



**The role of civil liberties and corporate social
responsibility disclosure information in the fast-fashion
sector**

Master degree in International Business

Nuno André da Silva Medon

Leiria, September of 2023



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Dissertation under the supervision of Professor Teresa Cristina Pereira Eugénio, Professor
at the Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão in Instituto Politécnico de Leiria

Leiria, September of 2023

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Resumo

A corrupção está generalizada nos países em desenvolvimento, não porque as culturas das pessoas são diferentes umas das outras, mas porque as condições são propícias a este acontecimento. A motivação das pessoas nos países em desenvolvimento para obterem rendimentos é relativamente mais forte, exacerbada pela pobreza, pelo desemprego e pelos baixos salários. A concorrência política e os direitos civis são frequentemente limitados. As leis e os princípios éticos na administração pública e privada estão subdesenvolvidos e mal preparados.

A indústria *fast-fashion* encontra-se numa encruzilhada entre a rentabilidade e a procura crescente de transparência e responsabilidade social. Este estudo analisa dados derivados de relatórios de transparência fiscal de 153 organizações do *Fashion Transparency Index*, lançando luz sobre as fases iniciais da pesquisa sobre a legitimidade da divulgação de informações de 21 países e o grau de liberdade nesses 21 países. Esta investigação centra-se na informação divulgada pelas empresas de *fast-fashion* e efetua uma análise crítica para determinar qual dos pilares Económico, Social e Ambiental é mais importante nos relatórios de RSE, analisando o impacto que os direitos civis podem ter nas organizações.

As conclusões sustentam que estas empresas recorrem a práticas de divulgação para legitimar as suas operações e responder às pressões dos movimentos e táticas de liberdade globais. No entanto, estas práticas podem nem sempre refletir total transparência e realismo. Este estudo realça a importância dos direitos civis na promoção e divulgação de RSE e explica as implicações teóricas e práticas desta relação para a sociedade, as empresas e o governo. Ao elucidar a forma de como as empresas de *fast-fashion* alavancam a legitimidade e respondem aos movimentos sociais nas suas práticas de divulgação, esta investigação pretende dar um contributo significativo para um discurso mais alargado sobre transparência, sustentabilidade e responsabilidade organizacional.

Palavras-chave: Corrupção, Legitimidade, Responsabilidade social das empresas, Indústria da moda rápida, Direitos civis, Movimentos sociais

Abstract

Corruption is widespread in developing countries, not because the culture of the people is different around the world, but because the conditions are conducive to it. The motivation of people in developing countries to earn income is relatively stronger, exacerbated by poverty, unemployment, and low wages. Political competition and civil liberties are often limited. Laws and ethical principles in public and private administration are underdeveloped and poorly prepared.

The fast-fashion industry is at a crossroads where profitability meets the growing demand for transparency and social responsibility. This study analyzes data derived from fiscal transparency reports of 153 organizations from the Fashion Transparency Index, shedding light on the initial stages of the research about legitimacy disclosure information from 21 countries and the degree of freedom in these 21 countries. This research focuses on the information disclosed by fast-fashion companies and carries out a critical analysis to determine which of the Economic, Social, and Environmental pillars is most important on CSR reports, looking at the impact that civil liberties can have on organizations.

The findings support that fast-fashion companies engage in disclosure practices to legitimize their operations and respond to the pressures of global freedom movements and tactics. However, these practices may not always reflect complete transparency and realism. This study highlights the importance of civil liberties in promoting CSR disclosure and sheds light on the theoretical and practical implications of this relationship for society, business, and government. By elucidating how fast-fashion companies leverage legitimacy and respond to social movements in their disclosure practices, this research aims to make a meaningful contribution to the broader discourse on corporate transparency, sustainability, and responsibility.

Keywords: Corruption, Legitimacy, Corporate social responsibility, Fast-Fashion industry, Civil Liberties, Social movements

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AOR	Associational and Organizational Rights
ARs	Annual Reports
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
FEB	Freedom of Expression and Belief
ISO	International Standards on Organizations
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
MNEs	Multi-National Enterprises
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PAI	Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights
ROL	Rule of Law
SGDs	Sustainability Development Goals
SRs	Sustainability Reports
TBL	Triple Bottom Lines
USA	United States of America
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WEF	Water Eutrophication Footprint
WFS	Water Footprint of Scarcity

1. Introduction

1.1. Investigation

Corruption is an increasingly discussed topic these days. With the recent international crises, it is of increasing interest to find solutions to tackle them effectively and, of course, in an ethical-legal way. It is believed that the best way to grow countries, and their economies and give a better quality of life to their populations, is to end any type of corruption in organizations since better transparency reduces the information asymmetry between principals and agents and enables shareholders and other stakeholders to make more informed decisions (Wu, 2005). The way people manage their lives becomes fairer and more transparent, and so it becomes easier to solve the problems that may arise and what factors can be changed so that the problems are solved.

Corruption in organizations, as is well known, should be understood as an illegal act, and should always be worldwide combated and eliminated, once it can negatively affect many different activities (Pilonato, 2020). Since this issue can manifest itself in various ways and impact on countless individuals, it becomes crucial to examine how information disclosure processes in organizations can be analyzed in response to such problems, particularly in the context of corruption situations of an economic, social and environmental responsibility nature.

1.2. Main research question

The insights absorbed from this dissertation hold significant implications for comprehending the functioning of the public sector when faced with the problems of corruption, namely how the information disclosed can affect a society. In environmental and sustainable terms, it will be important to understand the importance of companies communicating how they integrate sustainability concepts into their decisions and informing stakeholders about their sustainability projects and actions, since there has recently been an emphasis on integrating ethical, social, environmental, and economic issues into company reports (Eugénio et al. 2013).

Formulating this concern, it will be important to understand, as a research question and the main objective of the study, the importance of the legitimate information disclosure practices of fast-fashion companies in addressing the economic, social, and environmental levels of impacts in their operations based on society's civil rights of each country.

1.3.Dissertation structure

This dissertation is divided into 6 main chapters. The first one is the introduction of the dissertation, with the proper explanation of why this topic was chosen and what are the main questions to be answered. The second and third chapters consist of the literature review that supports this dissertation and the possible research hypotheses analyzed. In the fourth chapter is the methodology analyzed. This is divided into two distinct scenarios that are reviewed using different analysis techniques. Here are also analyzed the sources of information collection for the variables that were the target of the study. The fifth chapter consists of the discussion of the results and finally, the sixth chapter contains the conclusions of the work, its limitations, and directions for future research. At the end of the dissertation are published the references and webography.

2. Corruption in organizations

The actions of corruption can demonstrate characteristics contrary to the law or the duties of a certain position, by someone who in the performance of his duties, accepts to receive an advantage or a bonus in exchange for the provision of a service. Strictly speaking, the definition of corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016). It may be present in citizens, government, shareholders, and employees, and beyond their positions, their true decisions can be reversed in actions that bring benefits to organizations. Therefore, the costs associated with such decisions are supported by organizations which creates challenges for investors. This question is often viewed as negative for business as it affects a company's ability to compete and increases operational costs such as those associated with heightened legal risk (Hills et al., 2009).

Corruption is conceptualized by Transparency International (2022) as the abuse of power that weakens democracy, hinders economic development, and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, and environmental crisis. According to this movement, corruption can take many forms and can include behaviors such as bribe payments, favoritism, use of influence, and irregular payments in public contracts. This type of corruption can deleteriously affect a country's integrity (Voyer & Beamish, 2004). It can reduce operational efficiency, delay the dissemination of information, impact on income distribution, and increase the poverty level of a nation (Chen et al, 2010).

The growth of corrupt trends has been increasing as investment rises. (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016) From a macroeconomic perspective, the level of corruption in a country is determined by the country's economic, political, and cultural levels. Nevertheless, corruption affects these three parts since the system construction and execution of the decentralization degree between the national agencies, recruitment, appointment, compensation, and punishment not only affect the bud of corruption but also have a significant impact on the spread of corruption (Liu, 2016). In a micro-environment, individuals in the same system tend to embark on independent acts of corruption. There are several significant differences in the micro-level risk of corruption such as the influence of individual gender, education, values, and other determinants that conduct to rational choice theory, which focuses on individual behavior and assumes that each person tries to maximize their utility, aiming that the potential benefits of corruption exceed the potential costs (Monteduro et al., 2016).

Regarding the consequences of corruption at the organizational level, corruption is seen as a negative way of operating, reducing the company's operational efficiency (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016). Transparency in companies can be analyzed by the availability of information specific to listed companies, regarding financial and non-financial information, including information on economic, social, and environmental responsibility, and the desire to be transparent therefore results in information being made available to the public through periodic reports or the use of other means and channels, for example, websites, social media, blogs, social networks, etc. (Guo et al., 2022).

2.1. Corruption as a social problem

A social problem concerns not only the relationships that exist between the company, and society but also the contributions that these relationships can make to improving people's quality of life. A social problem is a condition or pattern of behavior that contradicts some other condition or pattern of behavior and is defined as incompatible with the desired quality of life. It is caused by factors operating at various levels of social life and involves inter-group conflicts, requiring social action to resolve them (Aspridis et al., 2013).

Corruption in general can be understood as a social problem since it affects the whole of society, goes against the pattern of behaviors or values and is characterized by a deviation from the value-oriented and norm-adapted way of promoting society's interests and needs. In the international environment, various interpretations of the term corruption are used, reflecting the preference of private interest over public interest. Therefore, the definition of corruption must be based on its specific manifestation, which is determined by the conditions of implementation of corruption in various spheres of social activities. The government's attempt to formulate and implement different and varied policies to combat corruption and reveal collective action to solve it sometimes fails to satisfy society's need for swift action and expected results, as these gaps in corruption are difficult to assess and hidden in non-financial forms, especially in the fast-fashion industry over actions on consumption, rights, and sustainability (Aspridis et al., 2013).

2.2. Effect of corruption on reports and sustainability development goals

Companies in publishing their financial statements are required to declare fair information that demonstrates the performance and the good course of the management. The requirement

of the Annual Reports (ARs) and Sustainability Reports (SRs) can drive the manager to commit fraud and manipulations on the financial statements, so those reports play a very important role in the decision and action process of each organization. In other words, they are the hidden card that makes a company attractive, and it can be played the wrong way when it does not demonstrate its true power. False information disclosed that has been manipulated will provide incorrect information that will be detrimental to decision-making. This certainly can cause losses to the users that affect the company not only financially, but also to the company's reputation; reducing the company's ability to maintain business continuity and even resulting in bankruptcy (Utami, 2019).

In 2015, United Nations countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which sets out 17 Goals (SDGs), which aim to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages. But it is also cross-cutting so that progress in its implementation enhances the goals of global health and sustainability progress. The 2030 Agenda and its Goals offer a comprehensive global vision for sustainable development, rather than limited to developing countries based on values such as equity and respect for human rights by addressing issues such as sustainable financing, scientific research, innovation, and monitoring and evaluation. Corruption poses a significant global threat and undermines democratic institutions, contributes to government instability, and decreases trust. Corruption threatens the economy by undermining fair competition and discouraging investment and trade. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the state and established laws have a significant and mutually reinforcing interrelationship in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and access to justice for all (Figure 1). As such, and as countries around the world are investing increasing efforts to meet the expectations placed by the 2030 Agenda, the crucial importance of anti-corruption in sustainable development is more appreciated than ever. The importance of anti-corruption is explicitly highlighted in Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), which requires states to "promote peace and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable societies and inclusive institutions at all levels" by reducing financial illicit or financial crimes, enhancing the recovery and return of stolen assets, substantially reducing bribery and corruption and development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (United Nations, 2023).

Figure 1

Sustainability Development Goals



Note. From Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations. (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, accessed December 2022)

Having keywords as the five P's such as People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, this document objectively aims to reach the year 2030 ending poverty and hunger in all of their forms, protecting the planet from degradation, ensuring that all human beings will enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives on a peaceful and inclusive society, all of this mobilizing all the necessary means to strengthened global solidarity, including through sustainable consumption and production, taking urgent action on climate change (United Nations, 2023).

2.3. Legitimacy theory

Legitimacy theory emphasizes that organizations continually attempt to ensure that they are perceived as functioning within the bond and norms of the society in which they operate. This theory implies the existence of a "social contract" between institutional organization legitimacy and its respective societies (Deegan, 2014). This social contract deals with whether an organization operates within the norms of society and the terms of this contract could be partly explicit, which consist of legal requirements, and partly implicit, related to the community's expectations. An organization needs to ensure that the terms are not breached to maintain a good state of legitimacy for the organization through which society allows the organization its continued existence. Inherent to this theory, society is considered

as a whole, without considering individuals separately, so in this situation, the residual products of the organization are absorbed by society (the natural environment), usually at no cost to the organization (product stewardship relationship). Inherently, organizations should not have any rights to these benefits to allow organizations to continue to exist, society would expect the benefits to outweigh the cost to society (Deegan et al., 2002; Belal 2008).

Expectations of society at large must be fulfilled by the organization, not just the owners or the demands of investors. Therefore, the theory argues that "organizations can only continue to exist if the society on which they are based perceives that the organization is operating according to a value system that is commensurate with society's value system" (Gray et al., 2010, p.28). Thus, following legitimacy theory, the level of legitimacy of an organization is of the utmost importance for its continued survival. However, operating an organization in this way is not always easy, as the various norms and expectations are constantly changing and therefore it is difficult to achieve congruence with the organization's goals. As a result, a so-called "legitimacy gap" can arise. Sometimes there may be "legitimacy threats" as, result of unexpected occurrences such as a financial scandal, major accidents, or any incident that affects the organization's reputation. These types of gaps can pose a risk to an organization unless it implements an appropriate legitimization strategy.

Organizations merely release façades to cover up the surrounding legitimacy gaps. Organizational failures in annual reports can be seen as a useful form of the company's reaction to the demands of interested parties, the information disclosed by organizational representatives may be intended to assure interested parties about the legitimacy of the organization involved (Blanc et al., 2019). While researchers (Cho et al., 2015) explain that the disclosed SRs and ARs are ambiguous and that they are not truly well reported, regarding the practice of actions for the execution of the proposed reality by the organizations. The study presents that social and institutional pressures demonstrate that organizations engage in hypocrisy and develop façades, thus severely limiting the prospects that sustainability reporting will ever evolve into substantive disclosures. The pieces of evidence conducted between two U.S.-based multinational oil and gas companies during the period of the significant national debate over oil drilling in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge conclude that the concepts of the organizational façade and organized hypocrisy are beneficial to the sustainability disclosure literature, once they provide a theoretical space to more formally recognize and incorporate how the prevailing economic system and conflicting stakeholder demands constrain the action choices of individual companies.

This approach points back to the fact that companies deliberately overshadow issues and actions related to the information they disclose (Blanc et al., 2019). These omitted results are translated as detrimental to society at large and are noticeable by the absence of the topic in organizational reports (Frost et al., 2005, Branco & Delgado, 2012). According to the findings of the mentioned studies, companies will not disclose information or discuss this topic because they fear that raising such a sensitive subject may generate suspicion of corruption-related topics.

2.4. Anti-corruption on corporate social responsibility

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is based on the interaction of organizations with economic responsibility, social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders. CSR includes economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary categories, and each category can be evaluated by a company's stakeholders, raising issues that go beyond the law to the intellectual norms of organizational behavior (Chan, 2020), leading to the business becoming socially responsible. In developed nations, CSR applications and practices are constantly growing and have become a focus for sustainable development, as are developing countries that are increasingly beginning to respect this conduct and the associated regulatory policies, due also to the growing membership of global partnerships. In the context of the globalization process, CSR policy and regulations are subject to constant change and adaptation to achieve sustainable cooperative development. Several organizations practice and disclose their CSR results voluntarily with a focus on people and the planet, but some organizations do it to build a "public image" and mainly increase their commercial profit.

Nowadays CSR and global sustainable development are among the most critical concepts applied and promoted by companies around the world, with the CSR framework undergoing constant change along with sustainable improvements and plans. Organizations are increasingly focusing on ethical organizational sustainability, which is a critical goal in the CSR model of any organization trying to achieve its long-term goals (Nguyen et al. 2021). Currently, CSR and global sustainable development are among the most critical concepts applied and promoted by companies around the world, with the CSR framework undergoing constant change along with improvements and sustainable plans. Organizations are increasingly focused on ethical organizational sustainability, which is a critical objective in the CSR model of any organization trying to achieve its long-term goals (Nguyen et al.

2021). Therefore, several authors are mentioned who support this model (Table 1), and several managers are trying to ensure that these objectives are effectively applied by organizations in the long term, along with the three main pillars of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach.

Table 1

Studies determining the fight against corruption based on the CSR report

Authors	Objective	Sample	Methodology	Results
Blanc, R., Cho, C. H., Sopt, J., & Branco, M. C. (2019)	Examine the changes in disclosure practices and the fight against corruption at Siemens AG.	Siemens AR and SR based on a timeline: -2000 to 2005. -2006 to 2008. -2009 to 2011.	Content analysis – ARs and stand-alone SRs are available on Siemens 'website.	Siemens did increase disclosure when faced with an event of threatening its legitimacy, (2006) and after the event of scandal.
Chan, H., Wei, X., Guo, S., & Leung, W. a. C. (2020)	Examine CSR in fashion supply chains.	Top 10 international fashion brands ranked in Interbrand 2017.	Multi-methodological approach.	The costs of CSR commitment will affect the optimal CSR commitment and advertisement levels of the fashion brand.
Chen, C., Ding, Y., & Kim, C. (2010)	Conduct a comparative assessment of anti-corruption practice disclosure in CSR reports among selected Malaysian and Indonesian companies.	24 companies that participated in the Malaysia Sustainability Reporting Award and 34 Indonesian companies that participate in Indonesia Sustainability Reporting Award	Content analyses of inclusion or exclusion of information related to corruption amongst Malaysian and Indonesian companies.	Companies reported low disclosure in all categories. Indonesian companies disclosed higher Accounting for combatting bribery than Malaysian companies.
Feroli, M. (2022)	Investigate if certified B-Corps undertake non-financial disclosure activities comparable to large, listed companies in the Italian fashion industry.	7 certified B-Corps and 13 listed companies from the fashion sector.	Content analysis of the sustainability reports and non-financial activities on the website; GRI Standards.	Differences in social communication between B-Corps (more communication) and listed companies. Discrepancy to what was declared by the CONSOB as a higher share of listed companies makes the report publicly available.

Kearney A.T (2009)	Examine the impact of CRS- CRS-environmental activities on the organization's performance.	99 sustainability-oriented organizations in 18 industries.	Research methodology aimed to determine whether organizations with sustainable practices are more likely to weather the economic downturn.	Financial advantages resulted from reduced operating costs (energy and water use, etc.) and increased revenues from the deployment of innovative green products.
<u>Pelikánová, R. M., Němečková, T., & Macgregor, R. B. (2021).</u>	Study the impact of COVID-19 on the fast-fashion luxury industry, regarding sustainability and CSR perceptions.	10 International Luxury Fashion Business. 10 Czech Luxury Fashion Business.	CSR content analysis on annual organizational information. Non-financial reporting. Annual reports. CSR statements.	A conclusive study that luxury companies tend to go for an extrinsic CSR, which impacts the means of production and the used materials. (For example, less furs.)

Source. Own elaboration.

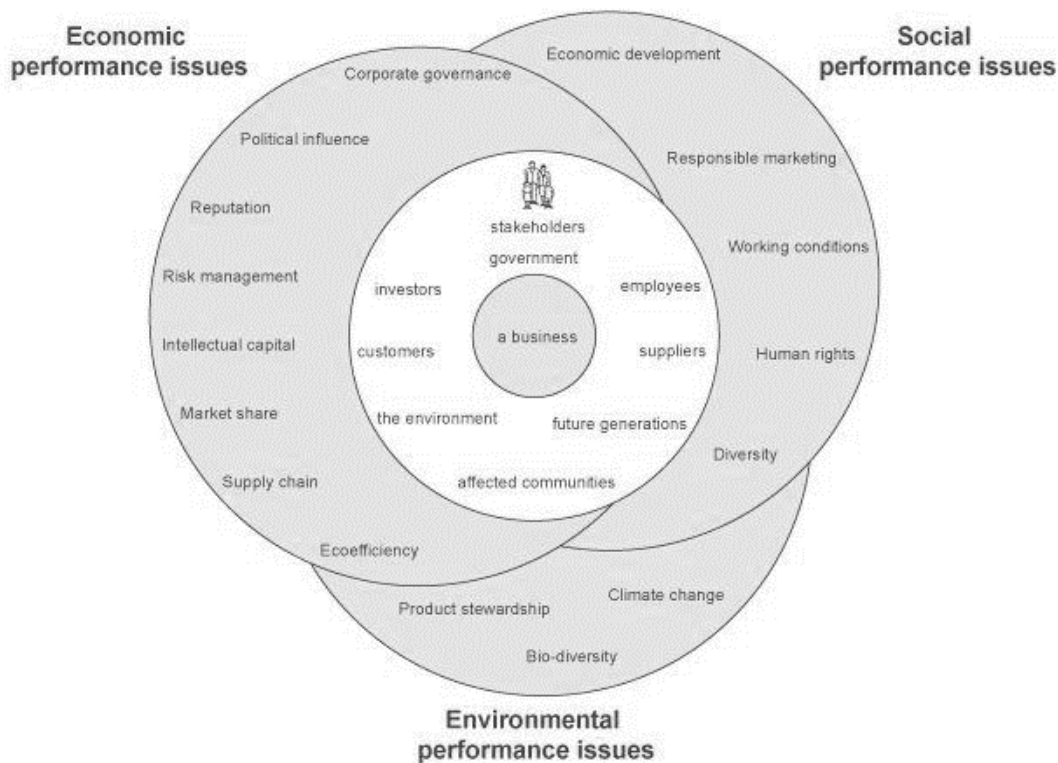
2.4.1. The triple bottom line approach

CSR is generally understood as how a company strikes a balance between economic, environmental, and social imperatives as illustrated in Triple-Bottom-Line-Approach in Figure 2.

The TBL approach is used as a framework for measuring and reporting corporate performance about economic, social, and environmental performance. It is an attempt to align private companies with the goal of global sustainable development by providing them with a more comprehensive set of integrating objectives than just the individual profit of each organization (UNIDO, 2022).

Figure 2

Triple Bottom Line Model



Note. From UNIDO. (<https://www.unido.org/>, accessed November 2022)

The economic line of the TBL framework refers to the impact of the organization's business practices on the economy and concerns the capacity of the economy as one of the subsystems of responsible sustainability. This row focuses on the growth of the organization with good corporate governance practices, reputation, and political influence on the growth of the economy and focuses on the economic value provided by the organization to the surrounding system in a way that enhances it and promotes its ability to support future generations. TBL's social line refers to conducting business practices that are beneficial and fair to labor, human capital, and the entire community. The idea is that these practices provide value to and develop society, for example, the inclusion of fair wages and the provision of health care coverage, as social responsibility can affect business performance and sustainability. TBL's environmental line refers to engaging in practices that do not compromise environmental resources for future generations. It concerns the efficient use of energy resources, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and minimizing the environmental footprint (Lee & Mao, 2015). Environmental initiatives have an impact on the business sustainability of organizations, as evidenced by Kearney's (2009) study (Table 1).

- Profit – Economic issues

In the context of the triple bottom line, profit can mean more than just the amount of money a company makes. This is because it will be easy to measure profit in money, but how can managers measure economic responsibility? How can stakeholder value be measured? Answering these questions is a challenge that must be responsibly analyzed by the managers of organizations. A company must ensure that it earns its income ethically and fairly. This includes finding business partners and suppliers with whom it aligns ethically, and for this to happen, the organizations and partners will need to develop a strategic operating plan in a way that engages both parties. Profit is also linked to a company's responsibility to pay its creditors and employees, and what is owed to them should be seen as a term of financial obligation and social responsibility, so the concept of economic capital should absorb the natural capital and social capital of organizations (Russo, 1998).

- People – Social issues

Traditionally, a company would prioritize investors or shareholders. The triple bottom line shifts the focus to individuals who potentially do not invest financially in the company but are still tangentially involved in its operations. Now, instead of trying to create value only by increasing returns for investors, the triple bottom line strives to create value by

encouraging employee volunteerism or the support or business success of small suppliers, for example. Social capital is a capacity that results from the prevalence of trust in a society or certain parts of it. It is a measure of "the ability of people to work together for common goals in groups and organizations." It can be developed at all levels of society, from the basic family unit to the major institutions of internal governance. It depends on the acquisition and maintenance of virtues such as loyalty, honesty, and trustworthiness. The central benefits arise from a reduction in social friction. Thus, for example, Russo (1998) believes that, if people who work together in an organization, need to trust each other because they are all working according to a common set of ethical standards, doing business costs less. Such a society will have more capacity for organizational innovation since the high degree of trust will allow a wide variety of social relationships to emerge.

Similarly, the degree of trust between a company or industry and its external stakeholders is likely to be a key factor determining its long-term sustainability.

- Planet – Environmental issues

The biggest deviation from purely financial information concerns information about environmental impacts. A company is often forced to choose between a lower-cost option or a more environmentally friendly alternative, and it is often much easier to communicate a company's positive changes to the planet by assessing the impacts that these alternatives have on the environment. The interesting thing about ecological TBL is that the carrying capacity of most ecosystems varies depending on the number and behavior of the economic agents operating in them. Consequently, these results vary over time and space. However, the more efficient the actors are, the more actors can be sustained (Russo, 1998).

As one of the studies used in this dissertation is the process of identifying the three pillars identified above for the companies under analysis whose data is publicly disclosed in their reports, in terms of evaluation, the relative importance of the CSR factors will be compared between the set of countries in which the companies are based. With this, the SDGs will also be assessed, framing Goal 16, relating to human rights and promoting society's freedom, privacy, and access to truthful information. Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights are fundamental to combating conflicts and insecurity, as are reducing the flow of illicit arms, fighting corruption in organizations and always ensuring inclusive participation.

3. Fast-Fashion

The concept of fast-fashion has gained notoriety in recent years. The rapid change of trends has been going along with the large MNEs in the textile industry, which is trying to keep up with the rhythm of the market in a massive and unmatched way. The shifting dynamics and the changing characteristics of the supply chain have forced retailers to a flexibility of design, quality, and costs (Doyle et al., 2006), because until the 80s, the industry of fast-fashion was based is a low-cost production and standardized styles that didn't change just because consumer demand was not present an accelerated rate. However, in recent years retailers have been forced to increase their production capacity due to constant demand and changing trend rates. This evolution causes retailers to increase their level of competitiveness and adopt the term "quick fashion" where a process of increased work between design and consumption begins.

Today, the fashion market is highly competitive and needs constant updates in the quantities produced. Retailers are forced to increase the "number of seasons", which will cause an increase in merchandise changes inside the stores. With the constant emergence of small collections of merchandise, fashion retailers are almost intimidating consumers to visit their stores with more frequency, with the idea on their heads "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" (Bhardwaj, V, 2010).

3.1. Fast-fashion as a social and environmental problem

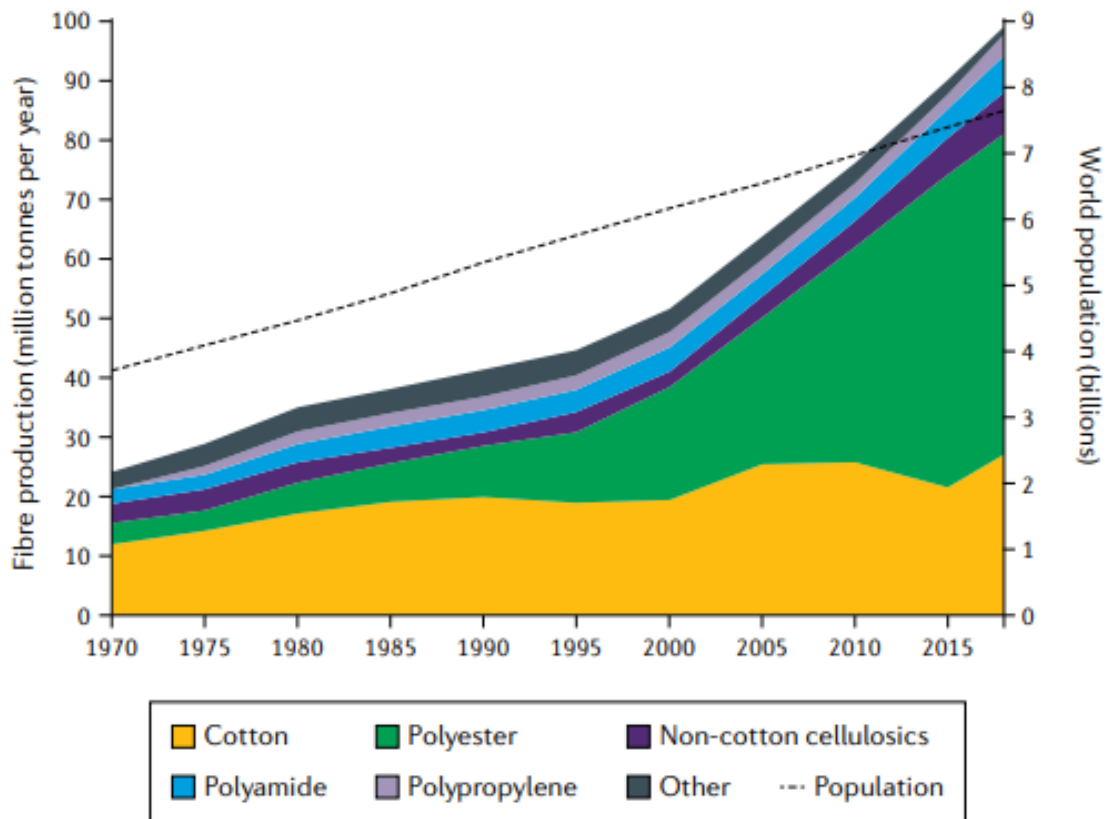
Society has been critical in tracing the transparency of global brands in the textile industry. For several decades large fast-fashion producers have shifted their sourcing from developed to developing countries, resulting in high levels of protest and numerous activists raising supply chain issues associated with human rights and modern slavery. Nowadays, organizations tend to follow CSR campaigns along with protesters and ethical activists, from SDGs reports and even modern slavery reports, including campaigning organizations have not only pressured regulators to create stricter disclosure requirements but have also continued to pressure organizations to disclose where their clothing is made and under what conditions. The relationship between social movements/civil liberties and the business world in the fast-fashion industry is often the subject of disagreement since civil liberty movements

in a developed world have focused on transparency and social responsibility processes on the part of governments and large companies (Guo et al., 2022).

During the last two decades, the fast-fashion industry has suffered several transformations due to various environmental changes (Bhardwaj, 2010). The increasing global scrutiny of supply chain operations is a risk factor for the environment where, according to several researchers*, this industry produces 8-10% of global CO emissions, consumes 79 trillion liters of water per year, responsible for 20% of industrial pollution from textile dyeing, contributes 35% of the primary oceanic microplastic pollution and produces massive amounts of textile waste (more than 90 million tons annually), most of which ends up in landfills and is burned, even the unsold products. Given the global proliferation of fast-fashion, the volume of waste produced and wasted represents a key environmental threat. 60% of global fiber production goes to the fast-fashion industry, and clearly. According to Figure 3, synthetic fibers are the high point of growth (such as polypropylene and polyamide). In the 2010s, growth in textile production outpaced world population growth, largely due to the rise of cheap production and fast-fashion and it continues to move in an increasing direction in an unexplained way (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Figure 3

Growth in global population and textile production by fiber type



Note. From “The environmental price of fast fashion”, Niinimäki et al. (2020, p.190)

Waste production can contribute negatively to the impact of the environment, including decreasing air and water quality. According to the study by Bailey et al., (2022), it was found that the negative environmental impacts resulting from the fast-fashion industry are manifested through water consumption, energy footprint emissions, saturation of international clothing markets, and an increase in end-of-life textile waste. The authors identify that more than 1900 chemicals are involved in textile production processes and in many cases the physical and chemical properties of water prevent the ability of their biodegradation. Increasing water scarcity has been observed in some places, and the water footprint, which is a measure of pollution consumption and has been used as a method for observing pH, shows that water is effectively influenced by this industry because of manufacturing processes that increasingly use sodium hydroxide.

The life cycle assessments evidenced as a useful tool to analyze consumer behavior in the quick disposal of garments show that the raw materials used to manufacture disposable garments (mostly underwear) are imported from several countries and do not justify, in terms of sustainability, the production VS. use. Major players in the fast-fashion industry, such as H&M and GAP, have significantly increased the footprint in this industry, shortening fashion cycles that generate gaps to be filled by new ideas and designs, remaking the "past" into a new "present." The complexity of properly recycling wastewater could provide various nutrients and organic matter to soils, but not all textile establishments or factories have wastewater stations and eventually, they end up releasing untreated wastewater undesirable to the environment. According to this study, retailer H&M had \$4.3 billion in unsold clothing items in 2018 resulting from the rapid growth of the fast-fashion industry. This generates large amounts of textile waste, where only 15-20% are recycled annually. In 2015, the USA was responsible for exporting over 700 million dollars in second-hand clothing. Some countries ban this type of import, but several markets of those that accept it are affected (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

In the field of regional affiliations, the evidence shows that China is one of the most consumptive countries in the fast-fashion industry, largely funded by the textile industry, it is the "number one" textile exporter producing over 2.5 billion tons of wastewater annually. In 2015 the textile industry accounted for 13% of the 41% of manufacturing wastewater discharge, where increases on the indicators of water footprint of scarcity (WFS) and the water eutrophication footprint (WEF) were observed. In 2016, the country added 963 billion yuan because of this activity, consequently, it has several water pollution problems with 32% of the country's water being infected. Europe is the region most concerned about this issue and is the one that contributes the most research and programs to mitigate the harmful effects of the fast-fashion industry. European nations are based on the concentration of textile waste recycling and for studies of this industry associated with environmental degradation. In Denmark, 50% of discarded textiles are collected for reuse and more articles and research related to environmental concerns are evidenced in Sweden than in the US (Bailey et al., 2022).

The clothing industry is resource intensive. Most of the resources required for fashion consumption are used before consumers get their clothes since several countries depend on globalized supply chains. This means that the relative proportions of consumption are verified in the country where the textile is produced, implying that 75% of the energy used

in the product's life cycle occurs even before sale and retail. The focus on cheap and speedy delivery has coexisted with a lack of focus on the social impacts in the supply chain, contributing to disasters that create social unrest like the giant Atacama desert dumping (Peters, 2021).

3.2.Social movement theory

While there is a general presumption by stakeholders with the transparency of companies about social and environmental responsibilities, companies' social and environmental disclosure practices are related. Stakeholder concerns about corporate transparency result in increased societal awareness and pressure on companies to demonstrate openness and disclose relevant information about their activities. Regarding companies' social and environmental issues, transparency includes making relevant and specific social and environmental information available through a range of information channels, media, and others. Stakeholders' concerns about social and environmental transparency in the financial sector are significant, since companies, as socio-economic development partners of the government, occupy a crucial position in any of the nations. This sector is very important, as demonstrated by governments' financial support for banks during the financial crisis, but also civil rights organizations that have been campaigning for greater transparency from financial institutions that fund social and human rights organizations (Guo et al., 2022).

There is growing concern among broader stakeholder groups regarding the socially irresponsible practices of financial organizations. The actions of companies that violate social and environmental rights could often not occur without the support of financial institutions in the form of financing, in other words, without the financing and investment role of financial institutions, many human rights violations would not happen (De Felice, 2015). Increasing media and stakeholder critique assessments are creating awareness specifically about investment and financing decisions that violate sustainable green practices, as civil liberty movements create greater societal awareness of socially irresponsible behavior by financial institutions. This awareness becomes an important force that can challenge the social and environmental transparency of financial institutions. Although research on corporate social and environmental responsibility and associated disclosure practices in the financial services sector is growing, this pursuit lacks a theoretical explanation concerning stakeholder issues (Guo et al.,2022). This problem is particularly evident a secondary stakeholder groups, such as organizations that are less dependent on

survival and those that want to gain corporate influence. It will be necessary to understand the consequences of secondary stakeholders and their associated claims using social movement theory since collective action underlies the emergence of stakeholder interests and corporate influence.

There are different types of social movement tactics, and research in the field, focuses on how different types of tactics are used by social movement organizations to gain influence on policy and organizational procedures. These tactics include lobbying, testimonies, collaboration, fundraising, petitions and counter-accounts, and extra-institutional tactics including sit-ins, protests, boycotts, violent attacks, and riots (Hond & Bakker, 2007). Those collective actions consist of coordinated behavior between two or more people that, at least minimally, satisfy individual goals and produce an outcome. Without collective action, constituents would be disconnected individuals with no coherent interest in the company's behavior, and managers would not be able to perceive changes or actions that should be changed in a company. By framing their interests, collective action among stakeholders facilitates the emergence of awareness, both among the constituents of the organization and in the eyes of managers. Thus, collective action should be seen as a necessary change to create change or social movements and influence institutions such as organizations (King, 2007).

Social movement theory also examines the predominance of conditions for collective action by people outside social institutions, facilitating access to those institutions, and allowing outsiders to potentially affect social and political change. Although it was designed primarily to evaluate the actions of state-oriented social movements, many of the key ideas of social movement theory can help understand corporate stakeholders. The firm and the state are social institutions with different levels of openness that have various constituents, and both are relatively close to outside interest parties but also attempt to actively manage their constituents. In both domains, the recognition of new constituents is a contested process, and informal, non-authoritarian processes shape outcomes and changes in the state and business, and the constituents of the state and business share a common struggle in which both groups must organize "aggrieved" individuals, generating collective action, for a collective good. This theory emerges as an explanation for change within organizations and in the organizational environment, and several authors recognize that change is a collective action, often influenced by a function of strategic actions, guided by community interests (King, 2007). Social movement theory complements standard organizational theories by

demonstrating how stable organizations can be disrupted by external publics seeking voice and recognition.

3.3.Civil liberties and corporate transparency

The notion of civil liberty, a particular notion from social movement theory (e.g., Guo et al. 2022; Chong, 2014; Bakker et al., 2013; Soule, 2012; King & Soule, 2007; Kaldor et al., 2003; Zald & Berger, 1978; Davies, 1962) suggests that people have rights, to freedom of thought, expression and action, and the protection of these rights from interference or restriction by powerful actors, such as government or multi-national corporations. Civil liberties are the hallmark of free, liberal, and democratic societies, and countries with a higher level of civil liberties allow individuals to express their moral, political, and religious views and voice their concerns without restrictions from any authority (Guo et al., 2022).

In a country with a high level of civil liberties, various social actors, including individuals, social movement organizations, and trade union bodies, are all active and campaign for civil rights. Civil liberties differ from country to country, and the social movement organizations and NGOs operating in a country are an important factor in the level of development of civil liberties in that country. These organizations have been able to defend and protect civil liberties and have protected civil liberties in much of the developed world (Gray et al., 2006; Soule, 2012).

Social movement theory provides important insights into the workings of social movement activities (such as protests and boycotts). In a broader sense, civil rights awareness can be created by civil rights movement organizations and social movement organizations. An interesting trend is observed in the more developed countries, where the previously dispersed shareholders of large companies are increasingly being replaced by fund managers and advisors from organized social movements that share a common ideology. These phenomena have gradually led to the development of social and civil movements centered on companies, both in the for-profit and non-profit sectors (Guo et al., 2022; Snow, 2004).

3.4.Effect of civil liberties on fast-fashion industry

The activities of companies are supposed to be in line with social values and congruent with civil liberties. When society is not convinced that the company is not operating legitimately,

then society will effectively repeal the organization's 'contract' to continue its operations (Deegan et al., 2002).

Stakeholders' concern about company transparency results in greater awareness in society and pressure on companies to show openness and disclose relevant information about their activities. Studies by Huntington and Dominguez (1975), Wintrobe (1998), and Greider (1998) corroborate this idea and show that multinational companies tend to invest in countries with a low level of civil liberties, i.e., where repression is high. Although the general level of democracy and the quality of institutions influence the decisions of multinational companies, the interaction between a multinational company and the government of the host country is also important. Levitsky and Way (2001), address the multidimensional nature of democracy and the different levels of influence that individual components of democracy can have on the investment decisions of multinational companies. Thus, the definition of democracy includes free and fair elections, adult suffrage, protection of civil liberties and few unelected guardian authorities (e.g., armed forces, monarchies, religious bodies), and multinational companies that interact with local governments and social actors such as trade unions are influenced not only by democracy, but also by the quality of institutions, and this can have implications for the organizations' investment decisions.

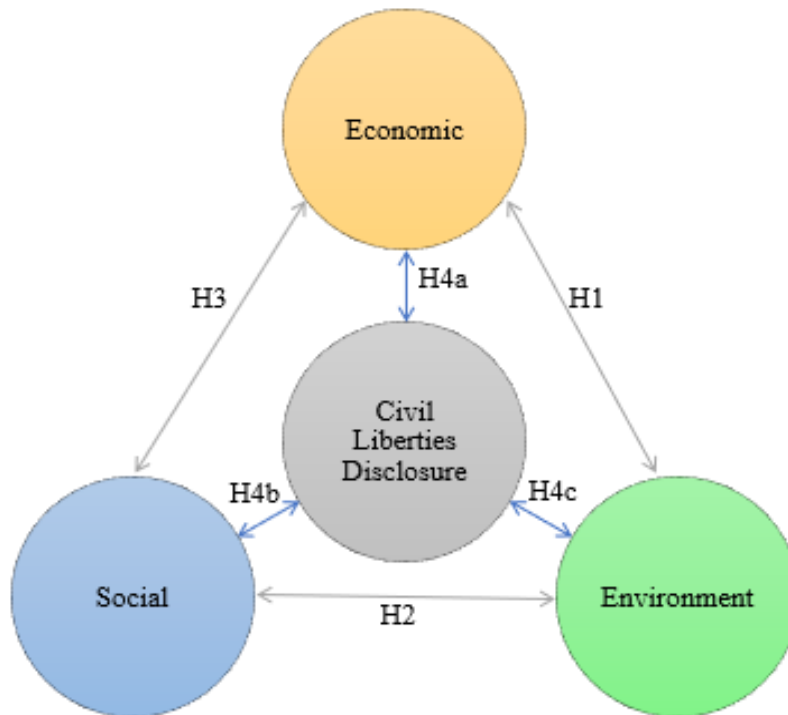
Multinational companies tend to invest in countries with a low level of civil liberties, that is, where repression is high and the economy low. While the general level of democracy and the quality of institutions influence the decisions of multinational companies, the interaction between a multinational company and the government of the host country is also important and this interaction between MNEs with local governments and social actors, such as trade unions, may have gaps and implications on investment decisions (Filippaios et al., 2019). Relations between social movements and civil society, on the one hand, and the business world on the other, are often shaped by conflicts over the domain of economic, cultural, and social life. Civil liberty movements in the developed world have focused on the transparency of the processes and activities undertaken by governments and large companies in declarations of social responsibility rather than on the economic issue, and the goal of achieving transparency in actions against companies is often motivated by a lack of transparency regarding companies' human and social rights records (Guo et al., 2022).

About companies' environmental issues, transparency includes making relevant and specific environmental information available through a range of reports, the media, and other channels. When examining the role that organizations have concerning environmental responsibility, it will be important to consider not only the direct violations that exist but also those who encourage and benefit from these actions by noting that civil liberties have a positive relationship with environmental factors (Guo et al., 2022).

Civil liberties have a direct influence on CSR (including TBL), as well it was also argued that the TBL pillars influence each other. In this sense, the general theoretical framework is conceived as follows:

Figure 4

Theoretical framework



Note. Own elaboration.

According to the revised literature and the designed theoretical framework, the hypothesis formulated are as per Figure 5 and as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the environmental pillar and the economic pillar on fast-fashion companies.

H2: There is a positive relationship between the environmental pillar and the social pillar on fast-fashion companies.

H3: There is a positive relationship between the social pillar and economic pillar on fast-fashion companies.

H4: There is an influence of Civil liberties disclosure on the Economic pillar (H4a) on the Social pillar (H4b) on the Environmental pillar (H4c) on fast-fashion companies.

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample composition

The study is divided into two scenarios. In the first scenario, the sample consists of secondary data from fiscal transparency reports of the fast-fashion industry, specifically the Fashion Transparency Index and the Corruption Perceptions Index for the creation of a TBL index.

The second scenario, in addition to the values resulting from the TBL index created on the first, where used online databases containing mainly components of country-level civil liberties measures. Those factors may have a potential influence, on corporate economic, social, and environmental disclosure practices, which is why it was decided to select the Freedom in the World Database 2022. Since CSR regulations set a broad framework and give directions for a better sustainable future and being SDGs tangible defined targets to measure the outcomes of those activities, the 17 SDGs were used as control variables to support the three TBL index pillars. Both goals bring together a common vision of sustainable development and address the socio-economic and environmental challenges.

4.2. Procedure for data collection – Scenario 1

In this subchapter, the sources of data collection used for the variables that make up the conceptual model of this dissertation on the first scenario are analyzed. The information, referring to the 2022 period, was collected through secondary information sources, through websites and databases of different international institutions, which are identified in detail below.

The Fashion Transparency Index analyzes and ranks 250 of the world's largest fashion brands and retailers according to the extent to which they disclose their policies, practices, social, and environmental impact. Brands were selected based on their annual turnover of over 400 million US dollars and represent a variety of market segments, including high street, luxury, sportswear, accessories, footwear, and denim, from across Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Africa (Fashion Revolution 2022 Index). The Fashion Transparency Index 2022 is available online on the Fast Revolution website and was created by Carry Somers and Orsola de Castro. This website was designed to raise awareness among people and companies, namely in the fast-fashion industry, and annually discloses economic,

social, and environmental information about various companies. The content is formally on topics such as ending human and environmental exploitation, safe and decent working conditions and living wages for all people in the supply chain, a redistributed and more equitable balance of power in the fast-fashion industry, stronger labor movements, a culture of transparency and accountability across the value chain, ending the throwaway culture and moving to a system where materials are used for much longer, reducing waste. (Fashion Revolution 2022 Index).

4.2.1. Questionnaire on fashion transparency index 2022

In the context of the first scenario, it was analyzed the transparency of the Fast-Fashion Industry. Out of the 250 companies selected, 153 actively participated in the questionnaire and the study conducted during the year 2022. The companies, from 21 different countries, are approached with formal questions regarding the information they disclose in their annual and sustainability reports.

According to the Fashion Transparency Index (2018-2022), the questionnaire under review is conducted across the companies in the sample, accounts for their brands' public communications, and is a way for the interested parties to better understand the information summarized at their various levels. Its questions are comparative in nature and report information on brand disclosure in five key areas including: policy and commitments, governance, traceability, know, show & fix, and spotlight issues, and the points are awarded only for information/data that has been publicly disclosed on the brand's or parent company's website, publicly available on the companies' websites and annual reports or annual sustainability/CSR reports (only counted if dated January 2020 or later).

4.2.2. CSR to TBL index

In the context of the first scenario, it was analyzed the transparency of the Fast-Fashion Industry. Out of the 250 companies selected, 153 actively participated in the questionnaire and the study conducted during the year 2022. The companies, from 21 different countries, are approached with formal questions regarding the information they disclose in their annual and sustainability reports. Initially, it was necessary to separate the companies that participated in the questionnaire and in the disclosure of information in the year 2022. The Fast-Fashion Transparency 2022 index analyzes 250 companies, of which 153 were willing

to associate company data with the questions referenced in this index, disclosing information on an economic, social, and environmental level (Table 2).

Table 2

Companies' participation in Fashion Transparency Index 2022

Brand Name	2022		
Abercrombie & Fitch	Y	Kmart Australia	Y
Adidas	Y	Kohl's	
Aeropostale		KOOVS	
AJIO		La Redoute	Y
ALDI Nord	Y	Lacoste	Y
ALDI SOUTH	Y	Lands' End	Y
ALDO	Y	LC Waikiki	
Amazon	Y	Levi Strauss & Co	Y
American Eagle	Y	Li-Ning	
ANTA		Lidl	Y
Anthropologie	Y	Lindex	Y
Aritzia	Y	LL Bean	
Armani	Y	Longchamp	
Asda	Y	Louis Vuitton	Y
ASICS	Y	Lululemon	Y
ASOS	Y	Macy's	
Balenciaga	Y	Mammut	Y
Bally	Y	Mango	Y
Banana Republic	Y	Marc Jacobs	Y
BCBGMAXAZRIA		Marks & Spencer	Y
Beanpole		Marni	Y
Belle		Massimo Dutti	Y
Bershka	Y	Matalan	Y
Big Bazaar - ffb		Max	
Big W	Y	Max Mara	
Billabong	Y	Merrell	
Bloomingdale's		Metersbonwe	
Bonprix	Y	Mexx	
boohoo	Y	Michael Kors	
Bosideng		Miu Miu	Y
Bottega Veneta	Y	Mizuno	Y
Brooks Sport	Y	Moncler	
Brunello Cucinelli		Monoprix	
Buckle		Morrisons	Y

Burberry	Y	MRP	
Burlington	Y	Muji	Y
C&A	Y	New Balance	Y
Calvin Klein	Y	New Look	Y
Calzedonia	Y	New Yorker	
Canada Goose		Next	Y
Carhartt		Nike	Y
Carolina Herrera	Y	Nine West	
CAROLL		Nordstrom	Y
Carrefour	Y	Old Navy	Y
Carter's	Y	Otto	Y
CELINE	Y	OVS	Y,
Celio		Paris	Y
Champion	Y	Patagonia	Y
Chanel		Pepe Jeans	
Chico's		Pimkie	Y
Chloé	Y	Prada	Y
Clarks	Y	PrettyLittleThing	Y
COACH	Y	Primark	Y
Cole Haan		Prisma	Y
Columbia Sportswear	Y	Pull&Bear	Y
Converse	Y	Puma	Y
Cortefiel	Y	Quiksilver	Y
Costco		Ralph Lauren	Y
Cotton On	Y	Reebok	
Decathlon	Y	REI	
Deichmann		Reliance Trends	
Desigual	Y	Reserved	Y
Dick's Sporting Goods	Y	REVOLVE	
Diesel		River Island	Y
Dillard's		Romwe	
Dior	Y	Ross Dress for Less	
Disney		Roxy	Y
DKNY		Russell Athletic	Y
Dolce & Gabbana		s.Oliver	Y
Dr. Martens	Y	Sainsbury's	Y
Dressmann	Y	SAINT LAURENT	Y
DSW		Saks Fifth Avenue	
Eddie Bauer		Salvatore Ferragamo	Y
El Corte Inglés	Y	Sandro	
Elie Tahari		Semir	
Ermenegildo Zegna	Y	SHEIN	
Esprit	Y	Shimamura	
Express		Skechers	

Falabella		Speedo	Y
Famous Footwear		Splash	
Fanatics		Sports Direct	
Fashion Nova		Steve Madden	
Fendi	Y	Stradivarius	Y
Fila	Y	Superdry	Y
Fjällräven	Y	Takko	
Foot Locker		Target	Y
Foschini	Y	Target Australia	Y
Fossil	Y	Tchibo	Y
Free people	Y	Ted Baker	Y
Fruit of the Loom	Y	Tesco	Y
Furla		Tezenis	Y
G-Star RAW	Y	The Children's Place	
Gap	Y	The North Face	Y
Gerry Weber		The Warehouse	
Gildan	Y	Timberland	Y
GU	Y	TJ Maxx	
Gucci	Y	Tod's	
GUESS	Y	Tom Ford	
H&M	Y	Tom Tailor	Y
Hanes	Y	Tommy Bahama	
Heilan Home		Tommy Hilfiger	Y
Helly Hansen	Y	TOPVALU COLLECTION	
HEMA	Y	Tory Burch	
Hermès		Triumph	
Hollister Co.	Y	Truworths	
Hudson's Bay		UGG	Y
Hugo Boss	Y	Under Armour	
Intimissimi	Y	Uniqlo	Y
Ito-Yokado		United Arrows	Y
Jack & Jones	Y	United Colors of Benetton	Y
Jack Wolfskin		Urban Outfitters	Y
JD Sports	Y	Valentino	
Jil Sander		Van Heusen	
Jockey		Vans	Y
Joe Fresh	Y	Vero Moda	Y
John Lewis	Y	Versace	Y
Jordan	Y	Very	
Justfab	Y	Victoria's Secret	Y
K-Way		Walmart	
Kate Spade	Y	Woolworths South Africa	Y
Kathmandu	Y	Wrangler	Y
Kaufland		Youngor	

Kiabi	Y	Zalando	Y
KiK	Y	Zara	Y
Kmart		Zeeman	Y

Note. Y represents the companies' participation.

According to the information disclosed in the index, points 2 (governance), 3 (traceability), and 5 (spotlight issues) of FTI were analyzed:

- Governance:

This topic analyzes who in the executive board is responsible for economic, social, and environmental performance, how it is implemented, and how improvements in these factors are linked to the performance of employees, executive directors, and suppliers. It seeks to find out whether brands are publishing a responsible fiscal strategy and whether there is worker representation on the executive board.

- Traceability:

In this section, a list of suppliers is disclosed, containing social details such as the address of the supplier, number of workers, gender breakdown, number of migrant workers, and union representation. It is verified that the lists of brands are publicly available and compliant with the Open Data Standard for the Apparel Sector, to make the information user-friendly for trade unions and NGOs, and it is verified whether the brands are active contributors to the Open Apparel Registry to enable social collaboration and efficient access to data by affected stakeholders.

- Spotlight Issues:

This section looks at whether brands disclose information on a range of issues, including forced labor, decent wages, sustainable purchasing practices, racial equality, overproduction, waste and circularity, sustainable materials, water and chemicals, climate, and deforestation.

Since the Triple Bottom Line is divided into three distinct fields: Economic Issues, Social Issues, and Environmental Issues, which may be relevant in the companies and industry under analysis, it was possible to associate these different three fields which were the result points reported in the questionnaire previously released by the Fast-Fashion Transparency

Index 2022 regarding the company's corporate responsibility into the three areas of the TBL (Table 3). The associated data resulted in 3 variables that will be used to analyze the study.

Table 3

CSR to Triple Bottom Line association

Fashion Transparency Index 2022	Governance	Traceability	Spotlight Issues
Variables TBL	Economic	Social	Environmental

Note. Own elaboration.

After collecting information on the values of each of the variables under analysis, it becomes important to categorize the companies in the sample based on their respective countries of origin. In this scenario, it is possible to group these different companies in a total of 21 different countries, so that it is easier to see which pillar is the most significant in each of the countries under analysis.

4.3.Procedure for data collection – Scenario 2

In addition to using the 153 companies under analysis in the methodology contained in the TBL index, the second scenario was supported by the Freedom House database, which provides data on core thematic issues related to democracy, political rights, and civil liberties from 2022 (Guo et al., 2022).

The Freedom House is the oldest American organization devoted to the support and defense of democracy around the world. Founded in 1941, Freedom House's work includes a range of research, advocacy, and publications to promote human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and independent media. This organization produces research reports and data adopting guidelines from the UN General Assembly's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and establishes comprehensive methodology based on surveys across countries to provide thorough annual reviews on the condition of civil liberties in countries around the world (Freedom House, 2022).

The civil liberty index considers four indicators: Freedom of expression and Belief (4 items), Associational and Organizational Rights (3 items), Rule of Law (4 items), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (4 items). The index is evaluated from a total of 15 items (CLSCORE) when each item is scored from 0 (lowest) to 4 (highest), with a total potential

score of 60. To examine the influence of the components of civil liberties (Guo et al., 2022; Kaldor et al., 2003) on CSR disclosure practices:

- Freedom of expression and belief is one of the basic measures of civil liberty movements and includes freedom of the press, freedom of practice, and institutional freedoms. Freedom of expression depends on the free flow of information to be effective and is important for the ability of wider stakeholder groups to voice their concerns (Blanc et al., 2017), which can influence companies' social disclosure practices (Guo et al., 2022).
- Associational and organizational rights are one of the most significant components of social movements (Guo et al., 2022). Previous literature on social movements highlights the collective right to organize, frame, or use specific movement tactics to influence institutional change, including transparency arguing that the collective roles of stakeholders such as workers and their associations have an impact on CSR (Guo et al., 2022).
- The rule of law, through an independent judicial system of fair trials and equal treatment, not only protects civil liberties but also enhances the rights of citizens). A country's federal and local courts play an important role in establishing the rule of law (Saunders, 2013) and play a central role in promoting other forms of civil liberties. Castiglione, Infante, and Smirnova (2015) argue that improving the rule of law increases the environmental responsiveness of companies.
- Personal autonomy and individual rights include freedom of movement, freedom to enjoy property and inheritance, personal and social freedom in terms of marriage partner and family size, protection from domestic violence, equal opportunities, and freedom from economic exploitation (Freedom House, 2022). Personal autonomy and individual rights are important influences on organizational sustainability (Pelletier et al., 2011), since influence the individual rights on companies' social and environmental practices, it is argued that this factor is relevant as it is related to the other components of civil liberties (i.e., associational rights and freedom of expression).

The SDGs are a unique and necessary opportunity to support sustainable, regenerative, and inclusive growth, without which it will be impossible to tackle social inequalities. They are considered to have the capacity to trigger economic growth and environmental

responsibility. This factor has been discussed for some time and, in this regard, Costanza et al. (2016), investigated different methods for linking the SDGs with CSR measures that could be the trigger for a global change in society. Pointing in the right direction is just as important as following the SDGs and their indicators, which is why Costanza et al. (2016) stress the importance of creating aggregate indicators in the overall study process.

According to Costanza et al., (2016), it will be fundamental to group the SDGs into social, economic, and environmental pillars. The authors investigated some different methods of relating SDGs to measure CSR in organizations (Table 4), and this measure is very important to create aggregated indicators on this methodology's overall process.

Table 4

The 17 SDGs clustered under the three elements of sustainable wellbeing

Efficient allocation: building a living economy (Economic pillar)

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Fair distribution: protecting social capabilities for flourishing (Social pillar)

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and provide access to justice for

all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Sustainable scale: staying within planetary boundaries (Environmental pillar)

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests,

combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss

Source: Own elaboration, according to Constanza et al. (2016).

4.3.1. Dependent variables - TBL index

The dependent variables in this study are the same as the TBL index created in scenario 1, namely the values corresponding to the companies under analysis regarding the Economic score, Social score, and Environmental score. Here, it was considered that the crucial aspects for evaluating these variables are outlined in the Fashion Revolution Index 2022.

Economic category: 4 themes including the direct contact details for the relevant department responsible for CSR disclosure, the name of a board member, the acknowledgment of how the company prioritizes money spent implementing CSR activities (responsible tax strategy), and how the company incorporates CSR performance into purchasing practices.

Social category: 3 themes including the direct relationship between employees and suppliers, processing facilities, and corporate socially responsible materials.

Environmental category: 6 themes including items on decent work, racial equality, sustainable sourcing, overconsumption of waste and circularity, water/chemicals, climate change, and biodiversity.

4.3.2. Independent variables – Freedom House index

The independent variable CLSCORE was provided by the database disclosed by Freedom House organization 2022. As stated in the literature the Civil Liberty Index (CLSCORE) provides country-level civil liberties that have a significant impact on society and can serve as an explanatory factor for corporate social responsibility accounting practices. In this study, will be also considered the four indicators of the index: Freedom of expression and Belief (FEB), Associational and Organizational Rights (AOR), Rule of Law (ROL), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (PAI), used to explore how they influence the results.

4.3.3. Control variables – SDGs

In addition to the civil liberties disclosure control variables, it was decided to include certain control variables that, as indicated in the literature, could offer insights into CSR and civil liberties. It was employed the SDGs index, which provides a global overview of the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Table 5

Distribution of the SDG´s by the TBL

TBL pillars	Sustainability Development Goals
Economic	SDG7, SDG8, SDG9, SDG11 and SDG12
Social	SDG1, SDG2, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG10, SDG16 and SDG17
Environmental	SDG6, SDG13, SDG14 and SDG15

Source: Own elaboration, according to Constanza et al. (2016).

The 17 SDGs will be clustered on three pillars: Economic, social, and Environmental, following Table 4 according to Constanza et al. (2016).

To obtain every pillar value, we have performed an arithmetical average of the SDGs that compose each one of the respective pillars (Table 5 shows the distribution of SDGs across the three pillars). Within the framework of the policy of prosperity for people and society and by their fundamental rights, it will be important to analyze the companies that govern

them, namely policies on decent work and economic growth, justice in institutions, sustainable consumption and production, sustainable awareness projects (Swain & Wallentin, 2019).

Table 6 summarizes all the variables in the present study and demonstrates the designation given to each factor under analysis, as well as their description and source.

Table 6

Variable descriptions and sources

Variable	Designation	Description	Source
Dependent variables	Economic	The TBL index scores, Economic_Score, Social_Score, and Environmental_Score (Governance, Traceability, and Spotlight Issues scores). Calculated by the created index TBL, based on the Fashion Revolution Index.	Fashion Transparency Index 2022 – Extracted values from the TBL index.
	Social		
	Environmental		
Independent variable	CLSCORE	Civil Liberty Index 2022	Freedom House 2022
Control variables: Components of Civil Liberty Score	FEB	Civil Liberty Index 2022 components: Freedom of expression and Belief; Associational and Organizational Rights; Rule of Law; Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights	
	AOR		
	ROL		
	PAI		
Control variables: Components of CSR	SDG_ECO	Sustainability Development Goals index 2022, 17 SDGs score by country.	Sustainable Development Report 2022
	SDG_SOC		
	SDG_ENV		

Source: Own elaboration.

Since all the indices analyzed are on different scales, it will be important to normalize these values, thus transforming the distribution scales of the variables under study. According to Martins (2022), to create a common measurement unit per indicator, and to be statistically processed, first, all the values need to be transformed on the interval [-1,1], by using the following procedure:

$$NI_k^{it} = 2 \times \frac{I_k^{it} - \min(I_k^{it})}{\max I_k^{it} - \min(I_k^{it})} - 1$$

where k is the indicator number (k = 1, ..., 153), i represent the country (i = 1, ..., 21) and t represent the year (t = 2022). Thus NI_k^{it} , is the new score value of the indicator I_k for the country i in the year t, and I_k^{it} is the original value of the indicator I_k^{it} for the country i in the year t.

After this procedure, the values scored by the 3 pillars on the TBL index (Economic, Social, and Environmental) (Table 2) were inverted and the intention is to have all indicators categorized in the same sense. At this point, all the indicators oscillate between -1 and 1.

To transform x values in the interval [-1, 1] to y values in the interval [0, 1] it was considered that the points $(x_0, y_0) = (-1, 0)$ and $(x_1, y_1) = (1, 1)$. By using linear interpolation, it was obtained the value of y using the following simplified formula:

$$y = \frac{x + 1}{2}$$

where y belongs to the interval [0, 1] and x belongs to the interval [-1, 1]. This transformation was used to convert the values of the old indicators (in the range [-1, 1]) to the new indicators in the range [0, 1].

Having all the indicators on the same scale and standardized, the results can be measured and compared fairly and accurately.

5. Results

On this section, will be illustrated and discussed the findings on civil liberties expectations toward the fashion brand's CSR practices.

Using IBM SPSS Statistics 28 software, it was possible to analyze the 153 companies participating in the Fashion Transparency Index 2022 questionnaire, group the companies by their country, and determine values such as the Mean and Standard Deviation. In addition, the scores of all the variables were transformed to have a single measurement scale and criterion. To carry out the correlation analysis of the three pillars of the TBL, it was used the bivariate correlation command, calculating the averages and comparing them with the independent variable. Finally, a linear regression was performed to control the situation of how the variables interact.

5.1.Scenario 1

5.1.1. Descriptive statistics

From a first perspective, regarding the points distributed between the three variables (Economic, Social, and Environmental) in the first scenario, it is possible to observe that the mean points per country are distributed proportionally between the companies under analysis (Table 7). At first glance, companies consider the Economic variable to have the most weight in the CSR disclosure ($M = 0.47$) after Environmental ($M = 0.38$) and Social ($M = 0.32$).

Usually, a larger standard deviation results in a larger standard error of the mean and a less accurate estimate of the population mean. Italy ($SD = 0.45$) has the highest standard deviation of all the countries in the Social pillar, thus Italian large fast-fashion companies are more likely to address CSR on environmental management, employment, local communities, and controlling and reporting economic strategies.

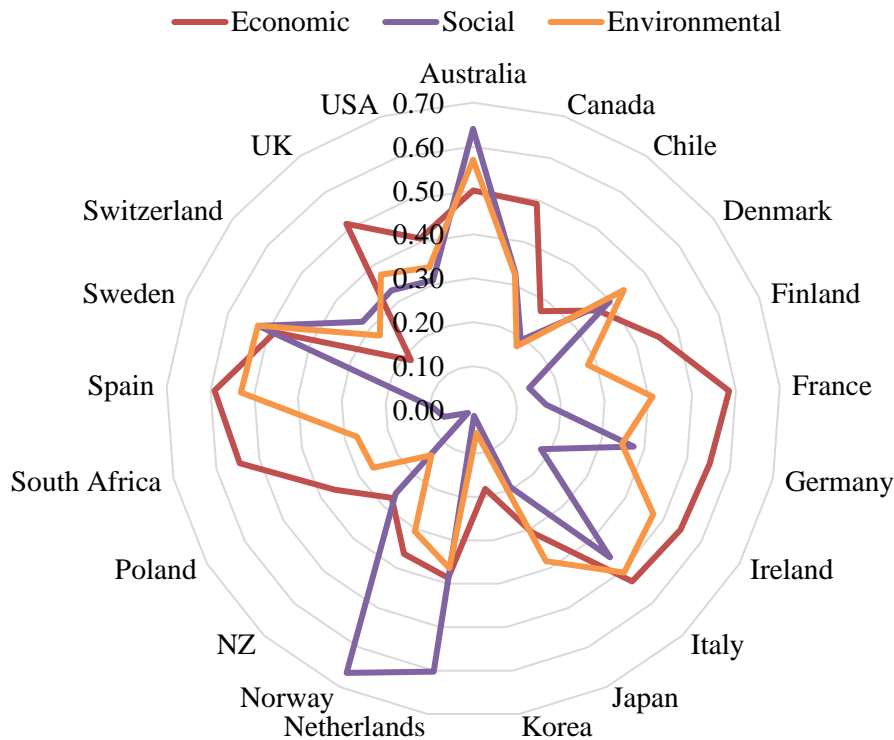
Table 7**TBL index by country**

Country	Economic			Social			Environmental		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Australia	0.5	4	0.27	0.64	4	0.34	0.57	4	0.42
Canada	0.49	5	0.28	0.33	5	0.41	0.32	5	0.24
Chile	0.27	1		0.19	1		0.18	1	
Denmark	0.36	2	0	0.4	2	0	0.44	2	0
Finland	0.45	1		0.14	1		0.28	1	
France	0.58	14	0.27	0.17	14	0.22	0.41	14	0.19
Germany	0.55	14	0.29	0.37	14	0.23	0.35	14	0.21
Ireland	0.55	1		0.18	1		0.47	1	
Italy	0.53	14	0.32	0.46	14	0.45	0.51	14	0.32
Japan	0.31	5	0.15	0.19	5	0.2	0.38	5	0.3
Korea	0.18	1		0.01	1		0.05	1	
Netherlands	0.39	4	0.27	0.6	4	0.16	0.36	4	0.27
Norway	0.36	2	0.39	0.66	2	0.28	0.31	2	0.19
NZ	0.27	1		0.26	1		0.14	1	
Poland	0.36	1		0.01	1		0.26	1	
South Africa	0.55	2	0	0.07	2	0.1	0.27	2	0.04
Spain	0.59	8	0.37	0.09	8	0.15	0.53	8	0.29
Sweden	0.48	3	0.29	0.53	3	0.3	0.53	3	0.34
Switzerland	0.18	2	0.13	0.32	2	0.05	0.27	2	0.11
UK	0.51	20	0.24	0.33	20	0.17	0.37	20	0.17
USA	0.41	48	0.25	0.31	48	0.28	0.34	48	0.22
Total	0.47	153	0.26	0.32	153	0.29	0.38	153	0.23

Note. Empty cells in the table mean that was not possible to calculate the standard deviation because only one company is analyzed in this country.

Figure 5

TBL Results of mean indexes from each country



Note. Own elaboration.

Following Table 6, its graphical representation clearly shows the prevalence of low scores on the Environmental pillar in our sample, compared with the other pillars as well as the overall prevalence of higher values in most of the countries of the Economic pillar. European countries such as Spain ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.37$), France ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 0.27$), Germany ($M = 0.55$, $SD = 0.29$), and Italy ($M = 0.53$, $SD = 0.32$) are more concerned about economic responsibility, as they have a higher average in this pillar. Regarding countries with more social concern, Norway ($M = 0.66$, $SD = 0.28$), Australia ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.34$) and the Netherlands ($M = 0.60$, $SD = 0.16$) stand out, while the lowest results are in Poland ($M = 0.01$, $SD = 1$), Korea ($M = 0.01$, $SD=1$) and South Africa ($SD = 0.07$, $SD= 0.10$). Countries such as Denmark ($M = 0.57$, $SD = 0.42$), Sweden ($M = 0.53$, $SD = 0.34$), and Japan ($M = 0.38$, $SD = 0.30$) are beginning to focus their CSR policies on the environmental pillar, as can be observed in Figure 5.

5.2.Scenario 2

5.2.1. Correlations

The correlations for the variables under analysis can be found in Table 8. According to Marôco (2018), in the human and social sciences, the thresholds of the Pearson correlations were considered by the following criteria: weak, when $|r| < 0.25$, moderate, when $0.25 \leq |r| < 0.5$, strong, when $0.5 \leq |r| < 0.75$, and very strong, when $|r| \geq 0.75$.

Table 8 shows that there is a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the economic pillar and the social pillar ($r = 0.495$, $p < 0.01$), which means that higher rates in the economic pillar are associated with higher rates in the social pillar, which empirically supports Hypothesis 1. There is a very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the environmental and economic pillars ($r = 0.840$; $p < 0.01$), which also means that higher scores in the economic pillar are associated with higher scores in the social pillar, thus supporting Hypothesis 2.

About the environmental and social pillars ($r = 0.633$; $p < 0.01$) there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between them, associating the higher the environmental disclosure index with the higher the social disclosure index, which empirically supports Hypothesis 3. These results are in line with several authors (Zanin et al., 2020), who affirm that the TBL presents an integrated assessment that considers the relevant environmental, economic, and social aspects. This allows for a more balanced and complete understanding of company performance since the three basic pillars are interrelated and are related to a concept that expresses the relevance of the environmental agenda, to integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions into the traditional measurement of business performance. In general terms, the TBL model requires companies to revolutionize the way they think and act in no less than seven interdependent dimensions: markets, values, transparency, life cycle technology, partnerships, time perspective, and corporate governance.

As expected, all the variables on the civil liberties disclosure list have a positive and statistically significant relationship with the CLOSURE variable, i.e. Freedom of Expression and Belief (FEB) ($r = 0.736$, $p < 0.01$), Associational and Organizational Rights (AOR) ($r = 0.707$, $p < 0.01$), Rule of Law (ROL) ($r = 0.918$, $p < 0.01$) and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (PAI) ($r = 0.477$, $p < 0.01$) are strongly correlated with the civil liberties

disclosure index. The CLOSURE variable also has a positive and statistically significant relationship with the SDG_SOC variable ($r = 0.228, p < 0.01$) and the SDG_ENV variable ($r = 0.286, p < 0.01$), with higher levels of Civil Liberties disclosure leading to higher social indices, namely fairer distribution in terms of protection, reduction of inequality in organizations, achievements of gender equality, implementation of global partnership for sustainable development and promoting healthy lives, and at an environmental level, higher levels of sustainable scales, namely ensuring sustainable management of water and sanitation, actions to combat climate change and promote ecosystems.

The variables FEB ($r = 0.214, p < 0.01$), AOR ($r = 0.201, p < 0.05$), and CLOSURE ($r = 0.215, p < 0.01$) have a positive and statistically significant relationship with the social pillar. Being the only significant relationship with one of the TBL pillars, this relationship has already been observed in previous studies, (Guo et al., 2022) stated that higher levels of civil liberties will result in higher levels of socially relevant information from organizations.

Table 8**Results of Pearson correlation matrix**

	ECO	SOC	ENV	CLOSUR E	FEB	AOR	ROL	PAI	SDG_EC O	SDG_SO C	SDG_EN V
ECO	1										
SOC	0.495**	1									
ENV	0.840**	0.633**	1								
CLOSUR E	-0.024	0.215**	0.067	1							
FEB	-0.032	0.214**	0.089	0.736**	1						
AOR	-0.026	0.201*	0.022	0.707**	0.539**	1					
ROL	0.018	0.149	0.096	0.918**	0.625**	0.531**	1				
PAI	-0.072	0.110	-0.049	0.477**	0.046	0.136	0.263**	1			
SDG_EC O	-0.182*	0.055	-0.141	0.053	0.061	-0.079	-0.085	0.370**	1		
SDG_SO C	-0.153	0.079	-0.029	0.228**	0.252**	-0.055	0.119	0.397**	0.832**	1	
SDG_EN V	0.156	0.011	0.082	0.286**	0.005	0.330**	0.359**	0.011	-0.664**	-0.708**	1

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ and * $p < 0.05$

Legend. ECO – Economic; SOC – Social; ENV – Environment

5.2.2. Regression analyses

Given that the CLSCORE variable only has a positive and statistically significant relationship with the Social pillar, a multiple linear regression was applied to obtain three parsimonious linear regression models and to be able to observe and evaluate the nature of the information disclosed by companies in the fast-fashion industry. These models were calculated using two different processes (Enter process - all variables and Stepwise process) to easily identify the most relevant variables in our models, and only the values from the Stepwise method, which indicates the variables that have the most impact and will be more important in these models, will be discussed.

The Models in Table 9 consist of three panels with the independent variable (CLSCORE). Since the independent variable is calculated as a sum of four variables, the Models presented will exclude this variable, since Freedom of Expression and Belief (FEB), Associational and Organizational Rights (AOR), Rule of Law (ROL), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (PAI) will be used as analysis variables.

An analysis of the variance inflation factor (VIF) values showed that there are no collinearity concerns in the stepwise models, as the values are less than 3, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019).

The coefficients of determination are between 0% and 100% and assess the percentage of variance represented by the dependent variables in the conceptual models. In the area of social and behavioral sciences, according to Cohen (1988), a coefficient of determination of 2% is classified as a small effect, a coefficient of 13% as a medium effect, and a coefficient of 26% as a large effect.

The (stepwise) model in Panel A consists of the dependent variable (economic pillar), the environmental pillar, and SDG_SOC. The ANOVA showed that the adjusted model is significant [$F(9,143) = 25,088$ and $p < 0.001$], so it can be that the model is adequate and explains 58.7% (large effect) of the variability of the economic information disclosure on CSR. This model shows that the environmental pillar ($\beta = 0.739$; $t = 14.114$; $p < 0.001$) positively influences the economic pillar and the group of social SDGs ($\beta = -0.156$; $t = -2.972$; $p < 0.05$) negatively influences the economic pillar.

The model in Panel B (stepwise) consists of the dependent variable (social pillar), the variables environmental pillar, AOR, and SDG_ECO. Again, the ANOVA showed that the adjusted model is significant on this model pillar [$F(9,143) = 8,473$ and $p < 0.001$] and can be inferred that they can be inferred that the model is adequate and explains 31% (large effect) of the variability of the social information disclosure on CSR. This model shows that the environmental pillar ($\beta = 0.510$; $t = 7.410$; $p < 0.001$), the associational and organizational rights disclosure information ($\beta = 0.263$; $t = 3.890$; $p < 0.001$), and the group of economic SDGs positively influence the social pillar. Only in this model can be observed the influence of the disclosure of civil liberties with the dependent variable Social Pillar, stating that higher levels of associative and organizational rights are associated with higher levels of social disclosure, which means, countries with higher levels of disclosure between company operations and workers, which influence institutional change, including transparency (Soule, 2009), have a positive impact on the social disclosure of CSR in companies in the fast-fashion industry.

At last, the (stepwise) model in Panel C reflects the dependent variable (environmental pillar) and the economic and social pillars. The ANOVA also showed that the adjusted model is significant [$F(9,143) = 33.365$ and $p < 0.001$], so it can be that the model is adequate and explains 64% (large effect) of the variability of the environmental information disclosure on CSR. The model shows that the economic ($\beta = 0.672$; $t = 13.234$; $p < 0.001$) and social pillar ($\beta = 0.288$; $t = 5.668$; $p < 0.001$) positively influence the environmental disclosure.

Table 9

Panel analyses of civil liberties and TBL disclosures

Panel A: Economic		β	<i>t</i>-test	Sig.	VIF	R square Adjust.
Model (All variables)	Social	-0.076	-1.179	0.240	1.519	0.588
	Environmental	0.794	12.549**	0.000	1.475	
	FEB	-0.108	-1.358	0.177	2.317	
	AOR	-0.028	-0.394	0.694	1.849	
	ROL	0.095	1.086	0.279	2.827	
	PAI	0.007	0.100	0.920	1.635	
	SDG_ECO	0.141	1.321	0.188	4.220	
	SDG_SOC	-0.242	-1.787*	0.076	6.736	
	SDG_ENV	0.015	0.138	0.890	4.154	
Model (Stepwise)	Environmental	0.739	14.114**	0.000	1.009	0.587
	SDG_SOC	-0.156	-2.972*	0.003	1.009	

Panel B: Social		β	<i>t</i> -test	Sig.	VIF	R square Adjust.
Model (All variables)	Economic	-0.127	-1.179	0.24	2.554	0.307
	Environmental	0.612	5.704**	0.000	2.525	
	FEB	0.105	1.021	0.309	2.33	
	AOR	0.208	2.304*	0.023	1.784	
	ROL	0.018	0.156	0.877	2.849	
	PAI	0.107	1.250	0.213	1.618	
	SDG_ECO	0.302	2.196*	0.030	4.132	
	SDG_SOC	-0.307	-1.748	0.083	6.743	
	SDG_ENV	-0.120	-0.871	0.385	4.133	
Model (Stepwise)	Environmental	0.510	7.410**	0.000	1.046	0.310
	AOR	0.263	3.890**	0.000	1.006	
	SDG_ECO	0.185	2.683**	0.008	1.051	
Panel C: Environmental		β	<i>t</i> -test	Sig.	VIF	R square Adjust.
Model (All variables)	Economic	0.660	12.549**	0.000	1.227	0.657
	Social	0.303	5.704**	0.000	1.249	
	FEB	0.049	0.671	0.503	2.339	
	AOR	-0.044	-0.687	0.493	1.844	
	ROL	-0.049	-0.609	0.544	2.843	
	PAI	-0.028	-0.459	0.647	1.633	
	SDG_ECO	-0.302	-3.180	0.002	3.989	
	SDG_SOC	0.301	2.465	0.015	6.606	
	SDG_ENV	0.016	0.166	0.868	4.154	
Model (Stepwise)	Economic	0.672	13.234**	0.000	1.088	0.640
	Social	0.288	5.668**	0.000	1.088	

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ and * $p < 0.05$

5.2.3. Additional analyses

In this analysis, the independent variable CLOSURE had to be divided into two different groups. To realize this, it was necessary to create a new variable (Disclosure_Groups). The values between [0, 0.49] correspond to the group designed “Lower Disclosure” and values on the interval [0.5, 1] designated “High Disclosure”. Note that the interval [0, 1] was divided on the mean point (0.5).

To understand the data, it was realized means comparisons between two types of disclosure groups (Lower and Higher). Table 10 show the results of a t-test for the comparison of means of independent samples, comparing variables from TBL index companies between high and low level of disclosure on the economic, social, and environmental scores. As observed in countries with high civil liberties ($n = 87$), the economic, social, and environmental information available is significantly higher than low civil liberties countries. There are only statistically significant differences in the social pillar when comparing the two disclosure groups ($t = -2.206$, $p < 0.05$).

These results are in line with the existing literature by Guo et al. (2022). The authors argue that companies with more extensive social information originally come from countries with higher levels of civil liberties. Companies with these levels are larger, more leveraged, with more growth opportunities, but higher share price volatility, compared to companies with less information available.

Table 10

Results of means comparison

	Lower Disclosure ($n = 66$)		High Disclosure ($n = 87$)		<i>t</i> -test	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Economic	0.45	0.25	0.49	0.27	-0.991	0.162
Social	0.26	0.27	0.36	0.29	-2.206*	0.014
Environmental	0.35	0.21	0.41	0.25	-1.621	0.054

Note. * $p < 0.05$

5.3. Synthesis

Analyzing Table 7 and Table 8 shows that H1, H2, H3, and H4b are empirically supported. It is now possible to conclude that the pillars of TBL influence each other that is, Hypothesis H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

At this point, with the results of the study, it is also possible to answer the research question "Do the civil liberties of a given country influence the corporate social responsibility of a company in the fast-fashion industry?", and the answer is that the increased disclosure of social rights in reports by this industry is only related to the social sustainability pillar and H4a and H4c are not empirically supported.

Being the case:

Table 11

Synthesis of the results as per the formulated hypothesis

Hypothesis	Description	Conclusion
H1	There is a positive relationship between the environmental pillar and the economic pillar on fast-fashion companies.	Confirmed
H2	There is a positive relationship between the environmental pillar and the social pillar on fast-fashion companies.	Confirmed
H3	There is a positive relationship between the social pillar and economic pillar on fast-fashion companies.	Confirmed
H4a	There is an influence of Civil liberties disclosure on the Economic pillar of fast-fashion companies.	Rejected
H4	H4b There is an influence of Civil liberties disclosure on the Social pillar of fast-fashion companies.	Confirmed
	H4c There is an influence of Civil liberties disclosure on the Environmental pillar of fast-fashion companies.	Rejected

Source. Own elaboration.

6. Conclusions

6.1. General conclusions of the study

It was examined whether civil liberties had an impact on the availability of corporate social responsibility by 153 companies from the fast-fashion industry across the world in the 2022 period. The study aimed to see if there was a relationship between CSR disclosure in the pillars of the "Tripple-Bottom-Line" concept, analyzing whether the pillars that make up the TBL have significant relationships between them. In doing so, to see if Civil Liberties also influenced these pillars. In countries with better civil liberties, greater openness is to be expected, which is likely to make companies in the textile and fast-fashion industry more inclined to be transparent about social issues (Jha & Cox, 2015). Based on the theory of social movements, more specifically, on the notion of civil liberty (Guo et al. 2022; Bakker et al., 2013; Kaldor et al., 2003), it was argued that countries with high levels of civil liberties allow individuals to organize and maintain their social movement activities (such as protests and boycotts) without restrictions, so fast-fashion companies operating in these countries will disseminate more social information and make it available through other means (e.g. social media).

The results of this dissertation support those arguments and contribute to existing accounting research on the influence of national factors on companies' economic, social, and environmental practices since determines that there is a positive and significant relationship between civil rights and corporate social disclosure. It was found that companies based in countries with higher levels of civil liberties make more corporate social responsibility publicly available than companies based in countries with lower values of civil liberties.

In terms of the practical implications of the study, companies based in countries with high levels of civil liberties can be encouraged to be more transparent about their economic, social and environmental practices. Governments can consider policies that promote a favorable regulatory environment for companies operating in their territory. This can include the protection of civil liberties and incentives to disclose information about CSR, and society can see this as a way of promoting corporate responsibility.

Investors and shareholders can use these results to make informed decisions about where to invest their capital. For example, companies with high levels of CSR disclosure may be considered more attractive to investors in the textile industry concerned with social issues.

Companies can use these results to compare their performance with that of other companies in different countries. This can help them understand CSR disclosure expectations in different contexts and adapt their practices accordingly.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of civil liberties in promoting CSR disclosure and sheds light on the theoretical and practical implications of this relationship for society, business, and government.

6.2. Limitations and future research

The study is limited by its sample size, which includes 153 companies from the fast-fashion industry in 2022. This sample size may not be fully representative of the entire global fast-fashion industry, which is vast and diverse, and in some cases only one company in the country of origin is analyzed (data released by the Fashion Transparency Index 2022).

The findings might not generalize to other industries or larger populations and this study focuses on data from 2022. CSR practices and civil liberties can change over time, and the snapshot of one year may not capture long-term trends or fluctuations.

The study suggests that countries with higher levels of civil liberties tend to have companies that disclose more information about CSR. This significance may indicate that there is a theoretical relationship between the political, governmental and social environment of a country and the behavior of companies and reading this dissertation may stimulate further research into political factors that affect this type of behavior on the part of companies around the world.

This dissertation is developed using social movement theory as a theoretical framework underpinning the research. This implies that the ability of people to organize and protest in countries with more robust civil liberties can influence corporate behavior. This theoretical link can be explored in future studies on how social movements affect business practices.

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