Storytelling For Communicating Sustainable Fashion
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BEHIND EVERY SURFACE HIDES A STORY
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2. This graduation paper has never before been submitted by me or anyone else in the framework of a learning assignment aimed at the attainment of a certificate or degree, within the AMFI programme or elsewhere.

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LET’S EXPLORE AND IMAGINE
My deep interest in storytelling and its use for the fashion industry was triggered during my exchange semester in Berlin 2015, where I attended a course in this area. Further, working for the Amsterdam-based brand Scotch & Soda, I had to communicate their new stories. As being fascinated by narratives, branding and marketing strategies, I have looked into several storytelling campaigns and tried to understand why it is so compelling. Therefore, I was highly interested in studying storytelling further.

During the second year at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, we had to create a sustainable brand concept, which made me understand the bitter and problematic sides of the fashion industry more. Designing and creating a new brand with a sustainable approach broadened my knowledge about environmentally friendly production, fair working conditions in general, but also about the damage this industry is causing. Further, as fashion has faced increasing criticism about the industry's environmental footprint, sustainability has become priority.

I started to absorb my knowledge of sustainable approaches and brands. But, when researching the current sustainability trend in general, several studies have stated convincingly, that customers are interested in buying into it.

Many people, including myself, have been influenced by green marketing and well created brand stories, without scrutinising credibility and honesty of a company. In general, consumers have become more sensitive to the need to turn towards green products. Despite, the sustainable fashion sector is still rather limited and has been stated by several studies as rather unattractive. Therefore, I was excited to understand why sustainable concepts have not conquered the fashion market in a way they have in other industries and why sustainable fashion is just not tempting nowadays.
STORIES ARE THE PERFECT MIX OF PLAY, DREAM & REALITY
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1.1 Rationale and Relevance

When the appreciation of natural resources and environment increased in consumer's minds, marketers responded to this change with communicating and promoting products as environmentally friendly and sustainable (Bhatia and Jain 2013). A greener image developed and increased the demand for eco and sustainable products (Wüstenhagen and Bilharz 2006). The rise of sustainability, has been influenced by several environmental and natural threats, such as water pollution, deforestation or non-biodegradable solid waste and questions ethical dimensions of various industries as well as creates an overall demand for transparency (Black n.d.; Baker 2003). Today, the public is more knowledgeable about irreplaceable resources and the harm certain industries and activities cause. Also, due to mass media and technological innovations, businesses have been more transparent about their ethical approaches (UNEP 2005). Certainly, sustainability has become more important, modern and accessible these days. Nevertheless, this ideology and concept still does not seem to be a priority topic, even though climate change and awareness of environmental issues are pressing issues (McKeown 2002). Whether a product is green or sustainable is neither crucial nor necessary for us. Further, understanding what such products represent appears to be highly difficult, considering the current overload of green communication and strategies.

For the fashion industry, as it is said to be one of the major environmental polluters (Greenpeace 2016), sustainability has become a strong concern. Back in the 90s, sustainable fashion has increasingly emerged in magazines and discussions. With Stella McCartney’s fake-leather approach (2001) and the first ethical runway display in Paris (2004), the idea and concept of sustainability has been growing in fashion (Joy, Sherry et al. 2012 cited Emberley). Determined by this incessant change, industry and catwalks show increasingly green or sustainable clothing.

There has been a shift in marketing and communication through boosting green products. When consumers became more aware of the environmental impact, their interest in green and sustainable products increased (Hultin and Villberg 2013). Accordingly, marketers and companies started to take utmost care of production and to assimilate green marketing strategies. Despite, sustainability in general has been seen as not highly attractive and it has not yet conquered the market in contrast to green products of other sectors have, due to various reasons (Schneider 2014; Joy, Sherry et al. 2012). One displays the complexity of sustainability and the difficulty to understand its definition and meaning (Niinimäki 2013). Further, due to many green advertisments of all kinds of products, an overload of green communication has appeared (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014). Also, consumers are having a negative image regarding sustainability. According to the research of Punitha, Aziz and Rahman (2015), this evolved from companies’ strong efforts to convince customers of a responsive approach. Through attempts such as eco-labelling, green advertisement and for example organic cotton price tags,
companies try to appear sustainable, but they are rather confusing to customers. Along with other difficulties, these issues are reinforcing each other in a way that it has become difficult to communicate about sustainability and in particular, about sustainable fashion. Many sustainable brands apply the communication and marketing tool ‘storytelling’. The tool is used to engage with customers and communicate concepts, values or ideologies. As some literature and articles2 have started to examine its effect and suitability for communicating sustainable fashion, this study explores storytelling’s practice. Further, regarding sustainability and sustainable fashion, it is necessary to understand the reasons for the current problems of communicating sustainable fashion. Thus, this report will shed light on the nature of storytelling as a communication tool in general and evaluate its role for sustainable fashion brands.

1.2 Research Aim & Questions

This research is specifically diving into the current communication of sustainable fashion and its connection to storytelling. Hereby, it aims to analyse why communicating green or advertising sustainability is not attractive, which current obstacles the communication of sustainable fashion faces and in which way abilities of storytelling can contribute to its communication. As storytelling, along other qualities, is stated to be suitable for communicating complex information, sustainability as being acutely manifold, could profit from its clarifying properties.

Therefore, the tools’ purposes and capabilities with regard to communicating sustainability will be further investigated. To give a direction to this research and in order to draw a suitable conclusion for the matter, the main question that will be explored throughout this study is the following: In what way can storytelling contribute to the communication of sustainable fashion brands today? Therefore, the following research questions will have to be answered in order to respond to the main:

Chapter 2: How can sustainability and sustainable fashion be defined? How can storytelling be defined?

Chapter 3: What are current obstacles of communicating about sustainability?

Chapter 4: Which abilities of storytelling in terms of brand communication exist? What are advantages of storytelling?

Chapter 5: What could be advantages of storytelling for communicating sustainable fashion?

This study is relevant for fashion brands and marketers, which have not yet found a successful or compelling approach for communicating their sustainable concepts. With this research study, I am not aiming to find definitive answers for each of the above questions, but to discuss them from different perspectives and to make observations about the current communication approach of sustainability as well as its possible connection to storytelling.

1.3 Methodology

The methods and sources for developing this research are displayed in this section. I attempt to contribute to an understanding of the current communication of sustainability and sustainable fashion, as well as the application and importance of storytelling explicitly for this industry.

Firstly, I used a descriptive approach, collecting information of existing literature and expanding my knowledge of the topic. To give a direction to the research, I developed a theoretical framework regarding the terms sustainability, sustainable fashion, green communication and storytelling. For this chapter, relevant information has been found in secondary data from online and scholar sources. All literature has been reviewed by its subject and sources to ensure its relevance and validity. The theoretical and conceptual examinations of

communicating sustainable brands and storytelling have provided a foundation for the collection of data and analysis process, in drawing conclusions about the meaning and use of storytelling for communicating sustainable fashion.

Following the theoretical framework (chapter 2), I continue with an analysis of the major difficulties, communication of sustainability and sustainable fashion are currently facing. I combined findings from secondary and primary data. The latter has been conducted through seven interviews concerning sustainable brands and the use of storytelling. These rather short and informal interviews have been used to gain an insight from retailers. Further, the key people being interviewed have expertise and knowledge in terms of sustainable brand concepts and the fashion industry. This primary data has been necessary, to avoid inaccuracy and data being outdated in secondary research as well as to add more relevance to my research. My goal for this third chapter was to discuss the difficulties around sustainability as well as to grasp the topic within fashion more in depth.

This chapter is followed by a discussion of the communication tool storytelling and its application in diverse sectors and departments. The goal for my 4th chapter was to dive into the different approaches and abilities of storytelling and explore literature’s and retailers’ perspectives. Also, it has been seen as highly important to examine the power and complexity of storytelling in general.

Further, in chapter 5 I evaluate the correlation of storytelling and the communication of sustainable fashion by using my findings of the previous chapters. Given that the purpose of this research is to understand how storytelling can contribute to communicating sustainable fashion, insights of brands using storytelling are yielding in an overall evaluation of its current role and application for communicating about green and sustainable fashion.

1.4 Limitations

Research and literature have reached a wide scope concerning sustainable fashion and storytelling. Regardless of the increasing use of storytelling for sustainable fashion concepts, in depth studies concentrating on this topic are limited. By interviewing employees of sustainable fashion brands, my research has been trying to receive more insights. Arguably, these interviews have not all give me consistent valid insights and can not represent general perspectives of sustainable retailer. Involving more brands, could have provided different findings as well as more contradicting results and would increase qualitative data. Also, this study is not discussing consumers' impressions nor does it intensively elaborate on the direct effect of communication on consumers. I mainly studied and discussed the subject from a brand’s perspective and attempt to serve first conclusions which are relevant for brands.

Further, due to the short time frame and complexity of the matter, the study does not include an intensive discussion of a variety of different abilities of storytelling. Analysing diverse approaches to apply and implement the tool could have evolved different outcomes. Concerning the validity of this research, my study and interpretations attempt to include an alternative understandings of the phenomena described. Further, by seeking data that is not confirming my findings nor is consistent with each topic, I prevented my research results from appearing highly untrustworthy or false.
Before there can be an analysis of the use of storytelling for communicating sustainable fashion concepts, the terms sustainability, sustainable fashion, green communication and storytelling as well as their background have to be defined and introduced.

2.1 Sustainability

“Sustainability names an idea, a system property that is dependent on the relationship between things that evolve through time and towards aspirational goal of thriving” (Fletcher and Tham, 2014).

Sustainability has been a rising and popular topic due to a general growing awareness of environmental threats. When speaking about sustainability and its communication, defining the concept of sustainability and its synonym green is necessary. In general sustainability is often mentioned in discussions about environmental harm, climate change, as well as production and working conditions. But its actual meaning and definition is difficult to embody. “Sustainability is a key issue for many corporations, in products and practices ranging from ‘green’ manufacturing to recycling initiatives” (Reilly and Weirup 2012:2). The principle of sustainability is stated as the integration of ecological, social and economical concerns (Reilly and Weirup 2012). Regarding to the often stated Brundtland report of 1987, sustainable production means development in favour of the needs and requirements of the current generation, without limiting the possibilities of future generations and nature (Kuhlman and Farrington 2010; Cerin 2006).

Hence, the concept is seen as the balance needed between the different time spans. One could also say, sustainability describes what we are willing to leave behind for next generations.

According to the research of Joy, Sherry, Vankatesh, Wang and Chan (2012), sustainability involves complex and changing environmental dynamics that affect human livelihoods. Also, literature has stated that defining this term is rather complex (Barnett et al. 1995; Niinimäki 2013). That is due to the fact, that it has been widely used and communicated through diverse concepts and ideas and because it is multifaceted. Further, sustainability's meaning has been changing in the course of time (Kuhlman and Farrington 2010) and is expected to transform further. As for the concept of sustainability no public consensus has been found, an overall definition seems to be difficult to state. Therefore, a combination of the above statements has been formed, concentrating on a definition and meaning for brands:

Sustainability is a concept and ideology integrating the attempt to act responsible towards society, economy and the environment.

2.2 Sustainable Fashion

Today, the fashion industry in particular is stated as embodiment of consumption (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014). Next to fast fashion and constantly changing trends, leading to overconsumption, disposables and benumbing the focus on durability, there is an other market within the global fashion sector. Since the early
90s, natural and recycled fibers appear on tradeshows and media, associated with sustainability (Fletcher and Tham 2014). When the climate change became a major concern, sustainable fashion evolved within the multiplicity of fashion sectors (Hultin and Villberg 2013). Kate Fletcher defines this certain industry as „fashion that fosters ecological integrity and social quality through products, practices of use and relationships” (2012). It is a sector which concerns the environmental impact of production processes, social justice, fair working conditions and economics of the global industry (Black n.d.). Despite the focus on specific materials, sustainable design is a holistic perspective including consumer behaviour. According to the study of Eriksson and Karlsson (2014), sustainability means „thoughtful and deliberate consumption”. Beyond that, many associate it with ecological fashion which refers to creating environmentally friendly and ethical products (Moody 2013). To be more specific, it means clothing production and its materials, which are less detrimental the environment (Hultin and Villberg 2013).

The term sustainable fashion includes two ideas ideas, contradicting each other in terms of meaning and ideology (Joy, Sherry et al. 2012). ‘Sustainability’ represents an approach which is an antagonistic concept to ‘fashion’, an industry based on consumerism. Some might state, an industry, boosting consumption can barely include a sector, focusing on less consumption and long lasting garments. Hence, it might appear controversial to customers. Also, consumers have been confused by the industry and sustainability itself.

However, the market of sustainable fashion increased enormously and since the past decades, several brands with green objectives emerged³. Consumers have started to buy into green and ecological clothing, because of the evolving cloud of sustainability. For this study, products made in an environmentally friendly, conscious, ethical, eco or responsible way belong to and describe the term sustainable fashion.

2.3 Green Communications

Today, green has developed to an own mainstream market and can be seen in consumer behaviour, media, products and services (Ottman 2011).

Green communication extends to all sort of branches and is referred to as the practice of transferring, promoting and lastly communicating in a green way. Further, it enables brands to re-market products and opened the door for establishing and branding separate product lines (Mishra and Sharma 2010). For instance, the French water brand Volvic coloured its labels green and promoted them as 100% recyclable plastic bottles (Roos 2010). Many businesses show own logos, certificates and advertisements following a green strategy. According to Jaquelyn Ottman’s (2011) research on the new rules of marketing, „greener” products are defined as having a lighter impact on the environment, while „sustainable” products are referred to as having a social dimension added. Hence, these changes and reaction on environmental awareness can be seen in marketing and communications. The American ice cream brand Ben & Jerry’s for example, was one of the first including green values in a mission statement in the 1980s. “Our Social Mission compels us to use our Company in innovative ways to make the world a better place.” (Ben & Jerry’s 2016).

³ Kuichy, Patagonia, People Tree, MUD Jeans, Eileen Fisher

(The Bizztro, 2016); (Sustainable brands, 2016)
Promoting its natural ingredients, but also concentrating on reducing environmental harm the brand developed a green communication strategy (Lamb, Hair and McDaniel 2014).

Also, giant automobile producers have launched alternative vehicles and electric cars as response to the overall shift towards green. Attempting to communicate a sustainable image, even a ‘Car free day’ has been announced by Volvo in 2009 (Raza and Awan 2010; Aguilera 2013). Although, vehicles and oil industries are soiling the environment. These companies try to remain a green, responsible or conscious image through its communication strategy.

Green communication and thus, also communication of sustainability, are part of what marketers describe as green marketing: “The marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe” [...] “The efforts by organizations to produce, promote, package and reclaim products in a manner that is sensitive to ecological concerns” (American Marketing Association 2011).

It is stated to be marketers’ response to changes in demand, slow fashion, as well as communicating sustainability. Green communication is the bridge between brand’s sustainability efforts, customers and consumers (Aulakh 2012). Further, its marketing can be described as a strategy where consumption, marketing and production processes focus on ways less deleterious to the environment (Mishra and Sharma 2012). Today, it mainly indicates a strategy focusing on ethical and sustainable communication to gain profit (Belz and Peattie 2012). Hence, for this study, green communication represents also the appearance of sustainability. In a nutshell, communication of sustainability and green communication will refer to the approach of promoting and communicating values and images in a certain responsive way including green marketing approaches.

2.5 Storytelling

“Storytelling can be defined as relating a series of events.” (Miller 2011)

“It is one of the world’s most powerful tools for achieving astonishing results.” (Guber 2007)

Storytelling is ubiquitous in our world. It has been at the heart of our way to communicate (Denning 2001). Stories shape our personalities, imagination, environment and our world perspective. Today, we have become masters of telling narratives. “Storytelling is an activity that is practiced incessantly by everyone” (Denning 2005, p.18). Every parent has told a fascinating story for its children and every child has told incredible stories to them. The famous narratives about Santa Claus, the Easter bunny or the tooth fairy, are only a few examples of fantasy figures and their stories we have been told and believed in. According to Miller (2011), we perceive our self, community and society through experienced stories. Further, good stories do surprise and make us think (Andrijauskaite 2015). Moreover, any story is creating pictures, gives meaning and makes information tangible. We all remember our experiences with certain stories.

However, the tool is often referred to as powerful narrative telling a story and is widely portrayed in communication. Much information is stored and indexed in form of stories (Herskovitz and Crystal 2010). Further, storytelling can range from a 200 words Tweet, a video story to an interactive narrative (Goren and Moyers 2009). Stories can be communicated through diverse channels, including television, social media, magazines and books. Hence, there are several diverse ways to tell and communicate a story. Especially, with the growth of social media and content marketing, telling stories within branding has become an overall strategy with growing recognition.
According to Hermansson and Na (2008), branding is the goal of storytelling. In terms of engagement, storytelling accomplishes a connection with an audience through sharing similar values, interests and ideologies. The brand Heinz let its customers tell a story about their ketchup with the appearance of ‘Your Ketchup, Your Way’. Customers share their everyday life experiences with it (Besocialized 2016). Through conveying the story, they become part of Heinz and its culture.

Shiffrin states, “the stories that we tell about our own and other’s lives are a pervasive form of text through which we construct, interpret and share experience” (Hermansson and Na 2008). Hence, brands commonly display their concepts and ideas through a story.

Using the previous example, Ben & Jerry’s advertises a little story in almost every campaign with implementing the brand’s founders, history, ingredients or production process and fun.

Further, their whole concept is published on their website: ‘From a renovated gas station in Burlington, Vermont, to far-off places with names we sometimes mispronounce, the journey that began in 1978 with 2 guys and the ice cream business they built is as legendary as the ice cream is euphoric’ (Ben & Jerry’s 2016). The brand implements its own story in advertisements, so that people remember it.

According to several studies (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014; McLellan 2006) storytelling, used as a holistic approach, is communicating strong meaning. For this research, storytelling will be analysed in terms of its use for communicating brand concepts. Therefore, it is defined as constructing narratives, used as a tool that communicates and shares information, meaning or experience with customers.

Storytelling is imagination. It influences perceptions, captures knowledge, builds identity, connects, attracts and enriches (Hutchens 2015).
3. GREEN COMMUNICATION & MARKETING

3.0 Since the 90s, companies have started to jump on the green and sustainable train, communicating conscious approaches and concepts. Communicating a product in a ‘green’ manner, has been stated as rather positive for a brand. Also, consumers do react and get influenced by green marketing (Mishra and Sharman 2010). Certainly, the phenomenon of green communication and sustainability has gained a foothold in modern markets. However, intricacies of green communication have affected sustainable fashion.

Sustainability has become a growing trend which brands use to communicate allegedly qualities of products (O’Rourke 2011). For example, T-shirts made out of 100% organic cotton, promoted as being fully untreated. But also the way products are produced have been advertised as being sustainable. Such as denims, produced with zero water waste. However, these claims have to be treated with a pinch of salt, as they are mostly neither proved nor comprehensible. Some brands produce and advertise ecological fashion, only to strengthen their image (Hultin and Villberg 2013). The Swedish retail-clothing company H&M for instance, launched a World Recycle Week on the 18th of April 2016, communicating an image of their contribution to a more sustainable industry. This effort appears to some highly responsible, but as H&M is one of the biggest fast fashion companies, this should behold critically. Further, although sustainability in general is undeniable in current marketing approaches, it still seems not very attractive and convincing. Although, the industry is quickly changing and developing responsible approaches, sustainability is elusive in fashion and textiles (Fletcher and Tham 2014). So what are the difficulties, especially in fashion?

Previous debates have identified several complexities for retailers regarding green communication as well as reasons for consumers not to buy into sustainable fashion (Choi and Chen 2015). Thus, the following analysis is focusing on present difficulties considering both, green communication in general and sustainable fashion. The following chapter presents the complexities, discussing research studies and interview results, to explore the question of what are current obstacles of communicating sustainability?

First, it is difficult to challenge the powerful hegemony of fast fashion, fast technology and fast food. Moreover, consumers are stated to be more drawn to ecological food for example, because there the health impact is easy to understand, while fashion has not yet reached this impact on its targets (Hultin and Villberg 2013 cited Glam). According to Solomon and Rabolt (2007), consumers are not used to the concept and its approaches, such as recycled fashion (Hultin and Villberg 2013). According to the researcher Bonini and Oppenheim, barriers for brands to become green are especially the lack of awareness, negative perceptions, distrust, high prices, and low availability (in Hultin and Villberg 2013).
Although, consumers appreciate the concept of sustainability, the idea behind it has been stated as highly complex and confusing, so that current approaches have not succeeded in engaging customers, when it comes to sustainable consumption (Choi and Cheng 2015 cited Pookulangara and Shephard). Further, there is still lack of knowledge concerning communicating sustainability among fashion retailers (Eriksson and Karlsson 2011). As sustainability is deluged through scepticism, sustainable fashion has been influenced by that. According to Kirsi Niinimäki (2013), the sustainable fashion industry can be seen as an undefined and inscrutable sector that needs to question current communication practices.

However, the majority of the researched articles and literature mentioned the general image problem, complexity, consumers’ perception, green marketing, lack of engagement and the exaggeration of sustainability in communication as recurring difficulties. Merging these individual arguments to receive a better overview, it can be said that current approaches of communicating sustainable fashion are facing three main obstacles: they are missing out on acknowledging the ambiguity of sustainability, the hyperbole of green communication and marketing, and the general image problem of communicating green and sustainable fashion.

3.1 Ambiguity

Today, sustainability can mean and describe many things. Hence, it has become difficult for consumers to understand what the meaning behind this ideology is and which brand is fully sustainable. “The word sustainability in itself is confusing and unspecific”, states Amy Hall (2016), director of the sustainable brand Eileen Fisher.

Further, she explains, every brand defines the concept for its own purpose. The director of the brand Raven & Lily, Jessica Sjolseth (2016) states that consumers lack knowledge and education about what sustainability actually means. Because sustainability is difficult to grasp, sustainable fashion becomes enigmatic too.

Companies try to compensate this through informing about production, material use and work conditions. But, it seems difficult to convince customers only through transparency regarding a brand’s sustainable concept, argues Sjolseth (2016). Due to its fragmented and complex supply chain, fashion manufacturing is less transparent (Joy, Sherry et al. 2012 cited Partridge). Furthermore, through using diverse certificates, companies have been trying to receive credibility. Even though, this has supported sustainability’s complexity.

According to the research study of Eriksson and Karlsson (2014), retailers are struggling to adapt their messages in an uncomplicated manner. Fashion brands and their strategies do not concentrate on consumers and their understanding of sustainability enough. Regarding Kotler et al. (in Hermansson and Na 2008) marketing requires that companies communicate with their customers in a clear and comprehensive way. But, all the various terms and concepts of eco, fair, conscious, responsible and sustainable fashion have created a puzzle and confuse consumers. Also, there is no universal standardization to certify a product as green (Mishra and Sharma 2010). Additionally, Amy Hall (2016) states that brands try to be responsible, organic and fair trade simultaneously, which seems not authentic. The information given is confusing and abstract, so that engagement regarding responsible consumption is not created (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014 cited Pookulangara and Shephard). Hence, communication of sustainability suffers from ambiguity.

4See Appendix Table 2.
5Interview of the 28th of March, 2016. See Appendix, interview 4, p. 41
6Interview of the 10th of March 2016, See Appendix, interview 2, p. 39
3.2 Green Marketing

Through diverse marketing strategies, it has become more misleading, what sustainability means and represents. It is not obvious what a green product advertised through a green campaign implies (Hultin and Villberg 2013). Also, consumers have been sceptical towards green advertising, deriving from brands enhancing their green image by creating campaigns without a proven sustainable impact (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014). Further, green marketing itself is stated to have challenges, due to the missing standardization, customers absent satisfaction and because it is still a rather new concept (Mishra and Sharma 2010).

Marketing and communication have been affected by ‘green washing’, resulting in a deceitful image of sustainability. Nowadays, also large brands, such as Nike, Timberland or Marks & Spencer, adapted a green image (Sustainable Fashion Design, 2012) and advertise this correspondingly. According to the research of Ottosson and Parment (Eriksson and Karlsson 2013), current communication has exaggerated green strategies in a way that resulted in sustainability becoming mainstream. Caroline Mewe7 (2016), founder of Alchemist Fashion BV, identifies this problem and states, this strategy should be forbidden. However, Jaquelyn Ottman’s (2011) research states, that the present approaches of green washing products, the tremendous information increase and a general oversaturation lead to a growing immunity against green messages and a ‘green fatigue’ among customers. Carlien Helmink8 (2016), employee of studio JUX, thinks this is not fully true: “It is not just black and white”. But consumers have developed a more critical approach towards green campaigns.

Communicating products green, ecological or ethical has become a prevalent strategy, but due to excessive green marketing approaches, markets have been drowned by its appearance.

Certainly, green communication and marketing contribute to sustainability’s ambiguity, as well as display a primary obstacle for sustainable fashion concepts.

3.3 Image Problem

Sustainable and green communication are often prejudged as being uncool. “The image and associations towards green fashion are partially very negative”, states Vetter (2009). Sustainability has been often stated as being rather unfavourable among consumers. The author John Grant (2007) has identified a ‘greenophobia’ among today’s consumers, that underlines the negativity of communicating sustainability. It might not be the case, that green products are rejected, but communicating green has been perceived with scepticism. Explicitly, the mentioned practices of greenwashing and brands’ overloading attempts to display conscious approaches have determined consumer’s critical propensity towards purchasing green products (Newell 2000) and thus to purchase sustainable fashion. Further, due to rather boring appearing brands and stereotypes associated with sustainable fashion, it has received a negative presence (Bakker 2016).

When thinking of ethical or ecological fashion, many people make cliché-ridden associations and have prejudices, such as sustainable clothing are hippie-clothing (Schneider 2014). Also, customers state it is not easy to find fashionable sustainable clothing. Furthermore, sustainable fashion has been referred to as pricy, not highly available and uncomfortable (Parker 2009).

This last difficulty of sustainability and sustainable fashion derives also from the first two problems mentioned. Sustainable fashion and its communication have a general image problem, due to the ambiguity and exaggeration of green and sustainability.

7 Interview of the 31st of March. See Appendix, interview 6, p.43
8 Interview of the of 4th of April; See Appendix, interview 3, p.40
As the difficulties overlap and also reinforce each other, it becomes even more difficult to communicate about sustainable fashion.

3.4 Sub-conclusion

In this chapter I started out discussing the variety of problems concerning the communication of sustainability and sustainable fashion and expounded three main difficulties: ambiguity, green marketing and the general image problem of sustainability. In a nutshell, present communication of sustainability has faced many obstacles and problems, which overlap, reinforce and interact with each other and make the concept itself more unclear and complex. The leading problem for fashion brands relies in exact this interdependency of the various difficulties of sustainability and sustainable fashion, enhancing complexity of the terms.

Evidently, to work against this equivocality of sustainability, clarification is needed. Additionally, consumers have to be educated about the topic in a way that is more authentic and not persuasive. As the research has shown, consumers are irritated by the concept of sustainability and the path it is communicated. If brands would focus on a dialogue and connection with customers, information would become more clear and explicit (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014) and customers might not tend negatively towards the topic.

As green marketing has done the opposite of supporting a sustainable approach and not contributed to a sustainable world (Peattie and Crane 2005), retailers need to work on a more inspiring path, working against the green fatigue among customers. Further, Mishra and Sharma (2010) argue that retailers need a coherent strategy so that green marketing can be successful. Certainly, there should be an engaging and holistic communication approach, averting the mentioned ambiguity and clarifying the negative image. Sustainability has to become more attractive. The difficulties of current communication can be interpreted even further. If there is no dialogue, engagement and bonding, consumers are unlikely to develop some sort of trust in a brand (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014 cited Pookulangara and Shephard).

Clearly, under the umbrella of sustainability and green communication, certain issues also influencing sustainable fashion have been found. Seemingly, the information I have accumulated so far, hint to retailers’ need of a coherent approach towards communicating sustainable fashion, where customers get informed and involved with a brand.
MEET THE RUNAWAY BRIDE

(Dailymail, 2015); (Fashion Gone Rouge, 2015); (Just Jared, 2015)
4.0 Storytelling is being defined as a powerful tool for interaction and engagement as well as to communicate complex information (Reissner and Pagan 2013, cited Parkin). Research studies have been starting to discuss the importance and use of the tool for sustainable fashion. Therefore, its relevance for communication in general has been decisive to study. Hereby, I have found different studies, examining the tool for different purposes and industries. Hence, my research continues with discussing storytelling's importance in terms of communication as well as its abilities of communicating a brand, sharing knowledge, connecting and transmitting values with customers.

4.1 Functions and Types

Certainly, there are many ways of differentiating storytelling into single types. Various studies have concentrated on the features a story has to embody (Kaliszewski 2012). Further, some examined the purposes of implementing the tool, such as leadership strategies, branding or education. Storytelling has been used over the years by several industries and also by fashion companies. Luxury brands (Dolce & Gabbana, Dior, Chanel) but also other brands of the sector have used it to communicate heritage, values, concepts or campaigns. Especially with social media consisting of multiple powerful channels, storytelling has been reaching customers in several ways (Fog, Budtz et al. 2011).

When researching purposes and functions, I have focused on four recently published studies, all acquire a different perspective on the tool. In ‘Storytelling in Management Practice: dynamics and Implications’ of 2013 by Reissner and Pagan, several functions of storytelling for management practices discussed by various authors are displayed. „Today's storytelling goes far beyond entertainment and instructions“, the authors state (2013:158). Although, this book concentrates on storytelling used within an organization, it can be translated for communicating a brand as well. Their research discusses storytelling used for interaction, fostering collaboration, communicating mission and vision, as well as core values, knowledge-sharing, educating audience and creating trust. As these abilities are also important for communicating a brand's concept, their arguments can be interpreted.

The author Stephen Denning concentrates in his article ‘Mastering the Discipline of narratives’ (2005) and 2nd edition of his book ‘The Leader's Guide to Storytelling’ (2011) on patterns of narratives that managers can tell in situations within organisations. The capabilities mentioned in his works focus on external communication and thus, also on consumer. For brands communicating externally, mostly important are the following: Sparking action, communicating identity, communicating the company, transmitting values and sharing knowledge. Although his research focuses mainly on leadership and management, his suggestions can be explained in terms of the use of storytelling for brand communication,
the exchange of information and knowledge as well as establishing conversations. For example, Denning (2011) points out that through telling a story of an employees’ misbehaviour or a mistake comes with certain values, which have been seen as important in an organization. Communicating who you are is not only an introduction, but is also building trust.

Further, in the research of Eriksson and Karlsson (2014), four types of stories with single purposes, concerning the communication approach of a brand itself and building brand relationships are found. These are classified by the authors as: heritage, contemporary, folklore and vision narratives. Heritage stories connect with consumers through the history and establishment of the brand. The luxury brand Chanel often plays in advertisements with its culture and the founder Coco Chanel, for instance. Contemporary stories are expressing brands’ general purposes and missions, but this type can also be used to share information and knowledge. The brand story of single campaigns such as the one of Heinz ketchup is an example of this kind. Folklore stories are established by the consumers itself and are therefore, difficult to manage. Vision stories share the brands view and give transparency. Eriksson and Karlsson (2014) elaborate, that people connect with stories of each kind and thus, result in engagement, values and meaning making.

Lastly, I found a fourth viewpoint in ‘Storytelling: Branding in Practice’ (2011) by the authors Fog, Budtz, Munch and Blanchette. As their research focuses on the tool for marketing and branding, valuable information has been found. “Storytelling is an indispensable tool for activating and making the company’s DNA visible and creating a shared direction” (2011:9). Furthermore, the authors argue, that the tool is not only to support a brand but more about strengthening the company’s culture. Also, translating company’s values in a tangible way makes people perceive them more quickly.

All studies acknowledge on storytelling’s use for displaying and communicating a brand and its concept. We have discussed this function with the example of Ben & Jerry’s. Further, Denning (2011), Fog et al. (2011) and Eriksson and Karlsson (2014) define storytelling as a suitable tool to share knowledge and information, for example about the products of a brand. Also, they acknowledge, establishing a dialogue is an important ability. Additionally, sharing values and engaging with an audience can be achieved through stories. Therefore, to communicate a certain product or concept, inform customers or connect with them, as well as sharing values, storytelling displays an applicable tool. However, these functions serve rather as an orientation and deliver information about storytelling’s abilities from different perspectives. It is necessary to discuss the various purposes and abilities of storytelling, to be able to approve its power and importance in terms of communicating a brand concept in general.

The following table (table 1 p.25) displays abilities of storytelling in terms of brand communication and engagement, according to the discussed above studies and books.
Table 1. Abilities of storytelling in literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storytelling function</th>
<th>Research studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Communication (Identity)</td>
<td>Denning (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eriksson &amp; Karlsson (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reissner &amp; Pagan (2013)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fog, Budtz, Munch and Blanchette (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge Sharing &amp; Information</td>
<td>Denning (2011)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eriksson &amp; Karlsson (2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fog, Budtz, Munch and Blanchette (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Denning (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eriksson &amp; Karlsson (2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fog, Budtz, Munch and Blanchette (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values and Engagement</td>
<td>Eriksson &amp; Karlsson (2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reissner &amp; Pagan (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fog, Budtz, Munch and Blanchette (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denning (2005/2011)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
4.2 Why tell a story?

With this chapter, I attempt to explore the found abilities and purposes further. Hence, the four functions explored in chapter 4 will give direction to the following analysis. Certainly, these abilities can also be found in other marketing tools. However, with this discussion the importance and advantages of storytelling applied by companies today, will be elaborated.

Brand Communication

“Using stories is an effortless way of conveying who you are, what you stand for” (Hermansson and Na 2008).

Denning (2005) states that people only trust you, if they understand who you are. As it has been argued, through stories people remember content much more easily and also use them to communicate with others. Generally, storytelling has been relevant in shrinking a communicational gap between a brand and its customers (McMaster 2015). For example, through communicating a brand and its vision, a feeling of sense and purpose is created, Reissner and Pagan (2013) state. Some brands also apply storytelling to communicate their mission, vision and values, through visualizing a personality. “A brand narrative without a well-defined, recognizable, memorable and compelling persona can become a series of disconnected adventures, jumping from narrative to narrative” (Herskovitz and Crystal 2010). Therefore, through a story explaining who you are and may using a strong character, customers can relate to your brand. Further, a brand establishing a character, also receives a face. Employees could be introduced through their own story. Hence, storytelling can give brands a personality (Simmons 2006). The Alchemist fashion brand introduces online its founder Caroline Mewe and her story. Hence, customers get an impression of who is working behind the brand and also, why it has been founded.

Eriksson and Karlsson (2014) point out that through displaying heritage and origin, brands can connect with customers and with the passion of creating the brand in the first place. Regarding Fog, Budtz et al (2011) an authentic core story enlightens and clarifies a company’s culture and makes it noticeable. However, a holistic story must be applied in a way, communicating with the whole target group (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014).

Sharing Knowledge and Information

Our abilities to communicate, listen and remember a story interrelates knowledge sharing, communication and expression (Leinaweaver 2015). Regarding knowledge sharing or educating, storytelling has been argued to be able to transmit information in a compelling way (Silverman 2006). Further, Shankar et al. (2001) state that storytelling is important for making sense of the world in general. Stories allow mankind to synthesize information, imagine difficult topics and associate it with pictures. A story always puts information in context through a beginning, middle part and ending. Knowledge-Sharing stories within organisations for example do consist of a problem description, setting, solution and explanation (Denning 2005). Furthermore, we do receive complex information much more easily when it is framed in context. Therefore, stories are ideal to share knowledge with. When we are given a set of data, we are unlikely to talk about it.

But when we listen to a story about the data, we have something to share (Silverman 2006). Today, customers increasingly seek for information about clothing and the story behind it (Vetter 2009; Aguilera 2013). Telling a story of how products have been created, makes a brand more transparent, but also can inspire the audience. Through telling a story, knowledge is shared and an understanding is created, so that boundaries can be minimized and sense-making begins (Fog et al. 2011). However, stories need to be communicated
in a positive way, as then they are more likely to conquer uncertainties (Denning 2005). Therefore, giving customers information about the brand’s concept and products in a conclusive way could increase certainty and minimize the existing lack of knowledge regarding sustainability.

Establishing a Dialogue

“Stories are a social form of human interaction and, when most effective, engage the listeners’ imaginations” (Dickman 2008).

One advantage of storytelling is its ability to establish a conversation with an audience. Especially through social media, the opportunities to get in touch with customers have increased. As storytelling is often used and communicated on social platforms, immediate responses and interactions from all around the globe can be seen (Ottman 2011). Nowadays, people even seek to connect with stories to make them their own (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014 cited Sith and Wintrob). In general, storytelling can support interaction and conversation with customers and establish a relationship with them (Hermansson and Na 2008 cited Woodside et al.). To be more specific, if there is no dialogue, consumers are unlikely to develop trust in a brand (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014 cited Pookulangara and Shephard). Certainly, communicating with stories does not have to establish trust. However, techniques used to generate brand experience might „touch the human heart” (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014, p.10). Clearly, powerful stories support a dialogue between a brand and its customers.

Sharing Values & Reinforce Engagement

Storytelling can incorporate values into compelling stories, so that an emotional bond can be conceived (Fog, et al. 2005). In addition, Reissner and Pagan state (2013) that stories allow the audience insights to the storyteller’s beliefs, values and personality. Especially, personal stories underscore values of trust and support (Silverman 2006). They certainly contribute to bond with someone or something. The Walt Disney movies have been creating strong connections with generations through its unique stories (BoF 2016). Further, fans become part of its culture after a movie was released, through available products, advertisements and figures of a movie. Hence, they immerse into Disney’s stories and world.

Furthermore, with an emerging focus on storytelling, marketers attempt to increase consumer engagement (Kaliszewski 212). Hence, it can contribute to an interaction of companies and their customers. Some stories can be invented and managed by consumers (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014). However, it is difficult to control their meaning, which results in a high risk for a brand’s reputation and image. Especially, social Media is forcing an interactive relationship between brands and consumer (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014). Customers respond online to a brand’s activity and their reactions on publications of a brand can be seen.

An example serves the #mycalvins campaign of the fashion company Calvin Klein. Customers were encouraged to use the brand’s hashtag, becoming part of the campaign themselves. With this, the company directly engaged over 600 customers via social media (Mines 2016). Clearly, engaging customers can support the relationship with customers and displays opportunities to receive feedback and impressions.
Sharing certain values means connecting with customers and thus, establishing a relationship on a deeper level than a simple purchase.

In an article of the Business of Fashion from May 2016, fashion designers have been interviewed regarding storytelling and its importance for brand concepts. According to the creative director of the fashion brand Jimmy Choo, Sandra Choi, when working on a collection for the brand, a story is essential to construct a framework around it (BoF 2016). Storytelling has been applied in the fashion sector to convey concepts, to give structure to a collection and to entertain customers (BoF 2016).

So why is storytelling with its abilities so essential? Clearly, the four objectives of storytelling are representing its importance for brands, their communication and customer relationships. First of all, as we have seen, stories are able to communicate information more easily, express meaning, share knowledge, connect with customers, create a dialogue and engages. These abilities are all included in this one marketing tool. Furthermore, stories are not seemingly fooling customers with its content and rather feel honest and familiar through its simplicity. It creates content, without showing plain marketing goals of your brand (Thomas 2012). Also, we connect more easily with stories than with other marketing tools, such as printed advertisements or simple promotions. From a psychological perspective, humans remember the most, what they have experienced.

Furthermore, stories include a rather unique message and let us experience an idea, concept or perspective. As they can make us think, feel and persuade, a special experience is created. Everybody enjoys hearing a good story. Hence, they are much more likely to stick in our minds (Snow 2014). Also, storytelling is an influential and important driver in communications and marketing. The business who is able to tell a good story has increasing advantage (Snow 2014).

Since years, researchers have been discussing the tool’s importance for various industries. However, for the often critically discussed fashion sector, storytelling has enormous advantages in terms of communication. Especially, these big issues in the world, such as our environment, can be simplified through stories (Linkedin 2016). As sustainability is not only a value itself, but also a sensitive and globally discussed topic, it is necessary to explain it in a way, customer do not feel pressured, but more integrated and can connect to it. Because stories enable us to understand the world and its issues through a pair of new lenses, storytelling has the power to change our perception on the fashion industry.
5.0 An evaluation of storytelling as a communicational tool for sustainable fashion merges all results and evolves from the findings of chapter 3 and 4, combining green communication, sustainable fashion and storytelling. This last chapter does not try to force a connection of the major topics of this study. In fact, as storytelling has been used for communicating sustainable fashion concepts, it seeks to discuss this combination with regard to the obstacles of green communication and hence, the difficulties of sustainable fashion. Further, this chapter attempts to give an answer to the question: What could be advantages of storytelling for communication of sustainable fashion?

It has been stated that the ambiguity of sustainability and sustainable fashion derives from complexity and uncertainty, so that further clarification is needed. Storytelling, making information tangible and supporting sense-making, can communicate the industry and concept more clearly. The complex lifecycle of sustainable products can easily be visualized through a suitable story in a way, customers understand it and receive an idea of the whole production process. Further, sharing information through stories can support clarification of the topic, because people remind them more easily. Also, conscious consumption is a matter of education (Eriksson and Karlsson 2013). Although, sustainable companies often display information on websites, it becomes more concrete through an exciting or inspiring story. Without an fully integrated story, customers easily distrust your concept explains Janne Erxleben (2016) from the MUD Jeans team Therefore, storytelling in a holistic approach can be used to inform customers and transmit clear information about sustainable concepts. Thus, the enigmatic appearance of fashion and sustainability receives simplification and description.

Also, green communication and sustainable fashion face a general image problem, deriving from prejudices, the overload of green communication and the mentioned ambiguity of the industry. Hence, brands need to communicate their intention and concept. In the opinion of Carlien from Studio JUX (2016), due to consumer’s critical approach towards sustainability, advertising personal advantages embedded in a story consumer can relate to, would be efficient. Throughout this study we have seen that telling a story gives a brand a personality and therefore, we can identify with it more easily. Further, storytelling enables to establish a community and to receive credibility, explains the team of MUD Jeans (2016). According to Denning (2011), storytelling contributes to a new perspective through its communicational power. Thus, communicating a brand and its sustainable concept in a comprehensive way could influence consumer’s perception and relationship to it. Thus, using stories could attract customers as well as affect the image of sustainable fashion.

The findings depict that, establishing a dialogue between brands and their customers is being regarded as crucial.
As stories are powerful in terms of creating a strong and emotional bond with an audience, brands could connect with customers on a deeper level. Arlene Birt, Sustainability Visual Storyteller and Information Designer, points out the importance of creating an emotional bond for informing about sustainability (Linkedin 2016). When customers have the ability to bond and become part of a brand's story, they engage with the ideology and thus with sustainability. Integrating customers through storytelling is highly important (UNEP 2005; Denning 2005). “If the story is compelling enough, it will do the work for you [...] travelling from person to person, and packed with emotions that will make people remember you and your company” (Hermansson and Na 2008). Creating a dialogue with customers helps to clarify and to minimize criticism and scepticism towards sustainability. Other tools can also establish a relationship and conversation between customers and companies. However, stories, as we know them and are used to them, are present in our daily lifes and thus, feel more close and real.

However, sustainable brands are not engaging enough with consumers and do not create a relationship with their target (Hermansson and Na 2008). Although, uncertainties but also negative perceptions regarding sustainability can be minimized when customers get more involved with the topic. In the current age, where individuals search for stronger relationships, it has become crucial for brands to focus on establishing a true connection with its customers. Thus, companies communicating sustainability have to focus on interacting and engaging with their consumers (Hill, Lee 2012). For example, MUD Jeans stays connected to its customers through their circular economy and leasing concept. After a purchase, customers can return their denims and tell their experience with it. This can be included in the returned denim, which will be sold as a vintage piece. Thus, their products become storyteller themselves and customers connect with a personal piece of clothing and the brand. One can argue that storytelling’s ability to engage customers and to create a relationship with them supports loyalty and thus influences the perception towards concepts such as sustainability. When customers relate to and interact with a brand and concept their relationship to it is strengthened and negativism towards it becomes reduced.

Additionally, establishing meaning and communicating brand values, has been essential for the communication of sustainable fashion. When we share the same things in life with others, we become closely connected. When consumers trust a brand and its sustainable approach, they share certain values with it (McLellan 2006). As sustainability is certainly about values in life, it is important to communicate these in a compelling way, such as through storytelling. Further, sharing stories may also means sharing a worldview (Eriksson and Karlsson 2014). Also, Fog et al. (2011) state that storytelling is useful to establish a shared direction.

Tim Holland (2016) from the brand Dick Moby, explains the importance of storytelling for sustainable fashion brands: “I think that it is the number one rule in the game of marketing or communication. If something doesn’t have a story, what is there to tell? And if there is nothing to tell, how are you going to connect to your customer?“.

In a nutshell, storytelling offers important abilities for communicating a brand and its concepts. Concerning the previously discussed difficulties sustainable fashion is facing, it has been shown that these abilities has the advantages of minimizing existing scepticism, clarifying the ambiguous and complex concept and creating an unique connection to customers, other marketing tools might not. Hence, storytelling can be seen as highly valuable for communicating sustainable fashion. Stories might not change the sustainable fashion sector rapidly, but they are able to bring the concept into customer’s daily life and might lead to first changes.
The previous research investigated and explored the topics sustainability, green communication and its obstacles, storytelling, as well as its abilities. This study attempted to display an answer to the question of how storytelling can contribute to the communication of sustainable fashion concepts. The findings suggest that, due to the current difficulties regarding communication of green marketing and sustainable fashion, an alternative communicational approach for sustainable fashion needs to be considered. Therefore, possible advantages of using storytelling for communicating sustainable fashion have been evaluated.

The communication of a brand and its identity, sharing knowledge and information, as well as establishing a dialogue, bond with customers, communicating values and engaging customers have been indicated as key components in communication. In conclusion, storytelling’s suitability to convey a sustainable brand and its concept helps clarify the image of a brand and sustainable fashion in general. Further, the tool establishes certainty and conveys explanation. Therefore, the ambiguity of sustainability can be reduced among customers. This is supported through storytelling’s power to share knowledge and to educate. Along with these qualities, storytelling is able to establishing a conversation with an audience. When brands can communicate with their customers, they develop a relationship and establish an emotional bond. Connecting through a story, means sharing values and thus, sustainable fashion can become more attractive. Furthermore, storytelling can convey value in ways that resonate with the audience, express a mission and vision, be integrated with the core brand story, inform and share knowledge as well as strengthen the overall communication of a brand. All in all, stories’ abilities can work against the obstacles of green communication and therefore, support the communication of sustainable fashion. Evidently, stories could enable fashion brands to shed new light on sustainability. Therefore, existing and upcoming brands with a green, eco or sustainable fashion concept should consider implementing storytelling to work against prejudices, image problems, green washing effects and overall, to attract customers truly.

However, there is no evidence, that sustainable fashion can reach the power fast fashion has. Further, using storytelling for sustainable fashion brands will not make sustainability suddenly more attractive. Nevertheless, storytelling is seen as an important driver for communicating sustainable fashion concepts and can influence its current state. After all, my study has shown that retailers and literature believe that storytelling contributes to communicating sustainable fashion concepts through its various abilities.

This research displays the ground debate of how storytelling can be used to communicate about sustainable fashion. Results have raised thoughts on its importance and possible contribution to the communication of sustainable fashion.
However, my outcome could be further elaborated through analysing the specific ways, storytelling has been implemented in sustainable concepts. Further research could reveal insights of the effect on customers, when it is applied by sustainable brands.

There have never been as many exciting and creative tools for communication and marketing. Especially in times when people are bombarded with choices, the ability to simplify your vision is important. Stories are rather natural to us and bond consumers to concepts and brands through the values shared and the emotional glue, which has been created. Hence, it can be just more powerful in the long-term, than other tools.

Overall, as sustainable fashion and its complexity requires foundational knowledge, its background has to be recognized. Further, the findings of my research show that storytelling can be seen as an inspiration and starting point for this industry. Therefore, all important results have been published on an interactive website for brands to access and use. The aim of this visual display is to educate about sustainable fashion, explain its current state as well as introduce the found abilities of storytelling. Communicatingsustainablefashion.com serves as a stimulating inspiration.

Go ahead, explore and tell your story!
7. References - Online


**Journals**


Books


Videos and Images


Interviews


How would you describe the current approach of communication and marketing for sustainable fashion? A little dull in general unfortunately. The negative part is always more magnified even though there are a lot of very cool sustainable brands out there!

Do you use a specific communicational approach for your products? We translated the ‘treehugger’ and ‘granola’ saying to Dutch: Geitenwollensok. We approach the market and our costumers with humour and believe that that is a good way to bring across a serious massage.

Do you think sustainable fashion has received a negative image? Yes, I think so because of the very dull brands that are out there. And mostly because of the hippies who don’t really know how to dress properly. But the times are changing fast and the stereotype ‘treehugger’ is fading.

What do you think of storytelling as tool for communication sustainable fashion? Definitely very important. People always respond to a story and passion behind a brand. We do so all the time in the store.
How would you describe the current approach of sustainable communication and marketing for fashion?
We educate our customers and try to tell the stories of the women and the materials in a clear way.

Do you use a specific communicational approach for your brand?
We use a positive approach of thoughtful purchases and modern designs rather than guilting people into purchases.

Do you think consumers might be confused by different green labels, certificates and green washing methods?
Yes, they probably are because they are uneducated about what it all means, however awareness is growing. Fashion is the 2nd largest profitable industry (next to oil/gas) and it also has the 2nd largest carbon footprint, and it is largely unregulated. However, there are several certifications - B Corporation, Fair Trade, Organic, etc. that are the clearest indicators for the consumer.

What do you think of green marketing?
If a product is eco-friendly and has the certifications, consumers definitely want to buy and should know, but it should be very clearly explained.
Do you think due to the current communication and green marketing of sustainability, consumers developed a green fatigue against conscious and sustainable fashion?
No, not a fatigue, it’s not that black / white. Although I do believe consumers have developed a critical approach towards sustainability. Which I can totally understand and have myself as well.

Do you think storytelling would be an efficient approach to communicate sustainable fashion?
Yes, especially because of this critical approach. If you have honest sustainable goals and you are able to communicate this clear, transparent and transparent, consumers will believe you. Especially if you do this by addressing their personal advantages and embedded in a story that they can relate to.
How would you describe the current approach of sustainable communication and marketing for fashion?
To me, sustainable communication and marketing for fashion are victims of a confused marketplace. What I mean by that is: The word “sustainability” in itself is confusing and unspecific. Each brand defines it for their own purposes (sometimes referring just to environmental issues, sometimes including environmental and social issues, and sometimes also including financial). This makes it very difficult for consumers to compare brands across equivalent attributes. Secondly, consumers are looking for different qualities. Some seek organic, some seek vegan, some seek Fair Trade, etc. And the brands are trying to be all things to all people. This isn’t realistic, nor is it authentic. Where communication and marketing does work is when Social Media gets involved. When people say good (or not so good) things about brands they are wearing, there is an element of credibility that doesn’t necessarily exist when a brand talks about itself.

Do you use a specific communicational approach for your brand?
Most people would say that our approach is understated. It’s only in the last 3-4 years that we’ve started even talking about Sustainability and Social Consciousness publicly. And, even so, the information that’s out in public is quite outdated. We are also known for our authenticity. We talk about the good, the bad, the ugly. And that, I believe, earns us credibility among our customers (who are very loyal to our brand).

Do you think consumers are confused by different green labels, certificates and green washing methods?
Yes, absolutely. People assume that organic means free of pesticides and bad chemistry. In fact, it generally only refers to the fiber, and not to the dyes, finishes, trims, etc. And Fair Trade is confusing because of the many different fair trade organizations and the variations of Fair Trade that they promote. Certificates are unreliable (easily forged, and only representational of a moment in time), and green washing methods are misleading because of lack of attention to water consumption, among other things.
How would you describe the current approach of sustainable communication and marketing for fashion?
Currently, brands do concentrate on eco and ethical communication. However, we are not focusing on this green approach. We use storytelling to tell how we came to our circular economy as well as to communicate who we are. We do not want to pressure customers or point on moral. We concentrate on product qualities, engaging with customers, connect through adventures they have with our jeans, fun, outdoor and alternative lifestyles.

What specific communicational approach do you use for your brand?
We use social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and blogs. We cooperate with bloggers, but not fashion blogger specifically, rather lifestyle and travel blogger. Currently, we engaged with Justine from 'Kept calm & went vegan'. Our customers should experience our product advantages and should be informed about what happens after a purchase.

As you investigate also into telling stories, what do you think about the tool in general?
It is an important and powerful communicational tool. It is connecting consumers with our brand and makes it unique. Especially, through our lease model we get more in touch with our customers, because they come back to us. Further, we establish a community, which is without storytelling not possible. Storytelling is giving us a personality.

What are disadvantages of storytelling for communicating sustainability?
This is difficult to answer. I do not really know any at the moment. But as we continue to grow, it could be a challenge to keep up our image. It takes 10 years to establish a relationship, but only 5 minutes to ruin it again.

What are advantages?
Establishing a relationship with customers, communicate concept, brand values, honesty and credibility.

How is storytelling being applied as a tool for engagement in fashion?
It is important that all fits together and is applied in a coherent approach. The whole company needs to communicate this story. Otherwise a circular economy can not be established. It has to be harmonious. We have to remain faithful. The whole concept has to become one story.

What elements of storytelling are you using to communicate and engage consumers in fashion?
We do not focus on specific elements, rather a coherent strategy. We do now launch a new project continuing our story and documenting the next step: recycling our jeans. That gives us the opportunity to prove our honest approach and to give transparency. Further, this road trip suits to the adventure our brand is attempting to communicate. However, a clear goal has to be transferred and a story needs to be honest. We are also not 100% sustainable, but we continue to work on that.
Do you use a specific communicational approach for your products?
All answers are on our website. Newsletter, social media, background info through the website. Next to that we provide instore info as our Magazine and showcards.

Do you think consumers are confused by different green labels, certificates and green washing methods?
This is the most serious issue. Green washing is used by many big brands because legislation is far too unclear. A T-shirt made with only 5% Organic Cotton can be sold and promoted as an Organic Cotton T-shirt. This is misleading and should be forbidden by law. Next to that the labelling is totally unclear. Fashion should have the same approach as food. Labelling regulated by the government.

What do you think about the current communication and marketing of sustainable fashion?
See above: it should be regulated by the government. To give reliable information.

Research studies state, that to truly engage with customers and to increase attention, storytelling is an ideal approach for sustainable brands. What do you think about this?
As long as you tell the truth and practice what you preach.

Would you be interested in creating a storytelling video for your brand to communicate your values and products?
Is a nice idea. But should be done really professional and broadcasted through serious channels with leverage.
How would you describe the current approach of communication and marketing for sustainable products?
We strongly believe that a positive approach is the best approach. And that a sustainable product can be of the same quality and price level as non sustainable products.

Do you use a specific communicational approach or marketing strategy for your products?
Not specific, although you could say we primarily focus on early adopters.

What do you think of storytelling as tool for communication of sustainable fashion?
I think that it is the number one rule in the game of marketing or communication. If something doesn’t have a story, what’s there to tell? And if there is nothing to tell, how are you going to connect to your customer?

Many sustainable brands are using storytelling to create credibility. Do you think that is important for sustainable or environmentally friendly brands?
That almost makes it seem like something negative. As said before, every brand needs to tell its story to connect to its customers. The only difference is that sustainable brands have stories from an environmental perspective.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
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<td>Lack of Engagement</td>
<td>Fletcher and Tham (2014); Eriksson and Karlsson (2014); Aguilera (2013); Schneider (2014)</td>
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Go ahead & Explore