company's promotional efforts constitute greenwashing. Furthermore, a deeper comprehension of greenwashing in the fast fashion industry is required to educate consumers and businesses on the implications and potential risks of green marketing strategies in this industry. In addition, the findings can be used to provide practical recommendations to other businesses in the same industry that wish to enhance their sustainability communication strategies while avoiding greenwashing.

The main research question that drives this study and will help deepen the understanding of this case study goes as follows:

RQ: *What is the nature of H&M's green advertisement presented in their social media posts to promote environmental sustainability, and to what extent do those qualify as examples of greenwashing?*

1.3. Key Concepts

This section provides a specific context for this research, providing clear and concise definitions of the key terms that are central to the study. This helps to mitigate any potential confusion and ensure a solid foundation for understanding the research by establishing a shared language for discussing the research questions and findings and ensuring an easy understanding of the treated topic.

Fast Fashion. Fast fashion refers to the rapid and cost-effective production of clothing in response to the latest trends, which leads to a high turnover of products and significant environmental impacts (Anguelov, 2016). The main objective of this business strategy is to optimize the buying cycle and reduce lead times, thereby ensuring the faster arrival of new fashion products in stores. The goal is to fulfill consumer expectations and cope with high-demand periods. (Barnes et al., 2006). Given the assumptions of uncontrolled production and purchasing, sustainability is not prioritized in fast fashion, and environmentally friendly practices are difficult to implement (Manning, 2018).

Sustainability. In its 1987 report, the Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of subsequent generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 37). It includes environmental, social, and economic aspects and is frequently represented by the 'triple bottom line' concept, which emphasizes the balance between profit, people, and the environment (Savitz et al., 2006). Since its inception, the concept has evolved considerably, influencing a variety of fields outside of economics (Portney, 2015). In addition, businesses and industries are increasingly employing sustainability practices, integrating

them into operations and decision-making processes in order to reduce negative impacts and contribute to a more sustainable future (Fryzel, 2014).

Green Marketing. This concept can be defined as marketing practices that draw attention to environmental problems and propose attitudes and strategies that could help in the solution of those issues (Fowler et al., 2012). This approach involves promoting products or services as environmentally friendly, using eco-friendly materials, sustainable production processes, and recycling initiatives (Peattie, 2001). However, green marketing claims can sometimes be misleading or unsubstantiated, leading to accusations of greenwashing (Laufer, 2003).

Greenwashing. Greenwashing is the misleading act of making unsubstantiated assertions about a business's environmental impact, which can result in consumers mistakenly believing that a product or brand is more environmentally responsible than it is (Laufer, 2003). This harmful practice not only undermines trust but also hinders genuine sustainability efforts (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). As a result, marketing and merchandising tools can easily manipulate both consumers and stakeholders by presenting a distorted, overly positive image of reality (Loughran et al., 2009).

Environmental claims. Environmental claims, frequently referred to by the term green claims, are statements made by businesses that enhance and highlight their positive environmental performance, the perks of their products, and any advantages or superior qualities in terms of environmental sustainability (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). These claims may be related to various aspects such as the manufacturing process, packaging, distribution, or even the social and ethical dimensions of production (OECD, 2011). Environmental claims are an essential part of green marketing strategies, although they are sometimes exaggerated, deceptive, or unsupported (Laufer, 2003). Accurate and transparent environmental claims are vital for building consumer trust and promoting genuinely sustainable products and practices (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

1.4. Thesis Structure

This master's thesis contains five different sections. The first chapter includes the background, the definition of the main concepts used to understand this study, and a description of the aim and research question. The second chapter includes an introduction to the fast fashion industry and the characteristics of fashion retailers, along with an explanation of the impact of conscious consumers on the corporate social responsibility strategies and sustainability efforts of companies within the sector to enhance their environmentally friendly image. Further, other essential subsections are included in this chapter that extend the developed literature review on green marketing, green advertising, and greenwashing. The third chapter describes the research methodology of a single qualitative case study, the procedures for collecting data and analyzing it, as well as a summary of H&M as an organization. The following chapter provides a summary of the study's findings, including an overview of H&M's green marketing initiatives and an in-depth analysis of each group of observed campaigns. The last chapter examines the study and draws conclusions, including a research overview, theoretical and managerial contributions, and a quality assessment of the research, which includes the observed limitations. Lastly, a section that closes with recommendations for future research in this field is included.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theories, concepts, and ideas that serve as the foundation for this research will be outlined, detailed, and explored in the next chapter. The first topic that is covered in this chapter is a presentation that gives an overview of the fast fashion sector, with particular emphasis on CSR and sustainability initiatives. In addition, the ideas of green marketing and advertising are discussed. Moreover, the idea of greenwashing is decomposed, as it is essential to both the investigation and the analysis of the data. It will be proven that this work is grounded on established principles through the utilization of relevant materials and publications that have been peer-reviewed, which will simultaneously open the road for further investigation and analysis of the subject matter.

2.1. Fast Fashion Industry

The apparel and retail industries have experienced a huge boost over the past few decades that has transformed the entire market. The industry has evolved, turning into a complex system where small designers and small producers have a testimonial presence and where large companies with an international projection dominate the scene, defining the necessities of consumers.

Fast fashion companies aim to reduce the lead time involved in the purchase cycle of new fashion products to meet the expectations of their customers (Barnes et al., 2006). Compared to traditional fashion, fast fashion has a shorter trend and product replacement cycle. As well, these companies introduced the concept of planned fashion obsolescence in the market, where items have a short 'life' and durability and need to be replaced constantly due to the creation of new purchasing necessities or the low-quality materials used in the production cycles that shorten the usability of the products (Philip et al., 2020). This reduction in the quality of the items and faster cycles of production have resulted in a reduction in the prices, which is conceived as one of the most attractive features for consumers and where the success of this industry resides. In addition, the use of low-quality materials, the shortening of production cycles, and the unmeasured boost in sales and production have translated into an increase in polluting emissions, raw material waste, and huge volumes of disused clothing.

These companies have gained immense popularity in recent decades by successfully molding the market to their advantage and creating unknown needs for consumers. As Anguelov (2016)

highlighted, they have successfully increased the traditional clothing seasons to more than 24 distinct cycles. To explain some of the main characteristics of fast fashion retailers, the principal ones have been collected in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of fast fashion retailers	
Agile supply chain	Sometimes aligned with the most luxurious brands in the fashion scenario, these fast fashion brands decide to recreate or imitate renamed luxury brands to offer similar styles to consumers at more affordable prices. They can recreate those looks seen on the catwalk or on any other celebrity within days. Their supply chains are connected directly with the demand of the market, allowing them to rapidly detect its variations and formulate a fast response to the offer.
Externalization of manufacturing processes	Their processes of manufacturing are externalized by allocating their different factories to countries where the labor is cheaper as well as the job wages. This usually has been translated as poor working conditions, safety, and non-respect for human rights.
Able to create necessities for consumers	Fast fashion retailers have created a dependency on consumers to be aware of their last campaign launches. They produce a limited quantity of a certain item, creating the necessity of purchasing an item that probably will not be produced again. By using the idea of so-called exclusivity, brands like Zara have increased their sales exponentially.
Cheap materials and low quality	These retailers usually utilize cheap materials of low quality derived from petroleum, such as polyester. The use of those materials causes harmful impacts and consequences in the environment, as well as poor quality and low durability in the final products. At the same time, a huge problem with waste management is created.

Source*:* Own elaboration from Rauturier (2021) and Becker-Leifhold et al. (2018)

Table 2 summarizes the key characteristics of fast fashion retailers. These retailers operate with agile supply chains, allowing them to imitate luxury brands and rapidly respond to market demand. As well, these brands are able to externalize manufacturing processes to countries with low labor costs, often resulting in poor working conditions. Further, these retailers create a sense of urgency for consumers by offering limited quantities of products, driving sales through perceived exclusivity. Lastly, they typically use cheap, low-quality materials that negatively impact the environment and contribute to waste management issues.

2.1.1. Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability

Even though the tendency of the fashion industry implies overproduction and environmental damage, there has been a progressive increase in the number of stakeholders demanding better practices and finer production models. Among the most powerful stakeholders that firms face, consumers are recognized as a key factor of change who intervene directly in the offer and demand of the market. The increase of conscious consumers, equally denominated as green consumers, has had an enormous effect on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and production strategies in big companies with an international presence (Porter & Kramer, 2006), forcing companies to initiate a change that affects the whole fashion sector.

CSR is a theory that tries to include all company activities whose main goal is to enhance well-being (Mishra & Modi, 2016) and present a commitment from the company to their obligations to society and the environment (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). CSR is closely related to the term sustainability and its three main pillars, also known as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL): environment, economics, and equity. In the same sense, the term sustainability was initially developed in the Brundtland Indicator (WCED, 1987), which warned of the detrimental environmental implications of globalization and economic progress. If the TBL goes up, then the firm is generating more revenue and profit, which is great for shareholders (Savitz et al., 2006). From those three aforementioned pillars, the concept of sustainability evolved and ended up being typified as economic, social, and environmental sustainability, which all together derivate and form the concept of sustainable development. The World Commission on Environment and Development presented the following definition of sustainable development in 1987: "Sustainable development

is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 37). Since that moment, the concept has evolved incredibly and nowadays affects many other areas than the economic one, but it sets up a great point of departure to understand this abstract concept (Portney, 2015).

By performing these sustainable efforts, companies try to fulfill the social expectations of stakeholders and be capable of creating a positive public image. As previously mentioned, these practices and the development of CSR have occurred due to external pressure from shareholders and stakeholders (Mishra & Modi, 2016), as companies have depicted and analyzed the effects of these on consumers and society as having a positive impact on several cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Sen et al., 2006). A socially responsible approach by companies and firms can change the performance of a product or the entire company in a positive way, providing them with more income and an increase in the social reputation of the company (Chernev & Blair, 2015).

Consumers prefer products and firms with a CSR approach due to two main reasons: the first is that they are perceived as indicators of social kindness and philanthropy, and the second is the concept of social acceptance regarding those activities. When consumers perceive that kind of behavior and reputation in firms, they are able to decrease their price sensitivity and increase their commitment to the company and brand (Chernev & Blair, 2015). When all these factors and clarifications are considered, it would be clear and feasible to state that CSR activities are a source of competitive advantage (Mishra & Modi, 2016).

Furthermore, within the fast fashion sector, companies have been trying to gather under 'sustainability' two different concepts, such as ecological sustainability and social sustainability. The use of words with a non-set definition, such as sustainable, eco-friendly, ethical, or green, is a common technique that many international firms use to be vague and unspecific and help them look more ethical and sustainable without giving real information and data (Patriot Act & Minhaj, 2019). Some examples of this can be seen in companies like Zara, H&M, or other newer companies, such as Shein, which have been trying to promote 'sustainable' products and practices while at the same time violating on numerous occasions the rights and employment conditions of their workers (Slater, 2019). Therefore, the only purpose of these companies is to acquire a better reputation by making green claims that, in the end, are meaningless and only lead to greenwashing.

Due to the market's focus on sales and profits, a considerable amount of disposable clothing is manufactured annually, leading the textile industry to be one of the least sustainable. As mentioned previously, in response to various triggers and factors, organizations within the fast fashion industry decided to implement marketing strategies in which misleading or exaggerated statements about the sustainability and environmental perks of their products or corporate practices were made, with the aim of appearing more eco-friendly and appealing to consumers who are increasingly concerned about sustainability issues. These strategies and practices are well-known as greenwashing.

2.2.   Green Marketing

The visible consequences of capitalism and overproduction within the sector and the increase in concern for climate change among numerous stakeholders translated into a visible political and social-ecological movement. This movement was initiated during the 1960s and continues to have a great presence in our society, directly impacting companies and their strategies (Camacho Monge, 2010). Green marketing has become a trend in several industries, including the fashion industry, as a result of customer desire for more ethical and ecological goods as well as the rising importance of sustainability (Lu et al., 2013). Nowadays, it still has a relevant role for marketers and organizations in general. Since Hennion and Kinnear first defined green marketing in 1976, the idea behind it has notoriously evolved, being referred to at that moment as "all marketing activities that have served to help cause environmental problems and that may serve to provide a remedy for environmental problems" (Hennion & Kinnear, 1976, p. 1).

One of the latest definitions of green marketing is the one provided by Gheorghiu, et al. (2013):

> "Eco-marketing is a component of the new marketing approaches which refocus, amend and improve existing marketing philosophy and practice, offering a considerably dissimilar perspective. Eco-marketing belongs to an assembly of approaches which try to make reconciliation between the lack of fit between marketing as it is presently practiced and the ecological and social realities" (Gheorghiu, et al., 2013, p. 373).

Further, green marketing can be recognized when it meets the following criteria (Segev et al., 2016): (1) describes how the advertised good or service is related to the natural world; (2) promotes

environmentally responsible behavior; and (3) paints the company in a positive light as one that is concerned about the environment and can offer more than mere goods.

Since it was first defined, the concept of green marketing has increased in reach and according to the definition of the American Marketing Association, it can be depicted from two different perspectives: the social and the commercial approach. From a commercial point of view, these marketed products should be produced in an environmentally friendly way by using sources and materials efficiently. On the social front, efforts should be made to minimize the adverse effects of production, promotion, packaging, and product recovery on the environment. Organizations should respond by focusing their efforts on designing such processes in a way that addresses ecological concerns (Novillo Díaz et al., 2018).

Within the fast fashion industry, green marketing represents a complex and sometimes contradictory concept as the sector itself and its traditional business model encourage consumerism, overproduction, and fast disposability of products as the motors for their development and growth (Alexa et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the increasing external and internal pressure exercised by different social groups, also known as drivers, forced the industry into a renovation that is widely viewed with skepticism by consumers. As a channel for promoting and disseminating good practices within a sector, green marketing is great, but the problem arises when it is used solely for increasing profits and obscuring the real impact of their business activities. Nonetheless, organizations do not always use green marketing as a mischievous business strategy, but as a tool that can be portrayed from different perspectives. Environmental marketing necessitates novel marketing and management approaches that can acknowledge and tackle the primary obstacles of how a company defines eco-friendliness, creates green products, and communicates its commitment and initiatives with credibility and effectiveness (Kärnä et al., 2001).

As described by Ginsberg & Bloom (2004), companies can utilize different types of strategies and practices regarding green marketing. The developed green matrix, represented in Figure 1, shows the types of strategies that companies can adopt in order to promote green marketing.
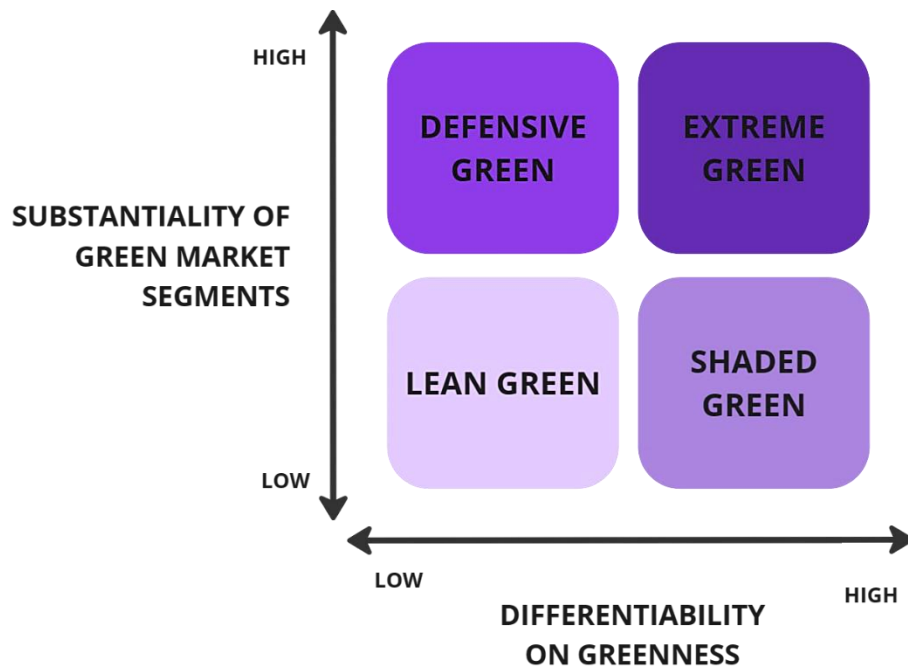
Figure 1. The Green Marketing Strategy Matrix. From Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004, p. 81. Modified.

According to Figure 1, and as described in the article by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), the matrix presents four types of green marketing approaches, rating them from high to low perceived greenness and comparing them at the same time with their real greenness and sustainable features:

Lean or Uniform Green Marketing

The marketed products that fall into this category maintain their own nature without masking or enhancing features, having an actual and perceived low greenness. Therefore, the organizations do not perform green marketing and thus, do not obtain economic benefits from it (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004, p. 81).

Shaded or Moderated Green Marketing

Considered a long-term business strategy, it involves significant investments to demonstrate financial commitment over a prolonged period. Businesses that employ such tactics usually develop and advertise sustainable products and solutions to gain a competitive advantage. This method entails the promotion of tangible attributes of a product through conventional marketing channels and subsequently emphasizing the environmental benefits of the product (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004, p. 82).

Extreme Green Marketing

The products that fall into this category have high levels of both customer perception and actual greenness. This is the most desirable situation for companies and other stakeholders. This involves the complete integration of environmental concerns into a company's management, strategy, and practices. In this case, companies are able to incorporate their values and practices without making a visible effort (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004, p. 83).

Defensive Green Marketing

These marketed products have a great perceived greenness by consumers but a low real greenness. The described products arise as a marketing strategy that is used to respond to competitors or negative publicity, as well as other external factors such as new legislation. It involves incorporating environmentally-friendly tactics to enhance the brand's sustainable reputation and minimize harm to the brand´s image. These products might lead customers to disappointment and in the end, be translated into bad experiences (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004, p. 81–82). This is the most undesired form of green marketing, as it could result in a loss of value for customers in general as well as a loss of brand credibility and loyalty (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). As presented in the study of Szabo and Webster (2021), these perspectives go from intentional greenwashing to unintentional greenwashing, no greenwashing, and unadvertised green initiatives (Szabo & Webster, 2021, p. 734–735).

Sustainable business practices have been adopted by companies as a means of meeting the needs of environmentally aware customers and other stakeholders without sacrificing financial success. In order to achieve commercial goals and create ecological harmony, this tactic calls for altering the traditional marketing formula by reinventing the "4 Ps" of marketing, also known as the strategies of product, price, place, and promotion, which are represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. 4 p´s of the Marketing Mix. Own elaboration.

Green Products. The definition of the product evolves from a basic tool to satisfy the necessities of consumers to: "The terms 'green products' or 'environmental product' are commonly used to describe those that strive to protect or enhance the natural environment by conserving energy and/or resources and reducing or eliminating the use of toxic agents, pollution, and waste" (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1271).

A green product is developed using environmentally friendly methods that cause minimal harm to the environment and has been designed as 'green' since its initial production and design stages. These products are typically made locally using recycled components and are often perceived by customers as being of higher quality due to their organic, healthy, and safe nature (Govender et al., 2016). In addition to using fewer resources and energy, green products positively impact the environment by reducing pollution and emissions. Green products often involve processes such as recycling, durability, repairability, and safety.

Green Prices. The term 'green pricing' refers to the additional costs associated with buying environmentally safe goods. While it may cost more to manufacture these goods, they can be promoted in a way that highlights their environmental benefits, such as with eye-catching packaging or catchy slogans (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1271). Green pricing strategies tend to appeal to younger age groups and economically advanced nations due to their greater

environmental awareness and eagerness to pay higher prices for goods with more sustainable features (Khan et al., 2020). Furthermore, brands may attempt to attract consumers' attention by associating the term 'premium' with green pricing. However, the higher cost of green items might also operate as a deterrent to purchasing non-green products, which could boost the purchase of other, less sustainable products with greater harmful effects on the environment (Dangelico et al., 2017).

Green Places. The term 'green place' describes the strategic arrangement of eco-friendly goods to help shoppers understand where to buy and how to make the best use of such goods. Logistics for product returns are also a part of this process, along with production-to-consumption distribution planning (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1272). Consumers are more likely to select an ecologically friendly product if they have easy access to it, therefore making green items more accessible through supermarkets or better locations inside physical businesses will enhance their appeal. The distribution and logistics of a green product must also be considerate of the environment, and a green place might relate to a digital space. Costs and environmental damage may be mitigated, revenues can be maximized, and products' long-term viability can be guaranteed with the use of technological and informational systems (Dangelico et al., 2017).

Green Promotion. Banerjee et al. (1995) state that in order for green promotion to be effective, it needs to fulfill at least one of the following conditions: promote ecological lifestyles; exhibit, enhance, or sustain a business image that is environmentally responsible; reveal or emphasize the connection between products and the environment (whether expressly or implicitly).

Furthermore, according to the research of Dangelico et al. (2017), specific and clear environmental claims have more power and effectiveness than ambiguous statements. Effective claims are usually associated with these characteristics: clarity, ease of understanding, tailoring to the target audience (being differentiated on many occasions for different countries), and the ability to arouse emotional commitment. Emotional appeals in marketing not only allow individuals to learn more about environmental issues and the effects of their choices, but they also forge a closer bond between consumers and the planet. Nevertheless, it's crucial to be aware and mindful of the problems caused by greenwashing and other forms of deceptive marketing.

Green promotion is often focused on the product's packaging and labeling, which are considered tools to differentiate from other brands and a way to reflect the company´s efforts toward

sustainability. Eco-labeling can translate into higher profits and a rise in the consciousness of consumers in general. The messages conveyed through green promotion through various channels such as advertising, websites, and campaigns are designed to increase the probability that customers will purchase green products (Mahmoud, 2018).

The promotion of environmentally conscious practices, commonly referred to as 'green promotion,' is a crucial component of the green marketing mix as it seeks to educate and inform consumers. In the context of the present case study, this aspect assumes particular significance. To fully grasp the context of this case study, we must also examine green advertising and its potential as a green marketing instrument.

2.3. Green Advertising

As the American Marketing Association (2020) defines it, advertising is:

> "Advertising is a business practice where a company pays to place its messaging or branding in a particular location. Advertising establishes a one-way channel of communication, where companies can broadcast non-personal messaging to a general audience. Unlike other types of marketing or even public relations, companies have total control over advertising. When a company pays to place an ad, it has complete control over how the content involved is promoted" (AMA, 2020).

Advertising is the creation and distribution of communications to promote or sell a product, service, or brand. It is a method of communication that utilizes multiple platforms, such as social media, radio, and television, to persuade an audience to act in some way or another (Opar, 2007). Therefore, green advertising is a crucial aspect of the success of green marketing. According to Banerjee et al. (1995), green advertising can be identified when the observed advertisement meets at least one of the following criteria: "(i) explicitly or implicitly addresses the relationship between a product or service and the biophysical environment. (ii) promotes a green lifestyle with or without highlighting a product or service. (iii) presents a corporate image of environmental responsibility" (Banerjee et al., 1995, p. 22).

A categorization widely used to study and frame green advertising communications and promotions is the one provided by Carlson et al. (1993) and developed later with the contribution of Polonsky in 1996 (Baum, 2012), which will be described in Figure 3.
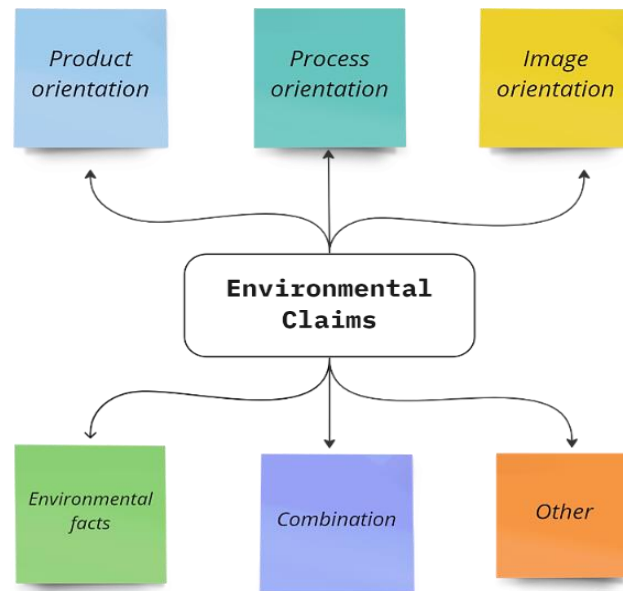
Figure 3. Types of Environmental Claims. Own elaboration from Baum (2012)

As presented in Figure 3, they were able to categorize the different green advertising environmental claims into six separate groups (Baum, 2012, p. 430):

- **Product orientation.** This group presents assertions that center on the ecological advantages of the product, including its energy efficiency, waste reduction, and utilization of sustainable materials.

- **Process orientation.** The assertions pertain to the internal technological processes, production methodologies, and/or waste management approaches employed by the entity, which yield ecological advantages. An organization has the potential to claim that it has decreased its carbon footprint by utilizing sustainable energy sources or optimizing its manufacturing procedures.

- **Image orientation**. This classification relates to statements that link the organization with an environmental initiative or activity that gets the support of the public. The claims that belong to this category are related to the preservation of endangered species and the promotion of sustainable energy options. Claims falling under this category pertain to the conservation of threatened species and the advancement of sustainable energy alternatives.

- **Environmental fact.** Claims that fall under this category are fact-based claims that the organization makes about the environment or its state. For instance, a company may state

that it uses environmentally friendly practices throughout production by reusing or recycling resources and/or employing methods that reduce pollution in general.

- **Combination.** The reliability of claims is constrained by different factors, such as products, processes, images, and the environment. Corporate entities frequently highlight the ecological sustainability of their merchandise using recycled constituents, energy-conserving manufacturing techniques, and the endorsement of environmentally conscious initiatives.

- **Other.** These cases are special because they include the environment and nonetheless fall outside the other categories. A corporation may advertise an item as 'ozone-friendly' without explaining what this term implies or how it was obtained.

For this case study's data analysis and limited purposes, a clear classification of environmental claims within social media material is crucial. As social media platforms continue to grow in importance, they provide an ideal stage for promoting green advertising. By leveraging social media for green advertising, businesses can showcase their commitment to sustainability and eco-friendly practices while reaching a broader audience.

Social media has become an important instrument in the fashion business, especially for promoting sustainability and eco-friendly practices. These platforms have provided consumers with unprecedented access to information regarding the environmental activities of corporations, allowing them to eventually hold these organizations accountable for their actions. This heightened degree of openness has altered the way customers engage with fashion firms and elevated corporate social responsibility to the forefront of company operations (Arnaboldi et al., 2016). Further, the increased use of these platforms has produced a radical change in the way people consume, characterized by speed, complexity, and dynamism (Bonilla, 2019).

Businesses within the sector have realized the potential of social media and are now using channels such as Instagram to promote their eco-friendly initiatives and stimulate consumer engagement and purchases. By emphasizing their dedication to sustainable practices, these businesses may both attract environmentally concerned customers and establish a favorable brand image (Arnaboldi et al., 2016). In addition, social media has created a venue for individuals to express their own experiences and preferences about sustainable fashion, motivating firms to adapt and modify their services accordingly.

Further contributing to the prominence of eco-friendly fashion is the rising popularity of influencer marketing. Micro-influencers and public figures who advocate sustainable living may successfully raise awareness of the ecological and social implications of the fashion industry and promote ethical businesses to their followers. By engaging with these influencers, businesses may reach a larger audience and encourage more individuals to embrace sustainable purchasing practices (Chu & Seock, 2020).

In the case of H&M, the company has established a solid social media presence, particularly on Instagram. During the first three quarters of 2017, the company generated more than 39 million post shares on Instagram with only 486 posts, according to a study conducted by ShareIQ (Bonilla et al., 2019). Moreover, within their study, the data presented highlighted the success of the company by comparing its presence and engagement with other companies in the sector (Bonilla, 2019). Currently, the official Instagram account of H&M counts more than 38 million followers (Instagram, 2023), where different campaigns, collaborations, and even products are advertised. Moreover, it is especially visible in the use of micro-influencers and other influencers to promote its campaigns and products, with a special emphasis on sustainability and good practices.

Therefore, social media has had a tremendous influence on the fashion industry by placing sustainability at the forefront of firms' and customers' minds. Through improved transparency and the power of user-generated information, social media platforms have empowered clients to hold businesses responsible for their environmental policies and have enabled brands to adapt to consumer preferences. Hence, firms such as H&M are increasingly using Instagram and other social media platforms to advertise their eco-friendly operations and interact with their consumers, eventually developing a more responsible and sustainable fashion sector (Arnaboldi et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, it's crucial to find solutions to the challenges that come along with utilizing social media for environmental advertising. While social media channels have taken on a new implication in the promotion of environmentally responsible fashion, there have been doubts raised over the accuracy and transparency of sustainability claims made on these platforms by firms. The practice of greenwashing, in which companies overstate or misrepresent their commitment to environmental responsibility, has grown increasingly widespread in the social media context (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). To achieve a positive solution to this issue, customers need to be aware of the differences between sustainable activities and greenwashing.

Using social media as a platform for green advertising has revolutionized the fashion industry by placing sustainability at the forefront of consumer consciousness. It is essential to address issues such as greenwashing if one wants to guarantee that the propagation of environmentally friendly practices will continue to be genuine and productive. Companies such as H&M can continue to promote positive change in the fashion industry and contribute to a cleaner future by promoting greater transparency, credibility, and creativity in green advertising on social media. This is one way that green advertising can be more environmentally friendly.

2.4.   Greenwashing

Greenwashing as a concept was first used in 1986 (Kubiak, 2016), with a definition that evolved according to Furlow (2010) to "greenwashing is the dissemination of false or incomplete information by organizations to present an environmentally responsible public image" (Furlow, 2010, p. 22).

In this sense, the representation of the values and organizational measures towards more sustainable practices is considered just a mere distortion of reality and embellishment of their public image to make a profit as an end. Therefore, a major part of the sector does not intend to produce more sustainably but to make customers believe that they do so (Strähle et al., 2016), building a lack of trust in their consumers. The skepticism and insecurities of fast-fashion consumers are based on the low transparency of these companies as well as their more than questionable decisions in many social scopes, including things like the protection of human rights, the improvement of working conditions, and the preservation of natural areas and natural resources. Greenwashing has little long-term value; if the product cannot live up to its promises, conscious customers and the media will eventually discover the hoax. This could damage the product, the brand, and its profitability, affecting other products of the brand.

The concept of greenwashing gained popularity in the 1990s when false and exaggerated claims regarding sustainable performance were spilled by companies to gather a better public image and increase their profits at the same time. This movement gathered the attention of many scholars that categorized greenwashing advertising claims under four categories, as stated by Leonidou et al. (2011): "(1) ambiguous, containing statements or phrases that are too broad to have a clear meaning;

(2) omission, excluding important information to evaluate its truthfulness or reasonableness; (3) false or lying, including claims that are clearly untrue or misleading; (4) acceptable, making specific environmental claims in a justifiable, self-explanatory, and clear way" (Leonidou et al., 2011, p. 8).

However, it is important to recognize what drives these companies to greenwash their products and practices. According to Delmas and Burbano (2011), and as presented in Figure 4, the drivers of greenwashing are divided into four groups: "(i) nonmarket external drivers; (ii) market external drivers; (iii) organizational drivers; and (iv) individual organizational drivers" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 68).
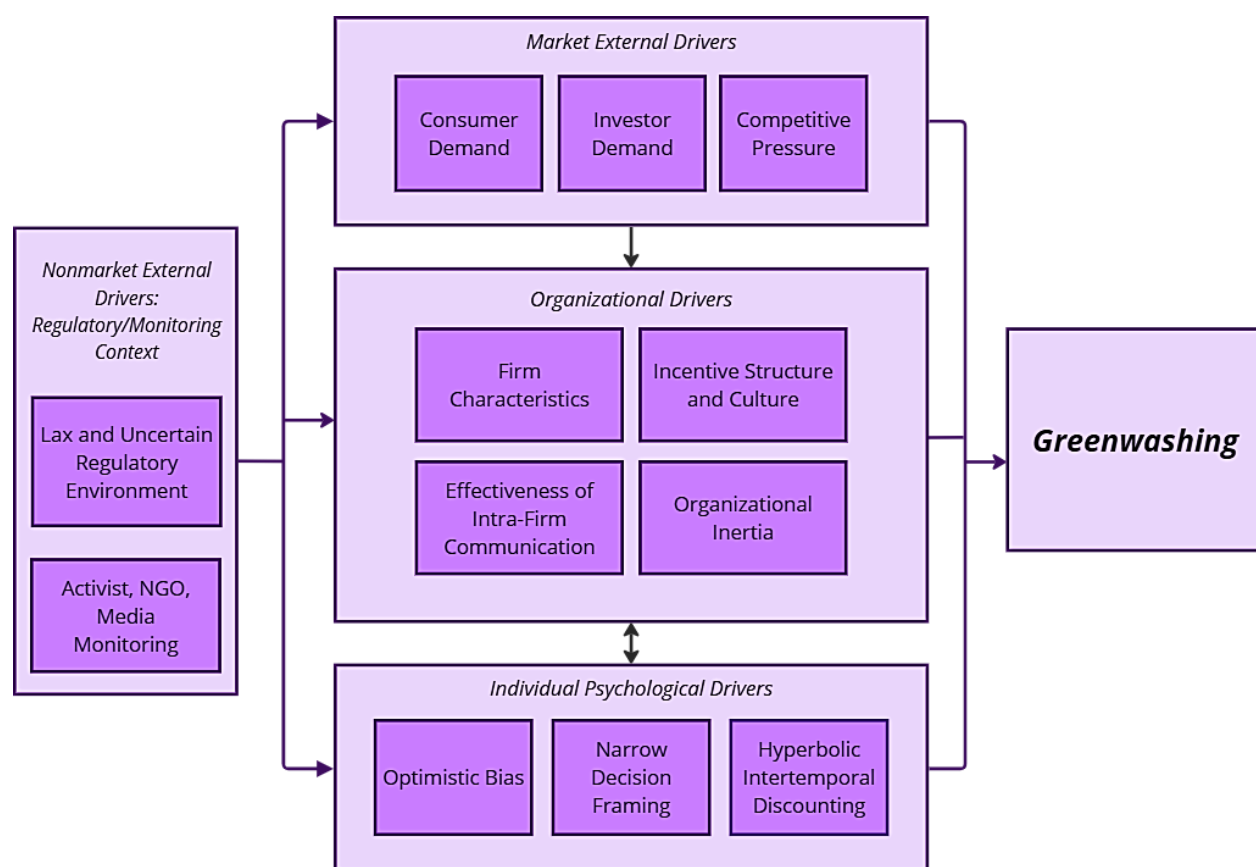

Figure 4. The Drivers of Greenwashing. Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 68. Modified.

Understanding these drivers is especially important for this case study when critically evaluating H&M's sustainability claims in advertising through content analysis. These drivers can help

identify the underlying motivations behind the company's sustainability messaging and assess whether they are genuine or simply a form of greenwashing.

Nonmarket external drivers refer to external pressures from stakeholders such as governments, legislation, NGOs, and the media. If, for instance, environmental organizations are pressuring a corporation to minimize its carbon footprint, businesses can react to that by emphasizing the use of sustainable materials in their marketing strategies. However, greenwashing may be present if the company's sustainability claims are not supported by concrete actions or are inconsistent with its actual practices. The regulatory environment is considered one of the most important and influential external promoters of greenwashing. Even so, the regulatory environment and laws do not fully explain organizational decisions (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 69–71).

Market external drivers refer to external competitive pressures from customers and investors, such as the need to compete with other companies offering eco-friendly products in order to secure a larger market share and a better position. To remain competitive in the marketplace, organizations may advertise their sustainability efforts, but it is crucial to confirm whether these claims are backed up by facts (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 72).

Culture, values, and objectives are examples of organizational drivers. If an organization has a strong commitment to sustainability and has taken concrete steps to reduce its environmental impact, this can add credibility to its sustainability claims. Key corporate characteristics, incentive structures, an ethical culture, the efficacy of interfirm communication, and organizational inertia determine an organization's response to external pressures (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 72–75).

Individual organizational drivers refer to an organization's employees' actions and motivations. For instance, if the organization's CEO is personally committed to sustainability and has made it a company priority, this can increase the likelihood that the organization's sustainability messaging is authentic. Personal psychological and cognitive characteristics influence managerial decision-making processes, which in turn influence the way external impulses translate into action motivation (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, p. 75).

By considering these various drivers of greenwashing, an analysis of H&M's environmental claims in advertising can help identify any inconsistencies or discrepancies between the company's

messaging and its actual sustainability practices. Nevertheless, these categorizations ignore other aspects of advertisements that evoke environmental and sustainable aspects without using verbal arguments. Therefore, greenwashing can be analyzed from two different perspectives: Executional Greenwashing and Greenwashing Claims.

Meanwhile, Greenwashing Claims are based on affirmations and statements regarding the sustainable performance of the company or the sustainability of its products. Executional greenwashing refers to the employment of nature-evoking aspects in advertising with the intention of intentionally enhancing a brand's image in relation to its environmental responsibility (Parguel et al., 2015, p. 108). Both advertisement techniques are interesting for this study and have relevance for the collection process of the data and its subsequent analysis.

2.4.1. Executional Greenwashing

Executional greenwashing is a marketing technique in which businesses use visual materials to infer or suggest that their goods, services, or operations are sustainable or environmentally friendly without explicitly or verbally stating these concepts. This approach, which can be viewed as misleading advertising, may persuade customers to believe that a good or service is more eco-friendly than it actually is (Parguel et al., 2015). Some examples include the use of imagery of natural landscapes, wildlife, or clean energy sources in advertisements without offering precise details or data regarding the ecological consequences of the product or service being advertised (Parguel et al., 2013). Therefore, these techniques appeal to the irrational side of consumers, because they are more complex and difficult to identify and analyze.

The use of executional greenwashing is often motivated by the desire to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and to a point of differentiation in the market by being superior to other competitors. However, this practice can result in consumer skepticism a loss of trust in brands that engage in it. This has the potential to cause confusion among consumers when assessing a brand's environmental reputation. Both non-experts and experts on environmental issues would be affected, with greater repercussions for those with low knowledge of the topic (Parguel et al., 2013).

Furthermore, as described by De Freitas Netto et al. (2020), this type of strategy includes elements with colors that evoke the natural world, such as green or blue. It also encompasses sounds that are used in advertisements, such as birds or other animals, which are meant to establish a connection between the advertised product or business and nature in the customer's mind. The representation of natural landscapes, endangered species, and other nature-evoking elements is also a recurring tool.

2.4.2. Greenwashing Claims

This type of greenwashing refers to the use of verbal arguments and statements that make misleading environmental claims. Statements that fall into this category must be shown to be false based on objective evidence that proves they deceive consumers both at the product and company levels.

As in the case of green marketing claims, Baum (2012) presented a categorization widely used to study and frame greenwashing communications. In this case, the classification used in his content analysis is based on seven groups, also known as the *Seven Sins of Greenwashing.* This categorization was created by the TerraChoice Group (2007), a Canadian environmental marketing agency later acquired by UL Solutions, and it has been utilized in many studies and articles. (Baum, 2012, p. 430–431)

(1) *Hidden Tradeoff:* This type of claim implies that a product is sustainable based on limited qualities, without considering other significant environmental and social concerns. The packaging or design of an 'environmentally friendly' product or service may contain tradeoffs related to the product's manufacturing process rather than the product itself.

(2) *No Proof:* This kind of claim is not supported by supporting evidence, which might be obtained with little trouble or by confirmation from a trustworthy third party. For instance, a firm might say that their products include a specific amount of post-consumer recycled material without offering any proof to support their claim or providing a third-party certification to back up their assertion.

(3) *Vague:* This kind of claim is either poorly defined or overly general, and its makers likely intend for customers to interpret it incorrectly. Vague assertions may give the appearance

that the company is committed to addressing environmental concerns, but they do not provide particular information on the strategies or measures taken by the company. The concepts 'non-toxic,' 'green,' or 'eco-consciousness' are some examples of these affirmations.

(4) *Worship false labels:* This kind of assertion offers the idea of support from a third party when, in practice, there is none. Some examples of these types of claims include concepts such as 'eco-safe' or 'eco-preferred.'

(5) *Irrelevant:* This kind of claim could be accurate, but it is neither relevant nor useful to customers who are seeking items that are better for the environment. 'CFC-free' is an example of a claim that is irrelevant since CFCs are already prohibited by law in many different nations.

(6) *Lesser of Two Evils:* This kind of claim could be accurate with respect to a certain class of products, but it draws attention away from the more significant environmental effect that the industry has. Examples include organic cigarettes.

(7) *Fibbing:* Claims about the environment that are in every way demonstrably incorrect belong in this category.

2.5. Summary: Theoretical Framework

To elucidate the levels of analysis, it is practical to provide an overview of the methods. The subsequent chapter opens with an analysis of H&M's official global Instagram account's posts. With this summary and classification of previous concepts and theories, presented in Figure 5, a framework for analyzing the collected data can be developed. An initial classification of posts based on the nature of the environmental claims stated in them was made. Regarding the prevalence of greenwashing aspects in the chosen posts, a final classification and differentiation were presented. In conclusion, this classification assists in answering the question of the true nature of greenwashing in relation to H&M's environmental sustainability-related green advertisements.
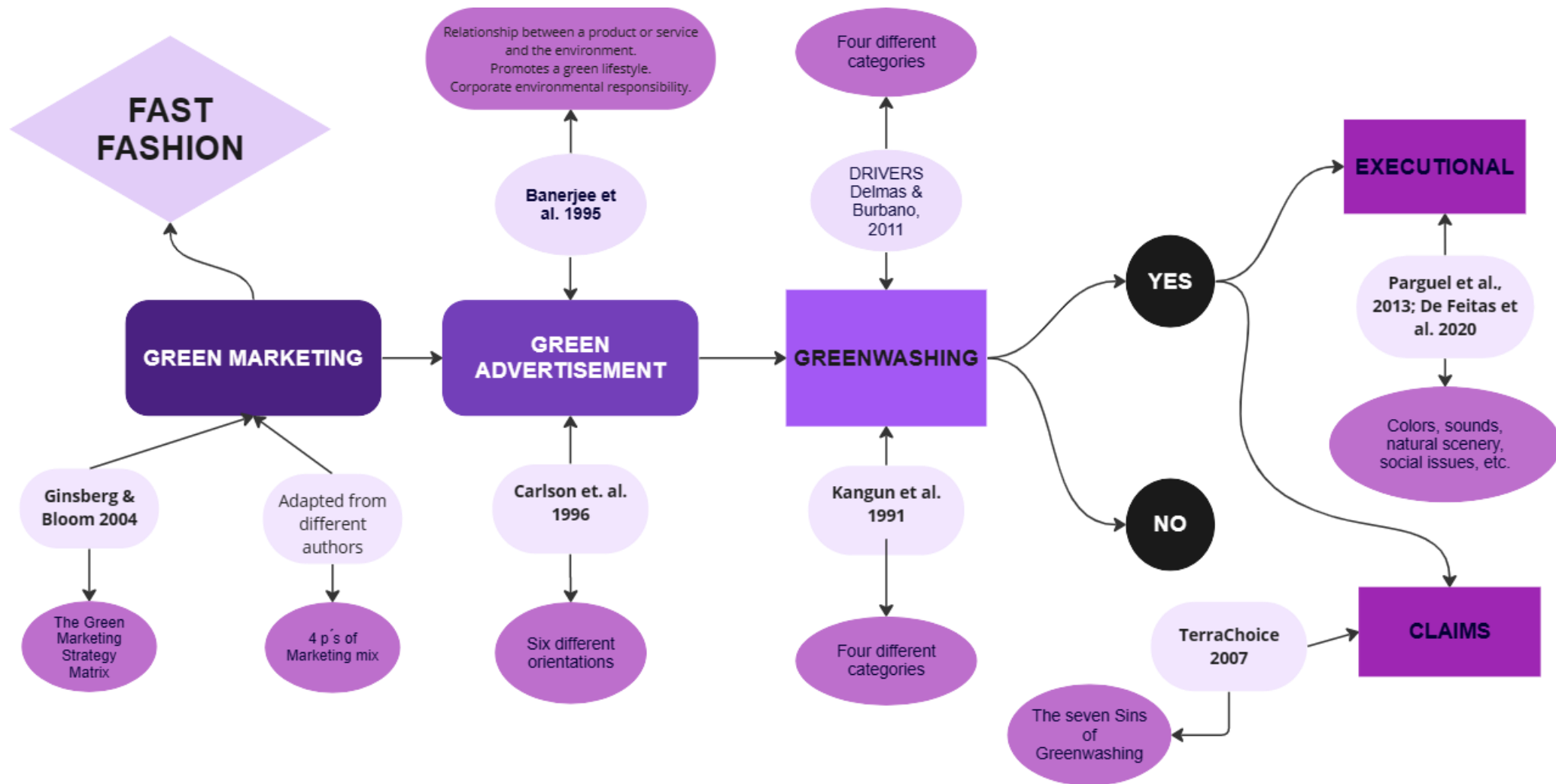
Figure 5. Theoretical Framework. Own elaboration.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodological part is divided into different sections. First, a brief description of the chosen research method is introduced, accompanied by an explanation of the data collection process. In the third step, the data analysis is displayed. Finally, a short case description of the chosen company for the analysis is shown. By utilizing the previous literature review and the collected data from the company´s official press site and Instagram page, among other referred material, a suitable data and coding framework for this study was developed.

3.1.   Qualitative Single Case Study

The selected method for this research is a qualitative single case study. A qualitative single case study is a research approach that entails doing an in-depth investigation of a specific instance, such as an organization, event, individual, or community, in order to investigate complex phenomena in a real-world environment (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is widely utilized in many disciplines, including business, education, and social sciences since it allows researchers to obtain a thorough grasp of the case and its underlying issues, produce hypotheses, and establish new theories or add to existing ones (Stake, 1995).

Several factors influence the choice of a qualitative single case study as a research method. The capacity to provide a rich, contextual understanding of a specific scenario is one of the key reasons for choosing this strategy (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Researchers might capture nuances and intricacies that could be ignored or neglected in other research approaches, such as quantitative methods or comparative case studies. The applicability of the qualitative single case study to a wide range of research issues and contexts is another reason for its use (Stake, 1995). Researchers might modify their methodology according to the case's specifics, making changes to data collection methods, theoretical frameworks, or analytical procedures as needed. In addition, according to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), single case studies are a useful tool for the formation of theories in situations in which previously proposed explanations are unable to fully account for a phenomenon or in which the formulation of new theories is necessary.

This study could have utilized different research methods, each of which has its own set of benefits and drawbacks. As an option, the quantitative research method could have been selected, which focuses on collecting and evaluating numerical data to uncover patterns and correlations between variables (Walliman, 2006). Although quantitative research can provide insights into variable relationships and generalizable findings, it may not be appropriate for understanding the deeper, contextual aspects of a phenomenon, which is where the qualitative single case study excels. Another option is to do a comparative case study, which entails studying many examples to uncover similarities and differences (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Comparative case studies can aid in generalizability and provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon.

Even though these research methods offer interesting possibilities for analysis, they might not provide the same level of analysis and understanding of the context as a case study. The qualitative single case study offers diverse advantages, but it also has disadvantages, including limited generalizability and the likelihood of researcher bias (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Despite all these advantages, the qualitative single case study still has some drawbacks. These constraints were carefully balanced against the method's benefits in the context of the undergoing study. The disadvantages of the qualitative single case study can be minimized by adopting a rigorous strategy that includes cautious case selection, triangulation of data sources, and recognition of researcher biases.

According to Rashid et al. (2019), the qualitative single case study process contains four phases: foundation, prefield, field, and reporting phase. The foundation phase requires to have a clear understanding of the research philosophy, concepts, and purpose to ensure the effective completion of the study. The research inquiry techniques, such as positivist or interpretive approaches, are determined by the philosophical stance, often corresponding with quantitative or qualitative methods, respectively. Additionally, research logic considerations, such as induction, deduction, or abduction, play a vital role in this phase.

The prefield phase involves designing a research process, including research questions, methods, ethical considerations, evidence gathering, empirical material interpretation, and analysis. Abduction is particularly important in this phase, as it allows researchers to study and explain social phenomena through the eyes of different social actors. Finally, the reporting phase presents the

case and participant descriptions, protocols, material interpretation, analysis, and conclusion (Rashid et al., 2019).

To sum up, the qualitative single case study was selected for the research due to its capacity to provide a rich, contextual understanding of the case, adaptability to diverse research questions and situations, and potential for theory formulation. While alternative research methods, such as quantitative research or comparative case studies, have merits of their own, they were not the best option for this project due to their limitations in addressing the specific research goals.

3.2.   Data Collection

A preliminary analysis of the selected time frame for the main data of this case study, spanning from 2021 to 2022 across the remaining social media sources, revealed that many similar concepts and materials were repeated across platforms. To streamline the data collection process and maintain a more consistent data source, Instagram was chosen as the primary platform for analysis. The collected data was retrieved from H&M's global official Instagram account, where the language of the posts is English. Moreover, the different types of posts that fall under the category of images or videos entail the analysis of various concepts, such as colors, images, sounds, etc., for this case study.

The chosen time frame for data collection is January 2021 to December 2022, which was selected for two main reasons. First, this period includes some of the most significant controversies surrounding H&M's environmental sustainability. Second, the number of posts related to green claims within this time frame is adequate for a comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, the selection of two complete years helped to give a better overview of the time of green advertisements and their tendency, allowing me to uncover possible patterns in the collected data. The following Table 2 outlines and interprets the final number of observed and collected posts.

Table 2. H&M´s Instagram Global Official account posts			
Year	Number of posts	Green ads	Percentage of green ads in the total number of posts
2021	911	57	6%
2022	656	17	2%

Source: Own elaboration

The initial analysis period spans from January 2021 to December 2021. During this timeframe, and as collected in Table 2, H&M made a total of 911 posts on Instagram, with 6 percent of them being green advertisements related to environmental sustainability. This period marks the company's peak activity on the mentioned social media platform, with more than 72 percent of the total analyzed posts within this case study relating to green advertising and environmental sustainability. The second analysis period spans from January 2022 to December 2022. During this timeframe, H&M made a total of 656 posts on Instagram, with 27 percent of them being green advertisements related to environmental sustainability. This period only represents 10 percent of the total number of analyzed posts within this case study. Although the focus of this analysis lies on green advertisements rather than other posts reflecting H&M's broader CSR policies, the company's efforts in promoting and supporting causes such as body positivity and the LGBTQ+ community with the hashtag #HMPride and campaigns that encourage healthier lifestyles with the hashtag #HMmove can be acknowledged. This is particularly remarkable during the period from January 2022 to December 2022.

Additionally, available data from the environmentally sustainable approach of the company and the main cases where the company faced criticism or even legal causes were collected. These materials come from different sources, such as sustainability reports and official press publications from H&M, as well as other web articles from journals such as The New York Times and other peer-reviewed articles. The selected time frame for these materials ranges from 2010 to 2022. This selected period provided a comprehensive overview of H&M´s environmental sustainability

practices and initiatives, as well as the challenges and controversies it has encountered over these years. In addition, it enabled the identification of trends, improvements, or setbacks in H&M's approach to sustainability, providing valuable insights.

3.3. Data Analysis

The selected analysis method is qualitative content analysis. The research technique known as Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is a versatile method utilized to rigorously analyze and contextually interpret data. The process involves methodologies that aid scholars in discerning, categorizing, and analyzing patterns, themes, and classifications within sets of data, thereby enabling a more profound understanding of subjective experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. According to Schreier (2012) and Cole (1988), the application of content analysis is ideal for conducting comprehensive research inquiries since it interprets written, verbal, or visual communication messages and is suitable for all three types of communication.

The origins of QCA date back to Content Analysis, a research method that emerged in the field of mass communication studies during the early 1900s (Krippendorff, 2018). According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), the method can be applied to both qualitative and quantitative data and can be carried out through either inductive or deductive approaches. Mayring (2014) outlines that a standard QCA procedure comprises several phases to guarantee a methodical method for examining textual information. These stages encompass the process of conducting research, which involves gathering data, preparing it for analysis, establishing a coding framework or system, coding the data, analyzing it, and interpreting the results. The process of conducting research involves the identification of the appropriate data type and quantity that is necessary to address the research inquiry. Additionally, the transcription and formatting of textual data are crucial steps in the research process. Furthermore, data anonymization is essential to safeguarding the privacy of individuals by removing any sensitive or extraneous information.

The coding framework should possess flexibility and adaptability, enabling alterations to be made as the analysis progresses. The collected data are then coded according to a predetermined coding framework, followed by the identification of patterns, relationships, and themes within the analyzed data The researcher can then refine the analysis through a process of moving between data and findings. The researcher then interprets the results by formulating deductions, identifying

implications for both theoretical and practical domains, and reflecting on limitations and prospective avenues for future research. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), the purpose of QCA is to offer a systematic approach for characterizing a phenomenon, improving understanding, and producing new insights. The organizational procedure encompasses the stages of initial open coding, subsequent category formation, and eventual reflection and analysis. According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research design is a continuous process that requires researchers to carefully examine the material multiple times in order to identify all pertinent headings.

The combined approach involves the utilization of qualitative content analysis in conjunction with an inductive methodology, providing researchers with greater flexibility in identifying specific segments of the data that can enhance the analysis. This method enables researchers to observe the research material without the constraints of predetermined hypotheses or theories, potentially opening new research avenues. This method has been chosen as it is intended to analyze the social media content displayed on the official Instagram page of H&M, that implies or is directly related to sustainable claims. The type of QCA that was applied during this research refers to a deductive approach. This is the most suitable type of approach, as it is based on previous theoretical and existing research studies. This method selection helped me as I was able to trust the analysis process and contrast my results with previous case studies.

Further, the data analysis is based on the previously mentioned theoretical framework, which consists of numerous articles and theories and is depicted in the previous Figure 5. A preliminary categorization was used to select the appropriate data for analysis. The criteria established by Banerjee et al. (1995) and Carlson et al. (1993) were used to delimit the typology of the selected posts utilized in the analysis. This initial classification helped define the posts that could be classified as green advertising. In addition, a second restriction was imposed, limiting the scope to only environmental sustainability issues.

Therefore, within this selection and according to Banerjee et al. (1995), the selected posts regarding green advertising needed to accomplish at least one of these characteristics: "(1) point out the connection between a product or service and the environment; (2) promote a sustainable lifestyle; and (3) project an image of sustainability and environmentally friendly attitude for the organization" (Banerjee et al., 1995, p. 22).

In addition, a greater connection was made between the types of green claims. This classification was derived from Carlson et al. (1993, p. 31), who categorized green claims as product orientation, process orientation, image orientation, environmental fact, combination, or other categories. After classifying the posts as sustainable green advertisements, they were gathered into three main groups. This division gave a more organized perspective on the data and a more effective way of analysis, in those repetitive patterns. The selected groups were:

- **Company collaborations**. Within this group, we can find all the posts related to official collaborations with other firms or institutions.
- **Own campaigns and partnerships**. This group includes general posts not associated with specific campaigns, as well as others referring to special and exclusive campaigns that are sometimes in partnership with other innovative companies.
- **Influencer marketing.** The posts collected under this title refer to those where renamed personalities or other influencers appear promoting H&M products or campaigns.

Once the selected materials were confirmed to be environmental ads and were properly clustered, a second evaluation was done. The second evaluation consisted of an assessment to determine if any of the selected posts as environmental green advertisements, could be addressed at the same time as any of the previously mentioned forms of greenwashing. The variables to identify the different forms of greenwashing were divided into two separate groups: executional greenwashing variables and greenwashing claims variables.

The executional greenwashing variables are based on the articles of the previously mentioned authors, Parguel et al. (2013, 2015) and De Freitas Netto et al. (2020), and an interpretation of the information provided in their respective research. Regarding the greenwashing claims, the selected frame took into consideration the classification made by the TerraChoice Group (2007). The following Table 3 contains the variables, that were previously identified and analyzed in the theoretical chapter of this case study. Therefore, they were used to try to determine if the selected posts are showing signs of greenwashing or if, on the contrary, they are genuinely and demonstrably sustainable and eco-friendly product campaigns.

Table 3. Greenwashing variables	
Executional Greenwashing variables	
Colors	Colors such as green, brown, or blue are related to natural scenery or the natural world in general.
Sounds	Such as birds, the sea, the wind, and other animals.
Images related to important issues	Climate change, endangered species, catastrophes, and other relevant issues related to environmental protection.
Natural scenery	Oceans, mountains, forests, and other nature emplacements.
Greenwashing Claim variables	
Hidden Tradeoff	The product claims to be greener but hides important negative attributes at the same time.
No Proof	Affirmations regarding sustainability that are not corroborated. Example: % of ecological materials, part of the process being sustainable, renewable, etc.
Vague	Too broad affirmations that might include terms such as 'sustainable', 'chemical-free', 'natural', 'ethically sourced', and 'low carbon footprint'.
Worship false labels	Provide a third-party endorsement that does not exist. Examples include claims such as 'certified green' and 'eco-approved'.
Irrelevant	The provided information might be true but is not important or shows concepts that are already required. As an example, the 'PVC-Free Packaging'
Lesser of Two Evils	Although the information may be accurate, it distracts attention from the deeper environmental impact.
Fibbing	Do not provide evidence and is categorically false.

Source: Own elaboration from previous materials (Baum, 2012, p. 430–431)

The table presents two groups of analysis for the collected posts. First, the executional variables are shown, paying special attention to colors, sounds, images related to important issues, and natural scenery. Second, the different seven sins of greenwashing are explained. To achieve more uniform results, the first section regarding executional greenwashing was presented separately according to the three categories shown. In the meantime, the greenwashing claims were presented in a collective and uniform way. This method of analysis avoided redundancy, was more concise, and was simpler to comprehend.

This classification and way of delimiting the collected data have been used in different peer-reviewed articles, such as Baum (2012), Sailer et al. (2022), Gutiérrez (2021), and other dissertations, as in the case of Nikula (2020). The thesis drew its ideas from a variety of classification schemes; hence, these schemes had to be adjusted for them to be applicable to the goals of this case study.

Finally, after describing and identifying the variables in the collected posts, an evaluation was conducted based on the discovered variables to estimate the likelihood of signs of potential greenwashing. For this purpose, a chosen measurement scale indicated the probability of greenwashing practice signs based on the identified variables in the analysis out of the total eleven. All variables hold equal significance, and no form of greenwashing is more important than another. Moreover, the variables are binary: they are either met or not met. This evaluation is represented in Table 4.

Table 4. Measuring scale of Greenwashing	
Number of identified variables	Probability of presence of Greenwashing
0	None
1-3	Low
4-11	High

Source: Own elaboration

The table explains the last categorization and makes remarks on the analysis. According to this, the measurement of the probability of the presence of greenwashing in the collection is estimated by a scale. This scale goes from 0 as the non-presence of greenwashing, to 11 as the maximum presence. This categorization gave a better understanding of the results and helped to obtain clear conclusions from the analysis.

3.4. Short Case Description: H&M

In order to understand the relevance of H&M in this case study and within the fast fashion sector, the main characteristics of the company, as well as their attempted efforts towards sustainability and green marketing, are presented.

H&M, which stands for Hennes & Mauritz AB, is a Swedish international firm that was founded by Erling Person in 1974. It is known to belong to the most powerful corporations in the fast fashion industry. This multinational firm is the second largest clothing retailer in the world, behind only Inditex. It has operations in 74 countries and more than 5,000 stores all over the world (H&M, 2020). The beginnings of H&M have nothing to do with the current position of the organization, since those were more than humble, with a single shop established in Västerås and aimed solely at the feminine audience. Their first opportunity to further internationalize beyond the Scandinavian market was in the 1970s, when they opened their first store in London, truly consolidating the

company as a multinational with a presence in different continents such as Asia or America in the 2000s. With the boost in its international presence and the increase in its profits, the company also had to start focusing on other topics that were relevant to its stakeholders. Nowadays, the H&M group is formed by eight different brands: H&M, COS, Weekday, Other Stories, Monki, Arket, H&M Home, and Afound. Each brand has its own perspective, but all gather under the same principles and values (H&M Group, 2022).

Sustainability and consciousness became essential concepts for the future vision of the company. With a doubtful reputation in terms of ethics and good practices and much criticism in the past concerning sustainability and human rights violations, the company decided in 2010 to launch one of the biggest movements toward sustainability. The name of the movement was the Conscious Collection, and it was a line of women's clothing that was manufactured using only materials that were obtained in an environmentally responsible manner. That campaign still contributes nowadays to their aim of achieving sustainable production in 2030 by only using recycled or sustainably sourced materials in their production chain (H&M's Conscious Exclusive, 2020). This campaign has been followed by many other marketing and social media advertising strategies that promote better approaches in terms of equality, innovation, transparency, fair jobs, stakeholder 'engagement, and circular fashion, among others (Troberg & Söderlund, 2020).

Despite all the company´s efforts, consumers and stakeholders, in general, are still a bit skeptical of the real motives and the organization´s reasons behind this change in its business strategy. H&M's lack of transparency has been called unsustainable and contributes to unacceptable practices such as childhood exploitation in their factories in Burma, as referenced and studied in the book Modeslavar by Swedish journalists Moa Kärnstrand and Tobias Andersson Akerblom (Gil et al., 2016), among other publications that continuously place the company in a delicate position, damaging and compromising their public image and reputation.

A further examination of H&M´s business plan, supply chain, and execution of sustainable practices is essential. The business strategy used by the company, which is focused on producing fashionable apparel quickly and affordably, is credited with the retailer's success (Joy et al., 2012). This model of production is based on a great international network of suppliers and a constant flow of new designs and collections, which leads to a large volume of production and consumption. This type of supply chain corresponds completely with the characteristics of a fast fashion business, which produces major negative effects on the environment and society (Claudio, 2007).

Furthermore, H&M's supply chain has been under criticism during the past decade, referring directly to worker rights and environmental damage. H&M suppliers in India and Cambodia engaged in a large-scale violation of labor rights, including poor salaries, overtime working hours, and hazardous working conditions (Blomberg, 2018). Additionally, the business's environmental impact has been a major worry due to problems including excessive water use, pollution, and waste generation linked to its production operations (Van de Pol, 2021).

As previously mentioned, the company has implemented a number of sustainability initiatives to address these problems. These initiatives include the H&M Foundation, which promotes sustainable fashion education, invests in innovative ideas to produce in a less harmful way, and reduces the negative environmental impact of fast fashion (H&M Foundation, 2021). In addition, in 2011, they joined the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), an organization whose mission is to promote sustainability and transparency in the apparel industry while also promoting the adoption of measuring tools such as the Higg Index (SAC, 2021). By 2030, the firm intends to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 40% inside its operations and by 59% throughout its value chain, as part of its commitment to being climate positive by 2040 (H&M, 2020). To accomplish these objectives, H&M has made investments in energy-efficient and renewable resources, as well as new technologies and innovations in terms of materials and production processes (Van de Pol, 2021).

Despite H&M's efforts in this area, some maintain that the company's fast-fashion business model intrinsically conflicts with sustainability goals. They argue that the rapid fashion industry's high production and consumption rates are fundamentally unsustainable and contribute to a 'throwaway culture' that promotes waste and overconsumption. (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). H&M's emphasis on recycling initiatives, such as their garment collection program, has been criticized for ignoring the fundamental cause of overproduction. (Black, 2015). In addition, the lack of specificity in their production processes and the true nature of their recycled products have been assessed, becoming a red flag for many stakeholders in terms of greenwashing.

To summarize, H&M's dominance in the fast-fashion market may be attributed to the company's rapid expansion, successful business strategy, and widespread presence around the world. The company made efforts to improve its supply chain management and implement sustainable practices. Consumers and stakeholders remain skeptical of its fast-fashion business model and the

intrinsic unviability of the industry. To evaluate H&M's progress toward a more sustainable future, additional research and analysis of the company's initiatives and business practices are required.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results obtained during the process of data analysis, which at the same time help provide an answer to the main question of this case study. By gathering the implications of the collected data, an answer to the nature of H&M´s environmental green advertisement was given. First, an overview of the company's major ups and downs in terms of sustainability is presented within the selected timeframe, to be finalized with a description of the findings in the collected posts from the official H&M global Instagram account.

4.1. Overview of H&M's Green Marketing Actions

Following, a summary of the biggest ups and downs of the company in terms of sustainability is provided. The described timeline includes eleven years, from 2019 to 2022, in order to provide a comprehensive extended scenario that helped arouse conclusions and further discussion.

2010

The first Conscious Collection from H&M was released in 2010, and it was centered on the usage of sustainable materials (H&M annual report, 2017). However, results from testing conducted in laboratories that were not affiliated with the manufacturer showed that approximately thirty percent of the cotton products contained genetically modified cotton (Opar, 2010). Additionally, it was said that the corporation hacked up unsold clothing in a New York store to prevent their further sale or use (Dwyer, 2010). In response, H&M has been providing consistent updates regarding its commitment to circular production, the utilization of recycled and sustainable materials, and numerous other environmental measures (H&M Conscious Actions Sustainability Report, 2010).

2011–2018

The years 2011–2018 brought H&M several challenges, including abuses of human rights, as well as allegations of child and slave labor, which damaged the brand's reputation. As an example, the Rana Place case in 2013 had the highest impact on the corporation's image. In response, the company continually expressed its dedication to the provision of better working conditions.

Furthermore, H&M continues with the implementation of the Conscious Campaign, highlighting its dedication towards sustainability, circularity, renewable materials, etc.

2019

The Norwegian Consumer Authority issued a statement in August 2019 accusing H&M of providing insufficient and unclear information regarding the level of sustainability of its Conscious Collection. Furthermore, the Conscious Exclusive collection was considered misleading by the Norwegian Consumer Authority (Hitti, 2019).

2020

In 2020, a reformulated Conscious Collection was launched. The use of new fabric technologies and recycling methods is the most outstanding part of the campaign. As well, a new material called Circulose is included in their production processes. Nevertheless, and contrary to the company's efforts, H&M is accused of greenwashing by several journalists and other stakeholders criticizing the use of Circulose (Petter, 2020). In addition to this, according to the Fashion Transparency Index, H&M was positioned in first place as the most transparent fashion retailer. (Marriott, 2020). This index considers information related to environmental policies and supply chain processes and effects but does not include information related to workers´ wages. Moreover, it only considers 250 brands with high revenues, leaving out of its radar countless small and medium brands (Willow, 2021).

2021

The cooperation with Héctor Bellerin, a famous footballer, was launched in February 2021. As a result, the line was promoted as being constructed entirely of eco-friendly materials, including all linings and trims. Cotton was either organic or recycled from the waste produced during the textile manufacturing process; nylons and polyesters were both 100% recycled, and synthetic fabrics such as ECOVERO viscose and Tencel lyocell were made from sustainably sourced cellulose fibers (H&M Press, 2021). In addition, the collaboration Lee x H&M is released during the same month. For the first time, the firm announced the creation of 100% recycled cotton jeans and other sustainably produced clothes using TRENCEL™ Lyocell and LENZING™ ECOVERO™

Viscose. In addition, for the first time, they included Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) data on hm.com, disclosing the water, CO2, and energy effects of each denim item.

H&M launched the Innovation Stories collections in March with the inaugural collection, Science Stoy. This collection encouraged the use of innovative and more environmentally friendly materials, technology, and manufacturing processes (H&M Press, 2021). Desserto®, a cactus-based leather made from organically cultivated cacti, was shown alongside EVO by Fulgar®, a bio-sourced thread made from castor oil, a sustainable resource.

H&M added Looop Island to the popular Nintendo game Animal Crossing: New Horizons in April. Looop Island, which has an eco-friendly motif, gets its name from H&M's unique clothing recycling process, which repurposes worn items into new products (H&M Press, 2021). In the same month, Maisie Williams was named the company's Global Sustainability Ambassador in conjunction with the Looop campaign. Another collection from the Innovation Stories series was also introduced. In order to provide garment dyeing processes that are less harmful to the natural environment, the Colour Story collection makes use of innovative techniques like biotechnology, pigments derived from plants, and digital textile printing.

In the month of June, the Changing Markets Foundation published a research titled "Synthetics Anonymous: Fashion Brands' Addiction to Fossil Fuels," in which several of the most successful high-street fashion companies were investigated for the true nature of the sustainability claims that they made. H&M claims were judged to be the least transparent, with 96 percent of their sustainable claims violating their sustainability principles in some way (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021). In response, H&M launched their YouTube campaign 'The Small Things' the same month. The campaign consists of a series of educational movies that highlight advancements aimed at creating a more sustainable future.

The cooperation with WIRED was unveiled in August. WIRED's New Moves series, in collaboration with H&M, highlights individuals who are taking aggressive steps to change the fashion industry's approach toward sustainability. These individuals are driving the charge for a circular approach to clothes, ranging from community campaigners to supply chain innovators.

The recycled partnership with the denim collection was published in September, with all pieces created from recycled denim. They aimed to close the loop by renewing and reusing outdated materials in this manner.

The partnership with the well-known actor John Boyega was unveiled in October. The collection is in line with H&M's goal to employ eco-friendly materials, such as organic or recycled materials, as well as other innovative and eco-friendly materials. H&M begins a new campaign in conjunction with PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) in November, employing vegan materials derived from more sustainable sources such as natural rubber or recycled polyester (H&M Press, 2021).

2022

H&M launched the Divided Virtual Competition in January 2022 in conjunction with the virtual fashion marketplace DressX, with the goal of creating digital fashion collections focusing on sustainability (Zwieglinska, 2023). The 'Cherish Waste' collection, part of H&M's Innovation Stories, was released in select stores and online in April. This collection included one-of-a-kind assortments dedicated to furthering cutting-edge materials, technologies, and processes, as well as exploring novel ways to repurpose fabrics and materials that would otherwise be considered waste (H&M Press, 2022).

In July, a marketing student named Chelsea Commodore filed a complaint against H&M, alleging greenwashing in relation to its Conscious Collection, which was later substantiated by a Quartz investigation (Wicker, 2022). Furthermore, the corporation had a problem with Norwegian authorities over the number of unsold goods it held. To close the year, the Circular Design Story campaign, part of H&M's Innovation Stories, debuts in December. The campaign emphasizes the circular pattern of each piece of clothing and component, as well as the use of sustainable and innovative materials (H&M Press, 2022).

During the analyzed period, H&M concentrated a significant portion of its Instagram content on sustainability efforts and the promotion of 'good practices'. This includes promoting brand collaborations that utilize eco-friendly materials, such as those with the examples of Lee x H&M and Good News x H&M. Additionally, the company has implemented internal programs like the Garment Collection, which encourages customers to recycle their clothing at designated collection

points in physical stores, as well as their campaign 'Wear.Care.Recycle'. The use of other educational or internal movements, such as The Small Things campaign, shows the effort of the company to educate its customers in terms of sustainability and internal processes.

H&M has also formed partnerships with innovative companies, such as We aRe SpinDye, a Swedish fashion technology firm that has devised a more sustainable method for coloring synthetic textiles. Furthermore, the brand has undertaken educational initiatives like 'The Small Things,' a YouTube series discussing various sustainability topics within the company, such as circularity in fashion. In addition, H&M has ventured into educational gamification through the creation of 'H&M Looop Island' in Animal Crossing, where players can engage with the brand and share their thoughts.

In addition, collaborations with renowned artists, micro-influencers, influencers, actors, and associations played a significant role. H&M leveraged PETA's endorsement for their vegan collection, 'Co-exist Story', and enlisted the help of celebrities like Maisie Williams, Gigi Hadid, or Rita Ora, as well as other influencers with the campaign #HMxME, to promote their sustainable approach.

4.2. Analysis of Executional Greenwashing on H&M's Instagram

As previously mentioned, the findings of this study were divided into three main groups: company collaborations, own campaigns, and influencer marketing. The posts included in these groups were analyzed following the previous Table 3 and with a final analysis in regards to Table 4. Firstly, a separate presentation of the results regarding executional greenwashing is made, making a division and interpretation of the three clusters found. To continue with a presentation of the findings of greenwashing claims, not making a distinction between company collaborations or partnerships posts, influencer marketing posts, or H&M's campaigns and promotions.

As in the case of greenwashing claims, there is a repetition of motives and themes regarding executional greenwashing aspects. Nevertheless, it is worth separating the findings to provide a graphic representation and essentially shows and justify the association found in terms of topics and post´s characteristics.

4.2.1. Company Collaborations

Posts relating to corporations' and organizations' collaborations with H&M can be found within this group. The purpose of the partnership is to develop unique, less polluting processes and goods, in addition to recycling endeavors. In addition, there is reciprocal support for issues and beliefs when H&M works together with other organizations. As an illustration of this, we came across the Co-Exist campaign, in which H&M and PETA engaged in a mutually supportive relationship with one another. Some of the partnerships with other businesses include Lee, GoodNews, Lemlem, and the Brock Collection. The presence of these kinds of linkages in green advertisements was made more apparent in 2021 because of a larger representation of the collected data. There are a total of 16 posts that are categorized in this cluster. In addition to this, a recurring pattern in the utilization of hashtags was found. Always included in the list of hashtags utilized was #HM, as well as a hashtag that was created from the initials of the firms and H&M. The hashtags #LEExHM, #GoodNewsxHM, and #LemlemxHM are just a few examples of those that are commonly used.

In reference to the presence of executional greenwashing, the majority of the posts that are relevant to this topic make use of colors that are connected to the natural world, such as green, brown, and various shades of blue. In addition, various components associated with the natural world can be discovered, such as water, leaves, fields, or even animals. The employment of animals such as cows, horses, and ducks to develop a connection with nature and the environment is one example of the kinds of factors that are notably obvious in the collaboration with PETA.

Figure 6. H&M´s Company collaborations. From H&M´s Global Instagram account, November 3rd (left) and 4th (right), 2021.

4.2.2. Own Campaigns and Promotions

This group comprises posts about H&M's internal advertising campaigns. In these campaigns, there are a variety of approaches, including educational, innovative production and material systems, and even futuristic ones related to the Metaverse. As a highlight of innovation, new materials from various sources, such as TRENCEL™ Lyocell, ECOVERO™ Viscose, or Desserto®, a cactus-based leather produced from organically grown cacti, are also presented. Further, a partnership with an innovative company in terms of production processes as We aRe SpinDye is announced.

Like the previous cluster, this one comprises 46 posts, the majority of which were published in 2021. The preponderance of posts corresponds to the expansion of the initiative, H&M Innovation Stories. This project combines the campaigns Science Story, Color Story, Circular Story, Cherish Story, and Metaverse Couture. These collections promoted the use of innovative and environmentally favorable materials, technologies, and production processes. Additionally, additional campaign varieties are included within this group. There are those associated with H&M Studio, H&M Beauty, and those that merely advertise products or clothing. The convergence of

posts gathered under the campaign The Little Things had a specific educational objective to promote sustainable materials and the proclamation of circularity and recycling-promoting processes, among other issues pertaining to sustainability.

Parallel to the preceding group, a recurring hashtag usage pattern was identified. #HM and additional hashtags such as #HMstudio, #iamthefuture, #HMTheSmallThings, #HMinnovation, and #LetsChangeFashion were always included in the list of utilized hashtags.

Some of the posts in this group feature colors associated with the natural world, such as green and brown, in allusion to the presence of executional greenwashing. In addition, various elements of the natural world, such as water, leaves, fields, the sky, the stars, and flowers, were uncovered, as well as videos containing nature-inspired noises.

Figure 7. H&M´s Own Campaigns. From H&M´s Global Instagram account, April 15th (left), and March 16th (right), 2021.

4.2.3. Influencer Marketing

This category includes posts about products or campaigns explicitly promoted by artists, celebrities, and other types of influencers. There are various types of influencers, ranging from small or micro-influencers with a small number of followers to large influencers or celebrities who amass a large fan base. This is the case with Maisie Williams, the rechristened actress from the cast of Game of Thrones who became the brand's 2021 sustainability ambassador. In addition to recycling efforts, the partnership aims to develop novel, less polluting processes, and products. This collaboration is a fantastic method of promotion, exponentially increasing the number of people reached by these campaigns.

In 2021, this form of influencer marketing in relation to environmental green marketing was more prevalent than in previous years. Nonetheless, 2022 was notably noticeable for influencer marketing unrelated to green advertisements, with the first quarter of the year being especially noticeable.

This group contains a total of 12 posts that have been categorized. As previously observed, a recurring pattern was discovered in the usage of hashtags. Always included in the list of utilized hashtags was #HM, as well as the tag of the profile of the major personalities or artists who collaborated. In the case of minor or moderate influencers, #HMxME, and #regram were used frequently.

Some of the posts in this group employed colors that invoke nature, such as blue and green. The representation of natural landscapes is also present, as evidenced by the use of the sea, fields, and flora. Therefore, there are clear indicators of the presence of executional greenwashing.

Figure 8. H&M´s Influencer Marketing. From H&M´s Global Instagram account,
May 8 th (left), and September 18 th (right), 2021.

4.3.   Analysis of Greenwashing Claims on H&M's Instagram

Several of the collected posts refer to the seven sins of greenwashing, another segment of the provided analysis framework for the collected data. Additionally, it must be made clear that a single post may contain multiple sins.

The Hidden Trade-Off sin, evident in green claims, implies that a product is 'green' based on a limited set of characteristics without taking into account key environmental problems (Baum, 2012). Within the collected data, its presence is evident. As an illustration, the terms 'organic' and 'recycled' are frequently employed to laud the sustainability of the products while overlooking the energy and other noxious or polluting materials used in the production of those garments. This sin can be found in 22 posts, the majority of which are located as the company`s own campaigns and promotions. The following post contains an explanation of the innovative materials used as in the production process; however, there is no mention of other toxic chemicals required for the process, mass production, or the excessive and unsustainable demand for water.
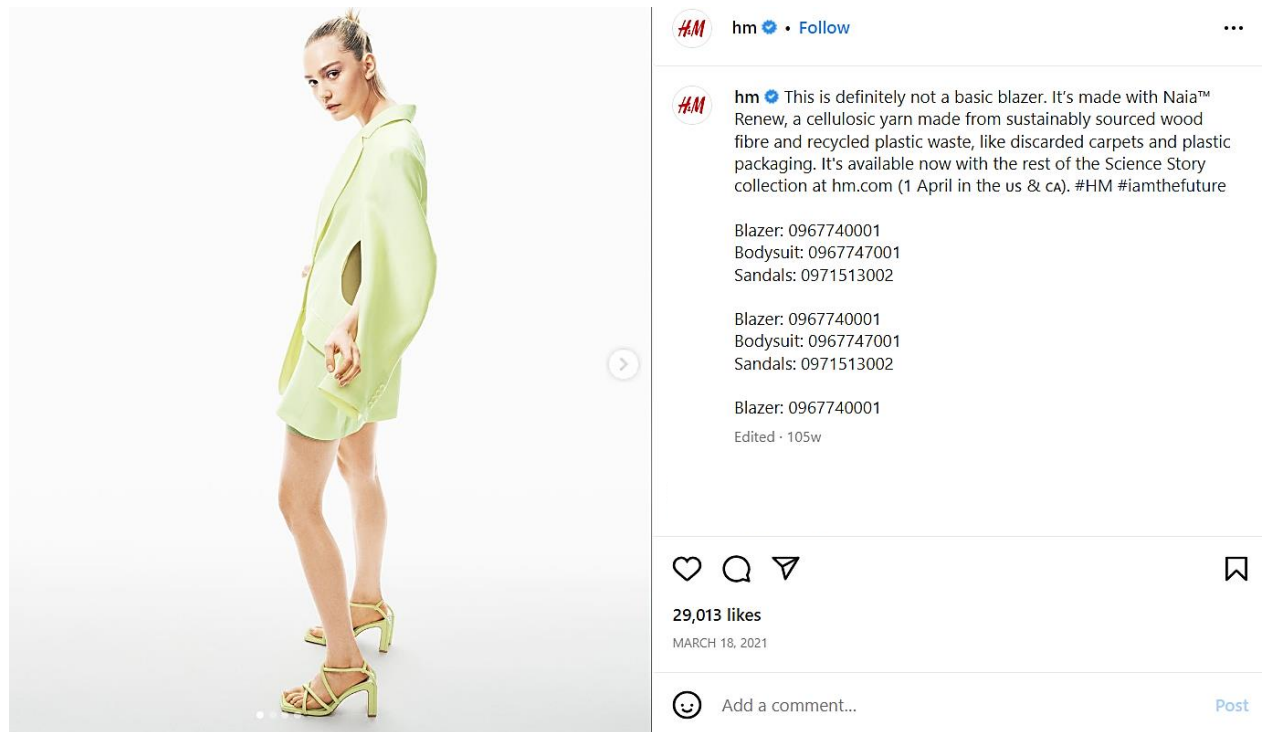
Figure 9. The Sin of Hidden Trade-Off. From H&M´s Global Instagram account, March 18 th, 2021.

When environmental claims are made without presenting evidence or certification from a third party to back them up, this is known as the "sin of no proof," and it is considered unethical. Posts that describe the utilization of renewable resources, methods, or even the sustainable composition of the products fall into this category because there is no further information to disprove or support those assertions. In total, there were 27 posts that exhibited indicators of there being no proof, meaning that a differentiation or highlighted group of posts where this took place could not be created.

The following post discusses the partnership with We aRe SpinDye. This is a clear example of insufficient evidence, as there is no empirical evidence of a smaller environmental imprint (as stated in the image) and reduced energy, water, and chemical consumption. Moreover, four images are presented in the same post. In these, the percentage of used materials is not specified, and there are unsubstantiated claims such as 'less use of synthetic chemicals' and 'processing water can be reused'.
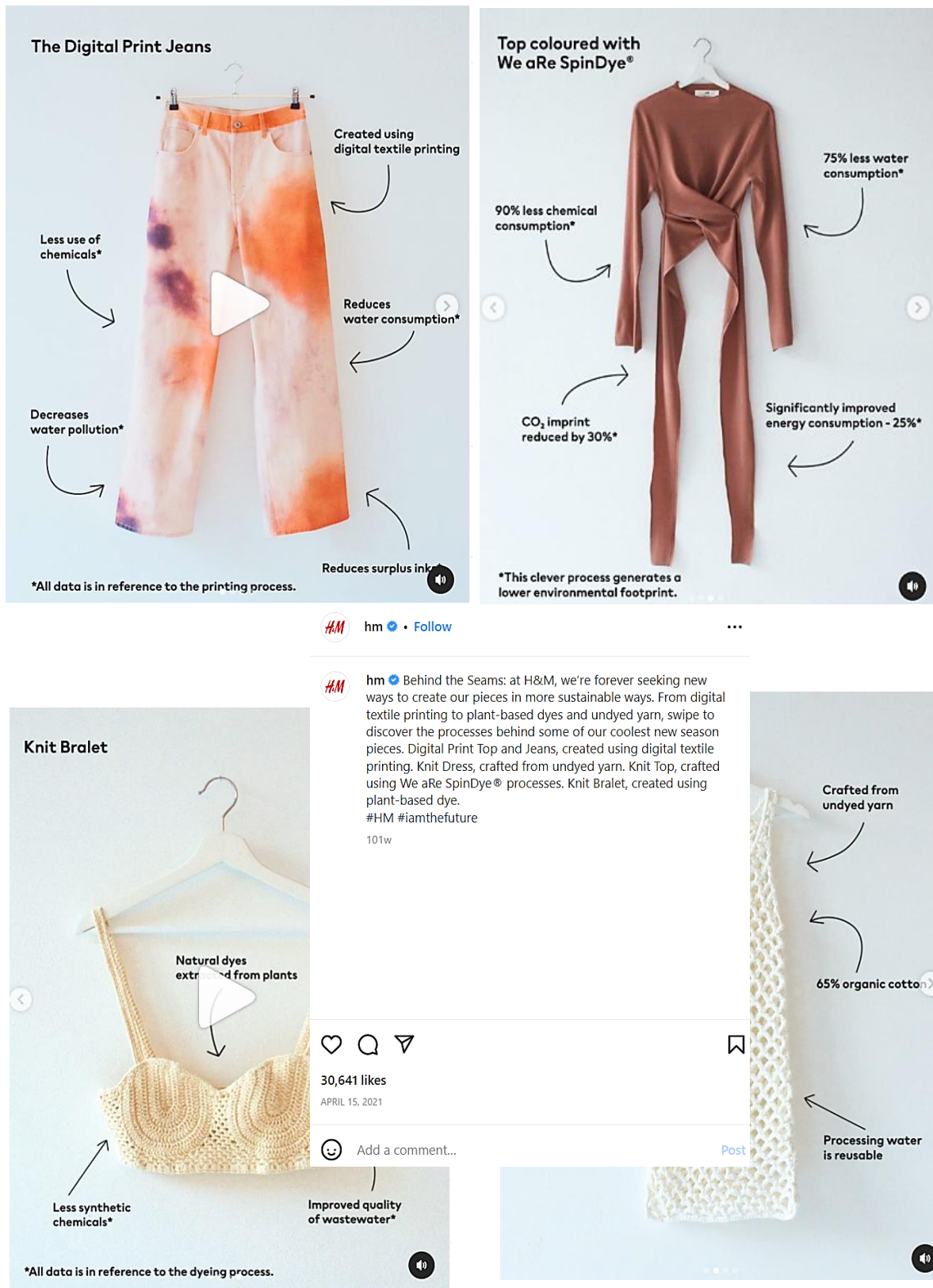
Figure 10. The Sin of No Proof. From H&M´s Global Instagram account, April 15 th, 2021.

The Sin of Vagueness presents claims that are either inadequately defined or too broad and generic with the purpose of causing consumers to misunderstand them. Vague assertions may give the impression that the company is committed to addressing environmental concerns, but they provide no specific information about the company's strategies or measures to achieve them. In total, there were 29 posts that exhibited indicators of vagueness, and most of the posts belonged to its own campaigns and initiatives.

Within the encountered data and posts, terms such as '100% recycled cotton', 'more sustainable choices and materials', 'cruelty-free', 'totally vegan', 'sustainably sourced wood', 'smaller environmental footprint', 'sustainable materials', 'plant-based ingredients' or 'pre-consumer recycled materials' show signs of vagueness. The unclear specification of these terms, as well as their continuous repetition, mislead consumers and provide an untruthful vision of the company and its approach. An example of the sin of vagueness is presented in the following post.
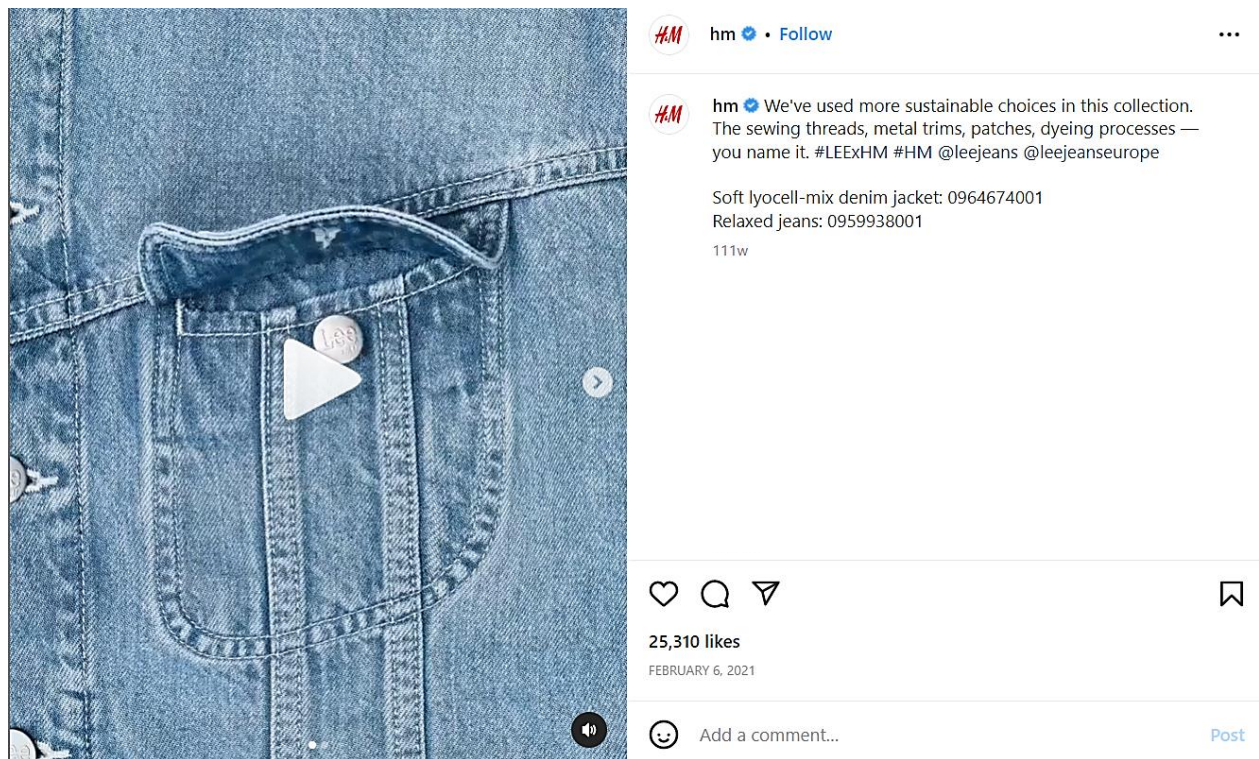

Figure 11. The Sin of Vagueness. From H&M´s Global Instagram account, February 6 th, 2021.

The term 'lesser of two evils' relates to claims that might or might not be truthful and true but that, at the same time, divert attention from other environmental implications that the company has. In this instance, the frequency of this sin can be found consistently throughout the majority of the collected posts. This occurs when the corporation is focused on delivering information about positive performance and respect for the environment but forgets to explain the adverse consequences of its manufacturing processes and the way in which they foster the never-ending buy-dispose cycle in which the industry is involved. An example of this sin is displayed in the following image.
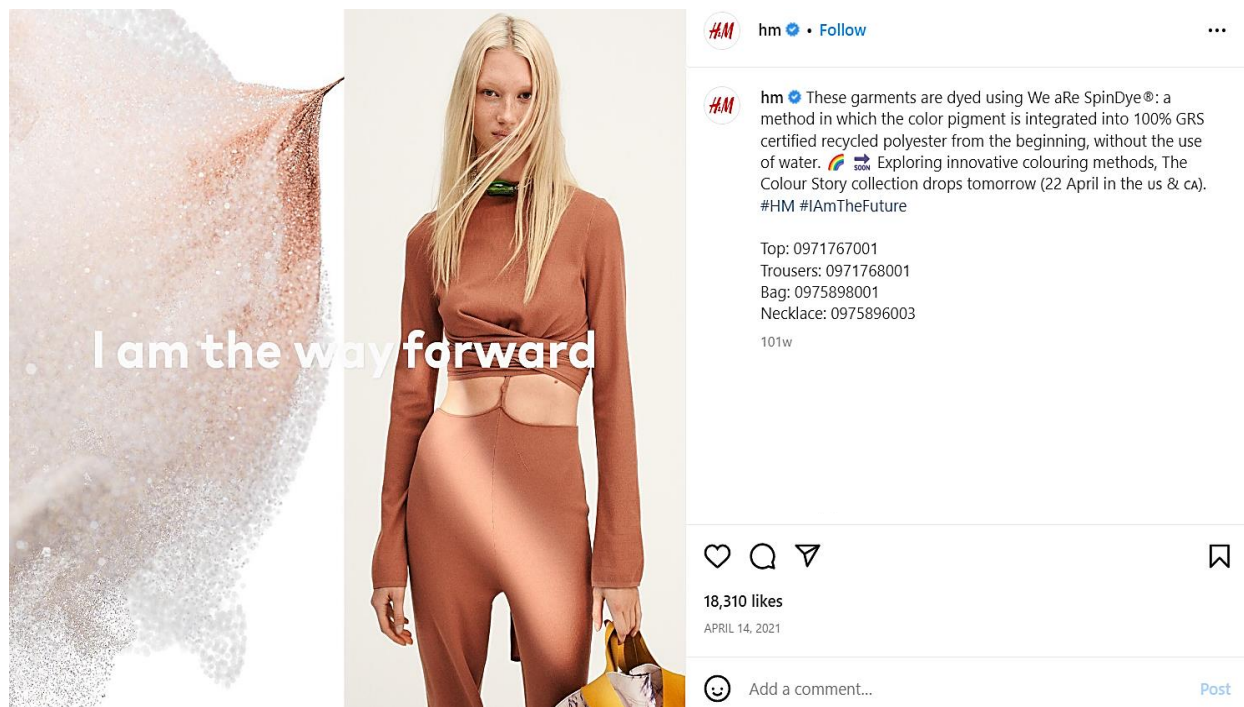
Figure 12. The Sin of Lesser of Two Evils. From H&M´s Global Instagram account, April 14th, 2021.

Upon analyzing the collected data, it was not possible to find enough evidence for the remaining categories of sins in environmental claims. These categories include the worship of false labels, where products falsely suggest third-party support; fibbing, which involves demonstrably incorrect environmental claims; and irrelevance, where claims may be accurate but neither useful nor pertinent to environmentally conscious consumers.

The last part of the findings consists of a global categorization of all the posts regarding green advertising. Table 5 presents a general consideration of the analysis results, where the summary of executional greenwashing and greenwashing claims is shown.

Table 5. Results of the analyzed data		
Executional Greenwashing variables	Colors	Present
	Sounds	Present
	Images related to important issues or causes	No evidence
	Natural scenery	Present
Greenwashing Claim variables	Hidden Tradeoff	Present
	No Proof	Present
	Vagueness	Present
	Worship false labels	No evidence
	Irrelevant	No evidence
	Lesser of Two Evils	Present
	Fibbing	No evidence
Number of identified variables	**Total**	**7**

Source: Own elaboration from previous materials

According to the results presented in Table 5, a total of seven variables were identified during the data analysis. Consequently, and based on the selected metric previously explained in Table 4, it can be affirmed that H&M engages in a high probability of greenwashing practices that deceive consumers and other stakeholders in general. As a means of attempting to answer the primary research question posed by this case study, the following chapter provides a broader perspective and analysis of the observed findings.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of the Study and Conclusions

This qualitative single case study's objective was to shed light on the strategies and tactics utilized by H&M to promote its sustainability efforts by analyzing the claims, tone, and visuals employed in its Instagram advertisements. The study analyzed the alignment between H&M's green marketing strategies and its real sustainability practices. This was done by conducting a qualitative content analysis of the company's Instagram posts. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether H&M's promotional efforts constitute greenwashing.

The research question guiding this study was, "What is the nature of H&M's green advertisement presented in their social media posts to promote environmental sustainability, and to what extent do those qualify as examples of greenwashing?". Although the literature on greenwashing and green marketing is extensive, a more precise examination of the developing social media context and the fast fashion industry was needed. This case study contributes to the growing literature on green marketing and greenwashing, emphasizing the importance of social media platforms like Instagram. Within the composed theoretical framework for this research, different concepts and definitions are explained in detail, such as green marketing, green advertising, and greenwashing. Further, a short presentation of the key characteristics of fast fashion retailers is provided.

CSR activities are a source of competitive advantage and go hand in hand with the widely used term sustainability (Mishra & Modi, 2016). However, the manipulation of consumers through marketing and advertising techniques is distorting reality. Businesses use green marketing as a strategy to appear more environmentally friendly while attracting customers who are becoming more concerned about environmental issues. Companies can utilize different types of strategies and practices regarding green marketing, so they have developed a green matrix that includes four types of strategies that can be adopted to promote green marketing. The four types of marketing strategies outlined in the matrix are lean or uniform, extreme green marketing, defensive green marketing, and long-term green marketing (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). Defensive green marketing is the most visible strategy when speaking about fast fashion businesses, and it involves incorporating environmentally-friendly tactics to enhance the brand's sustainable reputation and minimize harm to the brand´s image. Many times, businesses in the fast fashion industry employ

this kind of strategy. As in the case of the approaches to green marketing strategies, the shift in businesses' CSR has also impacted the modification of the conventional marketing formula by transforming the traditional "4 Ps" of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion). Green promotion is an essential strategy for this study, as its aim is to analyze the communications and promotions of H&M through an analysis of their social media posts and their related content. Within this concept, we find green advertising, a component of green marketing.

Green advertising is any type of advertising that explicitly or implicitly addresses the relationship between a product or service and the biophysical environment, promotes a green lifestyle, or presents a corporate image of environmental responsibility (Banerjee et al., 1995, p. 22). As well, social media has become an important advertising tool in the fashion business, especially for promoting sustainability and eco-friendly practices. Companies like H&M have recognized the power of social media and are today employing platforms like Instagram to promote eco-friendly efforts and encourage consumer participation and purchases (Arnaboldi et al., 2016). Influencer marketing has also contributed to the prominence of eco-friendly fashion, motivating firms to adapt and modify their services accordingly (Chu & Seock, 2020). However, it is important to address issues such as greenwashing if we want to guarantee that the propagation of environmentally friendly practices will continue to be genuine and productive (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Greenwashing refers to the practice of organizations providing false or incomplete information to create an environmentally responsible public image (Furlow, 2010, p. 22). This deceptive portrayal of values and organizational measures often leads to consumer skepticism and distrust, as it usually involves low transparency and raises questions regarding human rights, working conditions, and environmental preservation (Strähle et al., 2016). Delmas and Burbano (2011) investigated further into the causes of greenwashing and classified the many factors into four categories: nonmarket external drivers; market external drivers; organizational drivers; and individual organizational drivers. Greenwashing can be analyzed from two perspectives: executional greenwashing and greenwashing claims (Parguel et al., 2015). Understanding the H&M case and addressing the study's research question was possible through the analysis and use of the previous literature framework.

The research adopted a qualitative single-case study design, utilizing Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to analyze H&M's sustainable claims on its official Instagram page. A deductive approach based on prior theoretical and empirical research studies was employed, with data collected from

H&M's global official Instagram account between January 2021 and December 2022. Additional data on H&M's environmentally sustainable approach, as well as instances where the company faced criticism or legal issues, was obtained from sources such as sustainability reports, official press publications, and peer-reviewed articles.

The findings of this study were organized into two main groups. First, an overview of H&M's major green environmental marketing actions and criticisms was provided from 2010 to 2022, which suggested a connection between the accusations of bad practices and the company´s green advertising efforts. Second, an analysis of H&M's Instagram posts in 2021 and 2022 was presented, with three main groups of analysis: company collaborations, own campaigns, and influencer marketing. Each group displayed various aspects of executional greenwashing, including the use of colors, sounds, and images related to the natural world to create an impression of environmental consciousness. As well, greenwashing claims in H&M's Instagram posts were analyzed and categorized into the seven sins of greenwashing, with the most prevalent sins being hidden trade-offs, lack of proof, and vagueness.

The results indicate a high degree of the greenwashing present in H&M's environmentally friendly ads, raising suspicions about the company's commitment to environmental sustainability and the accuracy of its sustainability promotions. Although H&M has made public attempts to promote sustainability through partnerships, initiatives, and influencer marketing, the findings demonstrate that the company's advertisements still include aspects of greenwashing.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This research offers valuable theoretical contributions to the field of green marketing and greenwashing practices in the fashion industry. By analyzing H&M's green advertisement strategies and assessing the extent of greenwashing, the study enriches the existing literature on corporate sustainability communication (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Mishra & Modi, 2016; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

First, the study extends the application of the 'seven sins of greenwashing' to the fashion industry, specifically to H&M's advertising practices. This framework was created by the TerraChoice Group and further utilized and expanded by other authors (TerraChoice Group, 2007; Baum, 2012).

By systematically identifying and categorizing greenwashing claims present in H&M's social media posts, the research provides a deeper understanding of how fashion brands may use greenwashing tactics to create an eco-friendly image. This furthers the theoretical knowledge of greenwashing strategies employed by fashion brands and can be used as a basis for comparison with other companies in the industry.

Second, the research contributes to prior knowledge of the relationship between accusations of a company's unsustainable practices and its green advertising efforts. The findings suggest a correlation between external scrutiny and H&M's subsequent green marketing campaigns. This highlights the potential influence of public opinion and external pressures on a company's green marketing strategies, providing a new perspective on how companies may react to criticism and adapt their communication efforts.

Third, the study expands on the existing literature on executional greenwashing (Parguel et al., 2013; Parguel et al., 2015; De Freitas Netto et al., 2020) by examining the use of visuals, sounds, and other elements in H&M's green advertisements. By analyzing the way H&M employs these elements to create a perception of environmental consciousness, the research adds to the understanding of how executional greenwashing can be employed in the fashion industry. This insight can help researchers further investigate the psychological mechanisms behind the effectiveness of executional greenwashing and its impact on the attitudes and behaviors of consumers.

In conclusion, the theoretical contributions of this study include extending the application of the seven sins of greenwashing framework to the fashion industry, examining the relationship between external scrutiny and green advertising efforts, and gaining a deeper understanding of executional greenwashing in the context of fashion marketing. These contributions further our understanding of corporate sustainability communication, green marketing strategies, and the implications of greenwashing practices beyond the fashion industry.

5.3. Managerial Implications

This research on H&M's green advertising practices and the extent of greenwashing provides valuable insights for fashion brands striving to promote environmental sustainability and enhance their brand image. Fashion companies can improve their own marketing efforts by evaluating H&M's communication tactics and learning from both the successes and mistakes of the retailer's numerous marketing campaigns.

The lack of openness in the sustainability claims made by H&M is one of the key issues that have been highlighted because of this investigation. To build trust and credibility with consumers, fashion brands should ensure their green advertising efforts are transparent. Providing detailed information about sustainability initiatives, progress, and challenges can help prevent accusations of greenwashing and foster positive consumer perceptions of the brand's commitment to sustainability.

Consumers are increasing their skepticism of organizations´ green marketing claims and strategies therefore, brands that are perceived to engage in greenwashing may suffer reputational damage. To avoid such consequences, companies should prioritize authenticity and consistency in their sustainability communication. Aligning marketing messages with actual sustainable practices and ensuring that all aspects of the company's operations are genuinely focused on environmental stewardship are crucial.

The research highlights the importance of timely and appropriate responses to external scrutiny or accusations of greenwashing. Fashion brands should be prepared to address criticism by providing clear explanations of their sustainability strategies and demonstrating their commitment to improvement. Engaging in open dialogue with stakeholders and incorporating their feedback into future sustainability efforts can help strengthen the brand's reputation and maintain consumer trust.

The study emphasizes the role of executional greenwashing in shaping consumer perceptions. Managers should be mindful of the use of visuals, sounds, and other elements in their green advertisements. Ensuring that these elements genuinely reflect the company's sustainability practices and do not create a false impression of environmental commitment is essential.

As part of their sustainability communication strategy, fashion brands should consider investing in consumer education initiatives, such as H&M's 'The Small Things' campaign. By providing

consumers with information on sustainable practices, materials, and innovations, companies can foster a deeper understanding of environmental issues and encourage more conscious consumption habits. In conclusion, the insights derived from this research highlight the importance of transparent, authentic, and consistent green advertising practices for fashion brands. By addressing criticism, avoiding executional greenwashing, and educating consumers, companies can enhance their brand image and credibility while promoting environmental sustainability.

5.4.   Assessing the Quality of the Study

Addressing the quality of this case study to provide reliability to the findings is essential. First, the presented research question is well-defined and focused, aiming to analyze H&M's social media posts to assess green advertising and greenwashing practices. The study builds upon a solid theoretical foundation, citing various sources that provide relevant literature and theories. Recognizing the study's limitations is crucial to conducting an adequate assessment of the data´s consistency. Because of its restricted scope and focus on H&M, the study's findings are unlikely to be generalizable to the fashion sector (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The fact that the company's operational strategies may have deviated from significant industry trends in recent years explains it.

The methodology of the case study is appropriate for addressing the research question, employing a qualitative single-case study using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to analyze H&M's social media content (Schreier, 2012). However, a more detailed explanation of the QCA methodology and its application to the case study could have strengthened this section. Moreover, the research relies predominantly on qualitative analysis, which, while valuable for in-depth exploration, may be subject to researcher bias and interpretation (Walliman, 2006). Incorporating quantitative data, such as social media engagement metrics like 'likes', used hashtags, followers, or consumer surveys (Kietzmann et al., 2011), could provide a more objective assessment of the impact of H&M's green advertising efforts and strengthen the overall study.

A longitudinal study may offer further insights into the effectiveness and credibility of H&M's green advertising over time, given the dynamic nature of the fashion industry, consumer expectations, and sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, the use of other social media sources such

as TikTok or Twitter could provide a bigger picture of H&M's advertising efforts, enriching the research and providing further conclusions and connections.

The data collection process includes diverse and relevant sources, including H&M's Instagram posts, sustainability reports, official press publications, and peer-reviewed articles (Maxwell, 2005). Moreover, more detail on the data collection process, including the selection and sampling criteria, could have enriched the research. The data analysis process is described in a clear and thorough way. The study classifies posts based on their content and relevance to environmental sustainability issues and evaluates them for signs of greenwashing.

On the other hand, the case study could have gained value from a discussion of alternate hypotheses and viewpoints, which would have involved explicitly tying the findings back to the research question and aims. The case study makes a contribution to the current body of knowledge on green advertising and greenwashing in the fashion sector, particularly with respect to H&M. While the generalizability of the findings might be limited due to the single-case study design, the research adds value to the broader discussion on corporate sustainability and green marketing (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

Ethical considerations are not explicitly addressed in the case study. However, since the data comes from publicly available sources, such as H&M's Instagram account and sustainability reports, ethical concerns may not be significant in this particular study (Kaiser, 2009). Nevertheless, in order to maintain the privacy of other users who commented on the collected posts, comments and usernames were hidden.

The case study is well-structured, logical, and easy to follow, with language, style, and tone appropriate for an academic audience. However, the formatting of citations and references could be improved for better readability and consistency.

Despite these limitations, the research still provides a meaningful assessment of H&M's green advertising practices. According to the findings, it appears that the corporation's efforts have been welcomed with both acclaim and skepticism, and the efficacy of the company's actions toward sustainability is still up for discussion. The findings also reveal a correlation between accusations of unsustainable practices and H&M's green advertising efforts, as previously mentioned.

The study increases the theoretical understanding of green advertising and greenwashing by providing a comprehensive analysis of H&M's practices and offers a basis for future research that will expand on and dig deeper into the difficulties of green advertising and its ramifications for both businesses and consumers. This study emphasizes the importance of transparency, trustworthiness, and authenticity in corporate sustainability communications (Parguel et al., 2011) by revealing apparent contradictions and ambiguities in H&M's sustainability claims and advertising activities. Recognizing these limitations and quality assessments, this research remains a good starting point for further investigations into green advertising and greenwashing within the fashion industry. While there is room for improvement in certain aspects, such as methodology explanation and ethical considerations, the case study effectively addresses its research question and provides insights into H&M's green advertising practices.

5.5. Limitations and Directions for future research

This study presents limitations that should be acknowledged and explained. First, focusing solely on H&M may not provide a comprehensive understanding of greenwashing practices across the entire fast fashion industry. A broader analysis of various companies within the sector would be more informative in determining industry-wide trends and practices. Second, the study relies on the content analysis of social media posts, which can be subjective in nature (Krippendorff, 2018).

Different interpretations of messaging, tone, and visuals could lead to varied conclusions, potentially affecting the study's overall validity. A more objective approach, such as a quantitative analysis of measurable sustainability indicators, might yield more reliable results. Additionally, the research question's scope is limited to H&M's environmental claims in social media advertising campaigns, potentially neglecting other communication channels such as in-store promotions, website content, or public relations efforts (Kotler et al., 2010). A more comprehensive understanding of H&M's green marketing tactics could have been achieved by analyzing the company's sustainability communication strategies across multiple channels. Lastly, the study's focus on greenwashing may inadvertently overlook genuine sustainability efforts made by H&M. By focusing on the hazards and benefits of the company's communication strategies, the study may overlook the positive impact of H&M's sustainability initiatives.

This study examined H&M's green advertising tactics in depth, showing the complexity of greenwashing in the fashion sector (Parguel et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there are various potential research directions that can build on and supplement the findings provided in this study. Researchers could expand the scope of studied brands to include other fast fashion brands, slow fashion companies, or those within the luxury fashion segment (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Conducting cross-cultural and age group comparisons might help to explore consumer perceptions and expectations of corporate sustainability efforts across different cultures, markets, and age segments (D'Souza et al., 2007).

Performing longitudinal studies could be valuable in analyzing the evolution of green advertising strategies over time and tracking the progress of the fashion industry in addressing environmental sustainability issues (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). Integration of quantitative data, such as engagement metrics from social media or results from consumer surveys, may give a more objective evaluation of the impact of green advertising activities on the views and behaviors of consumers (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Exploring the function played by rules and standards in the fashion sector could prove useful in the fight against greenwashing and to improve the credibility of green advertising (Walker & Wan, 2012). Assessing the impact of collaborative initiatives and partnerships on green advertising practices and examining their influence on transparency and credibility in sustainability claims may provide further insights. Lastly, investigating the role of influencers and celebrities in shaping consumer perceptions and driving trends in the fashion industry, as well as their involvement in green advertising campaigns and their influence on consumers' attitudes toward sustainability, could be worthwhile (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016).

By exploring these directions for future research, scholars and practitioners can continue to build upon the current study's findings, deepening their understanding of green advertising and greenwashing within the fashion industry. This will ultimately lead to the creation of sustainability communication strategies that are more effective and credible, which can help drive good change in the fast fashion industry and beyond.

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