Marketing renewable energy

- A qualitative study of online marketing of renewable energy products on the B2B market

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Abstract

Traditionally, the role of marketing in business-to-business (B2B) transactions have been modest; marketing of B2B products are based on the believe that B2B customers only value product attributes such as price and quality, which apply to the functional consumption value. Emotional consumption values only apply to the business-to-consumer (B2C) market. However, due to digitalization and globalization, B2B companies are facing increased global competition and thus, the companies need to find new ways to stay relevant on the market. The current field of marketing is known as 'marketing 4.0'; in this era of marketing, where the key marketing concept is values and the enabling force of this era is new wave technology, the objective is to make the world a better place. Consumers are increasingly searching for companies and products, which can fulfil their personal needs and values. Thus, companies must approach their customers as humans with values, rather than merely customers. For B2B companies selling renewable energy solutions, the role of marketing is arguably different because the market is complex. Fighting climate change has become an important subject on the global agenda and different actions for sustainability and climate protection are being made; politically, targets for the use of renewable energy are made and furthermore, governments offer companies taxes and subsidies for investing in renewable energy technologies. Since the beginning of the 21st century, CSR has been a strategic part of most corporations, because of a growing consumer interest in sustainable consumption. Companies can use green marketing to promote their product's positive environmental value and with the growing public interest in sustainability, green consumers have emerged; green consumers are environmentally responsible and consume products, which do not compromise the health of the environment. However, despite different global actions for sustainability in the fight against climate change, the global consumption of energy will continue to increase in the future. Thus, there is a need for renewable energies. This study aims to discover how B2B renewable energy companies market their products on their websites. Based on the knowledge of B2B marketing and the current era of value-driven marketing, the aim is to identify which consumption values the companies use on their websites. To answer the research question, the research is conducted as a qualitative multiple case study, where the cases consist of three different renewable energy companies – from three different geographical locations – and their websites. The three websites are coded to discover and understand the message and values the companies want to communicate through their marketing.

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Introduction

Traditionally, business-to-business (referred to as 'B2B') marketing was known as industrial marketing. B2B are transactions made between companies, and the primary focus was selling, renting, or supplying products or services to other companies, with the purpose of further production (Grewal & Lilien, 2012). The transactions between companies were thus based on practical conditions. In B2B companies, the decision-making process of purchasing products is often based on multiple decision-makers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010); the buying process can thus be long and complex due to group decision-making and company influences (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). Furthermore, products on the B2B market are more complex and thus requires more knowledge from the buyers and thus, B2B companies often have fewer buyers and customers however, these also often purchase greater orders and larger quantities (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005). In contrast, the purpose of business-to-consumer (referred to as 'B2C') marketing is to sell products or services directly to the end users, the consumers. The path to the consumer is often shorter and the marketing approach is thus different because of the target market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

In general, marketing can be defined as the art of understanding consumers and their needs. According to Sheth et al (1991), there are five consumption values which can explain "why we buy what we buy" (Sheth et al, 1991, p. 159) and thus, there are five values, which companies can approach and use in their marketing strategy. Because we are all consumers, B2C has arguably received the most attention from marketing managers and academics (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005). The general assumption is that B2C customers consume based on the emotional values of a product, while B2B transactions are based on the functional values and a rational decision-making process (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004; Rizomyliotis et al, 2017). B2B buyers can not be persuaded with emotional values. In B2B companies, the role of marketing is thus regarded as irrelevant and managers are convinced it is only relevant for the B2C market (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Thus, for a long time, academic and managerial literature have suggested that marketing on respectively the consumer and business markets should be approached differently, because the B2B and B2C markets and needs are different (Coviello & Brodie, 2001).

In recent years, however, the focus on B2B marketing has changed and received increased attention (Rizomyliotis et al, 2017). Due to digitalization and globalization, companies face greater competition; transactions can happen across land borders and continents, and thus diminishes the challenges of time and space (Appadurai, 1996). Because of the globalized market, local customers do not merely purchase products from local suppliers. Thus, B2B companies need to find new ways to stay relevant and differ from the competing companies – both locally and globally (Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto, 2015) – and at the same time, the B2B companies need to adapt to the changing market (Hidalgo & SpringerLink, 2015). Online marketing plays an important role for B2B companies; most product information, customer communication, and trading takes place online (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Kotler et al (2016) argues, that the contemporary field of marketing has evolved to the stage of Marketing 4.0; the value-driven era of marketing where digital channels play an important role (Kotler et al, 2016). Marketing has shifted from being product-centric to human-centric; this deems that companies do not approach consumers as merely consumers but as human beings, with "mind, heart and spirit" (Kotler et al, 2010, p. 6). Products and services become personalised to fit individual needs and furthermore, products become sustainable.

In the value-driven era of marketing, the objective is to "make the world a better place" (Kotler et al, 2010, p. 6). One of the greatest concerns of our time is climate changes and thus, for many people, sustainability has become an important priority (Herbes et al, 2017). More consumers aim to live a sustainable and environmentally responsible lifestyle and thus, there is a growing consumer interest in knowing the supply-chain of how products are made and where they come from. The global environmental issues have caused

a shift in consumer's consumption habits and demands; apart from great price and high quality of their products, the consumers want to make meaning of their consumption (Faurholt & Bengtsson, 2006). The consumers search for companies which address and act environmentally responsible, and which offer sustainable products and services (Kotler et al, 2010). In the global climate change debate, the role of corporations is dual; corporations can use the earth's resources and produce products, which fulfil the needs and demands in our lives. However, corporations are also a part of the global problem; production of goods use the earth's resources and pollutes the environment (Dunphy et al, 2014). Thus, to make products sustainable, the production process needs to change (Antonides, 2017). While being a part of the problem, corporations are also one of the solutions; by implementing sustainable production, corporations can contribute to the well-being of the world (Dunphy et al, 2014). However, despite a global demand for sustainability in the fight against climate change, energy consumption will continue to increase (Burger et al, 2014). Using renewable energy for production is one-way corporations can implement sustainability in their company.

Across the globe, regulatory policies are made i.e. to reduce emission of greenhouse gasses (abbreviated as 'GHG') and furthermore, supportive policies, such as subsidies, are implemented to promote the use of renewable energy (Beck & Martinot, 2004). For a company, investing in renewable energy can have several benefits. Renewable energy is an abundant and cost-efficient fuel and thus, it is economically beneficial. Furthermore, renewable energy can have strategic and competitive advantages. By using renewable energy, the company can promote their product's sustainable benefits; this is known as green marketing (Gonçalves et al, 2016).

It is argued that B2B and B2C markets are different and should thus be approached differently. However, the contemporary field of marketing is arguably the value-driven era (Kotler et al, 2010), where the consumers are approached as human beings, rather than merely consumers, and values are the key marketing concept. Furthermore, the B2B companies are experiencing increased competition, due to digitalization and globalization. For B2B companies who are selling renewable energy technologies, there seem to be a contemporary market advantage and thus, this leads to the problem discussion.

Problem discussion

Renewable energy technologies are continuously evolving and adapting to the world's growing demand for renewable energy; the global energy consumption is growing and will continue to grow in the future (Burger et al, 2014). Thus, renewable energy needs to become a large share in the global energy mix (Mallon, 2006).

The demand for renewable energy comes from different sides; on a national as well as a global scale, governments are setting political targets for the use of renewable energy. For instance, in the European Union, the target is to produce 20% of all energy from renewable energy sources in 2020 (Burger et al, 2014, p. 58). On another level, corporations are interested in implementing renewable energy solutions for their production, because renewable energy supplies companies with inexhaustible energy, while being cost-efficient (Burger et al, 2014). Furthermore, it offers a strategic advantage for promoting the company's sustainable activities (Dunphy et al, 2014). Lastly, for many people, fighting global climate change is a top priority. Thus, in order to contribute with a positive impact on the environment, many consumers chose products and services that are sustainable and do not damage the environment (Gonçalves et al, 2016).

While B2B marketing is generally regarded as irrelevant, B2B renewable energy companies seem to have a marketing advantage; because of the growing attention and different needs for sustainable solutions – particularly renewable energy solutions – in theory, the marketing of renewable energy should be as simple as saying; '*The world needs renewable energy – buy our product!'.* However, marketing renewable energy is complex Herbes et al, 2017).

Fighting climate change is a global challenge, which most people are interested in participating in (Herbes et al, 2017). For a long time, corporations were branded as 'evil', because they were believed as only being interested in economic growth, while compromising the health of the environment (Dunphy et al, 2014). However, we are dependant on corporations and thus, governments and consumers are demanding corporations to implement sustainable production. For customers, – such as corporations – buying a renewable energy product is more than simply purchasing a product; buying a renewable energy product is an investment, which requires a large upfront payment (Beck & Martinot, 2004; Mallon, 2006). Therefore, customers are often dependant of support schemes, which can help finance the investment (Burger et al, 2014). The support schemes for renewable energy technologies are not fixed and thus, the possibility for financial support can change, and can vary in different countries. Furthermore, there is an increased attention on corporations, which are expected to act sustainable (Dunphy et al, 2014). For B2B companies, marketing is a challenge; but for renewable energy B2B companies, there seems to be an even bigger challenge. Because customers are highly dependent of support schemes, the attractiveness of a renewable energy technology is dependant of the financial support the investing customer can be granted (Mallon, 2006). For B2B renewable energy companies, it is thus a challenge to know their customers motivations for investing in renewable energy; is it because of politically decided targets? Is it because they want to become sustainable? Is it because they want to satisfy their customers?

This leads to the research question.

Research question

How does the global fight against climate change affect how B2B renewable energy companies market their products on their websites?

The purpose

The purpose of the research is to explore how B2B renewable energy companies approach the marketing of their products on their websites.

Theoretical framework

The following chapter serves as the theoretical framework for this research. The theoretical framework is used to achieve a greater knowledge and understanding of the underlying factors, which can contribute to answering my research question.

The first section will explore the origins and role of B2B marketing. The second section introduces the concept of the *value-driven marketing* (Kotler et al, 2010). In the third section, the role of digital marketing in a globalized world will be explored. In the fourth section, the concept of *consumption values* (Sheth et al, 1991) will be researched. The fifth section will introduce the concept of *green marketing* (Gonçalves et al, 2016). The sixth section will outline the benefits and risks of investing in renewable energy.

B2B marketing

In this project, the focus is on B2B renewable energy companies and how they market their products on their website, thus B2B marketing needs to be defined.

The definition of a business-to-business (*B2B*) company is "an enterprise that sells products or provides services to other businesses rather than to consumers" (Doyle, 2011). B2B companies sell, rent and/or supply goods, and/or services to other companies (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Traditionally, the B2B market was known as the industrial market (Grewal & Lilien, 2012). Here, the products were standardized because they served a large market and thus needed to apply to several customers, and the main attributes of the product were price and product quality. Thus, the marketing of these products was based on limited attributes, and companies thus only competed on price and quality.

In simple terms, marketing is about understanding the consumers and their needs (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005). In marketing, markets are divided into two categories where the consumers should arguably be approached differently; the business-to-consumer (B2C) market and the business-to-business (B2B) market. The B2B market is 15 times larger than the B2C market and is accountable for more than half the transactions in industrialized countries (Rizomyliotis et al, 2017). Thus, the B2B market is not insignificant however, in academic and managerial literature, consumer marketing has received significantly more attention than business marketing (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). In literature, the main argument about marketing is that the B2C and B2B markets should be approached differently because the needs are different (Coviello & Brodie, 2001; Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005). The differences in the B2B market compared to the B2C market "[...] are found in the nature and complexity of industrial products and services, the nature and diversity of industrial demand, larger volumes per customer, and [...] closer and longer-lasting supplier-customer-relationships" (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 21). In other words, B2B companies conduct in businesses with fewer, but bigger customers on a complex market, while B2C companies conduct in businesses on a less complex market consisting of many private customers. A renewable energy company might have few customers however, the scale of the orders is usually larger than for a B2C transactions. Furthermore, the decision-making process of buying a product is far more complex on the B2B market. B2B companies make complex and long-lasting buying decisions, based on different levels of decision-making and group decisions in the buying company (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). For instance, the decision for purchasing a renewable energy technology is rarely made by one person; renewable energy is an investment and thus, more decision-makers make a joint decision of investing. The decision-making is rarely dependant on one individual but rather a group of individuals in the company. This is to some extent accountable for the lack of academic and managerial knowledge and attention on B2B marketing (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

To successfully use marketing on the B2B market, it is argued that B2B companies must understand the differences between their business and the B2C market (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005). For the consumer, purchasing of a product relies not only on functional values, such as price and quality (Sheth et al, 1991), but also on emotional values (Sheth et al, 1991) and personal preferences (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). An argument for differentiating between B2B and B2C marketing is that industrial buyers do not act on the same emotional values to a product or brand as B2C customers do (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). The business market is different from the consumer market because of the different customer needs; for a company, purchasing of a product is based on merely the functional values of a product (Sheth et al, 1991) and rational decision-making processes, while consumers purchase products based on emotions (Rizomyliotis et al, 2017). On the consumer market, marketing is thus often used as tool for speaking to the consumers' emotions and irrational decision-making while for the business market however, marketing is used to explain the functionalities of a product. Based on this logic, price and quality would be the only attributes from which competing companies could use to differentiate their products. However, Levitt (1980) argued that any product is differentiable, and commodities do not exist; "Any product or service can he differentiated, even the commodity that seems to differ from competitors' offerings only in price" (Levitt, 1980, p. 83). Any customer – both from the business and consumer market – attach value to a product and uses it to satisfy his/her needs (Levitt, 1980).

In order to understand the market which renewable energy companies work on, we need to define it. Thus, the following section will outline the current field of marketing of consumer products.

Value-driven marketing

The markets are in constant change and thus, how marketers approach the markets change. Kotler et al, 2016) argues that marketing has evolved in four stages. The first stage, Marketing 1.0, emerged during the industrial revolution. Here, the main purpose of marketing was selling products to consumers. In this case, the target consumer was any person who was interested in buying the product (Kotler et al, 2010). Thus, the products were produced to serve a mass market and hence, they were standardized. For companies, the purpose was to lower the production cost and sell the products at lowest possible price, in order for more people to buy the products. This is known as the 'Product-centric era', where the product, its price and functionality were essential (Kotler et al, 2010). After this era, Marketing 2.0 followed; the 'Consumer-oriented' era (Kotler et al 2010). Because of rise of information technology in the beginning of the 21st century, consumers became more well-informed and their product demands thus increased (Kotler et al, 2010). Now, products were not standardized, but the consumers had a variety of products from different companies to choose from. This required greater marketing efforts from the companies, which now had to differentiate their products from competing companies. Marketing 3.0 is known as the 'value-driven era' (Kotler et al 2010). The essential part of this marketing is to treat the consumers as humans, and not merely consumers. As illustrated in the model below (Fig. 1), the key marketing concept is values (Kotler et al, 2010). For the consumers, consumption has moved beyond the functional aspect of the product. Increasing social, economic, and environmental issues are subjects, which consumers worry about and thus, the consumers seek companies that address these issues. For companies, these customer values require not only more from their products and services, but merely from the entire company; to assure the customers that the company can fulfil their requirements, the company defines their corporate mission, vision, and values, and integrate the desired values in the company (Kotler et al, 2010). Thus, the value of a product or service is not found in the product/service itself, but merely in the emotional and spiritual values, which the product/service fulfils for the customer (Kotler et al, 2010). Furthermore, 'new wave technology' emerged;

it is a "technology that enables connectivity and interactivity of individuals and groups" (Kotler et al, 2010, p. 5). Computers, mobile phones, and internet are accessible to most people, which thus makes interactive communication possible. In Marketing 3.0, the objective is to satisfy the consumers. This does not differ from the objective in Marketing 2.0 however, the objective in Marketing 3.0 goes beyond the individual consumer; it is about making the world a better place (Kotler et al, 2010).

	Marketing 1.0 Product-centric Marketing	Marketing 2.0 Consumer-oriented Marketing	Marketing 3.0 Values-driven Marketing
Objective	Sell products	Satisfy and retain the consumers	Make the world a better place
Enabling forces	Industrial revolution	Information technology	New wave technology
How companies see the market	Mass buyers with physical needs	Smarter consumer with mind and heart	Whole human with mind, heart, and spirit
Key marketing concept	Product development	Differentiation	Values
Company marketing guidelines	Product specification	Corporate and product positioning	Corporate mission, vision and values
Value propositions	Functional	Functional and emotional	Functional, emotional, and spiritual
Interaction with Consumers	One-to-many transaction	One-to-one relationship	Many-to-many collaboration

Fig. 1: Comparison of Marketing 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 (Kotler et al, 2010, p. 6).

Now, we are experiencing Marketing 4.0, which is a branch of the previous era of marketing (Kotler et al, 2016). The premise of this era is identical with Marketing 3.0 however, technology now plays an even more important role on the contemporary market (Kotler et al, 2016). When searching for products on the internet, customers are not limited by national borders and can thus choose freely among the companies and their offers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Companies are therefore dependant of their online channels to stay competitive and relevant.

The premise of the contemporary era of marketing is the digital possibilities. Thus, the following section will thus explore digital marketing.

Digital marketing

For companies, there are two major drivers of the increased competition; digitalization and globalization have increased the competition on the global market (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). The contemporary consumers increasingly seek information and buy products via the internet. To stay relevant and competitive on the global market, companies must thus have strong digital channels.

For a while it has been known fact that the interconnectivity of the world has changed; Appadurai (1996) argued, that the interconnectivity of the world has diminished the challenges of time and space, and commodities and information can cross vast distances freely (Appadurai, 1996). A major driver of the global interconnectivity is ascribed to digitalization. The notion of digitalization can be explained as "the

increasing interaction and convergence between the digital and physical worlds" (IEA, 2017b, p. 22). The digital world consists of the three cornerstones*; data*, which is the digital information, *analytics*, which is how the data is used for further analytical work with the purpose to gain information, and *connectivity,* which is the "exchange of data between humans, devices and machines" (IEA, 2017b, p. 22). Because of the opportunity to reach customers digitally, many companies choose to work both on their national and the international market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010) and thus increasing existent competition. Rosenberg & Van West described the marketplace quite accurately as a 'warfare' where "Marketing is viewed as a battlefield, competition as the enemy, and customers as the prize to be won or territory to be occupied" (Rosenberg & Van West, 1984, p. 30). New digital medias, such as the internet, mobile devices, etc., enable consumer participation, rather than traditional one-way marketing through i.e. newspapers (Rakic et al, 2014). The driver of the new wave technology is the general availability of technology; cheap computers, cell phones, and low-cost and easy access to internet have made it possible for individuals to participate and express themselves freely, and share ideas and opinions (Kotler et al, 2010; Rakic et al, 2014).

For companies, the emerge of interactive and participatory technology requires that they collaborate with different kind of actors. The consumers are not merely "a prize to be won" (Rosenberg & Van West, 1984, p. 30) but they are the key to manage marketing successfully. The consumers are well-informed and have specific opinions, values, and goals which they discuss and share with each other (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In order for companies to fulfil the customer's wishes, they need to collaborate with the customers rather than winning them over. Thus, the companies need to identify the customers' and their wishes. This new role of the customers in Marketing 4.0 challenges companies and their marketing strategies (Kotler et al, 2010). Companies must react and act on their customers' and shareholders' opinions to satisfy their needs; failing to do so can result in negative attention (Dunphy et al, 2014) and as with anything else in a digital world, this will spread fast with the potential risk of damaging the company's reputation.

For companies to distinguish themselves and create positive awareness of and attention to their company, the companies can use different marketing tools. In business marketing, content marketing is becoming an increasingly used method (Pulizzi, 2012). Content marketing can be defined as "creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes" (Wang et al, 2017, p. 1). Through storytelling, a company can create content which can engage customers (Dowling, 2016). It is a holistic way to tell stories about the company and its products in exiting ways, which can gain the customers' attention.

While the contemporary form of marketing is known as the value-driven era where emotions and personal preferences are an important driver of consumption (Kotler et al, 2010), B2B companies arguably practice functionality over emotional values (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). However, in the era of value-driven marketing, where the global fight against climate change is an important fight for many people (Herbes et al, 2017), other values may prove to be as important as functional values in B2B marketing. The question is, how B2B renewable energy companies 'win' their customers over?

Two consumption values have already been mentioned; the functional and the emotional value. However, there exists more values, which may be relevant for B2B renewable energy companies. Thus, the following section will explore consumption values and outline the concept.

Consumption values

Ultimately, the purpose of marketing is to sell a product to the customers (Rosenberg & Van West, 1984). For a company to sell a product, the company must first discover the customer's value and motivations for buying the product. There are different types of buying motivations and thus, the challenge for any company is to determine which value they want or need to appeal to. For B2B companies, the functional value is believed as being the only relevant value.

According to Sheth (1991), there are five consumption values which can influence consumer behaviour; the primary value is *functional value.* This value origins from Marshall's (1961) utility theory about the "rational economic man" (Gorman, 1992, p. 77), which refers to the idea that humans act rationally and with knowledge; the consumption behaviour is dependant of factors such as price and the individual's income. Alternatively, attributes such as price, durability, and reliability of a product has the greatest effect on the consumer's choice (Ferber, 1973). Decisions for purchasing is based on i.e. The functional value is the attribute, which is arguably the most important value of B2B transactions (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

The second value is *social value* (Sheth, 1991). This refers to the perceived value of a product or service, which is created from the product's association with specific social groups (Gonçalves et al, 2016). The association can be both positive and negative perception of stereotypes of i.e. demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural groups (Sheth, 1991). I.e. consumers purchase sustainable products to be associated with a sustainable lifestyle. Thus, this value deems that the customer chooses a specific product/service because of the social image the product offers, rather than functional values.

Third is *emotional value*. This refers to the feelings a product can evoke within the individual. Although emotions are often associated with intangible aesthetics such as religion, love, etc., tangible elements – such as products – can awake emotions as well (Sheth, 1991). Emotions can unconsciously motivate the customer to buy a product, if the product evoke some emotions which the customer make associations with. I.e. consumers who are concerned about – or even afraid of – climate change might engage in living a sustainable lifestyle, because of the feelings the changing climate evoke.

The fourth value is *epistemic value.* New products and experiences can provide this value however, a replacement of a known product with a new one can fulfil the value as well. I.e. if a customer is tired of his/her usual coffee brand, the customer can try a new brand to have a new experience. Or, the customer is simply curious and wishes to try something new. Or lastly, the customer wants to try a new brand to learn something new. Thus, this value fulfils the customer's curiosity, desire to try new things, obtain new knowledge, or learn new things (Sheth, 1991). This could be applied to a corporation; if the corporation is not satisfied with using fossil fuels for production, the use of renewable energy might gain a new experience and thus evoke epistemic value.

The last value is *conditional value.* Here, the customer seeks to fulfil a need, which is a result of certain situations or specific circumstances. For instance, when the customer requires popcorn at the movies or at Christmas, when the customer needs Christmas cards. The product becomes valuable, because it is needed in the specific situation (Sheth, 1991). It can be argued that renewable energy companies can use this value, because there is a current need for sustainable actions globally and thus, based on this condition, there is a need for renewable energy.

The customer's motivation for buying a product is dependant of the customer's consumption value. Sheth (1991) identified a theory of consumption behaviour, which consists of three fundamental propositions; 1. The consumer's consumption behaviour is a mix of multiple consumption values, 2. The consumption

values have different purposes dependant of the purchase situation, and 3. The consumption values are independent (Sheth et al, 1991). The customer's buying decision is thus influenced by one or more of the five abovementioned values and furthermore, the consumption can be conditional (Gonçalves et al, 2016). From the traditional industrial marketing perspective, B2B renewable energy companies would only need to focus on the functional value, because B2B customers only are interested in attributes such as price and quality. However, because climate change is a sensitive subject, which engage both governments and consumers, other values might as well apply to the marketing of renewable energy.

Consumers are increasingly interested in sustainability and thus, sustainable consumption of environmentally responsible products is increasing. As a result, a new group of consumers has emerged; *green consumers* (Gonçalves et al, 2016). For companies, the challenge is to learn about these consumers and their values, and how these new consumers affect and challenge companies. Thus, the following section will explore the concept of *green marketing*.

Green marketing

The objective in the current era of marketing is to "make the world a better place" (Kotler et alt, 2010, p. 6) and to communicate how you make the world a better place with your company's product. Environmental responsibility is a value, which many consumers demand. Today, fighting climate change and protecting the environment is of great importance for many people globally, and consumers are increasingly adopting a sustainable lifestyle and change their consumption habits (Herbes et al, 2017).

The emerge of green consumers have pathed way for the marketing counterpart, *green marketing*. The concept of green consumption is "consumption that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their basic needs" (Nair & Little, 2016, p. 171). In marketing, sustainability was first seen in the 1970s where the concept of ecological marketing and ecologically concerned consumers emerged (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). At the same time, Fisk (1973) presented his "Theory of Responsible Consumption" (Fisk, 1973). The concepts emerged because of the believe that the world population would increase significantly and with rising incomes, the consumption would increase as well and thus, harm the environment (Fisk, 1973; Peattie & Peattie, 2009). This early take on sustainable marketing and consumption was focused on the oil, cars, and chemical industry, while consumer behaviour revolved around recycling and fuel -saving (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). During the 1980s, the concepts of sustainable marketing and consumption evolved and covered more industries and consumption behaviours. During the 1990s, opportunities of implementing social environmental goals in the corporate strategy emerged and increased the attention on how to transform and reduce consumption (Peattie & Peattie, 2009).

Green marketing is defined as "Promoting a product or service's ability to improve the environment and conserve the earth's natural resources" (Doyle, 2011a). During the 1970s's focus on environmentalism, the scope of environmental attention was focused on local challenges. Furthermore, companies were believed as being part of the environmental problems; the attention was mainly focused on the negative impacts businesses had on the environment (Peattie & Charter, 2003). During the 1990s, a shift in perceptions and attitudes happened; from being mere local challenges, the perspective changed to global environmental challenges (Peattie & Charter, 2003). Moreover, businesses obtained a more important role in the protection of the environment; from being perceived as a part of the environmental problems, businesses became a part of the solution. Often, companies are being accused of being "evil" (Dunphy et al, 2014, p. 8); "Almost everything we depend on in our modern world is the product of corporations – from the food we eat, the clothes we wear to the phones and computers we use to communicate with each other"

(Dunphy et al, 2014, p. 8). Thus, it is impossible to complete end production. Instead of focusing on the damage corporations have on the environment, there has been an increased focus on the connection between corporation, society, and environment (Peattie & Charter, 2003; Dunphy et al, 2014).

A company can implement different sustainable solutions to promote their environmental credentials. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainability as an activity that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987 in Portney, 2015, p. 2). Ultimately, sustainability is not equivalent with environmental protection; sustainability consists of three pillars, *economy, society,* and *environment,* which jointly constitute sustainability. Thus, besides being environmentally sustainable, the RE must also be sustain society by fulfilling social needs now and in the future. Furthermore, sustainability must support economic growth (Portney, 2015). This means that being sustainable must not compromise a company's economy, but rather sustain a continuous growth, while sustaining and fulfilling social needs. Thus, for a company, sustainability is about balancing social responsibility, while growing economically, without harming the environment.

In this project, the focus is on renewable energy B2B companies and how they market their products. For companies investing renewable energy, renewable energy can be used as a green marketing tool to promote the company's sustainable actions by communicating their use of renewable energy. This is a strategic way to use sustainability, which can benefit the company; "Research shows a positive relationship between a firm's performance on environmental indicators and its economic growth" (Dunphy et al, 2014, p. 147). On the contrary, lack of sustainable actions can have the opposite effect and harm a company's reputation and thus, investing time and money in sustainability is advantageous for a company (Dunphy et al, 2014). In recent years, many companies have chosen to implement CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) into their corporation's philosophy (Diehl et al, 2017). This is a strategy through which companies can actively communicate their social and environmental responsibilities and activities to their customers. Failing to do so can have consequences among the customers; some chose to practice 'non-consumption'. Non-/anti-consumption is "a resistance to, distaste of, or even resentment of consumption" (Cherrier et al, 2011, p. 1758). Increasingly, consumers reduce consumption and boycott specific brands/companies if these fail to live up to the consumer's demands or act environmentally irresponsible (Lee, 2009).

For companies, sustainable solutions can be a strategic and competitive advantageous. However, implementation of sustainability can cause challenges for the company as well; the companies must adapt to changing external influences on the markets. Changing customer needs and regulations (i.e. emission taxes) are merely some of the external influences, which the companies must be aware of. However, renewable energy companies play an important part in the global fight against climate change.

The following section will introduce renewable energy, its benefits, and its risks.

Renewable energy

In the 21st century, global warming is one of the central environmental challenges, and has been a part of the global political agenda since the 1970s (Burger et al, 2014). Furthermore, corporations and consumers are increasingly adapting sustainability (Dunphy et al, 2014; Gonçalves et al, 2016). However, despite an increased focus on global sustainability and environmental protection, the global energy use will continue to grow. Currently, fossil fuels cover the largest share of the energy market (Mallon, 2006). Thus, there is a growing need for renewable energy (Burger et al, 2014).

Renewable energy (abbreviated as 'RE') defines as "Energy obtained from naturally-occurring renewable-energy sources (renewables) such as the sun (solar power), tides and ocean waves, hot rocks (geothermal), and wind" (Atkins, 2013). Using renewable energy holds several benefits; it excels by being an abundant fuel. For the environment, cause little or no emissions of greenhouse gasses (GHG), and little or no pollution of the air (Twidell & Weir, 2015). This is beneficial not only for the environment, but for public health as well (Burger et al, 2014). Socially, renewable energy creates local jobs and reduces the need for imported energy. For a company, investing in renewable energy holds several benefits as well; as aforementioned, companies can use their environmental credentials for marketing purposes by promoting their use of renewable energy (Dunphy et al, 2014). Furthermore, using RE is cost-efficient, because RE-sources are free, and RE can thus lower the company's energy cost and thus, save the company money (Mallon, 2006). Thus, RE is not only necessary for future energy generation, but also offers several benefits. However, regardless of the benefits, there are some barriers which can hinder the future growth of RE investments.

Although the use of RE is cost-efficient and the general life-cycle cost of RE is accepted as relatively low – compared to conventional energy – the upfront investment in RE technologies is expensive and can potentially hinder companies from investing in RE (Beck & Martinot, 2004). Governments across the world have an interest in RE and its benefits and thus, have different support schemes for financially supporting investments in RE, such as tax credits and subsidies (Burger et al, 2014). Furthermore, subsidies for fossil fuels are reduced to make RE more attractive (Mallon, 2006). However, the support schemes are not fixed, and the investing customers are thus exposed to regulatory risks. For any business, regulatory risks are potential, but RE projects are particularly exposed to regulatory risks. The process from the decision-making process of investing in RE to having a finished RE product is extensive. The amortisation period for RE is long, and because of the changing taxes, new taxes, subsidies, changing environmental standards, etc., RE projects are particularly vulnerable (Burger et al, 2014, p. 99).

Furthermore, companies using RE can be exposed to resource risks. Wind technologies are dependant of wind, solar technologies are dependant on sunrays, etc. In other words, these technologies are dependant of the weather (Burger et al, 2014). Changing weather can affect the energy production. Furthermore, dependant of the geographical position of the RE technology, there can be various outcomes of the energy production. Thus, before investing in a RE technology, companies need to obtain a resource assessment, which can define the expected energy production (Burger et al, 2014). However, this can never be 100% accurate, due to unforeseen environmental circumstances. Thus, the resource risks can affect the possible investments in RE technologies (Mallon, 2006).

Methodological framework

In the following chapter, the methodological framework for this research will be presented.

In the first paragraph, the background for this research will be introduced. Then, the research paradigm will be presented and explained, followed by the research approach. Then, the research design will be introduced. Follow this, the sampling approach will be outlined and explained, followed by the section 'data construction'. Then, the data and data analysis will be introduced.

Lastly, the trustworthiness of this research is established.

Research background

During the Fall of 2017, I worked as a communication and marketing intern at the Danish B2B renewable energy company, Aalborg CSP A/S. During the internship, I became curious about the market for renewable energy and I began to realise the complexity of the market. Thus, for my internship project, I conducted in a research to explore the national (Danish) and international customer's motivations for investing in solar energy. The research showed that the primary motivation was price, while sustainability was ranked as the secondary motivation.

The price and cost of solar energy is dependant of the market and policies; governments offer grants and subsidies for companies investing in renewable energy (Mallon, 2006). However, depending country specific policies and the renewable energy technology in question, grants and subsidies can differ (Burge r et al, 2014). Many companies are dependant of these and thus, for a company, investing in renewable energy can involve economic risks.

This made me wonder; when the market for renewable energy is seemingly dependant of external factors, such as national and global policies, how does renewable energy companies market their products? In this research, I thus aim to explore how B2B renewable energy companies market their products.

Research paradigm

The research paradigm serves as a methodological framework, in which the research in this project is conducted within. For this research, I position myself as a constructivist. Ontologically, this deems that there is no single reality or truth; there is a constant change which is caused by social phenomenon (Bryman, 2015). Thus, epistemologically, I position myself as a constructivist, which deems that reality needs to be interpreted in the specific context to discover the underlying meaning of events. In this research, I seek to explore how renewable energy B2B companies market their products on their websites. In a constructivist research, the aim is to understand the phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the aim of this research is to discover the underlying factors, explore, and understand these. The data in this research consists of coded text. To interpret and understand the reality of these texts, my theoretical perspective is hermeneutics. The aim of this perspective is to discover the meaning in the texts and understand the meaning from the author's perspective. To do so, I need to understand the context in which the text was produced; this can be the social and historical context (Bryman, 2015). In this research, the theoretical framework serves as an understanding for the context of the researched texts.

Research approach

In qualitative researches, the aim is to discover specific patterns and produce explanations from them (Gibbs, 2008). How we explain something can be based on either the inductive or the deductive approach.

This research is based on the inductive approach. This approach deems that the researcher draws theories from observations or findings (Bryman, 2015). As abovementioned, my research is loosely based on my findings from a previous research. Based on these findings, a new hypothesis emerged and thus, the theories regarding this area are derived from this. However, it can be argued if my research is rather a combination of both the inductive as well as the deductive approach; a combination of which is known as the iterative approach (Bryman, 2015).

Although the deductive approach is often associated with quantitative research, both approaches are often used in qualitative research (Gibbs, 2008). From previous findings I discovered that customers motivations for investing renewable energy is dependant of external factors such as political acts and subsidies. I then researched the theories within this area of knowledge. From this, my hypothesis emerged. Bryman (2015) argues, that after reflecting on the theory of the findings or data, it can be advantageous to obtain further data, in order to support the conditions of the research. Thus, in this research, I seek to understand how B2B renewable energy companies market their products. I then studied the theories relating to this area of research. Then, by using the iterative approach, the researcher goes back and forth between theory and data (Bryman, 2015).

Research design

Although research designs are more common in quantitative research (Flick, 2008), I wish to apply a design for this qualitative research. The design serves as a framework for the collection and analysis of the data in this research. Furthermore, the research design reflects the decisions I made about the collection and analysis of data.

The research is carried out as a multiple case study. In case studies, a single case is analysed in depth; Stake (1995) defines case study as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). In a multiple case study, more cases are analysed; this gives the opportunity to compare cases (Bryman, 2015). Yin (2009) distinguishes between five types of cases (Bryman, 2015). In this project, the cases are a mix of two types; one of which is the *critical case* (Bryman, 2015; Yin, 2009). This type defines as a case where the researcher has a theory, which the researcher wishes to understand better. To do so, the cases are chosen because of their ability to give a better understanding of the context, which can help confirm or reject the researcher's theory (Bryman, 2015). The second type is the *representative/typical case* (Bryman, 2015; Yin, 2009). Bryman (2015) calls this the exemplifying case, because the aim is to exemplify cases. The point of the chosen cases is not to show anything unusual, but merely to illustrate an example of a phenomenon, which is a part of a broader context (Bryman, 2015). In this research, the cases are chosen, because they can help me understand the context of my research, and if my theory is valid or not. Furthermore, the cases are merely a part of the existing amount of B2B renewable energy companies and their websites. Thus, the cases are chosen to exemplify the websites of B2B renewable energy companies.

As a research method, the case study method has often been criticised for not being generalizable, which is attributed as a strength in social research. Furthermore, the case study is criticised for only being useful as a preliminary study and its lack of reliability and generalizability (Abercrombie et al, 1994). However, as

Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, that although case studies may not be generalizable, this method excels by examining a case in detail and thus, provides with in-depth knowledge of a specific phenomenon. Gibbs (2008) argues, that the strength of qualitative data is that it is meaningful and diverse (Gibbs, 2008). The keyword in qualitative analysis is 'understanding'; it is important to achieve an understanding and deeper knowledge about the chosen phenomenon to produce a rich description. Thus, the case study method is useful as a tool for a detailed examination of a specific phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Sampling

In qualitative researches, sampling is often based on the purposive sampling method (Bryman, 2015). The research question should give an idea of who/what needs to be sampled to answer the research question. In contrast to quantitative researches where probability sample is preferred to generate data from random samples, the cases in purposive sampling are often chosen based on their relevance to the research question and the focus is on the different perspectives these cases might offer (Bryman, 2015).

It can be argued whether 'sampling' is the right term to use in qualitative research. The purpose in qualitative sampling is different from quantitative sampling; where sampling in quantitative research is based on statistical and generalizable results, sampling in qualitative research is "more purposive and flexible" (Flick, 2008, p. 26). Maxwell (2012) argues, that 'sampling' implies that the purpose of the sampling is representation (Maxwell, 2012). In qualitative researches, sampling is rather about deciding who and what to include - and what not to include - in the research (Maxwell, 2012; Bryman, 2015). In this research, 'sampling' represents the criteria from which the cases in this this project are selected.

It is not possible to study everyone or everything and thus, there needs to be some limits of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Flick (2008) argues, that sampling in qualitative research is more a question of selecting the appropriate case and materials and define the limits of the research (Flick, 2008). Thus, in this research, sampling serves as a framework in which the research is carried out. Thus, in this context, 'data construction' would be more appropriate than 'sampling' and thus, in the following section, the criteria for the data selection in this research will be outlined.

Data construction

In this project, the multiple case study consists of a selected number of B2B renewable energy companies and their websites. For companies, websites are an important part of contemporary marketing and it thus makes sense to analyse how companies use their websites for marketing purposes (Rose & Christiansen, 2009). The data construction in this project consists of three websites belonging to three different renewable energy B2B companies. Several considerations were made during the data construction process.

The selected number of companies were chosen from several criteria; three websites were chosen, because one of the major qualities in the multiple case study research is the opportunity to analyse cases in depth (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, for me to analyse the cases thoroughly, the number of websites needed to be limited to a few cases. Furthermore, I had to define some criteria from which I selected the companies and their websites: As a primary criterion, the companies were chosen based on different geographical locations. As aforementioned, because of digitalization and globalization, the internet plays an important role on the current global market; because of globalization and digitalization, customers can purchase products independently of time and space (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Thus, e-commerce, communication, retrieval of information, etc. are important tools for companies (Rose & Christiansen,

2009). Therefore, in theory, the geographical location of a company should not be important and thus, the cases represent different locations.

As a second criterion, I defined which parts of the websites should be the data for the analysis. As a primary data, I use the homepages of the websites. First impressions are very important in marketing (Lindgaard et al, 2006); when entering a website, the homepage is the first thing that meets the customer's eye. The homepage is an important part of a company's website which can provide with a lot of information; here, the companies often express the essence of their company such as products, projects, and activities (Rose & Christiansen, 2009). However, websites are rarely identical, and one company may not provide with the same information on their homepage as another company (Bryman, 2015). Thus, the 'about' pages of the companies' websites were selected. Often, the 'about' page gathers the essence of a company such as vision, mission, values, etc (Lawrence et al, 2007). The companies provide with different amounts of text on their websites. However, this may not be of any significance for the richness of the information, which the texts can provide with. Again, because the research is that of a qualitative research, the richness of the data is more important than the quantity (Flick, 2007).

Because the data origins from websites, the companies can modify their websites and thus change the data. Therefore, I have made screenshots of all the pages, which I use in this research. The screenshots were made in March 2018.

Data presentation

The selected data in this research is the homepage and 'about' page of the following companies; Canadian Solar, First Solar Inc, and Vestas.

The companies cover three different geographical locations – Canada, Amerika, and Denmark – and where thus chosen based on this. Besides this, the companies and their webpages where randomly selected.

To analyse and thus understand what the data are about, I use the analytical method *coding*.

Data analysis

Coding is an analytical method which can be applied to different sorts of data and can "define what the data you are analyzing are about" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38). Sometimes, coding is referred to as *theme* and vice versa (Bryman, 2015). Through the process of coding, codes are identified and categorised by applying names and organising the codes. By using this method, a structure will develop in the data, which can provide with an understanding of the data (Flick, 2007). This method is useful in this research, because I wish to identity how B2B renewable energy companies market their products. As introduced in the theoretical framework, there are different consumption values, which can influence the customer's buying behaviour (Sheth, 1991). Thus, I want to discover which values companies use on their websites.

With Sheth's (1991) consumption values and the theoretical framework in mind, I identified the codes on the homepages and 'about' pages. This method is known as *concept-driven coding.* Here, the codes represent concepts, which are already known from i.e. literature and presumptions (Gibbs, 2008). However, I do not wish to restrict my research and thus, in addition, I use d*ata-driven coding*. This approach deems, that the researcher does not have a list of pre-existing codes and tries to approach the coding with and open mind (Gibbs, 2008). As a researcher, it is practically impossible to not have any ideas or preconceptions, because "the researcher is both an observer of the social world and a part of that same

world" (Gibbs, 2008, p. 44). Thus, as a researcher, I approach the coding with an open mind and with the theoretical framework in mind however, I aimed at being as objective as possible.

There do not exist any guidelines on how to correctly use coding (Bryman, 2015). Thus, as a guideline, I started by identifying the codes on the three websites separately, starting with Canadian Solar's homepage and 'about' page, followed by First Solar, and Vestas.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, *reliability and validity* are essential for determining the quality of a research (Bryman, 2015). In qualitative researches, the quality is not without significance however, it should be approached differently than in a quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argues that *reliability and validity* suggest that reality can be boiled down to one absolute truth (Bryman, 2015). As an alternative to this realistic approach of *reliability and validity,* Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that *trustworthiness* is more applicable in qualitative researches.

The premise of trustworthiness is simple; how can I prove that the research and the findings are worth paying attention to? (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To prove the quality of my research, four criteria must be fulfilled; *truth value*, or *credibility* (Bryman, 2015), defines the credibility of the findings. This criterion is especially important, because of the premise that there can be more realities rather than one single truth. I have defined a framework, in which this research is carried out. Thus, how do I ensure that others accept my findings in the specific context in which my research is carried out? For some researches, respondents can confirm the credibility of the findings (Bryman, 2015). Trustworthiness is especially important for this research because of the nature of the data. In this case, my research does not consist of data from respondents; my data consists of findings from selected companies' websites. Thus, the process of finding this data will be thoroughly described and illustrated. This is to ensure that the research is as transparent as possible.

The second criterion is *applicability.* In this criterion, the transferability of the given research is determined (Bryman, 2015). A relevant question to answer here is whether the research and the findings can be put in another context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Thus, to make it possible for others to apply the findings in other contexts, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the researcher should provide the reader with a *thick description* (Bryman, 2015). This means that the findings must be described as detailed as possible; this ensures that others can test the findings in other contexts. Thus, in this research, the findings will be described in detail and illustrated as detailed as possible.

The third criterion is *consistency*. This criterion is a parallel to the criterion *reliability* from quantitative research (Bryman, 2015); in this stage, the dependability of the findings is determined. To ensure the dependability of the findings one could ask the question if the findings would be the same if the research was replicated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To make replication possible, everything in the research process is be saved and documented; problem formulation, data selection, notes, decisions about the analysis, etc. (Bryman, 2015). Thus, everything which is of any significance in my research will be kept and documented. Because my data consists of text obtained from websites, I have made screenshots of all the content I use in this research. Because companies can easily change and adapt the websites, there was a potential risk of losing the data. Thus, the screenshots from the websites can be found in the appendix.

The fourth and last criterion is *neutrality*. As a researcher, it is nearly impossible to be completely objective however, one should strive for transparency. Thus, it should be very clear that the research and the

outcome is not affected or altered because of personal interests, motivations, opinions, or values (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The research must document that I have acted unbiased as a researcher. Thus, the outcome of this research should clearly show that I have acted objectively and in good faith (Bryman, 2015).

Data presentation

The following sections presents the data in this project. The data consist of codes identified on the homepages and 'about' pages of Canadian Solar, First Solar, and Vestas. First, the codes from Canadian Solar's homepage and 'about' page are identified and explained, followed by First Solar and Vestas. At the end of the section, the codes from the three websites will be structured together in a table.

In the text, the codes will be written in *italic.* Screenshots of the websites can be found in the appendix.

Canadian Solar

Canadian Solar is abbreviated as 'CS' and the screenshots are cited as 'CS 1', 'CS 2', and so on. These can be found in the appendix.

Homepage

At the top of Canadian Solar's homepage, a slideshow is showing. It consists of seven different 'headlines'; the slideshow changes between seven different pictures, headlines, and textboxes (CS 1). The first slide is attributed with the codes *product* and *geographical location* (CS 1); the text is dedicated to describing the technical functions of their "KU modules" (CS 1) and furthermore, a symbol with the text "Global" (CS 1) communicates the geographical location, which the product applies to.

Furthermore, the slides cover different headlines and texts, which tell different stories about the company's different social and environmental activities; "Preserving biodiversity in the Congo" (CS 3), "Light up Africa with solar" (CS 4), "Solar park or biodiversity preserve?" (CS 5), "Learning from schools that save with solar"" (CS 6), "Unspoilt paradises want to stay that way" (CS 7). These apply to the code *CSR*. Moreover, in the text for "Light up Africa with solar" (CS 4), CS describes a political act by stating "During the COP 21 Climate Change Conference in Paris last December, Canadian Solar Chairman and CEO Dr. Shawn Qu made a specific call for action to phase out all kerosene lamps in the world and bring clean lighting" (CS 4). Therefore, this is attributed with the code *politics* (CS 4). Moreover, one of the reoccurring sentences on the slides is a button, which says "Discover the full story", which is repeated on six of the seven slides (CS 2, CS 3, CS 4, CS 5, CS 6, CS 7). This sentence is attributed with the code *Storytelling.*

The slides represent different parts of the world; "Global" (CS 1, CS 2), "Africa" (CS 3, CS 4), "USA" (CS 5, CS 6), and "Virgin Islands" (CS 7). These are coded as *geographical location.* Furthermore, some of the slides include a symbol accompanied with the text "CS6P-P" (CS 5, CS 6, CS 7), which is coded as *product.*

Below the slideshow, in the middle of the homepage, three illustrations accompanied with three different headlines are shown; "Virum, Denmark" (CS 9), "Alpincenter Hamburg-Wittenburg Germany" (CS 10), and "Solarpark Lindenhof, Germany" (CS 11). The text does not provide with further information however, it

must be assumed these headlines cover different projects, in different geographical areas, where CS has supplied with their products. Thus, they are attributed with the code *experience*.

At the bottom of the homepage, four icons with four headlines are showing (CS 12). In the first headline they communicate their *reach* by stating they are a "global leader" (CS 12). They state, "Canadian Solar is one of the three biggest solar companies in the world by revenue" (CS 12). This is coded *success*. Furthermore, they "employ over 9,700 people and operate on 6 continents" (CS 12). This is coded *company*. The next icon and headline state that they are "Making the difference" (CS 12) by "improving the lives of all those who interact with our brand in the communities we operate in" (CS 12). This is coded as *CSR*, because CS aims to protect the social world. The third headline, "9.5 GW pipeline" (CS 12) and accompanied text states "Explore some of our key solar projects" (CS 12). This covers CS's *experience*. The fourth headline says, "A bankable brand" (CS 12) and "Canadian Solar has more than 1200 active customers globally, and cooperated with 67 international banks" (CS 12). This is coded *economy*, because it communicates the stable economy of the company.

'About' page

At the 'about' page, the headline says, "The Canadian solar difference" (CS 13). This is attributed with the code *nationality,* because it communicates the origins of the company. Furthermore, in the following text it reads "Canadian Solar exists to make the difference" (CS 14). This is attributed with the code *vision*. The difference they wish to make is to their "customers, colleagues, partners, investors and all whose lives we touch" (CS 14). Thus, these are coded with *external influence* and *internal influence*. The next sentence, "We are also here to make a positive difference to the environment and society as a whole" (CS 14), is coded *CSR*. CS further states, "We do this by providing exceptional solar products and services that meet the specific needs of customers, employees, partners and investors" (CS 14). This is coded *product,* because CS states, that their product and service is the reason they can make a difference.

The following text is coded *company*; "Founded in 2001 in Canada, Canadian Solar (NASDAQ: CSIQ) operates as a global energy provider with successful business subsidiaries in 20 countries on 6 continents" (CS 14), because it tells something about the company history. Furthermore, they state "Besides serving as a leading manufacturer of solar PV modules and provider of solar energy solutions, Canadian Solar has a geographically diversified pipeline of utility-scale power projects" (CS 14). This is coded *reach*, because this emphasises their geographical diversity.

The following text is coded *growth;* "With the company's recent acquisition of Recurrent Energy, Canadian Solar's total project pipeline is now 11 GW, including an increase of the late-stage project pipeline to over 2.3 GW" (CS 14). The following text reads "With state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities in Canada, China and Vietnam, Canadian Solar employs over 12,000 workers worldwide. This translates into more than 27 GW of panel shipments, or over 70 million PV modules, in the past 17 years" (CS 14). This is coded as *experience*, because it outlines the company's work. The last section of text is coded *mission;* "Together with Recurrent Energy, Canadian Solar is ushering the way into a new era of clean, competitive, mainstream power" (CS 14). Here, they communicate their mission with their products.

The following headline says, "Making the difference in management" (CS 15) and the accompanied text communicates the management of CS. Thus, this is coded *management;* here, the management of the company is introduced.

Follow this, the headline is "Making the difference to our customers" (CS 17). This is attributed with the code *external influence,* because it communicates how CS's work influence their customers. The following piece of text, "Canadian Solar is dedicated to changing the lives of all its customers for the better" (CS 17), is coded as *CSR*, because CS communicates that they want to make their customer's lives better. Then, the text "Our PV panels have been so thoroughly tested and proven under harsh conditions that we offer a 26-year warranty with confidence" (CS 17) is coded with *economic security*, because it communicates the security CS can provide to their customers. The following text, "All the above and our customer support in over 20 countries adds up to attractive bankability too. Our customers always have peace of mind knowing they are dealing with a highly ranked, reliable company" (CS 17), is attributed with the code *economy;* it communicates the reliability and stability of the company.

The next headline, "Making the difference to solar projects" (CS 18), is coded with *product* because it communicates what CS can offer their customers; "We offer our customers the opportunity to invest in utility-scale solar power plants" (CS 18). The following text, "With a successful track record developing, engineering, constructing and connecting over 3.8 GW, Canadian Solar stands out as one of the leading solar developers globally" (CS 18) is coded as *company,* because it provides information about the company. Then, they communicate their e*xperience;* "Companies like BlackRock, Samsung and TransCanada are among our list of customers that rely on us to deliver reliable solar solutions" (CS 18). The section ends with the text, "In addition, we help boost the social responsibility profile of any portfolio providing advanced solar solutions that enable sustainable development world wide" (CS 18), which is attributed with the code *CSR* because it communicates CS's contribution to sustainability.

The next headline, "Making the difference for the future" (CS 19), is coded as *CSR*, because it communicates, that CS wants to make a difference for the future, which is a trait in sustainability. The following text, "Canadian Solar operates three state-of-the-art PV research centers for cells, modules and systems in Canada and China. Combined more than 250 scientists, engineers and technicians conduct research to continuously improve our solar cell and solar module technologies. With R&D investments of over 600 million USD, more than 1000 global patents and strategic R&D partnerships with NREL, ECN and DuPont, Canadian Solar is a globally recognized innovator of the solar industry" (CS 19), is coded *company*, because it communicates the capacity of the company's activities.

The final headline on the page, "Making the difference to solar projects" (CS 20), is a repetition from CS 18, where the headline was coded *product*. However, in the text it says, "Canadian Solar is a multinational corporation that works across diverse cultures on a global scale" (CS 20). Thus, this is attributed with the code *company*, because the headline and text communicate something about the company. The following text, "As such, we promote a socially progressive and responsible approach to Human Resources, production quality, management standards, supply chain management, marketing, customer services and community involvement" (CS 20), is coded as *CSR*, because it communicates the differences which CS makes. The last part of the text communicates a very specific activity, which CS supports; "In particular, we support sports like ice hockey, soccer and basketball with sponsorships, donations and, not least, by attending the games of our favorite teams" (CS 20), which is also coded *CSR.*

First solar

First Solar is abbreviated as 'FS' and the screenshots are cited as 'FS 1', 'Fs 2', and so on. These can be found in the appendix.

Homepage

First Solar's homepage consists of video illustrating what seems to be the production of their products. This video is accompanied with a headline, which says "Leading the world's sustainable energy future" (FS 1). Below this statement, the reader has the option to click a button, which reads "Our technology" (FS 1). Thus, the headline is coded *product*, because it links to the company's technology.

Aside from the video, the information on FS's homepage is modest; below the video, four boxes with four different headlines are illustrated; "Series 6 Module", "Energy advantage", and "PlantPredict webinar" (FS 2) These apply to the code *product* (FS 2), because they lead to further information about the company's products. "First solar energy services" applies to the code *service* (FS 2); the link leads to a page, which communicates the services the company provides with.

'About' page

As seen on the company's homepage, the company's 'about' page introduces a video at the top of the page and yet again, the video is accompanied with the headline "Leading the world's sustainable energy future" (FS 4). 00.25 minutes in the video it states, "The time for solar energy is now" (FS 4), underlining the urgency for solar energy. Thus, this is coded as *product,* because it applies to FS's product.

Below the video, five headlines are showing; the first headline, "Unparalleled experience around the globe" (FS 5), with the accompanied text, "First Solar has developed, financed, engineered, constructed and currently operates many of the world's largest grid-connected PV power plants. Our experience across the solar value chain reduces risk while delivering more reliable, dependable and cost-effective solutions for our customers" (FS 5), is coded *experience,* because it communicates the company's experience.

The second headline, "Fastest growing PV technology" (FS 5), and text, "No company invests more in R&D[1] advancing our technology to rapidly increase our energy yield, lower LCOE[2] and provide stable grid integration" (FS 5), is coded *product*, because it communicates the technicalities of their product.

The third headline, "Cost competitive" (FS 6), and text states, "First Solar delivers an LCOE that is cost competitive with fossil fuels. First Solar technology delivers power during peak energy use smoothing costs for energy consumers against fuel-price volatility" (FS 6). This is coded *economy,* because it communicates the cost of using renewable energy.

The fourth headline and text are coded *CSR*; "Corporate responsibility - Leading the way in sustainability" (FS 7) and "First Solar knows that clean affordable solar electricity is an essential part of the worldwide energy mix. That's why First Solar leads the way with the lowest carbon footprint, lowest water usage and fastest energy payback of any PV technology" (FS 7). Here, FS defines their corporate social responsibility.

In the fifth and last section on their 'about' page, FS states they have the "Strongest Balance Sheet in the Industry" (FS 8); "With the strongest financial stability in the industry, the use of our technology in debt-financed projects is unparalleled. Our bankable energy solutions provide access to capital and low-cost financing from leading utilities and energy investors." (FS 8). This is coded *economy*, because it communicates the company's economy and the economy of possible investors.

[1] R&D is short for 'research and development'.
[2] LCOE is short for 'levelized cost of energy' (Boubault, 2016).

Vestas

Vestas is abbreviated as 'V' and the screenshots are cited as 'V 1', 'V 2', and so on. These can be found in the appendix.

Homepage

Vestas uses a slideshow at the top of their homepage, consisting of five different pictures accompanied with different headlines and text. The first headline and text say, "Vestas Hybrid Solution – Changing the game" (V 1) and "Combine wind and solar energy resources with storage for flexible delivery of power" (V 1). This is coded as *product,* because it tells something about the technicalities of Vestas' product.

The second headline is "V120-2.0 MW^{tm} prototype installed" (V 2) with the text "The V120-2.0 MW turbine prototype with the ability to run in 2.2 MW Power Optimised Mode, strengthening wind energy output for the 2 MW platform in low- and ultra-low wind conditions" (V 2). This applies to the code *product*, because it lists some technicalities about one of Vestas' products.

The third headline, "Vestas to acquire Utopus Insights" (V 3), and text, "Vestas has entered into an agreement for the acquisition of the Utopus Insights, Inc., a leading energy analytics and digital solutions company" (V 3). apply to the code *growth;* by acquiring another company Vestas communicates that the company is expanding.

The fourth headline, "Vestas – Anti-icing system^{tm}" (V 4), and text, "To maximise wind energy production in cold climates, Vestas introduces new anti-icing system and ice assessment tool" (V 4) applies to the code *product*, because it communicates something about some of Vestas' technologies.

The fifth headline, "Vestas 4 MW platform - Onwards and upwards" (V 5), and text, "Three new turbine variants expand platform reach and strengthen performance across wind classes" (V 5), informs about another technology from Vestas and thus, are also coded as *product*.

Below the slideshow, it reads "Wind. It means the world to us^{tm}" (V 6). This is coded as *slogan*. The following text, "Vestas is the energy industry's global partner on sustainable energy solutions. We design, manufacture, install, and service wind turbines across the globe" (V 6) is coded *company*, because it tells something about the company and what they can deliver. The following text, "and with 92 GW of wind turbines in 79 countries, we have installed more wind power than anyone else" (V 6) is coded *experience*. The following text, "Through our industry-leading smart data capabilities and unparalleled close to 76 GW of wind turbines under service, we use data to interpret, forecast, and exploit wind resources and deliver best-in-class wind power solutions. Together with our customers, Vestas' more than 23,000 employees are bringing the world sustainable energy solutions to power a bright future" (V 6), communicates something about the company and how they work thus, this is coded as *company* as well.

Under the headline "Vestas facts" (V 6), Vestas has illustrated some numbers about their products and thus, this is coded *experience*.

At the bottom right corner of Vestas' homepage, it reads "Current share price" (V 7). Thus, here Vestas communicate the value and financial situation of their company and thus, this is coded as *economy.*

'About' page

Again, on the 'about' page, Vestas uses a slideshow at the top of the page, consisting of two slides; on the first slide, the headline reads "Making wind work – together we power the future" (V 8), accompanied by the text "For more than 30 years our efforts have been devoted to raising the profile of wind as a mainstream energy source" (V 8). The headline and text apply to the code *vision,* because it communicates Vestas' goal of their work. Below the text are the button options "View Vestas' track record" (V 8), which applies to the code *company,* because it communicates the company's past performance and expected performance, and "Our commitment to sustainability" (V 8), which applies to *CSR.*

The second slide applies to the code *storytelling*, because it states, "Volvo Ocean Race 2017-18 - Follow our journey" and "Vestas 11th Hour Racing is set to achieve exemplary results in sport and sustainability" (V 9). This tells a story of an activity, which Vestas participate in.

A repetition from the company's homepage is seen on the 'about' page; "Wind. It means the world to us™" (V 10). Again, this is attributed with the code *slogan.* Further down in the text, it states, "It's a world that will far exceed the predicted 10% of electricity generated by wind by 2020" (V 10). This is coded as *performance,* because it communicates the generated by wind. The following text, "It's a world where wind's increasingly competitive cost of energy combined with reliable delivery on an industrial and global scale places it securely alongside oil and gas" (V 10), is coded as *economy*; because it addresses the economy of renewable energy. Lastly in the text it says, "It's a world populated by far more than the 59,000 turbines we've already installed on behalf of customers in more than 70 countries across six continents." (V 10). This is coded e*xperience,* because it communicates Vestas' experience.

At the bottom of the 'about' page, Vestas introduce three headlines; the first, "Profile - Vestas at a glance" (V 11), accompanied with button option "Read more about us" is coded as *company,* because it applies to the company. The second headline, "Sustainability – and what it means to us" (V 11), accompanied with the button option "How we manage sustainability", is coded as *CSR*, because it communicates the company's CSR. The las headline, "Wind energy – a solid business case" (V 11) with the button option "Discover wind", is coded *product,* because wind is a part of Vestas' product.

All codes

With all the codes outlined and explained in the sections above, I structured the codes i n the table below. Here, the codes from the three different companies are illustrated in alphabetical order:

Canadian Solar	First Solar	Vestas
Company (CS 12, CS 14, CS 18, CS 19, CS 20)	Company (FS 1, FS 5)	Company (V 1, V 6, V 8, V 11)
CSR (CS 2, CS 3, CS 5, CS 6, CS 7, CS 12, CS 14, CS 17, CS 18, CS 19, CS 20)	CSR (FS 7)	CSR (V 8, V 11)
Economic security (CS 17)		
Economy (CS 12, CS 17)	Economy (FS 6, FS 8)	Economy (V 7, V 10)
	Energy needs (FS 7)	
Experience (CS 9, CS 10, CS 11, CS 14, CS 18)	Experience (FS 5)	Experience (V 6, V 8, V 10)
External influence (CS 14, CS 17)		

Geographical location (CS 2, CS 3, CS 4, CS 5, CS 6 CS 7)		
Growth (CS 14)		Growth (V 3)
Internal influence (CS 14)		
Management (CS 4, CS 15)		
Mission (CS 4, CS 14)		
		Performance (V 10)
Politics (CS 4)		
Product (CS 1, CS 5, CS 6, CS 12, CS 14, CS 18)	Product (FS 1, FS 2, FS 4, FS 5)	Product (V 1, V 2, V 4, V 5, V 11)
Quality mark (CS 13)		
Reach (CS 12, CS 14)		
		Renewable energy (V 8)
	Services (FS 2)	
		Slogan (V 6, V 10)
Social activities (CS 20)		
Storytelling (CS 2, CS 3, CS 4, CS 5, CS 6, CS 7)		Storytelling (V 9)
Success (CS 12)		
Vision (CS 14)		Vision (V 8)

In the following chapter, the codes will be used for the analysis and discussion of the cases.

Analysis

In the following section, the selected cases and the data from the previous section will be analysed. The theories from the section *Theoretical framework* will be used to draw conclusions from the findings. First, the homepages and 'about' pages of the three different cases will be analysed separately. Then, the cases will be analysed comparatively to confirm or dismiss patterns in their marketing strategies. Lastly, the results will be discussed.

The codes identified in the previous section will be in *cursive.*

First, the homepage and 'about' page of Canadian Solar will be analysed.

Canadian Solar

Canadian Solar is a Canadian developer of solar panels. According to their website, based on revenue, they are one of the three biggest solar companies in the world (CS 12; Canadian Solar, 2018).

Homepage

From the codes identified on Canadian Solar's homepage, it can be argued that they use a broad marketing approach. First, at the top of the homepage, CS has a slideshow, consisting of seven different slides (CS 1, p. 1). Out of the seven slides on the homepage, the first slide (CS 1) is the only one to directly outline the technical attributes of the company's product. From this slide it can be argued that CS uses the strategy of traditional industrial marketing. From Sheth's (1991) theory, the functional value is the primary value of consumption and thus, it makes sense to place this information as the primary headline. Furthermore, on the first slide, it says "global" (CS 1). Because the slide applies to CS's product it does not apply to any specific area and is merely communicating that CS can deliver their product globally. For companies on a globalized market, it is important to be able to deliver to any part of the world (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). This slide can thus be argued as using the strategy of traditional industrial marketing, where the functionality of the product was the most important attribute (Grewal & Lilien, 2012). However, the following slides differ from this strategy; instead, CS uses the method of content marketing (Moezzi et al, 2017). While the texts do not directly communicate the relation between the stories and the products, a symbol accompanied with a product name is showing at the corner of some of the texts; "CS6P-P" (CS 5, CS 6, CS 7). Thus, it must be assumed that this product is related to the stories. The five slides communicate specific stories, where CS have supplied with their product. If these stories are randomly or strategically chosen will be discussed in the section 'discussion'.

The slides do not directly describe or include the company's products; the slides merely communicate different activities, in different geographical areas around the world. The headlines for the stories are "preserving biodiversity in the Congo" (CS 3), "Light up Africa with solar" (CS 4), "Solar park or biodiversity preserve?" (CS 5), "Learning from schools that save with solar" (CS 6), and "unspoilt paradises want to stay that way" (CS 7). These are coded as *CSR* but also *storytelling* (CS 2, CS 3, CS 4, CS 5, CS 6, CS 7) and common for the stories are that they emphasise the positive affects CS and their solar energy products can do by saving (CS 6), preserving (CS 3, CS 5, CS 7), or "call for action" (CS 4). The stories communicate the difference CS and their products have made for humans, animals, and nature, and thus, the stories communicate the different social responsible activities, in which CS engages in. Kottler et al (2010) argued

that objective of Marketing 3.0 is to "make the world a better place" (Kottler et al, 2010, p. 6), which is what CS do through their products, by preserving and protecting. Although the technical attributes are not communicated, the functional value of the product is communicated through the stories, which serves as specific examples of the product's functionality. The stories apply to the functional value by communicating what the products can do and thus, this serves as examples which customers can be inspired by. In terms of marketing, CS uses the strategy of green marketing, by promoting their product's ability to protect and benefit the environment (Doyle, 2011a). Dunphy et al (2014) argued, that there is a connection between companies and their environmental performances and economic growth (Dunphy et al, 2014, p. 147) thus, the stories can serve as a strategic way to enhance CS's sustainable activities and thus attract customers.

In the middle of their homepage, CS has illustrated some of their projects in Denmark (CS 9) and Germany (CS 10, CS 11), which illustrate their *experience.* As well as the content in the slideshow, the content covers different geographical areas. Solar technologies are dependant of the weather and the production of energy thus vary, depending on the weather (Burger et al, 2014). A general believe about solar energy is that it is most effective in geographical areas with many sunny hours (IEA, 2017a) and in the slideshow, CS illustrates cases from Africa and Virgin Islands, which are among the warmer areas of the earth. Thus, when CS illustrates their experience in Denmark and Germany, it communicates that solar technologies can work in different parts of the world, with different climates. Although the exact energy production cannot be measured, solar energy can be implemented in most areas of the world (Burger et al, 2014).

Another interesting information can be found at the bottom of their homepage (CS 12); in four headlines, CS sums up what their company is about. The first headline "global leader" communicates CS's *reach* by stating that they are "one of the three biggest solar companies in the world by revenue" (CS 12), employ 9,700 people, and operate on six continents. This information applies to the functional values, because it tells something about the company and the economic stability of the company. The second headline, "making the difference", applies to emotional values; CS again follows Kotler's (2010) objective of making the world a better place (Kotler et al, 2010) by being "committed to improving the lives of all those who interact with our brand in the communities we operate in" (CS 12). However, in the section 'discussion' the value of sustainability will be discussed. The third headline, "9.5 GW pipeline", applies to the functional value. The last headline, "a bankable brand" "with the stable business operation" (CS 12), applies to the functional value. As aforementioned, investing in renewable energy involves economic risks for the customer (Burger et al, 2014). Thus, communicating economic stability is strategically smart, because it gives some sort of security to the customers. Furthermore, it communicates to potential investors that the company is worth investing in and for customers, this is an indicator for the economic stability of the company.

'About' page

At the top of their 'about' page, it says "The Canadian Solar Difference" (CS 13). Kapferer (2012) argues that country names offer certain information and they hold a lot of power; "they have the power to influence through the spontaneous associations they evoke" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 88). A country name can evoke good or bad associations. In terms of renewable energy, Canada is known for its high generation of electricity from renewable energy. In 2015, 66% of their electricity generation came from renewables, placing them at the top of countries, who produce most energy from renewables; only Norway, New Zealand, Brazil, Austria, and Denmark produce a larger share (National Energy Board, 2017). Thus, because Canada is known for their use of renewable energy, the word 'Canada' serves as a quality marker which can enhance the company's reputation. However, this information can only serve as a positive attribute, if the customer

is aware of this information; to hold this knowledge, it requires that the customer have done some research. In the digital age of marketing, the customer is well-informed (Kotler et al, 2010; Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015) and thus, in theory, the company can expect the customer to hold this knowledge.

The word 'difference' serves as theme on the company's 'about' page; further down the page it states, "Canadian Solar exists to make the difference" (CS 14). This difference is meant for their "customers, colleagues, partners, investors and all whose lives we touch" (CS 14). Furthermore, they want to "make a positive difference to the environment and society as a whole" (CS 14). Thus, CS communicates their sustainable responsibility internally in their company, while also making a difference externally.

Throughout the page, the headlines on the page begins with "Making the difference" where the first the first difference is "in management" (CS 15). The following headlines are; "Making the difference to our customers" (CS 17), "Making the difference to solar projects" (CS 18, CS 20), and "Making the difference for the future" (CS 19). These activities are in line with the requirements of sustainability, which is about meeting the current needs without comprising future needs (WCED, 1987 in Portney, 2015). Furthermore, CS highlights one of the attributes of functional value, 'reliability' (Sheth, 1991); "Our customers always have peace of mind knowing they are dealing with a highly ranked, reliable company" (CS 17). As seen on the homepage, where CS wrote that they are "a bankable brand" (CS 12), economic stability and reliability is important attributes for customers, because it communicates economic security (Burger et al, 2014).

First Solar

First Solar Inc is an American manufacturing company of solar panels. According to their website, FS has the strongest financial stability in the industry (FS 8; First Solar, 2018).

Homepage

In terms of coding, it is a challenge to analyse the modest amount of text on FS's homepage; it is more advantageous to create codes from the context of a sentence, because it gives a better understanding of the overall context (Gibbs, 2007). The homepage only consists of one full sentence. However, the amount of text may very well be a strategic marketing choice from First Solar, and this can offer a lot of information about the company.

A video covers the main part of the homepage, accompanied with a headline, which simply says, "Leading the world's sustainable energy future", accompanied with a button below, which reads "our technology" (FS 1). The homepage does not contain any descriptive text; only four headlines in four different boxes are found below the video (FS 2). The focus on FS's homepage is quite clear; the product is the main priority for the company. Thus, FS uses the approach of the traditional industrial B2B marketing (Grewal & Lilien, 2012), and Sheth's (1991) consumption theory where the functional value is the primary value of consumption. However, the headline states "leading the world's sustainable energy future" (FS 1) which implies that FS follows the objective of making the world a better place through the product they offer (Kotler et al, 2010).

'About' page

First Solar's 'about' page consists of more text than the homepage. Again, the top of the page consists of a video, accompanied with the headline "Leading the world's sustainable energy future" (FS 4). In the video

FS states that "The time for solar energy is now" (FS 4), and thus, FS communicates that their product is a necessity and thus, this is a functional value. However, it can also be argued as being communicated as a conditional value. The premise of the conditional value is that the product's value depends on situational factors (Sheth, 1991). By stating "the time for solar energy is now" (FS 4), FS communicates a condition for their product, because it is needed at this specific time (Sheth, 1991).

Further down the page, FS offers five different headlines with text. Under the first headline, "Unparalleled experience around the globe" (FS 5), the text reads; "Our experience across the solar value chain reduces risk while delivering more reliable, dependable and cost-effective solutions for our customers (FS 5). The words 'reliability', 'dependability', and 'cost-efficiency' are keywords for customers; Ferber (1973) highlighted these as the most important attributes of the functional values (Sheth et al, 1991) and furthermore, FS addresses one of the customer's greatest concerns about renewable energy; cost-efficiency. Customers want to be sure if the cost of renewable energy can compete with the price of conventional energy sources i.e. fossil fuels and thus, save money on energy (Mallon, 2006). With the on-going debate about the economy of renewable energy, it is thus necessary for companies to include this subject.

The following two headlines, "Fastest growing PV technology" (FS 5) and "Cost competitive" (FS 6), and texts, address the functional value of the products as well. In the text, FS positions themselves in front of their competitors by stating that "No company invests more in R&D advancing our technology to rapidly increase our energy yield" (FS 5). Their position compared to their competitors is repeated in the fifth headline, "Strongest Balance Sheet in the Industry" (FS 8), and again in the text "the use of our technology in debt-financed projects is unparalleled. Our bankable energy solutions provide access to capital and low-cost financing from leading utilities and energy investors" (FS 8). Furthermore, FS directly states that their product "is cost competitive with fossil fuels" (FS 6) and again addresses the concerns about renewable energy (Mallon, 2006). The general theme in these statements is *economy*; both the company's economy, but also the customer's potential economy with solar energy. Moreover, in the fourth headline and text, "Corporate responsibility - Leading the way in sustainability" (FS 7), FS addresses the necessity for cheap energy; "First Solar knows that clean affordable solar electricity is an essential part of the worldwide energy mix" (FS 7). The cost of solar energy applies to the functional value however, it can be argued if it is rather a conditional value (Sheth, 1991); because of the "worldwide energy mix" (FS 7), solar energy is 'essential' and thus, through this condition, FS highlights the need for their product by communicating the worldwide energy mix as a condition.

Vestas

Vestas is a Danish wind energy company and are pioneers of the wind energy technology (Renewable Energy World, 2014).

Homepage

Vestas uses the same design strategy as Canadian Solar; at the top of their homepage, there is a slideshow consisting of five different headlines. The first headline, "Vestas Hybrid Solution –changing the game" (V 1), and the second headline, "V120-2.0 MW^{tm} prototype installed" (V 2) highlight the functional values of Vesta's products by describing the technicalities. In the third headline, Vestas states that they are acquiring "a leading energy analytics and digital solutions company" (V 3). The purpose of acquiring another company is growth; by acquiring another company, Vestas gain access to the acquired company's knowledge and

expertise and secure a quick growth of their company (Kapferer, 2012). The fourth and fifth headline, "Vestas anti-icing system™" (V 4) and "Vestas 4 MW platform - Onwards and upwards" (V 5), and the accompanied text are communicating the functional value of some of Vesta's products as well however, it is worth noticing the sentences "changing the game" (V1) and "onwards and upwards" (V 5); although the headlines and texts in this context apply to the functional values of the products, the headlines include the brand name "Vestas" (V 1, V 5). A brand name is essentially meant to "to protect the innovation: it acts as a mental patent" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 35). Here, the brand name is used in direct relation with the products, which are "changing the game" (V 1) and "onwards and upwards" (V 5).

In the middle of the homepage, it states "Wind. It means the world to us.™" (V 6), which serves as a *slogan* for Vestas. Implementing a slogan is a great commitment, because it embodies the company brand and what they can deliver. Thus, a slogan can result in both negative and positive outcomes for the company - if the company's products or service fail to live up to the expectations, the slogan can backfire (Kapferer, 2012). In this case however, Vestas does not deliver any promises, but rather they declare their dependability of wind. Furthermore, they communicate that their work happens in collaboration with their customers and employees; "Vestas is the energy industry's global partner on sustainable energy solutions" and "Together with our customers, Vestas' more than 23,000 employees are bringing the world sustainable energy solutions to power a bright future" (V 6). Thus, Vestas does not position themselves as the absolute answer to powering the sustainable future, but merely they include wind, customers, and employees as a part of the answer. Without customers and wind, Vestas would not be able to build a sustainable future. In the current era of marketing, where digitalization makes interconnectivity possible, it is beneficial to include the customers in the company's activities (Kotler et al, 2010). Furthermore, where corporations often have been perceived as 'evil' (Dunphy et al, 2014), Vestas strategy diminishes this perception.

At the bottom right corner of the homepage, Vesta's share price is illustrated (V 7). As of April 2018, the share price had increased by 1.6% (Vestas, 2018). This information is useful, because the share price can be used as an indicator for the strength and well-being of the company and can potentially foresee a company's future success (Burger et al, 2014).

'About' page

On the top of the 'about' page, Vestas uses a short slideshow, consisting of two slides. On the first slide content, "Making wind work - Together we power the future" (V 8), Vestas positions wind as the main driver and actor of their work; "For more than 30 years our efforts have been devoted to raising the profile of wind as a mainstream energy source" (V 8). The text leads to the two button options "View Vestas' track record" and "Our commitment to sustainability" (V 8). Hence, the headline and text apply to two subjects; first, Vestas communicates their achievements through their track record and second, their commitments to sustainability (V 8). Thus, from the headline "Making wind work" (V 8), Vestas communicates the internal achievements within the company, while also communicating their external sustainable commitments. Sustainability is not only about sustaining the environment, but also sustaining the company's economy (Dunphy et al, 2014); acting environmentally sustainable should not compromise the company's economy WCED, 1987 in Portney, 2015). Thus, there is a connection between the company's internal and external sustainable activities.

In the second headline, Vestas uses *storytelling* to communicate that they participate in the Volvo Ocean Race (V 9). The text does not communicate much about the purpose of Vestas attending the race; "Vestas 11th Hour Racing is set to achieve exemplary results in sport and sustainability" (V 9). Only by clicking the

"discover more" button, further explanation about the purpose of this headline was given; in the race, it is "bringing the race to many of Vestas' most important markets, from Europe to South Africa, China, Brazil and the USA" and furthermore, "The race finishes in June 2018, with a special final leg passing through the home of Vestas' headquarters in Aarhus, Denmark" (V 12). Thus, journey is a story about Vestas travelling across the world and then finishing in the company's 'mothership' in Denmark.

Further down the page, the company's slogan is repeated in a headline (V 10). The following text highlights three 'facts', all starting with the words "It's a world […]" (V 10). The first fact states that "It's a world that will far exceed the predicted 10% of electricity generated by wind by 2020" (V 10). Thus, according to this, wind is moving forward and fulfilling the world's energy need. The second fact comments on the cost of renewable energy; "It's a world where wind's increasingly competitive cost of energy combined with reliable delivery on an industrial and global scale places it securely alongside oil and gas" (V 10). Here, Vestas addresses the doubts customers may have about wind energy; if it is reliable and cost-efficient compared to other energy sources (Burger et al, 2010; Mallon, 2006). Furthermore, 'cost-efficiency' and 'reliability' are important attributes of the functional value and these are highlighted in the text (Ferber, 1973; Sheth, 1991). In the third fact, "It's a world populated by far more than the 59,000 turbines we've already installed on behalf of customers in more than 70 countries across six continents" (V 10), Vestas' highlights their experience, which covers different customers in different countries and thus, they communicate their international reach. Furthermore, by stating that the world is 'populated' by turbines, Vestas applies human-like traits to the turbines and include the technology as an active team-player, rather than mere a product.

In the following section, the cases will be analysed comparatively, and the cases' similarities and differences will be discussed.

Comparative analysis

The selected cases in this multiple case study have very different marketing approaches on their homepages and 'about' pages.

Compared to Canadian Solar and Vestas, FS's homepage is very simple; both CS and Vestas use a slideshow at the top of their homepage. In terms of traditional industrial marketing, First Solar's homepage stands out by mainly focusing on their product and technology (FS 1). In addition, Vestas uses a slideshow on their 'about' page as well. With the slideshows, the companies can create content with different purposes, for instance, CS's slideshow consists of both posts with information about their products and posts about their CSR commitments (CS 1, CS 2). The same applies to Vestas' homepage, where the slideshow consists of posts about their products and technology, and a post about their acquisition of another company (V 1, V 3). In general, all three websites use the functional value, however, they use it in different ways. Although Canadian Solar uses storytelling on their website and does not directly communicate the technical attributes of their products, the content is arguably dedicated to the functional value (Sheth, 1991); instead of merely stating the functionalities of their products, CS uses concrete examples of what their products can do by applying detailed stories about the products. However, at the same time, it can be argued that the stories apply to the emotional consumption value. The question is which kind of value sustainability is. This will be discussed further in the section 'discussion'.

In terms of internationalization and globalization, some interesting facts can be highlighted from the companies' websites; Canadian Solar has implemented the country name 'Canada' in the brand and uses it

as a quality mark in the sentence "The Canadian solar difference" (CS 13) (Kapferer, 2012). On both First Solar's and Vestas' homepages and 'about' pages, it is not mentioned which countries the companies originate from. Because the interconnectivity of the world has changed and diminished the challenges of time and space (Appadurai, 1996), locations and distances do not play an important role on the contemporary market. However, a country name can offer a lot of information because it "combines information at all levels: from political to social to cultural to economic to tourist, from the past to the present, real and imaginary, in complete syncretism" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 123). Thus, a country name is associated with the social value (Sheth, 1991), which is created from the product's association with specific social or geographical constellations (Gonçalves et al, 2016). Implementing a country name in marketing can evoke both good and bad associations for the customers and thus, this strategy should be used with caution. Another aspect of globalization is the companies' ability to gain customers internationally. On all three of the companies' websites, they highlight their global reach and experience; "Canadian Solar has more than 1,200 active customers globally" (CS 12), "Unparalleled experience around the globe" (FS 5), and "We design, manufacture, install, and service wind turbines across the globe" (V 6), are among some of the examples. This serves as a functional value, because it illustrates the companies' abilities to deliver projects, independent of geographical distances.

Another important subject to address when marketing renewable energy is economy – both the renewable energy companies' economy and the economy for the investing companies. On the homepages, both CS and Vestas highlight information about investing in their companies (CS 12, V 7), while FS does not provide any information about this. As aforementioned, investing in renewable energy projects involves risks for the investing company (Burger et al, 2014). Thus, communicating the economic situation is important for renewable energy companies, because it communicates low construction risk; companies with and thus, guarantees some sort of security to the customers. Another economical risk is the cost-efficiency of using renewable energy; resource and regulatory risks can affect the production and cost-efficiency of renewable energy (Burger et al, 2014) and thus, cause renewable energy to be more expensive than using fossil fuels (Mallon, 2006). On their 'about' pages, all the companies deal briefly with this issue; "Canadian Solar is ushering the way into a new era of clean, competitive, mainstream power" (CS 14), "delivering more reliable, dependable and cost-effective solutions" (FS 5) and "It's a world where wind's increasingly competitive cost of energy combined with reliable delivery on an industrial and global scale places it securely alongside oil and gas" (V 10). They do not offer concrete examples that illustrate how their price of renewable energy compare to other sources. Because of different taxes and subsidies, which are often different from government to government and are thus country-specific, the companies do not decide economy of the use of their RE technology (IEA, 2017a). To obtain this information, the customers need individual calculations, where the possible subsidies and taxes in their country is counted in. Furthermore, RE technologies use natural resources, such as sunrays and wind. The amount of sun and wind can vary, dependant on factors as changing weather and geographical positions, which can affect the production of energy (Burger et al, 2014). Therefore, again, each customer need specific and individual calculations to determine the possible generation of energy from the RE technologies, based on their geographical location. Thus, the companies can only comment on the cost of their product and technology, but not provide specific information.

In the following section, some of the similarities and differences from the three cases will be discussed.

Discussion

For any company, the purpose of marketing is to understand the customer's needs and based on this knowledge, make the costumers buy their products or services (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005; Rosenberg & Van West, 1984). For B2B companies, the marketing approach has often been based on functional and rational values (Rizomyliotis et al, 2017) however, in the contemporary era of marketing (Kotler et al, 2010), there is more at stake for the companies. Besides the question of how to market products on the B2B market, marketing renewable energy products is even more interesting; Herbes et al (2017) argued, that marketing renewable energy is complex, because of the multiple factors that influence the market of renewable energy (Herbes et al, 2017). Although, from a marketing perspective, B2B renewable energy companies seem to have several benefits; globally, there is a need for renewable energy; the world's energy consumption is increasing and thus, governments are setting i.e. energy share targets for RE (Burger et al, 2014). Furthermore, customers and consumers are increasingly interested in sustainability (Gonçalves et al, 2016). Thus, as the companies highlight on their websites, there is a need for RE in the global energy mix. However, rather than merely selling products, it can be argued that renewable energy companies serve a bigger purpose.

When Herbes et al (2017) calls marketing of renewable energy "a significantly more complex matter" (Herbes et al, 2017. P. 4) this is not an understatement. Renewable energy is not merely a question of customer needs, but rather a combination of different political, social, and conditional factors. Since I began this research in February 2018, both Canadian Solar and Vestas have made changes on their homepages; they have changed the content of some of their slides. With their web designs, it is easy to make changes, without changing the entire website. The slideshows consist of content, which can easily be changed and adapted. Canadian Solar has changed the three pictures and headlines in the middle of their homepage, which illustrates some of their projects (CS 22). Furthermore, they have changed their information in the four headlines at the bottom of their homepage; from employing 9.700 people in March 2018 (CS 12), as of May 2018, they now employ 12.000 people (CS 23), and their project pipeline has grown from 9.5 GW in March 2018 (CS 12), to 11.1 GW pipeline in May 2018 (CS 23). On Vestas's homepage, the headline and content for "V120-2.0MW™" (V 2) is substituted with "Interim financial report Q1 2018" (V 12). Furthermore, the news of a new order in Sweden has been added to the homepage (V 13).

The new contents represent current topics, because it communicates Vestas' financial record for the first quarter of the year and a new order. As aforementioned, information about a company's economy is useful, both for stockholders and customers, because it communicates the company's current financial situation (Burger et al, 2014). Furthermore, the news of a new order in Sweden adds to Vestas's experience. However, besides being current topics, the content might as well be changed for strategic reasons. Digitalization and globalization has increased the competition for companies, which thus must find new ways to distinguish their company from the others and stay competitive (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). One of the premises of globalization is that information and goods travel fast across the globe (Appadurai, 1996), and local challenges often require global actions. For instance, the fight against climate change. Companies can use their websites to fast and effectively communicate how their company and their products help prevent challenges on both a local and global scale.

Another aspect from the companies' websites, is economy. As abovementioned, all three companies address the question of whether the use of RE is cost-efficient and economically sustainable for the investing company. While the RE companies are of course competitors, however, the companies in these cases address their product price compared to conventional energy sources; "It's a world where wind's increasingly competitive cost of energy combined with reliable delivery on an industrial and global scale

places it securely alongside oil and gas" (V 10) and "First Solar delivers an LCOE that is cost competitive with fossil fuels" (FS 6). The real competition for RE companies are conventional energy solutions; while the use of RE technologies is increasing globally (IEA, 2017a), there are still some barriers to the use of RE (Beck & Martinot, 2004; Mallon, 2006). The support schemes to support investments in RE and thus, until these changes, conventional energy sources will remain a competition for RE companies (Burger et al, 2014; Mallon, 2006).

In this project, the cases are based on companies and their websites and as shown in this research, the companies approach their marketing differently. However, shared for the companies are that sustainability is of great importance on the websites. But how can sustainability bring value? This will be discussed in the following section.

Values in renewable energy

I began this research by asking how B2B RE companies market their products on their websites. In the current era of marketing, it can be useful to market more aspects of a product, rather than just the functional value (Kotler et al, 2010) and because climate change is a sensitive topic, it may be a topic attached with emotions and thus, RE companies can potentially implement emotional values in their marketing strategies. However, as illustrated in this research, the functional values of a product can be communicated in several ways and the three case companies have different approaches. Furthermore, the value of sustainability can be argued.

An example can be found on Canadian Solar's homepage; one of their slides involves the technicalities of their product (CS 1), where the remaining slides tell different stories about the impact solar energy have had on i.e. the biodiversity in Congo (CS 3). It can be argued that sustainability applies to the emotional value; the posts in CS's slides tell stories of how their products preserve, save, and help animals, humans, and nature (CS 3, CS 4, CS 5, CS 6, CS 7). These actions speak to the emotions, because it involves the well-being of the nature and its living creatures. It is not unusual to use this strategy. A famous example can be found in 2014, when Greenpeace made a video where they parodied LEGO's song "Everything is awesome" (LEGO, 2014) by telling them that "Everything is NOT awesome" (Greenpeace, 2014). The purpose of the video was to end LEGO's partnership with Shell, because Greenpeace wanted to end "Shell plans to drill in the Arctic with the very real risk of a huge oil spill that would destroy this unique ecosystem" (Greenpeace, 2014a). The video gained instant attention, because it depicted an Arctic environment consisting of people, nature, and animals, which drowned in oil. In the public climate change debate, emotions play an important role because the results of climate change can damage the environment as we know it (Roeser, 2012). The Greenpeace video gained special public empathy, because the victims in the video included children, animals, and the Arctic – innocent victims – drowning in the mighty corporation's oil. Although the stories on CS's are less dramatic than the Greenpeace video, the approach is the same. In the climate change debate, these kinds of stories create attention, because they contain victims, such as children and animals, and thus creates social engagement (Moezzi et al, 2017). However, it can be argued that sustainability is also a functional value.

Even though the stories on CS's homepage applies to the emotional value, the stories still commu nicate a functional value of CS's products; i.e. in the posts "preserving biodiversity in the Congo (CS 3) and "unspoilt paradises want to stay that way" (CS 7), the buttons "Discover the full story" on the two stories lead to pages where it is communicated that CS has delivered their products and thus made these stories possible (CS 24, CS 25). Thus, their product contributes to the preserving of biodiversity and unspoilt paradises.

Another example can be found on First Solar' homepage, where their headline states, "Leading the World's Sustainable Energy Future" which is accompanied with a button reading "Our technology" (FS 1), and thus links "the world's sustainable energy future" to their product by linking to their technology. Because of the impact corporations have, they are urged to take responsibility and lead the world into a sustainable direction (Dunphy et al, 2014). The benefits of sustainability can be used both by the renewable energy companies, which can use green marketing to communicate the environmental benefits of their products (Peattie & Charter, 2003), while the investing company can use green marketing as well to promote their use of renewable energy. Although sustainability does not directly relate to the price and quality of a product, sustainability becomes a functional value because it enhances the products functional value by being sustainable (Green & Peloza, 2011), and it is thus a benefit companies strive for.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, sustainability has been an integral part of companies and their strategy (Moura-Leite & Padgett, 2011) and for now, sustainability and environmental issues are that companies must work with. However, times change and what might be the main challenge today, might not be the same tomorrow. Furthermore, the values which customers value on the current marketing 4.0 market (Kotler et al, 2016) might not be the same value on the marketing 5.0 market.

Conclusion

While B2B marketing may have been regarded as irrelevant, the need for renewable energy – and renewable energy companies in particular – is far from irrelevant. On a global scale, renewable energies have been recognized as a crucial part of fulfilling the future energy needs and fighting climate change. In this research, I began by asking *How does the global fight against climate change affect how B2B renewable energy companies market their products on their websites?* By conducting in a multiple case study, where three websites from three different B2B renewable energy companies where coded, three different approaches on how to market renewable energy were demonstrated.

For B2B companies, the functional value was originally the primary value of a product and as such, it still is. However, how the functional value is communicated can vary from the strategy of traditional marketing, where the technicalities of a product are outlined, to content marketing, where storytelling is used as a tool for communicating the functional attributes of a product. One of the most important attributes about renewable energy is the price, which all three websites communicate. Furthermore, the economic stability of the RE companies are another attribute which is communicated on the websites.

In the fight against climate change and call for sustainability, renewable energy plays an important role and thus, renewable energy companies have a strong position on the global market. Consumers and governments are increasingly interested in a sustainable future and because the global energy consumption will continue to increase, there will be a need to increase the use of RE technologies. However, renewable energy companies do not compete internally with each other; rather, the companies compete against conventional energy sources, such as fossil fuels. The RE companies are dependant of the financial support, which governments can offer customers investing in RE. Thus, B2B renewable energy companies can market the functional attributes of their products and address the financial circumstances of investing in RE technologies. The fight against climate change might evoke strong emotions, which the RE companies can address as well however, the companies are not able to control the regulatory circumstances of renewable energy.

Further research

Appadurai (1996) argued that the interconnectivity of the world has changed, and digitalization and globalization have diminished the challenges of time and space (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). As discussed in this research, companies can change the content on their websites and adapt it to different circumstances and current subjects. Furthermore, many companies choose to have several websites, which are targeted at different countries. The three companies in this research are no exception.

The question is whether companies should standardize or adapt their marketing (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). Thus, it would be interesting to conduct in a research to explore how different companies target their marketing at different countries, and why.

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