IN WHICH WAY CAN HIGH STREET RETAILERS INFLUENCE CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION THROUGH GREEN COMMUNICATIONS?
My deep-seated interest in sustainability in the fashion industry was first triggered during a project on designing a fully sustainable fashion brand in the third semester at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. During this time, I got in touch with the facts of the environmental damage the fashion industry is causing. Collecting trash bags full of plastic that have been washed up at the coastline of Iceland during a voluntary work camp has given me another, profounder perspective on the environmental issues we are facing.

Since then, fashion and the huge industry behind it has always inhered a particular bitterness for me. Although, or mainly because, I am deeply passionate about fashion, I have come to the conclusion that I do not want to contribute to the environmental harm caused by the ever-changing world of fashion.

I therefore started to immerse myself further in the topic of sustainability in fashion. I attended conferences, courses and read books about the subject which gradually revealed possible approaches to solving these issues. These ideas were not only providing a view on radical, new systems of designing, producing and consuming clothes, but they also presented products that were modern, fashion-forward and in line with the newest technologies.

As my excitement grew, I also had to recognise that my fellow students’, friends’ and other peoples’ perception of sustainability were rather dull. People I talked to beyond the fashion industry continuously confirmed me that they associate sustainable fashion, or ‘eco-fashion’, with boring, earthy browns and pricy clothes. But also my fellow students seemed to regard sustainable fashion as uninteresting, and the recurring topic of sustainability in the curriculum as tiring.

During the following years of my studies, I continued to observe efforts regarding sustainability made by small brands, but also by large high street retailers. What has struck me was that although more sustainable product lines were available in fast-fashion retailers, consumers still seem to have a ‘dull’ perception of sustainable fashion.

During the research for this thesis, I have taken up a part-time internship with the ‘Ethical Fashion Forum’ in London, an online platform promoting sustainable strategies and solutions for the fashion industry. In this work, I researched and wrote about the basics of sustainability and current issues in sustainable fashion. The internship has provided me with valuable insights and knowledge for this research.

First efforts of bringing sustainable fashion to the mass market and making it more palatable for the mainstream consumer have been attempted during the past decade. However, the question is whether the ‘mainstreaming’ of sustainable fashion can be successful while consumers hold a negative perception towards green fashion. Getting sustainable fashion into the high street is crucial, as large retailers serve a broad audience, produce in high quantities and can therefore have a big impact on making sustainability the norm. The research of this thesis focuses on green communication strategies in the fashion industry and how they can influence current consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion.

I would especially like to thank my graduation coach Peter Buts who has supported me with great guidance during this semester and has helped me through the process. Further I would also like to thank my second reader, Brigitte Schriks, who has significantly helped me finding the bigger goal and meaning of my graduation project and has directed me back into the right direction in a time of struggle.

Above all, I would like to dedicate a special thanks to my parents. Without their longstanding, endless support, motivation and profound believe in my skills I would not have been able to finalise this four-year program.
# INDEX

## 1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Rationale 4
1.2. Research Question 4
1.3. Aim 4
1.4. Methodology 5
1.5. Structure 5
1.6. Limitations 6

## 2. SUSTAINABILITY IN FASHION
2.1. Introduction 7
2.2. Definition sustainability
   Sustainability and Fashion 7
2.3. Relevance 9
   Business | Consumer
2.4. Consumer perceptions 10
   Greenophobia | Too Fast to Be Green | Greenwashing | Green Fatigue
2.5. Purchase Behaviour 12
   Motivators for Green Purchasing | Barriers to Green Purchasing
2.6. Conclusion 13

## 3. GREEN COMMUNICATIONS
3.1. Introduction 14
3.2. Defining Green Communications 14
3.3. Implications of Communicating 'Green'
   Advantages | Disadvantages 14
3.4. Conclusion 15

## 4. GREEN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
4.1. Introduction 15
4.2. Green Communication Strategies in the Fashion Industry 16
   Communication Volume | Credibility | Transparency | Storytelling | Education | Simplicity | Humour |
   The Unexpected | Consumer Engagement | Collaboration | Claim Specificity | Celebrity Endorsement | Scope Reduction 16
4.3. Communication Channels 23
4.4. Measuring Efficacy 23
4.5. Conclusion 25
5. GREEN COMMUNICATION ON THE HIGH STREET

5.1. Introduction 26
5.2. The High Street Consumer 26
5.3. Strategic Tools for High Street Retailers 27
   Normalisation | Education and Simplicity | Personalisation | Specificity | Credibility | Transparency |
   Humour | Narrative | Surprise | Engagement | Desirability
5.4. Implications for High Street Retailers of Influencing Consumer Perceptions 30
5.5. Conclusion 31

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

6.1. Books 34
6.2. Studies 34
6.3. Online 35

7. APPENDIX

7.1. Case Study: Marks & Spencer 38
7.2. Case Study: Patagonia 43
7.3. Case Study: The Reformation 48
7.4. Expert Interview: Sarah Ditty 54
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

Since the 1970's sustainability has gained in importance globally and events like the Chernobyl power plant explosion in 1986 and the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 raised concerns about the environmental health. Hence, consumers have been progressively demanding ‘environmentally-friendly merchandise’ (Phau and Ong, 2007, p. 772 cited Kaufman, 1999; La Ferla, 2001; Montoro et al., 2006; Wustenhagen and Bilharz, 2006). Companies have in turn been responding with the increased implementation of ‘eco-friendly strategies’ (Biloslavo and Trnavcevic, 2009).

And although the fashion industry is the second biggest environmental polluter worldwide (Stewart, 2012; Fashioningchange, 2012), sustainable fashion products have not yet caught on with the mainstream market to the same extent as in other industries, organic food products for instance. A study of Mintel (2009) showed, that the overall market share of ethical clothing covers only 1% of the clothing market in the UK (Jay, 2011; James, 2012).

But precisely because of the size of the industry and its damaging impacts, Hill and Lee (2011) argue that the fashion industry has the opportunity to have a significant impact on the green movement1. Furthermore, as fashion is characterised by continuous change as well as expressions, it embodies the means and power to communicate new sustainable notions in society (Hultin and Villberg, 2013, p. 8 cited Flew, et.al. 2009).

During the past four years of engaging in the field of sustainability in fashion, personal observations and repetitious conversations have shown that consumers often hold negative attitudes towards green fashion. This manifests itselfs in prejudices of sustainable fashion being uncomfortable, unstylish or of lower quality. The research confirmed these findings, constituting the basis for this study.

Although a range of fashion brands are already focusing on designing and producing sustainably, and green product lines have been introduced on the high street, Jay (2012) and James (2012) both argue that green fashion is still holding a niche market position.

The negative perceptions of green fashion are, in fact, influencing its wider take up and purchasing. In a recent roundtable discussion in 2013, which brought together various experts of sustainability in the fashion industry, attendants commonly agreed that the biggest issue facing sustainable fashion is the not-yet wide-spread demand it is exposed to. Influencing consumer perceptions is thus crucial to enhance this demand in the mainstream market (Payton, 2013).

This research is thus relevant for high street retailers and marketers working in the fashion mainstream segment aiming to make green fashion more attractive to their audience, while pursuing the bigger goal of mainstreaming green fashion. The findings of this study will demonstrate how the negative consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion can be positively influenced through various communication strategies.

1.2. Research Question

In which way can high street retailers influence consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion through green communications?

1.3. Aim

The goal of this study is to investigate current consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion as well as green communication tools in fashion in order to determine how they can be used by high street retailers to influence perceptions on sustainable fashion. Rex and Baumann (2006) argued, that in order to integrate sustainability into lifestyles, production and consumption, green products need to speak to a wider audience. High street retailers both have the means and power to achieve a broader adoption of sustainable fashion since they are are firstly targeting the broad mainstream, and are secondly communicating trends and values which can influence consumer mindsets.

---

1 the green movement is a social and political movement aimed at protecting the environment and reducing environmental harm
The contribution of this research lies in the providence of tools for green communications which are aiming to influence the image of sustainable fashion. Moreover, findings of the research also contribute significant insights into the measuring of efficacy of green communications.

Next to giving answer to the research question, another outcome of this study is an end product which gives practical relevance to the findings. The product constitutes a guide for high street retailers (specifically the marketing department) to effectively use communications for altering consumer perceptions on green fashion. The guide depicts key factors for high street retailers to consider in communicating ‘green’.

1.4. Methodology

The research approach for this study was chosen to be conducted in the traditional method. Because extensive research has already been produced on the topic, the literature was first reviewed before any primary data was collected.

Both primary and secondary research methods have been employed. Secondary research was used to establish the theoretical framework of the topic and to get an understanding of the issues of sustainability, green communications and consumer perceptions. Most sources have been found online, including books, studies, research papers and articles which represented relevance to the topic.

Primary research has been conducted in order to add depth and first-hand data to the research. The focus on collecting qualitative data was chosen as it presents more relevance to the research topic. The primary research includes an expert interview and a multiple case study of green communications in the industry.

The interview was conducted with Sarah Ditty, Editor-in-Chief of the Ethical Fashion Forum. Sarah Ditty has more than ten years of experience as a journalist, writer and business consultant in the field of sustainability in fashion. Having also repeatedly written about the subject of green marketing, Ditty represents a suitable expert for the research of this thesis.

The case study is comprised of three company examples, being ‘Marks&Spencer’ (M&S), ‘Patagonia’, and ‘The Reformation’. The cases were chosen based on their exemplary approach and strategies in green communications. Detailed information on the interview and case study can be found in the appendix, page 38.

Observations from the simultaneous part-time internship at the Ethical Fashion Forum have also been considered in the research process and findings.

1.5. Structure

The structure of the research is determined by following sub-questions which help to answer the main research question.

Chapter 2: What are consumer perceptions of sustainability in fashion?
Sustainability, its relevance and role in fashion, as well as current perceptions and purchase behaviours regarding sustainable fashion

Chapter 3: What is green communication and its implications in the fashion industry?
Green communication definition and implications of communicating ‘green’

Chapter 4: Which tools of green communication are currently used in the industry?
Communication tools, channels and effectiveness metrics of strategies

Chapter 5: How can green communication be used to influence consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion on the high street?
The high street consumer and effective communication tools to influence his perception of green fashion

The structure of this thesis is following a funnel model, starting with the broader background knowledge and frameworks of the issue. The last sub-question (chapter five) then specifically focuses the research on high street retailers, leading to answering the main research question.
1.6. Limitations

The research field of sustainability and green marketing in general, but also specifically in the fashion industry, has reached a wide scope of research during the past decades. It was therefore difficult to consider all published theories and studies and consequently a selection of studies had to be made. This means that a range of existing theories had to be excluded from the literature review, constituting a first natural limitation. A second selection was made in choosing industry examples for current green communication strategies (chapter four), meaning that others were excluded.

Due to the limited time frame, the study focuses on green communications, which is one part of the umbrella term of ‘green marketing’. Furthermore it should be noted that green communications can be tailored to a variety of stakeholders. This study solely focuses on the externally-oriented green communication strategies targeting consumers.

Although this thesis was written with the aim to approach the topic in an objective way, my longstanding passion and engagement for sustainability in fashion could have influenced the research and writing. For the case study, three exemplary companies were chosen. And yet not intended, my personal opinion or liking of the company could have affected the brand presentation. The insights and information gained during the internship at the Ethical Fashion Forum could have additionally biased the research and findings. All of these factors can thus act as limitations.

For explaining current green communication strategies in chapter 4.1., several industry examples were chosen. This means that other suitable examples were excluded, constituting a selection and limitation.
2. SUSTAINABILITY IN FASHION

2.1. Introduction

The following chapter will address the first sub-question of this thesis, namely ‘what are consumer perceptions of sustainability in fashion?’ To answer this question, we first have to look at sustainability in itself. How is it defined, what does it mean and, finally, how does it fit into the concept of fashion? The chapter then goes on to discuss why sustainability is relevant in the fashion industry today. This question is examined from two sides, revealing the relevance for businesses, and the relevance for the consumer. A next section further investigates the perceptions consumers carry of green products and fashion and will simultaneously bridge into the last passage which addresses the green purchase behaviour.

2.2. Defining Sustainability

Even after four decades of its existence, researchers, experts and industry professionals are still struggling with appointing an universal definition to the term of ‘sustainability’. It has been repeatedly stated in existing literature, that the defining of sustainability or ‘green’, which is often used as a synonym, is a complex task (Mohajan, 2011) and that there is no public consensus on what it actually means (The Boston Consulting Group, 2009; Sandeep et al. 2011; Shields, 2010; Jensen, 2010).

The majority of proposed definition however, considers three factors inherent to sustainability - social, environmental and economic aspects. The definition of the Brundtland Commission similarly combines these elements. As it is also one of the most cited definitions today, it will serve as the theoretical basis of this study.

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” - (‘Our Common Future’, 1987, p. 43)

Deriving from this definition, a green company is not only setting economic and financial factors as important objectives, but is also also considering environmental and social matters, and is striving to behave accordingly in the least harmful way (Biloslavo and Trnavcevic, 2009).

A green product is generally cutting environmental and social impact or harm in any stage of the supply chain, ranging from raw materials to disposal (Ottman, 2012). However, a truly green product has hardly been achieved as it requires the elimination of impact in every supply chain stage. The aim of a green product is to create a ‘closed loop system’ in which waste is used as the raw material for new products, leading to the creation of ‘zero waste’.

Because the terms of sustainability and green are very ambiguous, constituting different meanings for different people, cultures and product groups (The Boston Consulting Group, 2009), finding a universal definition might not be the best solution. Instead, it has been suggested that sustainability should be regarded as a variable term. Its meaning should therefore be determined by the sender communicating a message about sustainability (Jensen, 2010).

Sustainability and Fashion

The fashion industry is the epitome of consumerism. Fashion is living off ever-changing trends, inventory is turned over rapidly and fast-fashion brands are offering new products in stores almost every week. Outsourcing manufacturing into countries characterised by a race to the bottom, has only pushed down prices of fashion products, making them disposable goods which are often bought cheaply and thrown away after few uses. After all, the next trend is already waiting on the retail shelves. The most regarded aspect of green fashion was found to be durability (Hill and Lee, 2012) - the total opposite of what drives fashion. Consequently, the combination of this consumerism-embodying industry, and sustainability, which in fact confronts consumption, could be seen as a paradox (Huws, 2013).
In the past four decades, since the increased integration of environmental concerns into the public agenda, brands have progressively tried to combine fashion with green objectives. What has emerged from the beginning of the millennium are brands founded with the aim to ‘be green’ and ‘do good’. Examples include Patagonia, Toms, NOIR and Stella McCartney. The success of these business cases shows that, although a theoretical paradox between fashion and sustainability exists, practically the combining of green and fashion is not impossible.

2.3. Relevance

Sustainability is here to stay. According to several experts, green fashion is not just another trend temporary appearing in the cycle of fashion, but sustainability will transform the whole industry (Hultin and Villberg, 2013, p.39 cited Varton, 2008). It is equally influencing individuals’ lifestyles, as it is affecting every aspect of business.

Business

More and more companies are integrating and planning to integrate sustainability into their business (Biloslavo and Tranavecic, 2009, p.1159 cited Bradbury and Clair, 1999). A study of Futerra (2013a), a leading agency of sustainability communications, in 2013 found, that the companies who have implement sustainability into their business will have more than doubled by 2018 (figure 2.3.1.).

Companies have come to realise that they are acting in a community in which, together with consumers, they do not only bear economic, but also social and environmental responsibilities (Hultin and Villberg, 2013, p.9 cited Mishra and Sharma, 2012). Brands are moving away from the idea that making profit is the only necessary objective to sustain a healthy business. And although profitability remains crucial to businesses, Boztepe (2012) states that companies are increasingly seen as establishments which are affected by and sensible to the outside environment. The integration of sustainability is therefore becoming a necessity for brands.

Various motives for businesses to go green have been observed. These include the pressure of stakeholders, cost reduction, exploiting of a new market niche, targeting the green consumer segment, avoiding taxes and fines connected to environmental legislation, and perceived moral obligations (Biloslavo and Tranavecic, 2009).
It has also been found that ‘greening’ the business can cause a significant increase in business performance. Cronin et al. (2009) thereby state that a ‘green orientation’ can lead to higher market share and financial returns, increased capabilities and increased commitment of employees. Similarly, socially responsible initiatives result in improved customer satisfaction and firm value (Cronin et al., 2009). Hence, sustainability can be relevant for firms to operate more efficiently.

The growing consumer demand for sustainable products represents a major relevance for companies to turn green. As consumers are becoming better informed about environmental impacts of products and supply chains (Hultin and Villberg, 2013, p.2 cited Gam, 2011), they are also asking for greener product alternatives from companies. At the same time, brands are increasingly pressured to justify their choices and impacts. However, consumers endorse also small efforts made by fashion brands to lower their impact (Hill and Lee, 2012).

Consumer

Consumers’ environmental consciousness has been growing during the past years (Phau and Ong, 2007). Climate change and resource scarcities have become ever-present issues, demonstrating the impacts our lifestyles have on the ecosystem. Research has found that consumers generally have low levels of knowledge on how garments and fashion products are produced and which social and environmental impacts the fashion supply chain entails (Phau and Ong, 2007; Hill and Lee, 2012).

Nevertheless, consumers are also starting to scrutinise these impacts (Hill and Lee, 2012, p. 487 cited Lipek, 2008; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Mintel, 2009) and to become more interested in buying sustainable fashion (Hill and Lee, 2012, p. 487 cited Gam, 2011; HillerConnell, 2011). It has been argued that, in fact, almost all consumers can be seen as ‘green consumers’. Kardash (1974) states that when faced with the decision between two intrinsically equal products, differentiated only by the level of sustainable impact, consumers would always choose the ‘greener’ product (Peattie, 2001). Therefore, sustainability is certainly relevant to everyone, although not to the same extent.

Different green consumer groups have been identified according to the level of relevance they attribute to ‘green’. Futerra, one of the leading agencies for green marketing, presented a segmentation of green consumers based on a model by Chris Rose (‘What makes people tick: The three hidden worlds of Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers, 2011’) in which he segmented people according to what motivates them. Futerra’s further developed model groups consumers into three different wedges based on their attitudes towards sustainability. The different groups are named ‘Bricks’, ‘Greens’ and ‘Golds’ (Ethical Fashion Forum, 2013). ‘Bricks’ are extremely focused on their immediate environment and issues affecting them personally. They think more in local frameworks and do not consider themselves being able to have an impact on global issues. Communications about global issues are therefore tendentially ignored by ‘Bricks’. ‘Greens’, on the other hand, are the big-thinkers, embracing the discussion of global issues. They are the forerunners of sustainable fashion. Greens are the first to adopt a new sustainable trend and to turn their back towards it as soon as it becomes too mainstream. The biggest wedge, however, are the ‘Golds’. These are the majority of consumers who embrace fashion, status and success and love everything popular. ‘Golds’ like to go with the flow and although they see themselves as individuals, they don’t want to stand out. Because this segmentation into ‘Bricks’, ‘Greens’ and ‘Golds’ provides a valuable framework for this research, it will be used and referred to throughout the study.

2.4. Consumer perceptions

Greenophobia

Green marketers are facing several issues when it comes to the effective promotion of green products. As Peattie and Crane (2005) argue, green marketing has in fact not contributed to a more sustainable world (Hultin and Villberg, 2013). And although sustainable fashion is already available on the high street, its adaption has not been taking off to a great extent (James, 2012; Jay, 2011). Because, as Jay (2011) noted, availability does not necessarily lead to consumer commitment.

One cause for this aggravated adaption can be associated with the existence of negative consumer perception of sustainable fashion. John Grant (2007) identified these negative perceptions as a ‘greenophobia’ which is prevalent in today’s mainstream culture. A phobia is generally defined as ‘an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something’ (Oxford Dictionary). Grant listed several characteristics how this ‘greenophobia’ manifests itself with regards to green products:
they are primitive, dirty, rough, smelly, unpleasant;
they are a step back from modern living standards;
they are inconvenient, time-consuming;
they represent a sacrifice, the loss of benefits and satisfactions;
they can be uncomfortable, (…)
with no compensating positive benefits other than ‘virtue’;
they are weird, for weird people, hippy;
they are part of a fixed lifestyle, you’d have to conform;
they are more expensive and less effective

(source: Grant, J.; 2007; The Green Marketing Manifesto, chapter C)

In the expert interview, Sarah Ditty confirmed this view by saying that sustainable fashion has seen many prejudices during the past twenty years. ‘Eco fashion’ was thereby classified as ‘hippy’, for a segment of people who are into nature, products being of lower quality, brown, scratchy and just not desirable. Jay (2011) also noted that in fashion, green products are also perceived to be lacking style. Considering that consumers carry these thoughts on green products, it comes as no surprise that sustainable fashion has not yet experienced a wider adaptation. Especially in fashion, products which are viewed as being ‘backwards’ (old-fashioned), weird (not in ‘normal’), uncomfortable and more expensive without offering additional benefits, have a low chance of selling. This ‘greenophobic’ attitude is further reinforced by certain conditions which are presented in the following sections.

Too Fast to be Green
As it has been outlined before, the concept of green fashion is marked by the incompatibility of fashion and sustainability. Accordingly, consumers do not believe that the ideas of both concepts can fit together (Hill and Lee, 2012, p.484 cited Hiller Connell, 2010). Especially fast fashion and the high street are not associated with sustainability or green products (Hultin and Villberg, 2013). This perception of consumers is very well understandable considering the low levels of knowledge consumers generally have regarding the environmental impact of the fashion industry. However, it may also illustrate a barrier to the adoption of sustainable fashion as it may lead to increased scepticism of green fashion in the high street and resultingly affect purchase behaviour.

Greenwashing
A crucial influencer of consumer perceptions today is the problem of ‘greenwash’. In the early 1990’s, green marketing activities peaked significantly as environmental concerns became more prominent amongst the public. Companies quickly jumped on this so called ‘green bandwagon’, marketing products based on environmental claims. It turned out, however, that most of these claims then lacked credibility, green products did not promise what they preached and often fell short in functionality. The ‘greenwashing’ was thereby referred to as a brand’s attempt to appear ‘greener’ as they actually are (Vermillion and Peart, 2010, p.70 cited Deen, 2002). Also the displaying of environmental concerns which are superficial or dishonest is regarded as greenwash (Rettie, et al., 2012, p.422 cited Collins English Dictionary, 2009). As a consequence, consumers lost trust towards green marketing and grew scepticism instead (Rettie et al., 2012). This scepticism is still prevalent today. Partly due to the internet and increased access to information, more and more cases of greenwashing are being disclosed in the past decade (Armgarth, 2009a), which only accelerates consumers’ mistrust and negative perception. John Grant (2007) stated that these greenwashing activities have partially led to the ‘greenophobia’.

Green Fatigue
Research found that, although the appearance of environmental issues in the media increases, the general awareness of these problems decreases. The reason for this condition has been named ‘green fatigue’ (Shields, 2010). This means that the public is getting tired of sustainability marketing and is growing immune against green messages. The growth of green marketing activities has lead to an over saturation of messages geared towards sustainability. Additionally, due to the previous explained lack of consensus of what green is, these messages are often contradicting, communicating different information of how to live a proper sustainable life (Shields, 2010).
Marketers are simply overusing the term ‘green’ itself and therefore, consumers are said to become ‘desensitised’ to the whole topic of sustainability (Shields, 2010).

2.5. Purchase Behaviour

Motivators for Green Purchasing
Consumers who already hold a high level of environmental and social values and are more concerned about the environment are also more likely to engage in green purchasing (Hultin and Villberg, 2013; Gilg et al., 2005). A study by Thøgerson and Ölander (2002) confirmed that green values drive green purchase behaviour. However, consumers who carry those values still represent a minority of the market which also explains why sustainable fashion has not been very successful in the mainstream market yet. These findings represent an opportunity for marketers to engage more people in green purchasing through the promotion of green values.

A crucial factor for purchase which should not be disregarded is the product design. In fact, consumers’ purchase decision in fashion is first of all based on the product appearance. Sustainability aspects in contrast are considered last (Huws, 2013). What that means is, for green fashion to attract the mainstream, it must above all be well designed. The product design should not lack behind the ‘traditional fashion’ in any way. Consumers are willing to pay 15% more for tailored clothing than for apparel with an eco-label (Marsh, 2012). This implies, that sustainable fashion needs to focus as much on the product design as on the product greenness, also in communications.

Hill and Lee (2012) stated that the low knowledge level of fashion’s impact may also constitute a barrier to green purchasing. It appears logical that consumers, who do not know about the destructive impacts of the fashion supply chain, like the water-consuming cotton harvest, toxic dyes, child labour or low wages, do not recognise the necessity of sustainable fashion. Therefore, consumers are more likely to engage in green purchasing when they receive information and are reminded about these impacts (Phau and Ong, 2007, p.776 cited Carlson et al., 1993). However, the question is how much information is too much and when does it lead to green fatigue rather than green purchasing? This question will further be investigated in chapter 4.2.

Consumers are more influenced by products which offer a personal benefit for them (e.g. health, safety or cost benefits) (Kim et al., 2012, p. 7 cited Carson et al., 1993; Vermillion and Peart, 2010). Even consumers who already hold green values are found to be driven more by personal benefits than by environmental benefits (Vermillion and Peart, 2010). Fashion products, however, are credence goods. This means that the value of ‘green’ in most of these products is hidden to the consumer (Meyer, 2001), and their green benefits do not directly affect him, but have impacts further up the supply chain (e.g. in production). Brands can thus reduce the scope of the green claim (scope reduction) by highlighting personal benefits.

On the other hand, the ‘perceived consumer effectiveness’ (PCE) (Gilg et al., 2005), meaning the personal impact one individual can have with a purchase decision, is similarly important. If consumers feel that with their purchase decision they can actually have an impact and influence the social or environmental conditions, they are more likely to engage in green purchasing (Hill and Lee, 2012, p. 485 cited Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Gilg et al., 2005). Above findings imply that in order to engage consumers in green purchasing, it is important for fashion companies to not market products solely on the attribute of being ‘green’ but to also communicate personal benefits and impacts for the consumer.

Barriers to Green Purchasing
One main barrier for buying green is the persistent ‘greenophobia’ which leads to consumers prejudging green products and sustainable brands or avoiding them. Sustainable brands often recognise that green fashion is coupled with these negative consumer perception and may only speak to a certain consumer segment which can affect consumers purchase behaviour. Hence they sometimes choose not to focus their communications on the green aspects of the product (also see chapter 4.2., page 16).
ASOS is an online fashion retailer offering more than 65,000 branded and own label products, attracting 29.5 million unique visitors each month (source: ASOS website, 15/04/14). 'The ASOS Marketplace' is a platform for smaller brands and boutiques to sell their products online and be listed in a certain category (e.g. independent label, vintage or ethical). 'Goodone', a small label working with upcycled materials has stated in an interview to have deliberately chosen not to be listed as 'ethical' in the ASOS Marketplace, but to register as an 'independent label'. A spokesperson of Goodone stated: 'if we were listed as ethical, that might limit who would click on that link on ASOS Marketplace. So we chose to be listed as independent label in order to reach a wider potential customer base.' (Jay, 2011).

Furthermore, green purchasing is also negatively influenced by the scepticism towards green advertisement resulting from greenwashing activities of brands. The lack of trust consumers have regarding the information they receive and the green claims that are made by companies can result in the avoidance of a green purchase (Phau and Ong, 2006).

Sustainable fashion brings along an additional burden consumers have to overcome when making a purchase decision. Next to evaluating the price, quality or fit of a garment, considering the social and environmental impact is complicating the decision-making process (Hill and Lee, 2012, p.480 cited Gam, 2011; Hiller Connell, 2010). Due to this resultingly higher levels of stress, it has been found that consumers are less motivated to process green messages and also tend to deliberately ignore them when making decisions (Peloza et al., 2012). Therefore, it has been questioned whether green communication can be effective with a strategy that highlights green values next to, or above traditional product benefits. Peloza et al. (2012) also argue that due to this active avoidance of green messages, sustainability cannot be processed via the central route of persuasion (facts and message content convince the listener) which only leads, if at all, to short-term effects. It could therefore be assumed that a more effective communication strategy would use the peripheral route of persuasion, for instance by speaking to the emotions of consumers.

2.6. Conclusion

The first sub question that has been answered in this chapter addressed current consumer perceptions of sustainability in fashion.

We have seen that there is an ambiguity surrounding the terms green and sustainability, for both companies and consumers. This condition can potentially constitute a noise in the communication process and the green message could be misconceived by consumers. It is therefore crucial for brands to define their understanding of these terms. In order to get consumers having the same point of view, fashion companies should clearly communicate to their audience what ‘green’ means to them and their products.

Furthermore, ‘greenophobia’ represents a main issue in consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion. These perceptions are making green fashion less attractive and ultimately hinder green purchasing. This means that these ‘greenophobic’ attitudes first have to be overcome in order for sustainable fashion to reach a higher market share.

Consumer perceptions are further marked by low knowledge levels of the environmental and social impact fashion entails. This is especially important because it indicates that consumers need more information and education on sustainability in the fashion industry. But we have also seen that consumers have already developed a fatigue from an information overload given through green communications. This constitutes a paradox between the need of educational information and the demand for it. Therefore, an argument resulting from these findings is that a new approach to educating consumers on sustainability is needed. Fashion companies need to find solutions how to communicate educational information on impacts and processes, without tiring their audience.

Another paradox exists between consumer demand and purchase behaviour. Consumers are asking for greener products and brands, but they are also growing more sceptical towards offers and claims. For companies, this means that, on the one hand the thrive to offering more sustainable fashion is necessary. On the other hand, when communicating about ‘green’, fashion companies should make sure to validate any information they give and be able to back up any claims they make. Otherwise, initially good intentions can easily be attacked as cases of greenwashing and damage a brand’s image.

---

2 upcycling is the process of reusing waste materials and processing them into new products. Different to recycling, upcycled materials do not loose in quality in the process and can therefore be reused in infinite cycles.
What becomes clear is that several factors aggravate the green communication process in comparison to ‘non-green’ communications. The challenge for fashion brands lies in considering the lack of consensus regarding sustainability, consumers’ low knowledge levels of fashion’s impacts, consumers’ scepticism and green fatigue, as well as the reduction of scope in their communication strategies.

3. GREEN COMMUNICATIONS

3.1. Introduction

This second chapter expands on green communications and their implications in the fashion industry. We first look at the definition of green communication. Which bigger concept is green communication part of? Lastly, advantages and disadvantages of communicating ‘green’ are presented.

3.2. Defining Green Communications

Green communications are part of the wider practice of so-called ‘green marketing’. Green marketing derives from ‘traditional’ marketing in which the marketing mix (price, product, place and promotion) is used to satisfy consumer demands and achieve company objectives (Arseculeratne and Yazdanifard, 2014). Within the concept of sustainability, however, the marketing mix is described as green price, green product, green place and green promotion. Green marketing, then refers to an extended concept which aims to sell and promote products and services which satisfy demand and achieve objectives, but which are also environmentally beneficial (Gurusamy et al. 2013; Armgarth, 2009a). Furthermore, green marketing also aims to communicate a business’ environmental concern and consequently foster a positive brand image (Arseculeratne and Yazdanifard, 2014, p. 131 cited Ottman, 1998). It can therefore serve to promote a sustainable product and service, brand image, or both.

The Boston Consulting Group report (2009) defined four P’s of green advantage, key aspects for a company to follow a successful sustainability strategy. These are planning (integration of sustainability into the corporate strategy), processes (‘walking the talk’), green product offering and green promotion. This study focuses specifically on the last stage of green promotion. In this context, green promotion or communications are referred to as the ways and strategies how fashion brands communicate about sustainability to the consumer.

3.3. Implications of Communicating ‘Green’

Through research it became apparent that some fashion brands choose not to make use of green communications, despite their high level of sustainable efforts, while others do engage in green promotion. In order to understand green communication strategies, it is crucial to explore the reasons behind these decision. Advantages and disadvantages of communicating green are presented in the following paragraphs.

Advantages

Having repeatedly mentioned that consumers are increasingly demanding sustainable products, services and brands, an apparent advantage for fashion companies is to communicate one’s efforts in order to respond to this demand and target the green market niche. But as Biloslavo and Tranvcevic (2009) state, a brand’s communications on sustainability can also represent a competitive advantage and build a brand’s green image and reputation in the minds of the public.
Disadvantages
Arguments of green communication being rather disadvantageous have emerged extensively in existing literature. They are mainly assigned to the issues of audience limitations when communicating ‘green’ and companies’ fear of greenwash accusations.

Communicating about sustainability has effects on the audience scope the message is reaching. As it has been shown by means of the example of the green fashion label ‘Goodone’, preferring not to be listed as an ethical brand in the ASOS Marketplace, sustainable fashion is still speaking to a specific group of consumers. Only seeing words like ‘green’, ‘sustainable’ or ‘organic’ can lead to some consumers foredooming green products and brands and consequently to a lower consumer reach.

Verma P., Verma R. and Verma M. (2013) have in this respect also found that green advertisement does influence green purchasing only for consumers who are already engaged in green behaviour. This finding in fact shows an interesting problem, which has also been mentioned by Nin Castle, designer of Goodone: ‘eco fashion has dug itself into a hole, preaching to an already converted audience, when it needs to engage with new consumers’ (Jay, 2011). Therefore, one disadvantage of communicating ‘green’ is that while it might have positive effects on one consumer group, it is also likely to scare off another consumer group carrying more negative perceptions of sustainable fashion.

A second disadvantage derives from the main issue sustainability is still facing today: it is cluttered with scepticism. Consumers have been found to closely analyse green claims, especially those lacking reasonable benefits and credible information (Phau and Ong, 2007, p.775 cited Branthwaite, 2002). Many businesses are thus ‘scared’ to be accused of greenwashing and contain themselves with their green communication. Research also suggests that many companies are in fact more sustainable than they claim to be, due to deliberate ‘under-investing’ in green communication (Peloza et al. 2012).

3.4. Conclusion

Surprisingly, the literature review showed that the majority of analysed studies highlighted more disadvantages of communicating ‘green’. This result in fact questions whether companies should make use of green communications at all. Yet, the research in existing literature and discussion with industry professionals confirmed that green communications certainly have a relevance in mainstreaming sustainable fashion (also see chapter 2.3., page 9).

One could thus argue that green communications are mainly been disadvantageous due to the communication strategies that have been applied. The way green fashion is communicated is simply not appealing to the majority of consumers. Similarly, Rahbar and Wahid (2011, p. 80) noted: ‘the factor resulting to consumer’s weak response to environmental advertising is not the consequence of consumer’s unwillingness to take action and change their behavior to purchase green products; rather consumers are unwilling to change their purchase behavior given the manner in which ‘green’ products have been promoted and advertised’.

Reasons for this condition which we have already explored are the promotional lack of personal benefits, the former targeting of consumers who already hold higher environmental values and the overuse of green message leading to fatigue and boredom of the sustainability topic. Further reasons will be explored in the following chapters.

4. GREEN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

4.1. Introduction

The following chapter firstly highlights the common and recognised tools in green communication of fashion brands. What became apparent is that not all mentioned examples can be assigned to only one strategy. In fact, many strategies use a combination of different tools. Further analysis and implications of this practice will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter. Furthermore, the importance and use of different communication channels will be discussed. The last section then focuses on the effectiveness of green communications. What are metrics for measuring the effectiveness of green communications? And can it be measured at all? The findings are supported by
the multiple case study, comprising the brands Marks & Spencer, Patagonia and The Reformation. Additionally, insights from the expert interview with Sarah Ditty are integrated.

4.2. Green Communication Strategies in the Fashion Industry

Communication Volume

The ‘volume’ of communication, or how much brands are communicating about their green efforts, appeared to be one of the most discussed topics within the literature. Sandeep et al. (2011) propose two options, namely companies can either use their sustainability focus as a marketing tool or they can choose not to promote this aspect and simply be green. Meyer (2001) stated that Meffert and Kirchgeorg (1998) have suggested a similar framework which introduces four different strategies. Thus, companies can communicate sustainable benefits of a product dominantly, equally with conventional attributes, supporting conventional attributes or not at all (ignoring). Davis (1993) again focused on the ‘claim emphasis’. How much emphasis is given to the product’s sustainable aspect compared to other benefits. This means that sustainability can then be either communicated as the number one unique selling point, or rather as an added value, being inferior to other benefits. Because the communication volume is one of the most important and discussed themes in green communications, the following sections will further elaborate on the different strategies within communication volume.

Arguments for ‘loudly’ communicating about sustainability were rare in existing literature. In fact, most recommendations proned to a more modest take on green communications. Reasons for this bias have been outlined in chapter 3.4., implications of green communications. In this sense, Armgarth (2009b, ‘over-do-it’) gave the advise: ‘2% organic material might be better than 0%, but it does not give you the right to call yourself green. In the long-term you might actually have some proof that your actions have resulted in benefits for the environment, small things do amount up to something. Don’t flaunt it until it’s worth it!’.

The flaunting strategy also comprises the marketing of green benefits as the first unique selling point. We have seen in chapter 2.2., relevance, consumers would make the more sustainable choice when faced with two similar products, and Maryruth (2010) has confirmed this statement. Resultingly, dominantly promoting green benefits could be considered an advantageous strategy if the green product does not differ from the ‘non-green’ alternative in other aspects.

But we have also seen that, in fashion, the most critical factor for consumers is design while sustainability takes the last place. This might be another reason only few companies are following the flaunting strategy. Fashion is and has always been about the look and therefore design sells more than sustainability.

Opposite to flaunting green benefits, some brands deliberately choose to not communicate their sustainability, even though they are making efforts to become greener. The PR firm Cohn & Wolfe named this strategy ‘green muting’ (Nail, 2011). Although most of these brands produce sustainability reports and have spaces of their website dedicated to their initiatives, their ‘greenness’ is thereby not used for selling. One reason for this strategy was laid out by Makower (2013), stating that these companies are not looking ‘to sell more stuff’, but rather, because sustainability offers other internal advantages (Makover, 2013), as also laid out in chapter 2.2., relevance. Another reason again are fears of greenwash accusations (Nail, 2011). And as we have seen from the example of ‘Goodone’ in chapter 2.5., page 12, the ‘green muting’ strategy is also used to attract a broader range of consumers.

Luxury fashion brands who are in fact engaged in sustainability are often ‘green muting’. For example, Stella McCartney, a high-end designer label internationally known for its sustainable business focus, has not directly integrated ‘green’ into its communications. On first sight, the products, advertisements or retail environment do not give hints of the brand’s actual green commitment. Instead, Stella McCartney, as well as other high-end brands, are using a ‘multi-level approach’ (Heathcote, 2011).

Detailed information on sustainability are accessible through the brands’ websites for consumers who are interested. But they are not communicated at the first instance to not bore those less interested.

The third strategy of communication volume is an in-between of flaunting green and green muting. Sustainability is thereby not concealed, but it is also not used as the number one unique selling point. Instead, the strategy aims to establish ‘green’ as normal, as an aspect that just comes along with a great product.
In this respect, the three sustainable fashion brands Tricotage, Emesha and Christopher Raeburn have been analysed in a case study by Huws (2013). All three stated that the product design is their first priority and above all sustainable fashion has to be desirable for the consumer. The green factor should just come as a ‘bonus’ after the consumer got attracted by the product appearance (Huws, 2013). In this sense, Christopher Raeburn said: ‘above all it’s about the product – your product has to look better and to have more value than the next product in order to sell’ (Huws, 2013, p. 23).

Considering that the product appearance is the most influential factor in consumers purchase decision, it becomes clear that also green fashion should be design-led. Making fashion sustainable should not prevent it from looking good. In fact, as Ali Hewson, founder of the green fashion brand ‘Edun’ acknowledged: ‘in the fashion business, desirability is sustainability’ (Anaya, S., 2010). Thus, design has repeatedly been recognised as an important focus, also in communications (Jay, 2011; Huws, 2013; Angel, 2013). Again a strong example for this design focus is Stella McCartney. As Anaya (2010) stated: ‘Stella McCartney became known as a chic designer label that’s convincingly green, not as a green designer label that is convincingly chic’.

For this strategy of ‘normalising’ green fashion, brands should aim to integrate sustainability into their existing communications (Peloza et al.; 2012). Peloza et al. (2012, p. 85) also stated that this approach will simultaneously lead to ‘elevated perceptions of sustainability among stakeholders’.

Credibility
Credibility has repeatedly been declared the most crucial aspect of green communications today. It is the be-all and end-all of sustainability and, as Sandeep et al. (2011) state, it is ‘the foundation of effective green marketing’. Companies have learned from the greenwash backlash in the early 90’s, that making false, unauthentic or not credible statements will not increase sales in the short run, but will only damage the brand image in the long run (see chapter 2.3., greenwashing).

Surprisingly, many firms are still trying to throw claims at consumers that lack any substance and background. According to Mishra and Sharma (2012), only 5% of green campaigns are in fact containing claims which can be regarded as being true (Hultin and Villberg, 2013).

The Oxford dictionary defines credibility as the ‘quality of being trusted and believed in’. For companies making green claims it thus means that any claim needs to be backed up with information, actions and evidence. The point of credibility is proving that brands practice what they preach which will ultimately lead to enhanced brand authenticity (Heathcote, 2011).

Simply bombarding consumers with a mass of information however will not work either. Credibility is important, but considering the previously discussed state of green fatigue, it should not become rampant. This means that brands need to find a balance of giving information to be credible but not tiring their audience (as it was also found for educating consumers, chapter 2.6., page 13).

From the research it became clear that a strong focus on credibility is inherent to the green communications of Patagonia and Marks&Spencer. Patagonia for example is strongly building its credibility by being honest towards consumers. Within the company’s online ‘Footprint Chronicles’ tool, the customer can view the origin and impact of each product and Patagonia is thereby also disclosing less sustainable aspects. According to Pasquinelli (2011), this honest communication is building consumer trust and enhancing consumer loyalty.

A common tool used amongst fashion brands to build credibility is the use of labels, certifications or the partnering with non-governmental organisations (NGO’s). Certifications are mainly placed on the product labels or packagings and are especially effective if the consumers is familiar with the meaning of those (Pasquinelli, 2011). In 2004, Marks&Spencer has partnered with Greenpeace to address seafood issues which has built its credibility as the UK’s most sustainable seafood retailer (Greenpeace, n.a.). More recently, M&S is collaborating with ‘Oxfam’, UK’s best known poverty organisation, to collect old clothes for their ‘Shwopping’ initiative. However, Pasquinelli (2011) also remarked that partnering up to gain credibility is also a ‘delicate process’. Both organisations need to be complementary and pursue the same goal.

Transparency
Transparency is going hand in hand with credibility. According to Makower (2013), transparency in business is ‘a demand for companies to account for and report their impacts, commitments, goals and progress’. Being transparent therefore means providing (credible) information. But business transparency today also means going one step further and giving consumers insights into the whole supply chain.

One brand that has taken the transparency strategy to a new extreme is ‘Honest by’. The company stepped onto the fashion stage in January 2012 and has since then set new standards for the fashion industry. The concept is presenting a unique communication on the products’ supply chain costs and...
processes to the consumer. While shopping online, customers can view the origin, costs, raw materials, working hours, CO₂ emission, water footprint and even mark-up of every single product component, from the cotton used right up to the security pin. Clearly, this is a pioneering concept which is hardly applicable to most companies in the industry.

Yet, fashion brands large and small are making efforts in adopting a more transparent communication strategy. ‘Rapanui’ is an ethical fashion company from the U.S. which lets consumers trace a product’s origin in an online interactive world map giving detailed information on every step within the supply chain.

‘Nike’ is building on the example of Rapanui and provides an online, interactive manufacturing map giving information on worker quantity, gender ratio, percentage of migrants and average age of workers. Clearly, it is more difficult for large, global fashion brands to be transparent due to the more complex supply chains. H&M has recently published a list of 95 percent of its global suppliers (Berfield, 2013).

But Nike is additionally applying the transparency strategy from another perspective. In 2013 the brand has launched the ‘MAKING’ app which gives designers information on materials, their environmental impact and allows them to visually compare these. The app is freely available and therefore also serves consumers getting informed about the greenness of materials in apparel and clothing.

The transparency strategy cannot be fully nurtured without honesty. Being transparent allows consumers to see a brand’s efforts, but it also hints to its weaknesses. And this is important. Trying to disclose only the good will ultimately lead to loss of credibility, because, as Armgarth (2009b) claimed: ‘no one likes perfect, but more importantly no one trusts perfect’. Admitting mistakes and shortages is therefore part of transparency and can also be used to strengthen the perception of corporate commitment regarding sustainability. In their ‘Footprint Chronicles’, Patagonia is stating green benefits, but also negative environmental impacts of their products. And while mentioning its accomplishments in its sustainability report, H&M is likewise stating issues that still need improvement. M&S is telling its stakeholders which of its ‘Plan A’ commitments have been achieved, which are delayed or even which have been cancelled. Nobody is perfect, consumers know that and will scrutinise fashion brands which claim otherwise (Pasquinelli, 2011).

Storytelling

Storytelling is a marketing tool that is commonly being used to speak to the emotions of consumers and to communicate a company’s mission and values (Hermansson and Na, 2008). Accordingly, some fashion brands are communicating their sustainability story by means of this tool. Futerra claims that consumers need messages which appeal to their emotions and narrating sustainability efforts through a story can add ‘meaning and purpose’ to a brand’s green mission and make their communication compelling (Futerra, 2013b). However, Sarah Ditty noted that communicating sustainability through a story can also pose a challenge. Sustainability issues are often complex, inheriting scientific, political or social aspects. Wrapping this complex information in a story can be a way to simplify the issues for consumers, but it is also difficult and ‘people get it wrong all the time’.

Chipotle, a Mexican food supplier, has turned sustainability issues in the food supply chain into a short, animated, emotional film. ‘The Scarecrow’ film is picturing a future world of synthetic, factory-like food production in which animals are fed with growth hormones and antibiotics. The main character, a scarecrow, is feeling depressed by this world’s food culture and starts harvesting fresh fruits and vegetables in his garden instead, which he then processes into wholesome meals and sells them to others. The film is accompanied by a gaming app which lets users play the scarecrow and provide healthier and better food in this ‘world of Plenty’. In this way, Chipotle is not only telling the story of the company’s own mission (‘change the way people think about and eat fast food’), but it is also telling the story of issues in global food supply chains, such as animal confinement, growth hormones, antibiotics or pesticides. Chipotle is thereby combining education with entertainment by the means of storytelling.

Patagonia again is telling the story of product durability in a short film as part of the ‘Worn Wear Campaign’. The movie follows Patagonia customers and their gear, narrating the stories they experienced with the products through the years. Interestingly, the stories also reveal how clothes fell apart and how colours faded after several years of use. The owners describe how they continued to repair and to mend them, instead of buying them new. In this way, Patagonia is again using honesty in its communication, combining it with storytelling and building its credibility. What is also playing a part is the element of the unexpected: a clothing brand running a campaign in which the message is to fix its products, rather than purchasing them new.
**Education**

Considering that the general public does not know much about the impact of the fashion industry, educational information from brands has been stated to be a crucial part of green marketing (James, 2012; Hill and Lee, 2012, p. 487 cited Gam, 2011; Gam and Banning, 2011; Su, 2006). Sarah Ditty also confirmed that educating the consumer is important, but at the same time, brands should not bore their audience. Information overload on the subject of sustainability simply leads to consumers perceiving it as ‘dull or unexciting’ (Heathcote, 2011) and would thus only strengthen ‘greenophobic’ attitudes. The right dosing of information is a balance act many fashion brands are still struggling with in their communications according to Ditty.

Patagonia is strongly focusing on the educational strategy. The brand is curating a blog called ‘The Cleanest Line’, posting about environmental and outdoor topics without the aim to market its products. As part of the latest campaign ‘The Responsible Economy’, the brand has also published a collection of environmental essays. Yet, a large portion of Patagonia customers are ‘Greens’ (see chapter 2.2., page 10), meaning that they demand these information and want to dive deeper into environmental topics. The strong educational strategy therefore works well for Patagonia.

‘The Reformation’ on the other hand is targeting young, fashion-conscious women in their twenties. Green messages are largely communicated through their social media channels, most notably Facebook. Education and information is given in small doses, frequently, but not constantly. Additionally, they are kept short, understandable, simple, witty and fun. The way the brand is giving these information is tailored perfectly to its audience. The pairing of a simple, young and bold use of language together with appealing imagery makes this information more fashionable and appealing to their customers. Educating consumers can be combined with and integrated in various other strategies such as transparency, storytelling, consumer engagement or humour.

**Simplicity**

As we have seen in chapter 2.1., ‘defining sustainability’, the whole spectrum surrounding sustainability is very complex. All issues involved are difficult to understand for companies, and even more so for consumers. Therefore, an important tool for green communications are simple messages which can be easily understood by the consumer. Pasquinelli (2011) claims that, in this sense, jargon should be avoided and instead, facts should be brought straight to the point. Pasquinelli further mentions Marks&Spencer’s ‘Plan A’ as a good example of this practice. Closely studying the communications used in ‘Plan A’ revealed that the issues are expressed using simple language. Although ‘Plan A’ is relatively elaborate, containing 180 green commitments, all issues are described clearly, to the point and accompanied by facts.

‘The Reformation is equally ‘simplifying’ in their communications. The brand is mainly adding environmental facts to their messages which are kept extremely short. As such, the brand would post a new product image paired with the headline: ‘Meet the Tansy top, she’s made from tencel. A traditional cotton t-shirt uses 257 gallons of water to produce; a tencel tee uses only 6. Nothing gets us hotter than saving water. #jointhereformation’ (The Reformation, 2014).

Sarah Ditty also stated that simplifying the message is crucial in communicating about sustainability. Because consumers don’t know much about the issues and have little time, they need messages that are easy, short and understandable. If information is too complex or elaborate, ‘it just makes people shut off’.

**Humour**

One way to appeal to peoples’ emotions is through humour. Humour is a naturally human characteristic and can therefore speak to and engage a large majority of people (Futerra, 2013b).

As a matter of fact, sustainability is a serious topic. But also communicating ‘green’ in a serious way and leveraging guilt feelings in consumers, which many prior green marketing strategies were built on, has been found to not change behaviours (Angel, 2013). Instead, producing positive feelings, entertaining and inspiring consumers is a more effective strategy. Futerra found that the use of humour or irony to communicate serious issues ‘can make people question themselves and their behaviour leading to real change’ (Futerra, 2013b).

Although the theory of this strategy has been explored, fashion brands who are actually communicating sustainability in a fun way are scarce. Surely, approaching a serious issue with humour can be a risky business, especially when talking to a broad audience which might hold different understandings of what is funny. However, The Reformation is an example of this strategy. Their environmental facts are often concluded with their own, humorous take on that issue and are supported by not-so-serious imagery (figure 4.2.1.).
But also gaming apps are sparking the fun factor, allowing consumers to explore the issues through ‘learning by doing’. In fashion, sustainability games have not gained huge popularity yet, while other industries are already tapping into the potential of games. Yet, M&S is again a forerunner in this area by releasing the ‘Clear-out-challenge’ online game. In the game, players have to drag several pieces of clothing into a ‘shwopping box’ within a certain time frame. When this has been achieved, an info box gives the player short information of how these virtually ‘shwopped’ garments could impact environmental and social issues if ‘shwopped’ in real life. Notably, this information is supported by hard facts and simple comparisons and is intended to also educate consumers about impacts. Kamal (2013) suggests that games and sustainability constitute a natural synergy. Both activities are mainly ‘social actions’ and are tapping into a person’s emotions (Kamal, 2013). The combination, called the ‘green gamification’, is a strategy used to portray sustainability in a positive, fun, engaging and enjoyable manner.

The Unexpected

Just as with humour, communicating sustainability through the strategy of the unexpected has not been widely practiced amongst fashion brands. One famous example however, is Patagonia’s ‘Don’t buy this jacket’ campaign, launched in 2011. Placing an image of their latest product with the bold statement to not buy it was surely a risky decision and an unexpected move from Patagonia. However, because it expressed exactly the opposite of what consumers are used to from marketing (trying to sell), it stood out from other green messages and attracted broad media coverage. Heathcote (2011) claimed that communicating sustainability in an unexpected or surprising manner is ‘a winning formula for a viral campaign’. Further, this communication tool is especially speaking to a younger target group (Heathcote, 2011).

Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement is a widely used strategy within fashion brands’ green communications. Sustainability is an issue that concerns everyone and brands and consumers have to act in concert in order create and live greener lifestyles (Hill and Lee, 2012). Brands are therefore acknowledging the need for consumers to be able to take actions themselves.
Within the case study, Patagonia and M&S showed strong initiatives and efforts in engaging consumers. Patagonia is running several Tumblr blogs on diverse sports. The content features athletes but also tells stories of real Patagonia customers, and thereby Patagonia is not only selling their products to their audience, but also using them as an inspiration.

Another initiative geared towards consumer engagement was done during the 2012 U.S. elections. Patagonia informed consumers about the political candidates’ environmental aspects and encouraged them to register for the voting. Additionally, consumers could make a personal statement by finishing the sentence ‘I vote the environment because I love …’ which would then be tweeted and displayed in real time in Patagonia stores and on their website. Patagonia has thereby engaged the public in several ways: first to vote in the election, second to get informed about sustainability in politics, and third to communicate their own environmental statement and therefore engage others.

John Grant described in his book ‘The Green Marketing Manifesto’ how Marks & Spencer became known as a true leader in sustainability due to their initiatives in consumer engagement. According to Grant (2007, chapter B1) ‘leaders don’t boast about their exploits, but rather are on a journey, leading people with a destination in mind’; and M&S is excelling in that field. One of the latest example is the company’s ‘Shwopping’ campaign which engages consumers to bring old clothes to Oxfam which will then be recycled. But M&S is also great in listening to their audience and, more importantly, reacting to what they say. Providing the opportunity to create a dialogue between consumer and brand is another way of consumer engagement and is more closely analysed in the following section.

Collaboration

As part of ‘Plan A’, Marks & Spencer is communicating the slogan ‘Doing the Right Thing’ in order to state their business mission and establish sustainability as ‘normal’. Interestingly, the idea to this phrase did not originate in the M&S marketing department, but instead, it came from the M&S customers themselves. The company has directly asked customers for their ideas and input. Biloslavo and Trnavcevic (2009) stated that thereby the ‘customer becomes a team worker or external expert whose opinion is of crucial importance for the marketer’. In 2010, the brand offered 100,000 Pounds going to a charity of choice for the best proposal of a consumer’s ‘green idea’ that would then be implemented into the business.

Pasquinelli (2011) noted that some brands have taken up this strategy of consumer collaboration in which they engage in a two-way dialogue with their consumers and together create new ideas and products. Thereby, brands often take up the role of facilitators, providing spaces and tools through which customers can take part in the conversation (Pasquinelli, 2011).

Another example of this strategy, also mentioned by Pasquinelli (2011), is the ‘Air Care Campaign’ launched by ‘Levi Strauss and Co’. Similarly to Marks & Spencer, Levi’s asked their customers to send in ‘innovative, covetable and sustainable air-drying solutions for clothing’, which in the end resulted in the creation of Levi’s famous ‘Water<Less’ jeans, using significantly less water in the production and finishing process than ‘traditional’ jeans (Pasquinelli, 2011). By means of this example, Pasquinelli (2011) described how involving stakeholders into a brand’s journey towards a more sustainable business does not only raise consumer awareness of certain issues, but also engages them in a discussion on these issues and challenges them to find solutions.

Claim Specificity

The communication strategy of ‘green’ can also be categorised according to the specificity of the messages. Alniacik and Yilmaz (2012) defined this claim specificity as ‘an umbrella term describing the informativeness, objectivity, concreteness, quality and strength of the claim provided in an advertisement’.

The degree of specificity with which a green claim is made also contributes to the perceived credibility of that claim. Accordingly, Alniacik and Yilmaz (2012) stated that claims which are more specific result in higher perceived credibility, enhance purchase intention and produce a ‘more favourable brand belief’ (Alniacik and Yilmaz, 2012). Davis (1993) findings confirm these favourable attitudes of companies and products towards more specific messages. Specific claims are giving factual and concrete information (Alniacik and Yilmaz, 2012). On the other hand, communicating information of low specificity and using highly ambiguous words like ‘sustainable’, ‘recycled’ or ‘natural’ has several times been found to have ‘negative advertising appeals’ (Peloza et al., 2012).

When looking at sustainability communications of fashion brands, it becomes apparent that many companies are using vague information in their communications about sustainable fashion. River Island states on their website: ‘We have incorporated the use of renewable energy sources into our operations and reduced the levels of product packaging. River Island also recycles and uses biodegradable materials whenever possible.’ (River Island, 2014) Futerra noted that choosing the
vague path can again lead to increased consumer scepticism (Futerra, 2013b). Sustainability leaders in fashion however, such as M&S or Patagonia show clear, specific information which is to the point and supported by data and facts.

**Celebrity Endorsement**

A strategy that can also be recognised amongst fashion brands to promote their green image or products is the use of celebrities in their communications. Celebrities are often regarded as role models and therefore they can wield a strong influence on consumers (World Economic Forum, 2013). Especially younger consumers can be positively affected by celebrity endorsement (James, 2012).

The high street retailer H&M has continuously used this strategy to promote their ‘Conscious Collection’. Stars like Vanessa Paradis or, more recently, the model Amber Valetta, have posed for the campaigns, and the likes of Jessica Alba, Miranda Kerr or Michelle Williams are wearing the ‘conscious’ pieces out for events. Marks & Spencer again has teamed up with Joanna Lumley, a British comedian, to promote the ‘Shwopping’ campaign.

‘The Green Carpet Challenge’ is an initiative by Livia Firth, encouraging celebrities to wear sustainable fashion and gowns on red carpet events. According to Epum (2012), contributor of the Ethical Fashion Forum, this initiative is having a positive influence on consumer perceptions regarding green fashion. What it communicates to the consumer is that sustainable fashion can be desirable, high-quality and luxurious (Epum, 2012).

Epum also refers to a study published in the ‘Journal of Economic Psychology’ which found that women’s brain activities can be enhanced by seeing a celebrity wear a product or brand. Recognising this potential, fashion brands are increasingly making use of the celebrity endorsement strategy (Epum, 2012).

**Scope Reduction**

As already discussed in chapter 2.5., page 12, ‘scope reduction’ is positively affecting green buying behaviour. Thus, a strategy used in green communications is building on the personalisation of green messages. Personalising communications thereby means that brands state how the individual’s action will have an impact, or how a green product will directly benefit the individual.

In the food industry, scope reduction is done by promoting health benefits of organic food. In fashion, however, this is more difficult since clothing is a credence good (see chapter 2.5., page 12). Nevertheless, personalisation strategies have been recognised as being crucial to make sustainability relevant for consumers and engage them in green behaviours (Davis, 1993; Futerra, 2013b). Sarah Ditty confirmed this statement saying that consumers need to see how green fashion will have an impact on their life and how it relates to them. And when it comes to social issues consumers need to be able to identify with those people.

Marks & Spencer is making use of personalisation in their online game ‘The Clear-out-challenge’. The company is reducing the scope by communicating to the player which impact their ‘shwoppings’ can have if done in real-life (figure 4.2.2.) By connecting the fun activity online with the offline ‘shwopping’ activity, M&S is ultimately also aiming to engage players in ‘real-life shwopping’ by informing them about the personal impact they can have.

![Figure 4.2.2. M&S ‘Clear-out-challenge’ online game (M&S website [retrieved: 28/03/14])](image-url)
4.3. Communication Channels

All of the above stated strategies and tools are communicated through a broad variety of marketing channels. In fact, green communications are not restricted to lesser marketing channels than ‘traditional’ communications. Yet, much of the current green communication is being done through one-dimensional channels. Pelozza et al. (2012) stated that the most commonly used channel for communicating about a brand’s sustainability efforts is the sustainability report, generally published on the company’s website. In the same instance, Pelozza et al. (2012) also noted that only communicating ‘green’ by the means of these reports does not appeal to most consumers. Arguably, a reason for that could be the mass of complex information sustainability reports are compiling and the general public’s lack of interest and time to read them.

An insight deriving from observations is that another often used channel is the product label or hangtag. Fashion brands often communicate green product benefits at this point-of-sale, hoping that the sustainable aspect will influence the purchase decision. As we have discovered in previous chapters, sustainability can potentially add value to a product, although it is not the critical trigger for buying fashion. Moreover, Boztepe (2012) found that consumers are using labels and tags as one primary information source of sustainable products and companies. Thus, product labels and hangtags can be effective tools to communicate information and also to tell stories.

What appears from the examples used for explaining various strategies in green communications is that multiple marketing channels are used simultaneously to communicate the same message. What is important then is to take a holistic approach and be consistent in the message that is being communicated across different media (Pasquinelli, 2011; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010).

It is to note that there are channels of one-way communication, such as sustainability reports, product labels or packaging, and there are channels allowing for two-way communication, being mainly the digital channels. Whichever channel is used, fashion brands should align their choice with the communication strategies they are using. Storytelling and giving educational information for instance can be done through either the one-directional or two-directional communication approach. Collaborating with consumers, however, requires a more interactive approach and an environment in which consumers can easily respond to a brand’s words and actions.

4.4. Measuring Efficacy

Are fashion companies measuring whether their strategies are effective in terms of influencing consumer perceptions? And, if yes, how is it being measured? In fact, finding and giving answer to this question was one of the biggest challenges in this research.

Companies are certainly measuring their level of sustainability, or green performance, while fewer brands are also measuring the effectiveness of their green campaigns (as opposed to their ‘traditional’ campaigns). Cronin et al. (2010) investigated that also existing literature has paid little attention to green marketing efficacy. However, evidence of brands measuring the effectiveness of their green communications with regards to consumer perceptions of sustainability was almost non-existing. In fact, it has been quite surprising to discover that many companies do not measure whether their spending in communications is bringing any return on investment in this sense. Further research exposed two possible reasons for this behaviour.

First of all, measuring performance based on green communications can be complex. Distinguishing whether an increase in sales is coming from the green marketing or ‘traditional’ marketing is in addition difficult (Arseculeratne and Yazdanifard, 2014). More importantly, Arseculeratne and Yazdanifard (2014) also stated that ‘the outcome of a green marketing strategy cannot be expected in the short run’, which makes it even harder to put effectiveness into numbers.

Second, when considering consumer perceptions, companies might not measure their communication impact on these because they see no value in terms of business performance. Yet, knowing which attitudes your audience holds towards sustainable fashion can represent an advantage for choosing the appropriate communication strategy. In the research, Marks & Spencer was found as the only company who is to an extent going into that direction by measuring their audience’s perceptions towards ‘green’. M&S identified four different groups amongst their customers, holding different attitudes towards sustainability. Over the years of promoting ‘Plan A’, the company noted that the consumer groups have changed and more consumers moved into the ‘greener’ group (figure 4.4.1.).
The research gives M&S insights into their customers’ green attitudes and needs that can be catered through communications. Additionally, the data reassures the company of the effectiveness of ‘Plan A’ in terms of influencing consumer perceptions.

Segmenting consumers in this way and measuring the evolution of the segments is not necessarily indicative of any monetary gains. Yet, it does provide M&S with information on the ‘green mindset’ of their customers and which communications they are likely to respond to. It is therefore beneficial for high street retailers to measure their audience’s perceptions in various ways and over time, even if the value does not show in the financial statement.

Measuring consumer perceptions can be a difficult task since perceptions are ‘soft’ indicators and can hardly be allocated to any ‘hard’ outcomes such as sales. Yet, there are various methods and tools used in ‘traditional’ marketing to put a value on these ‘soft’ indicators.

First, companies should identify certain key performance indicators (KPI) relevant to the objective of their communication strategy. KPIs could for instance be the consumer knowledge, awareness or interest of certain issues. Further, KPIs could entail the attitudes consumers have towards certain products or campaigns. At the same time, brands should set KPIs in green purchasing behaviour to possibly find an interrelation between perceptions and behaviour.

For measuring the influence of consumer perceptions, it is crucial to measure KPIs over a certain time frame to recognise development. Companies could therefore do pre- and post-campaign research, or not restrict it to campaigns and simply measure continuously.

One method companies can use to measure perceptions are surveys or interviews of customer samples, just as M&S has done for their consumer segmentation. When doing surveys, subjective questioning can be helpful to identify ‘soft’ indicators. This method asks questions which are redirected towards a certain response and tickle out the respondents feelings, attitude or opinion of the topic. Surveys can also be web-based and especially useful for high street retailers to reach the internet-savvy consumer group of ‘Golds’ (see more chapter 5.2., page 26).

Certainly, there are metrics and tools available for brands to measure their consumers’ perceptions of sustainable fashion. But companies need to first recognise the value and need for them to evaluate the effectiveness of their communications. Until now, many brands have seemingly not reached this point yet.
4.5. Conclusion

The fourth chapter firstly laid out existing green communication strategies in the industry, followed by choices of marketing channels and efficacy metrics of green communications.

A reason for much of the green communications not impacting with consumer perceptions has been found as the single focus on only one of the tools available (World Economic Forum, 2013). This is often the educational approach, giving information in reports, on websites or product labels, while tiring consumers through monotonous, one-way communications. What can be concluded is that green communications have not yet exploited the whole range of marketing tools available. What sustainability is still lacking is excitement, engagement and fun. Publishing an address list of suppliers is certainly neither exciting nor relevant for consumer. Discovering product origins through an interactive online world map is certainly more intriguing. Technology is providing excellent tools to engage people and actually educate them in a subconscious manner.

It became clear from the case study and examples, that most brands which successfully practice green communications are applying a mix of the tools that have been discussed. It is important to notice that this mix is adjusted to the brand DNA and target group. The Reformation is more often making use of fun elements as they are speaking to a younger audience. Patagonia on the other hand is greatly focusing on the educational part, since their audience is likely to seek deeper insights into the topic.

Most brands which are engaging in green communications are additionally not identifying the green perceptions of their audience. Shockingly, they are also not measuring whether their communication impacts these perceptions and are thereby effective. This means that many green communication activities are done and spent money on without knowing whether they actually affect consumer mindsets of sustainability and in which way. Current green communications could in fact have further negative effects on green perceptions, aggravating its wider take-up instead of contributing to a more sustainable world. Yet, we don’t know it, because we don’t measure. This knowledge is therefore significant. Knowing about consumer perceptions can also be advantageous for choosing a communication strategy, monitoring consumer perceptions’ development and possibly adjusting the strategy accordingly.

Concluding, there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy for communicating about sustainability, but deriving from the findings, companies should consider certain aspects when planning for green communications:

**Identify your audience:** Who are you talking to? What motivates them? Which perceptions and attitudes do they hold towards sustainability?

**Set your goals:** What do you want to achieve with your green communications? Which key performance indicators could you determine that help you keeping track of this goal?

**Choose your strategy:** Which tools speak best to your audience? How can they positively affect their perceptions? Which channels help you to reach your audience?

**Measure:** Is your strategy effective? How are your audience’s green perceptions changing? How can you adjust your strategy accordingly?
5. GREEN COMMUNICATION ON THE HIGH STREET

5.1. Introduction

The last chapter of this study specifically focuses on the fashion high street and applies the previous findings to this market segment. First, consumers shopping at high street fashion retailers are analysed, mainly with regards to their attitude of ‘green’. Second, green communication strategies appealing to this consumer are proposed. The last section then discusses the implications of high street retailers influencing consumer perceptions of green fashion.

5.2. The High Street Consumer

The first questions that needs to be posed when thinking about green communication strategies for the high street is ‘who are we actually talking to?’ Next should be ‘what is his attitude towards sustainability and green fashion?’ The first step of getting green communications right is knowing your audience. Sarah Ditty repeatedly mentioned this is a crucial factor for an effective communication strategy. ‘It is about knowing who your audience is and speaking in a way that makes sense to them’. At the same time, she recognised that this is also one of the biggest challenges brands are facing today.

Naturally, retailers are targeting diverse consumer groups and some of the tools appeal more to one group than another. Thus, it is crucial for each brand to find out who their specific consumer is and how he is thinking about sustainability. Ottman (2012) confirmed this finding by saying that there is a ‘need to do customised research to understand one’s own consumers’ attitudes and awareness of specific environmental attributes, including carefully segmenting the marketplace, and marketing one’s products accordingly’. It is equally important for retailers to measure the effectiveness of their communication strategy and monitor whether their messages catch on with their audience.

As we have seen in chapter 2.3., page 10, the biggest wedge of consumers are the ‘Golds’. This segment derives from Chris Rose’s initially investigated consumer group of ‘Prospectors’. They are the main component of the mainstream shoppers, following fashion and trends, seeking approval, social status and success. Further they are motivated by (social) recognition, simplicity, fun, achievability or celebrity endorsement. Because of their social nature, channels to best reach these consumers are social media platforms, entertainment and mainstream media. Below scheme gives an overview of the key features of the ‘Gold’ consumer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>characteristics</th>
<th>drivers</th>
<th>channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>observing others</td>
<td>fun</td>
<td>high street brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bending the rules</td>
<td>fashion</td>
<td>celebrities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>always looking for the better solution</td>
<td>simplicity</td>
<td>mainstream media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>embracing consumption</td>
<td>achievability</td>
<td>social networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demanding immediate actions and effects</td>
<td>visibility</td>
<td>popular online platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoiding controversy</td>
<td>success</td>
<td>online blogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>following fashion and trends</td>
<td>social status</td>
<td>online forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>esteem / self-esteem</td>
<td>mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rewards</td>
<td>latest technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Futerra claimed that former green communication strategies have built on ‘scaring’ consumers and endorsing negative feelings regarding environmental issues. However, these tactics are not working for ‘Golds’ since it is not fun for them and they do not see the benefits for their personal lives (Futerra, 2013b).

Many green campaign targeted towards the ‘Golds’ are also encouraging consumers to make a statement and stand out. However, brands have to realise that these consumers want anything but sticking out of the mass. They do feel comfortable as part of a group and retailers should therefore provide opportunities for ‘Golds’ to connect with peers and be part of a community (Futerra, 2013b).

‘Golds’ love consumerism. They enjoy changing fashions and buying new ‘stuff’. Promoting less consumption as it often has been done in green marketing, would therefore go against their principles and likes. At the same time, this strategy displays ‘Golds’ in a negative light, by causing further environmental harm. Naturally, ‘Golds’ do not respond to these messages and adopt a repellant attitude towards sustainability. For high street retailers, it is therefore crucial not to promote less consumption, but better consumption. ‘Golds’ don’t want to be restricted in their consumption behaviour and brands could therefore tap into increasing sustainable consumption by making it more attractive, easy, pleasurable and beneficial for the ‘Golds’.

‘Golds’ are not only fashion-forward but are also likely to keep up with new developments in online and mobile technology. Social media, online platforms or mobile apps are places where ‘Golds’ spent a large portion of their time online, making those channels suitable means to reach the ‘Golds’.

‘Golds’ will adopt a more positive attitude towards green fashion when they perceive it to be ‘cool’, normal, mainstream, easy, personally beneficial and fun. Thus, high street brands need to use tools which portray sustainability in that way in order to achieve this tipping point in consumer perceptions. Suitable strategies which resonate with the characteristics and lifestyles of the ‘Golds’ are presented in the following section.

5.3. Strategic Tools for High Street Retailers

Following section picks up on the prior discussed strategies in chapter 4.2., and answers the question how these tools can be used to make sustainability specifically appealing to the ‘Golds’.

Normalisation

The ‘Gold’ mainstream consumer’s main interests in buying fashion is what is fashionable and what is ‘normal’. Communication strategies on sustainable fashion thus need to focus on two main aspects: In the first instance, sustainable products should be promoted in the same way as ‘traditional’ fashion: with focus on design and fashionability. For green fashion to become mainstream, it needs to blend in more with the non-green products. James (2012) remarked that building a distinction between green and non-green fashion collections through marketing will contribute to the maintaining of these two separate markets and prevent sustainable fashion from becoming part of the mainstream. Sarah Ditty also noted that, ultimately, consumers should not have to make a decision between green or not, but sustainable fashion just needs to be easily available to them, just as ‘non-green’ fashion is now. This approach of making green ‘normal’ has also been supported by the research of Grant (2007), Huws (2013), Rettie et al. (2012) as well as Hultin and Villberg (2013). Further, attracting consumers first by the look of sustainable fashion can positively influence their perceptions and contribute to the gradual fading of the ‘greenophobia’.

In the second instance, after the consumer’s interest has been drawn, the sustainable benefits should be communicated as an added value. On the one hand, giving information is important to enhance consumer knowledge of sustainability in the fashion industry. On the other hand, displaying green benefits as an added value can positively influence the purchase decision without reducing the range of potential buyers beforehand. This can be achieved by giving short, simple, credible and specific information on the product hangtag or other means at the point of sale. At the same time, retailers can use these mediums in combination with other tools such as storytelling or the use of humour.

Education and Simplicity

One important aspect deriving from chapter 2.2., page 28 is that high street brands have to clearly communicate their definition and implementation of sustainability in fashion. Thereby, brands can lay a common basis between them and the audience for their messages to be understood.
The way of communicating information about sustainability should derive from the prior research of the consumer group which is targeted. The educational information needs to be given in a language and tone of voice which is familiar to the consumer. In general, ‘Golds’ should be approached with a simple, easy and understandable language. Thus, ‘simplifying’ is a crucial strategic tool for high street retailers that should be used to communicate information about sustainability.

In order to avoid green fatigue, educational information should also not be given all at once. At the point of sale, the information should be kept short and to the point. Nevertheless, retailers should provide all the information for those who want to dig deeper into the activities of the brand and learn more. Because high street retailers are targeting a wide range of consumers, including those who show less interest in ‘green’ while others show more, the prior mentioned multi-level approach of providing information is an effective solution to satisfy all consumer types within the ‘Golds’. The company’s own website can serve as a suitable medium to give more information and to elaborate on the brand’s green activities.

In the long run, high street retailers should also keep an eye on the green knowledge level of their audience. Measuring the knowledge levels can give brands further directions of their educational strategy and accordingly adjust the amount and content of the information they provide.

Personalisation

For ‘Golds’ it is important to see the personal benefits they get from purchasing green products. Different to ‘Greens’, they are more self-centred and do not respond to messages which are promoting the bigger cause or benefits they can’t relate to. They need to see how sustainable fashion will positively influence their lives. One important aspect of the communication strategy for high street brands is therefore to highlight personal benefits for consumers. These benefits can also be expressed in form of becoming part of a community or achieving a certain social status.

Part of the ‘greenophobic’ perceptions is that sustainable fashion comprises a sacrifice for the consumer. Yet, ‘Golds’ don’t want to give anything up if they do not receive anything better in return. Thus, high street retailers need to communicate how green fashion adds value, instead of taking it. Rewarding sustainable choices or behaviour is equally an effective tool to foster more sustainable lifestyles amongst ‘Golds’.

Specificity

Next to giving information in a simple and understandable language, the message should also be clear and specific. Avoiding vague and general terms is thereby crucial. Instead, the claims and information should be supported by definitions, facts and metrics. Communicating specific information will help brands build credibility and lower the risk of consumers forming sceptical attitudes towards the claims.

Credibility

For any brand that is communicating about sustainability and their green activities, being credible is an essentiality in order to earn consumer trust and avoid greenwash accusations. And so it is equally crucial for high street retailers.

Because ‘Golds’ need information which are immediate, easily accessible and straightforward, a suitable strategy for high street brands to communicate their credibility is through partnering up with well-known NGOs or getting their green products certified. The certification or label can then be put on the product hangtags, effectively highlighting the brand’s credibility at the point of sale without an overload of information.

What is important for this method, however, is that the certificate or partner organisation is familiar to the brand’s audience. If the consumer does not know the meaning of those, this strategy of building credibility will be less effective. In order to choose a suitable certification body or partnering organisation, brands should research which green certificates, labels or organisations their specific target group is knowledgable and aware of.

Credibility should additionally be confirmed giving more elaborate information through other channels such as the brand’s website, sustainability reports or the social media presence. However, the given information then needs to be specific in order to enhance credibility.
Transparency

In the age of social media and the internet, consumers are increasingly demanding transparency from companies (Heathcote, 2013). Simply making sustainability claims is not enough. Consumers want proof and will dig deep to find it, or disprove it.

Being transparent is a strategy that can support the credibility of a high street retailer, but which can also raise consumers' knowledge of sustainability in the fashion industry.

The ‘Gold’ consumer has a powerful tool at his hands - the internet, and he loves using it. The internet makes it possible to find out almost anything about each and every product and brand. Thus, it is much riskier for companies to hide things, then to openly admit them. In fact, being flawed can help brands gain consumer trust. Online product reviews which contain bad and good scores are more trusted by 68% of consumers (Trendwatching, 2013). For green communications it is therefore crucial to not convey the illusion of perfection. Failures should be admitted, along with the brand’s achievements, and always with the statement to improve those shortcomings in the future.

Yet, another way to be transparent is to give consumers direct insight into the supply chain. Generally, ‘Golds’ do not have much time and are less likely to seek more information on the origin or production of their products. However, if it is presented in a fun and exciting way, or combined with new technology, it will attract ‘Golds’ interest. This openness earns consumer trust and, along the way, ‘Golds’ can gain the much-needed knowledge of the practices and workings in the fashion industry.

Humour

The findings of the previous chapter confirmed that sustainability in fashion has been widely communicated by means of ‘lecturing’ consumers and triggering their guilty conscience to influence purchase behaviour. Yet, ‘Golds’ are drawn to products and brand that add fun and joy to their life. Making sustainable fashion enjoyable and fun for the consumer is therefore an effective strategy for high street retailers to influence their audience’s perceptions.

Combining green messages with humour or irony can spark the ‘Golds’ interest. However, when choosing this strategy high street brands should assess whether their approach is understood and accepted by their audience. Companies should therefore identify the type of humour their audience is responding to.

Another strategy is the gamification of ‘green’, engaging consumers in games connected to green activities or sustainability issues in the industry. Even better if the game also integrates other communication strategies such as incidentally educating the consumer about sustainability or providing personal benefits or rewards in form of social status enhancement, community belonging or monetary rewardings. The M&S ‘Clear-out-Challenge’ is a great example of a strategy combining ‘green gamification’ with the education and personalisation. For ‘Golds’, ‘green gamification’ is besides especially effective when it is supported by the latest technological tools.

Narrative

Using narrative elements to communicate a story about sustainability can be another effective tool for high street retailers. Complex issues and happenings of sustainability can be wrapped up in stories which are more comprehensible for the ‘Golds’. If the story is also fun, engaging and relatable, retailers can easily grab the audience’s attention. What is more, storytelling gives companies the opportunity to portray sustainable fashion in a more positive, fashionable context which can ultimately contribute to the decrease of ‘greenophobic’ attitudes.

A large portion of the fashion industry revolves around the use of imagery to create desires and tell stories. Thus brands are certainly able to also ‘fashion’ sustainability through visuals. In order to make a narrative more engaging and speak to the emotions, short films or animated movies can be used. Publishing these on social media or the internet, again is an effective way to get exposed to the ‘Golds’ and to spread the story.

But stories can also be told at the point of sale or at the first contact of the product with the consumer, e.g. on the product hangtag. As mentioned before, short and simple (educational) information should be given in the first instance. Providing this information as a story can make the addressed topic or issue more interesting and engaging for ‘Golds’, while communicating it clear, understandable and relatable for everyone.

Surprise

Portraying sustainability in an unexpected way can grab consumers attention and break through the mass of tiring, informative green messages. The surprise element is an effective method for ‘Golds’,
since they are always looking for new fun and excitement to enrich their lives and to share (online) with their friends or community.

Combining the unexpected with humour can be a method to bring sustainability into discussion for the ‘Golds’. The aim is to make sustainability exciting for the consumer, and to represent in an unusual way which can positively influence consumer perceptions.

Again, the internet is a great tool to spread the unexpected message with the potential prospect to go viral. Brands can thus catch their audience’s attention, astonish them and strengthen a ‘not-so-boring’ image of green fashion.

Engagement

Considering that two thirds of the energy and resources used in a garment are happening during the use phase (e.g. laundering), consumers are having a significant stake in creating a sustainable fashion industry. It is therefore important for brands to engage their audience into green activities and show them that consumer and retailer have to work together to achieve this goal.

However, for high street brands it is important to notice that ‘Golds’ are unlikely to do anything for others or the environment without receiving any benefit or reward for themselves. Thus, any activities should clearly have and communicate a social or monetary reward for ‘Golds’.

An interesting characteristic of ‘Golds’ for the engagement strategy is that they are willing to ‘bend the rules’ (Rose, 2012). ‘Golds’ do not want to follow the rules, yet they are also not content to break them. High street retailers should thus consider these attitudes and provide opportunities for ‘Golds’ to act accordingly when engaging them in any activities.

‘Golds’ want to be engaged and be active, especially the younger generation of consumers (World Economic Forum, 2013). Creating ways to get in direct contact with the audience and to listen to what they are saying benefits high street retailers in two ways. First, it makes it easier for brands to get direct feedback on their efforts and adjust their strategies accordingly. Second, asking for the consumer’s opinion, advise and ideas will make them feel valuable and builds trust between consumer and brand. Communicating sustainability as a journey they are taking together is a great way to get consumers on board and engage them.

Desirability

An important motivator for ‘Golds’ are celebrities and famous personalities. Celebrity endorsement is so effective with ‘Golds’ because they are seeking status and success, and are therefore looking up to those who already have it. Celebrities are often also seen as role models by ‘Golds’ which they aim to emulate. Having famous people promote sustainable fashion and support green brands can thus help making it more desirable, ‘cool’ and normal.

However, just with ‘non-green’ celebrity endorsement, brands should consider which green image or message they want to communicate and which personality suits this goal and the brand.

Celebrity endorsement can have a significant impact on consumer perceptions. For ‘Golds’, celebrities convey the image of luxury, status, high quality and the best of the best. Sustainable fashion that is worn or promoted by a famous personality thus profits from this image. Celebrity endorsement is a tool that can greatly contribute to eliminating the ‘greenophobic’ perceptions of sustainable fashion being of lower quality, backwards or ‘weird’.

5.4. Implications for High Street Retailers of Influencing Consumer Perceptions

After laying out effective tools for high street retailers to communicate with the ‘Golds’, the following section illustrates implications for retailers to influence consumer perceptions.

‘Golds’ are a large portion of consumers and in order for the fashion industry to become more sustainable, green fashion needs to be attractive and desirable for this consumer segment. At the moment, green marketing is largely speaking to the ‘Green’ consumers, those who are more environmentally aware (Jay, 2011; Rex and Baumann, 2006), keeping sustainable fashion in the state of a niche market (James, 2012). Communications are thus focused on highlighting environmental benefits. Yet, as we have seen, ‘Golds’ are not primarily motivated by these aspects. In order to achieve a broader appeal of sustainable fashion, green communications therefore need to follow different strategies, making it more relevant and beneficial for the ‘Golds’ (Meyer, 2000). Since high street retailers are the preferred shopping destination for ‘Golds’, they are the suitable means to achieve this broader appeal and influence consumer perceptions through communication strategies.
‘Brands are the manufacturers of cool’ (Futerra, 2013b). Especially high street brands which are serving a large proportion of consumers, have the means and power to ‘dictate’ what is in fashion, what is popular and what is ‘normal’. They also have the ability to promote sustainability as a better way of living (Huws, 2013) and ultimately make sustainability part of our ‘normal’ lifestyles. High street retailers therefore represent a driving force in influencing the public image of sustainable fashion. Sarah Ditty confirmed that, although negative connotations connected to green fashion are still fairly widely held, these perceptions have already started to improve. This change is partly due to high street retailers such as H&M launching green collections and engaging in sustainability.

High street brands who aim to fully integrate sustainability into their operations could also gain business value from influencing consumer perceptions. We have found in chapter 2.6., that perceptions affect green purchasing behaviour. More positive perceptions of sustainable fashion could thus enhance the attractiveness and purchasing of a brand’s green products.

### 5.5. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate how high street brands can influence consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion. The previous chapters have explored and given answer to the four sub questions posed.

1. What are consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion?
2. What is green communication and its implications in the fashion industry?
3. Which tools are currently being used in green communications in the industry?
4. How can green communications be used to influence consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion on the high street?

We have seen that the existing ‘greenophobia’ is influencing consumers’ purchase behaviour, contributing to the aggravated take-off of green fashion. Thus, influencing these perceptions through effective and appealing communication strategies for ‘Golds’ is necessary to broaden green fashion’s reach to the mainstream market.

From the analysed tools it became clear that many green communication strategies are not tailored to the needs and desires of the mainstream consumer. They have solely educated consumers through (too much) complex, one-way information, have marketed products based on sustainable aspects, or restricted consumption instead of promoting better consumption. Yet, these strategies do not resonate with the mainstream consumer. ‘Golds’ are mainly motivated by fun, fashion, benefits and desires. Accordingly, green communications for the high street need to promote sustainable fashion as ‘normal’, informative yet simple, personally beneficial, credible, specific, transparent, enjoyable, surprising, narrative, engaging and desirable. Below scheme gives an overview of the proposed tools and main features which can be used to build a green communication strategy tailored to a brand’s DNA and specific target consumer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normalisation</th>
<th>Communicate ‘green’ as an added value, after the product design and quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Educate consumers through various channels and information intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity</td>
<td>Communicate information understandably, clear and straight to the point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalisation</td>
<td>Highlight personal benefits over environmental benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specificity</td>
<td>Support claims through hard facts and clear definitions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the most surprising findings however, is connected to the effectiveness of green communications. Most brands do not measure whether their communication efforts have any impact on consumer perceptions, mainly because they do not see the value for their business. Yet, measuring their audience’s perceptions can benefit the brand in choosing the right communication strategy and adjusting it effectively over time. This means that brands are spending time and effort on communicating without knowing whether their messages are having any impact on consumer perceptions. Green communication strategies should therefore place great importance on measuring its impacts and monitoring developments over time.

High street brands carry a significant responsibility in mainstreaming sustainable fashion, communicating a more positive image and making it more desirable for mainstream consumers. Hence, high street retailers have the opportunity to act as facilitators of change, engaging people into sustainability through excitement, inspiration and joy. The communicational approach retailers should take is best expressed in below concluding thought:

‘The key is positive vision: we need to know not so much what we are against as what it is we are for, the future we truly desire even while telling the truth about the current reality’ - (Robertson, 2014)
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

6.1. Books


6.2. Studies

Armgarth, K. (2009a) *A Touch Of Green*, Unpublished thesis (Bachelor), Amsterdam Fashion Institute


Huws, C., A. (2013) Consumers’ attitudes towards sustainable fashion and the promotion of ethical fashion brands, Unpublished thesis (Bachelor), University of Glamorgan


Shields, L., 2010, Green Marketing in the Age of Twitter, Green Fatigue & Bright Greens. McGill MBA Japan Independent Study


6.3. Online


Futerra (2013b) *Redefining Consumer Demand*, [Online], 14/05/13, Available at: http://www.futerra.co.uk/blog/redefining-consumer-demand retrieved [Retrieved 24/03/14]

Greenpeace (n.a.) NGO - *Retailer Partnership Case Study: Greenpeace and Marks & Spencer* [Online] Available at: http://www.fmi.org/docs/sustainability/Greenpeace_and_Marks_and_Spencer_Partnership.pdf [Retrieved 15/03/14]


Trendwatching (2012) Flawsome - Why brands that behave more humanly, including showing their flaws, will be awesome [Online] April, Available at: http://trendwatching.com/trends/flawsome/ [Retrieved 23/04/14]

7.1. Case Study: Marks & Spencer

Business profile
Marks & Spencer (M&S) is a British multi-channel retailer founded in 1884 in Leeds. The brand's values have been, since the beginning of its existence, quality, value, innovation service and trust.

The company is represented in 50 countries worldwide, employing close to 82,000 people and selling through 766 stores in the UK.

In 2013, the 'Marks and Spencer Group plc' generated a revenue of £10bn, thereof £4.1bn in the UK.

For the UK, turnover on food products comprises 54% of the total. General merchandise, including apparel products, are 46% of the total turnover.

M&S is the leading retailer for womenswear, menswear and lingerie in the UK.

Target group
M&S does not make self-proclaimed statements regarding their target group. Yet, currently the brand is aiming to reach a younger audience and to sell more fashion than clothing products. However, the average M&S customer is still in the age range of 30 - 60 years. Because of the brands presence on the high street and their larger range of clothing products, a large portion of their target audience can be said to be 'Bricks' and 'Golds'.

Sustainability
M&S has set itself the goal to become the world's most sustainable retailer. In 2007, M&S has thus initiated 'Plan A', a corporate sustainable strategy entailing several goals and commitment in seven different categories and all areas of operation:

1. Involve our customers
2. Make Plan A how we do business
3. Climate Change
4. Waste
5. Natural resources
6. Fair partner
7. Health and wellbeing

The initial plan was set up for five years, with 100 commitments to be achieved. In 2012, M&S completed 94 of them and added 80 more for the coming years. As of now, the company has achieved 138 of 180 commitments.

45% of M&S products have a ‘Plan A’ credential. The company aims to reach 50% by 2015.
Communication initiatives

‘Plan A’
Use of simple language and specific facts (also stated by Pasquinelli, I., 2011)

‘By the end of this year, we’d reduced our CO² emissions by 23% compared to 2006/07. That’s a reduction of over 160,000 tonnes a year or 37% per square foot of our stores, distribution centres and offices.’

In their ‘Plan A’ report, M&S is also stating which commitments they haven’t achieved and which ones they have abandoned.

‘Look behind the Label’ campaign
M&S gave information on the labels of various products regarding their origin and environmental impact. This campaign was launched in 2006, prior to ‘Plan A’ to first educate consumers about sustainability. Aim was to raise awareness of the issues and make customers approve and value ‘Plan A’. Issues addressed were:

- fair-trade
- salt
- environment
- fats
- durability
- recycling
- sustainability
- washability
- free-range
- non-GM
- animal welfare
- natural cleaning

![Image](marketing society.co.uk)

It’s not just our green dyes that won’t harm the environment.

Our policy on dyeing clothes is black and white. We’ve banned all our suppliers from using 56 chemicals in the production process that put either their employees or the environment at risk. We also insist that all remaining dyes are removed from effluents before releasing them back into the environment. To ensure they meet our stringent standards, regular factory audits are conducted. So, it doesn’t matter whether our dyes are blue, red or yellow, they’re as kind to the planet as the green ones.

www.marksandspencer.com

image source: marketingsociety.co.uk

APPENDIX
MAINSTREAMING GREEN FASHION 39
‘Doing the Right Thing’ campaign
is the initiative of M&S to change and influence mainstream behaviours and attitudes of sustainability. Activities included the reduction of (400 million) plastic carrier bags and rewarding gift vouchers for each garment donated to an Oxfam store.

The slogan (‘Doing The Right Thing’) was initiated by M&S customers during research. Several respondents stated, e.g. ‘I just want to do the right thing’.

‘Your Green Idea’ (2010)
engaging consumer to propose a new green idea for Marks&Spencer. The reward were £100,000 going to the charity of the winner’s choice.

Seafood partnership with Greenpeace (2004)
M&S scored high on seafood sustainability in Greenpeace studies on UK supermarkets. M&S provided the NGO with valuable information on their operations and used the rank as UK’s most sustainable seafood retailer in their advertisements. Greenpeace used M&S as a business case example for other retailers.
Facebook voting (2013)
After achieving 1 million Facebook followers, M&S encouraged customers to divide 1 million pennies (£10,000) by voting online between four of their charity partners to receive.

Shwopping (launched 2012)
Campaign aiming to encourage customers to bring unwanted or old clothes to Oxfam stores to be recycled (3.8m clothing items and £2.3m raised for Oxfam).
M&S additionally provided ‘Shwoppboxes’ in stores in which customers can drop the clothes.

Clear out challenge
an online game launched to support the Shwopping initiative. Players have to drag certain pieces and amount of garments into a ‘Shwoppingbox’. If successful, the player is informed on how these garments could have made an impact in real life.

Sharp suiting
an online game in the same style as the ‘Clear out challenge’. The player has to choose materials that are used for each component of the brand’s ‘sustainable suit’ (e.g. organic wool, recycled polyester, plastic bottles etc.) After each fulfilled component, information is given on what materials is exactly used. The challenge of the game is completing
Sources


Greenpeace (n.a.) NGO - Retailer Partnership Case Study: Greenpeace and Marks & Spencer [Online] Available at: http://www.fmi.org/docs/sustainability/Greenpeace_and_Marks_and_Spencer_Partnership.pdf [Retrieved 15/03/14]

7.2. Case Study: Patagonia

Business profile

Patagonia is an international apparel company operating in the outdoor clothing and gear segment. The brand’s products are designed for various sport and outdoor activities including climbing, fly fishing, skiing, snowboarding, surfing and trail running. Patagonia Inc. is owned by ‘Lost Arrow Corporation’. The company was founded by Yvon Chouinard, 1973 in California, and its philosophy is based on the founders’ passion for nature and outdoor sports. Chouinard is still the owner of the company.

Patagonia’s mission statement is:

‘Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.’ - Yvon Chouinard

Patagonia is selling its products through 62 own retail stores in 12 countries and 13 further partner stores in Europe, employing 1680 people globally.

The company’s last year turnover accounted for $575m globally (May 1st 2012 - April 30th 2013).

Target group

Patagonia targets outdoor enthusiasts of all demographics. Its products are mainly made for people engaging in ‘silent sports’, without the use of any motors (e.g. ice and rock climbers, surfers or fly fishermen). Because of the brand’s strong focus on sustainability, its target group comprises people who not only love being in nature, but also improving the environment. A large portion of their target group are thus ‘Greens’.

Sustainability

Patagonia is a brand that was establish with sustainability in the core of its business. Yvon Chouinard is an outdoor lover and has since the beginning of his career put strong focus on the sustainability of his products. Patagonia products need to fulfil following criteria:

- strong / long-lasting / as versatile as possible / supple / feel dry / comfortable against the skin / as light as possible / easy to care for

In 2012, Patagonia became California’s first benefit corporation (b corp), a for-profit business that is considering environmental and social aspects in their operations and strategy. The company also dedicates 1% of its yearly sales to protecting the environment.

Patagonia is recognised as a leader of sustainable business practices, as it is implementing sustainability into every aspect of their supply chain.
‘Don’t buy this Jacket’ Campaign (2011)
An advertising printed in the New York Times during ‘Black Friday’ which encourages consumers not to buy their product. With this campaign, Patagonia aimed to encourage consumers to only buy what they need. The campaign was an unexpected marketing strategy with a counterintuitive approach to consumption which gained global media attention. Although the advertisement discouraged purchase, the company’s annual sales grew by almost 40%.

‘The Footprint Chronicles’ (first launched in 2007, relaunched in 2012)
The Footprint Chronicles is an online initiative disclosing environmental and social footprint information for most of its products within the 2013 product line. It includes a world map that visualises the production journey of each product, accompanied by images of the factories.
Brand Ambassadors
Patagonia has appointed 88 athletes as brand ambassadors within each of their targeted sports. The chosen athletes are regularly testing new Patagonia gear and work closely with the design department to improve the products. Their stories are also published in the Patagonia Tumblr blogs.

Patagonia Tumblr Blogs
The brand operates lifestyle blogs on Tumblr for each of their targeted sport segment. The blogs feature stories and visuals of athletes (brand ambassadors) and ‘real’ Patagonia customers with their gear.

‘The Cleanest Line’
is another blog curated by Patagonia. Content includes environmental and outdoor issues, without any product promotions.

‘Vote for the Environment’ Campaign
Along with the elections in the U.S., Patagonia launched an online Twitter campaign with the has tag #becauseilove. The brand encouraged customers to complete the statement ‘I vote for the environment because I love …’ and tweet their image or message. The tweets were then displayed in their stores in real time. At the same time, the company provided information on the environmental focuses of the election candidates.
‘Common Threads Initiative’ (launched 2011)

The Common Threads Initiative is a pledge between the brand and its customers to buy, produce and use their products more sustainably. The five guiding principles are: reduce, repair / resale via ebay, recycle and reimagine. The brand is thereby asking customers to not buy what they don’t need. As part of the initiative, Patagonia is taking back used and worn-out products made from Capilene fibres and recycles them into new polyester clothing.

**Partnership with eBay Inc.**

As part of the Common Threads Initiative, Patagonia has partnered up with eBay to create an online marketplace on eBay for Patagonia customers to sell and buy used Patagonia gear. Patagonia was thereby the first big retailer to encourage its customers to resell and buy their products on eBay.

‘Worn Wear Campaign’

An online movie / short film (28 minutes) showcasing several Patagonia customers with their Patagonia gear. Customers thereby tell the stories they have experienced with the products. They also show how they are falling apart and how they have continued to repair them over the years. On the accompanying blog (wornwear.patagonia.com) customers can contribute their own product stories. In 2013, Patagonia also hosted a ‘worn Wear’ Party with a ‘repair clinic’ for customers to bring their gear and learn how to repair it.

**A Party to Celebrate What You Already Own**

Black Friday 11/29/13 at 4pm
‘The Responsible Economy’ (launched 2013)
In their latest campaign, Patagonia seeks to find answers to the question how a responsible economy would look like. The brand actively encourages customers to take part in the conversation and share their ideas:

‘We don't have all the answers - but, we invite you to join us as we seek out the stories, solutions, examples, and new leaders of the responsible economy’

Until now, the campaign entails a collection of essays on the topic.

Sources

Patagonia (2014) Patagonia Website, Available at: www.patagonia.com


7.3. The Reformation

Business profile

The Reformation is a relatively small fashion business founded and still located in Los Angeles. It was started up in 2009 and is employing approximately 50 people in LA.

It is operating on an innovative business model of buying vintage clothing and surplus fabric and redesigning it into new fashion pieces. The company operates a factory in Downtown LA, selling directly to the customer and thereby eliminating the middle men.

The brand believes in the possibility of ‘changing the world without changing your style’

Distribution channels include own stores in Los Angeles and New York, as well as an online shops selling to customers internationally.

Prices for the products are kept under $300, to make their clothes accessible.

Target Group

The brand itself names its target group the ‘#refbabes’, young girls and women (in their twenty’s or early thrity’s) who want to express their femininity but look ‘cool’ and casual at the same time.

Sustainability

The Reformation grew out of the creative designer’s aim to not create any fashion waste.

The material sourcing is done in three different ways. One source are vintage garments which are taken apart and the fabric is reused. The second one are surplus materials, also called ‘deadstock’ which is sewn into products. The third source are virgin, sustainable fabrics made from closed-loop yarn (water is reused in the process).

The Reformation is also working on ‘environmental impact reports’ which give quantifiable data to their impacts. These will also give visual and comparable impact information to customers on the product they bought - ‘So when you buy a dress from us you saved the equivalent of a thousand showers.’ (Deutsch, A., 2012)
**Facebook and Instagram**

The Reformation is continuously publishing small, informative posts on sustainability issues. The posts are appearing alongside their 'non-green' marketing. The text is kept short, to the point, in the language of their customers and accompanied by visuals.

---

**Reformation**

30 March

Meet the Tansy top, she’s made from tencel. A traditional cotton t-shirt uses 257 gallons of water to produce; a tencel t-shirt uses only 6. Nothing gets us hotter than saving water. #jointhereformation

---

**Reformation**

10 April

The textile industry is one of the most chemically dependent industries on earth and the No. 2 polluter of clean water. We’re trying to lessen the blow by using fabric that already exists because we heart dolphins. #jointhereformation

---

Image source: Reformation Facebook page. [Retrieved 15/04/14]
#Refbabes

The brand ranks fashion bloggers like Rumi Neely (Fashion Toast, see below) or It-girls like Alexa Chung amongst their loyal customers. Frequent posts are featuring these personalities wearing Reformation clothes.

Image source: Reformation Facebook page, [retrieved 15/04/14]

Reformation Tumblr Blog

Reformation is also running a tumblr blog on which it mainly posts own images and few visuals from other sources. Again, environmental information is combined with visuals and designed in an contemporary style. It is kept short and often accompanied by facts on the fashion industry and its impacts. The sustainable aspect is blended in with

Desirability

Education
Normalisation
Simplicity
Humour
Use of humour

Most of the company's green messages are paired with a humorous or funny statement. The brand knows who their customer is and they make use of their language to reach them.
Sources


7. 4. Expert Interview: Sarah Ditty

Sarah Ditty has more than ten years of experience in the field of sustainable fashion and is now working as the Editor-in-Chief at the ‘Ethical Fashion Forum’. The Ethical Fashion Forum operates an online platform and consultancy, providing tools and resources for fashion businesses aiming to produce more sustainably. During her work, Sarah has repeatedly researched and written about the topics of green marketing and communication strategies in sustainable fashion.

What perceptions do consumers hold towards sustainable fashion today?

I think that a lot of the perceptions surrounding sustainable fashion from the consumer side of things is in the middle of an interesting change. For the past twenty years or something, the perception of sustainable or green or eco fashion has been kind of classified as something that is hippy, or only for a certain set of people who are very into nature. Materials are not that high quality and perhaps made from hemp and therefore brown and scratchy and just not that nice. Part of an eco lifestyle basically which has a very particular aesthetic and a certain set of values that only a small number of people subscribe to. But at the moment it is interesting because I think that perception is still probably fairly widely held, but it is definitely changing. And I think a lot of that is due to some of the high street retailers are doing at the moment, one is obviously H&M’s ‘Conscious Collection’. It has only been around for a short time but I think it is definitely busting your common consumers perception of what’s sustainability and how sustainable fashion can look like. And then lots of smaller designer who are doing that, maybe more in the local kind of way, and other things like the ‘Green Fashion Week’ are busting this perception of what sustainability is.

What you described there has been my starting point for this research. I came across the term ‘greenophobia’ in the ‘Green Marketing Manifesto’ by John Grant which describes a general fear people have towards sustainability and green products. Do you think that the mainstream shopper on the high street is having this greenophobia?

I think by and large yes. Obviously that's not scientific but even speaking to my own friends who are not necessarily interested in sustainable fashion, a) they don't generally know what the term means and b) they think you mean 'hemp things'. It doesn't even really cross their mind that much but I think that is changing. Because I have even noticed amongst my own peers that people say 'Oh yeah I saw that recycled collection from H&M or I saw something in the metro about this'. So I think people started to, not know, but able to recall. It's in their imagination now, more than it was ever before.

Do you believe these negative perceptions are also influencing consumers not to buy green products?

I don't think they look at something and say 'Oh my god, it's eco, it's probably gross'. I think most importantly it's just how a product looks. And I think without seeing something the terminology of green fashion or eco fashion makes them picture something that is made of hemp, scratchy and for hippies, somebody that lives in a forest. But I think if they actually see it, those terms wouldn’t necessarily turn them off. In fact, that could act as an added value. They could look at something thinking 'Oh my god this looks super stylish and amazing and its also green? Wow cool'. Actually that's a quite cool thing. So it depends on if it's a visual, tactile thing or something more in their imagination.

Have you experienced in any way that brands are trying to overcome these negative perceptions?

Yes I think that this is one of the biggest challenges for our brands: understanding how consumers behave, how consumers think, what they respond to and what they don't. And maybe the hardest audience isn’t even necessarily consumers, maybe the hardest audience is actually people who work in the fashion industry and boutiques, shop owners, buyers and retailers. I think those are the people who put those connotations on the products more so than the general consumer even would. I don’t think the general consumer even thinks about it all that much. So I feel like the perceptions they really
got to burst first is the people who are in charge of stocking products and the press who is writing about them.

How do you think that would be different to convincing the consumer, in terms of communications?

I think the way you convey your sustainability story to press or buyers would be different than you communicate it to the consumer. Because obviously it is those peoples’ job and for consumers they have very little knowledge about how everything works and very little time to figure it out. So I think those issues don’t really cross consumer’s minds at all, whereas obviously for press and boutiques and buyers, they are always looking for stories. Boutiques are looking for something that sells but also a story that helps selling it.

Do you see any current struggles brands face in communicating sustainability to the consumer?

Yes, because the issues are really complex. And as I said, consumers largely don’t know much about the issues and aren’t going to look much into them. They want something easy. Trying to tell that story which can be very complex you know, the science behind environmental issues or really complicated somewhat political, social issues can be very hard to communicate in a meaningful way. So that it is also really short and snappy and grab a shopper’s attention is really tricky and people get it wrong all the time. Probably most of the time they get it wrong. And some people are quite good at getting it right. There are a few brands where you can see they are getting it right because they are growing, year on year and are quickly becoming household names.

My research similarly revealed a paradox there: consumers don’t know much about the impacts of fashion which makes them value sustainable fashion less. But getting too much information from brands also makes them tired.

Exactly. or if it is too complex it just makes people shut off. And then you don’t really communicate anything at all.

So should companies then actually take this educational approach at all, or should they make use of other tools?

I think they should, it’s just how they do it. For example, one brand that is really good at it is ‘The Reformation’. They are based out of L.A. and their main sustainable-related attribute is that everything is made in Downtown L.A., in the garment district there. They also use only dead stock, recycled and off-cut material and so everything they make is obviously in limited numbers. But I think the way they communicate it in terms of how they use Facebook and Twitter and Instagram just works. And obviously the design has a big impact too and that itself communicates something. But they just really seem to know who their customer is and speak in that language. And they do that well with the sustainability stuff as well. Rather than putting all the information all at once they have this little thing where they put little fashion facts out on social media or like little stories on the hangtags which they send out, or sometimes even the products have a funny environmental slogan on them. And I think they do that very well. Check it out they are really good.

So anyways, they put out little facts about sometimes complex things like detoxing chemicals, but the way they do it through the graphics they have and even the font, the visual image is really effective, especially for their audience.

So you mean they should find the balance between giving information but not too much to be boring?

Yes. I think it is just really about knowing your audience, knowing your customer and speaking their language. Obviously if she is a girl of 25 she is going to require a certain style of language, and even though you have to communicate about these complex things, that’s fine. But you have to do it in that language. Whereas a woman in her fifties, she is probably more educated, has kids, is a business leader or whatever, she will digest information in a completely different way. So you have to be able to
speak in that language. It is about knowing who your audience is and speaking in a way that makes sense to them.

**So what if you have an audience which is initially not that interested in sustainability? How can it be made attractive to them?**

In that instance it really is keeping it super short and simple. And then hopefully over time their knowledge will increase and perhaps they will become a little bit more interested if it makes sense in their life. But definitely try making it as personal as possible, it’s crucial. Because the only way people are going to respond is if they see how, whatever that thing is, impacts their life. Or they can feel like they can identify with that issue or the person who makes their clothes if it’s a social thing or they can see a tangible way that it relates to them.

**And are you aware of any ways brands measure the effectiveness of their green marketing regarding consumer perceptions? This was something very hard to find in the existing research.**

I have no idea about that one unfortunately. I can imagine the big high street retailers measure all of their marketing whether it is sustainable or not so I assume they have some more information about that but I never came across any solid information on that.

**What do you think is needed to make sustainable fashion more attractive for the high street shopper?**

I think it just needs to be easy. My favourite example is always ‘Sainsbury’s’ and how they adopted a policy to only stock fair trade bananas. So you go to any Sainsbury’s and you don’t have the option. You don’t have to think about it. You just buy fair trade bananas and you go home, eat your banana and a producer got paid a decent wage for the bananas that they grew.

So basically it’s a strategy of normalising green.

Yes they are making it normal. It’s a policy that they chose. Cause that’s the thing: consumers are busy, they have busy lives, they have 30 minutes after work to find a thing or one day off, a couple of hours off in the afternoon. They don’t have a ton of time to search out all the information or to be able to make a decision in-between what’s ethical and what’s not. Everything should be made in an ethical and sustainable way. It just has to be easy for consumers to take part and at the moment it’s not. Right now they have a choice and the information isn’t out there, easy for them to access to make that decision, so there shouldn’t even have to be a decision.

**So do you believe in a future of all products being sustainable and sustainability being something very normal in fashion?**

Definitely. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t think it was possible. But I think business is going to have to do better. Not only because it’s the right thing to do, but because there is only so many resources to get around and there is only so much cheap labour to go around. And it’s also clear from Rana Plaza* that they can’t afford to have their reputation at risk in that kind of way. So good business is going to be ethical and sustainable and that’s it.

**Do you see any issues in how the high street (e.g. H&M and its Conscious Collection) is communicating ‘green’ right now?**

I think they are doing a pretty good job in terms of making it appeal to the consumer. I think there is a lot of work they need to do on what some people might call the greenwashing. The ways in which collections can be considered ‘conscious’ or how they wanna call it. Often it’s just a tiny facet of the ethical and sustainable spectrum. So it might be made of sustainable materials, or organic cotton and it’s easy to make that look like the solution to everybody’s problems. Obviously, that product was still made by who we don’t know in what country, getting paid what wage and probably it was made in Bangladesh or Cambodia or wherever wages are very low and all these problems persist. It’s great that its made of organic cotton but it’s like leaving out the other facets of issues at hand and I think
that is slightly misleading for consumers. So it’s great that they are doing it and they are definitely
fasting perceptions about sustainable fashion but there is a long way to go in this journey. So
hopefully they’ll work on that there.

An interesting aspect i discovered was the idea to completely drop the word ‘sustainable’ and
all related terms in order to normalise it. What do you think of that?

I think it would be really nice if we could drop those terms but I think we would be doing a real
disservice in educating consumers if we dropped those terms. Because people largely don’t
understand what any of these things mean and I think it’s important for everyone to know the impact
of the clothing that we wear. It’s the same with food or any other sector. I hope one day it does
become obsolete but we are a long way from that. And until then I think we need to stick with terms
that raise awareness and identify when good things are being done.
Of course this thesis was printed on FSC-certified paper and with soy-based ink. But that’s nothing to brag about on the first page.