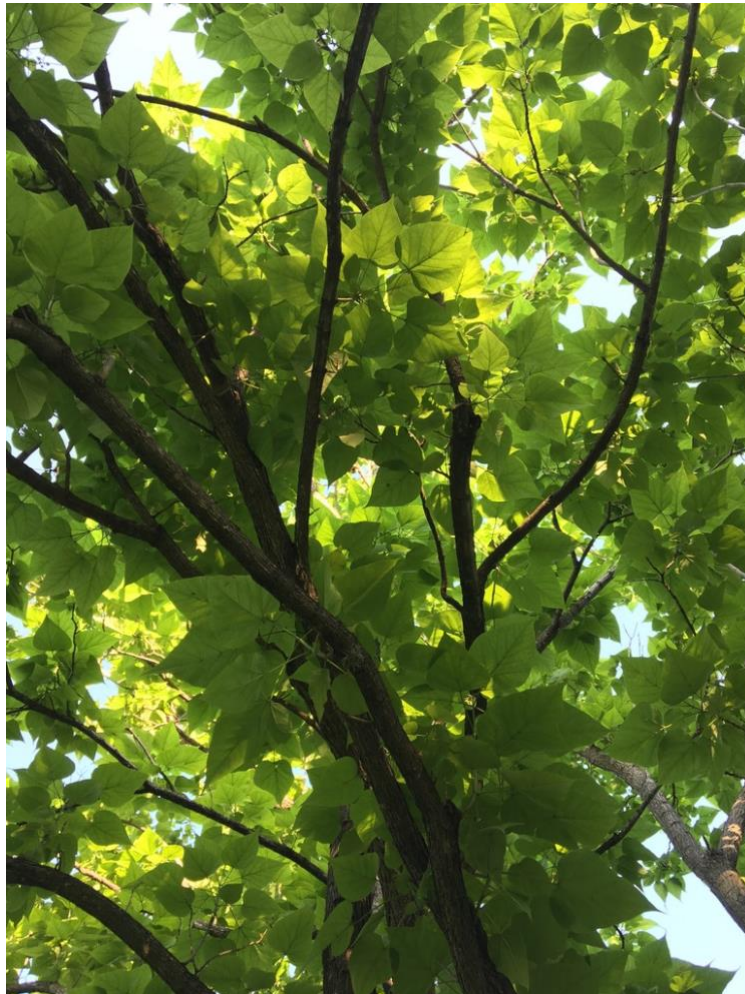# Can We Buy Sustainability?

A Multiple Case Study of How Brands Discursively Commodify Sustainability

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Abstract

Sustainability is an important societal matter and is gaining attention from many levels in the global society because it can be seen as one of the means to combat the global overconsumption and exploitation of resources. In continuation of this, more consumers are demanding sustainable actions and products from companies, and companies are to a larger extent communicating regarding sustainability in their branding efforts.

This research has the intention of investigating how sustainability, as one of the overarching societal matters that need attention, is commodified by companies through external communication and what possible effects such a commodification might have. Sustainability is a complex matter, which has no absolute definition, however, for this research, the attention is paid to what is understood by the environmental pillar of sustainability, which entails 'green' behavior, recycling, the wellbeing of nature and the environment, etc.

To examine this commodification of sustainability by brands, a mix of six international and domestic brands has been chosen, spread across the three mediums of social media, specifically influencers on Instagram, TV, and websites, thus, these are popular branding outlets, reaching many consumers.

The method of multimodal discourse analysis was chosen as a method to investigate how companies commodify sustainability. Multimodal discourse analysis enables a comprehensive and interpretive analysis of all modes present in a company's external communication and is therefore applicable to extract the discourses that shape a commodification through different modes. The analysis was carried out through four steps, firstly was each data case analyzed at the textual level, step one; then the visual and sound level or other present modes, step two; thirdly a comparison between one medium was conducted and then the fourth step entailed a comparison of the brands across mediums.

The analysis showed that it was the interplay among the different modes that create discourses, which then shape a commodification of sustainability by brands. The mediums do not play a role in the exact commodification, however, they create a context for where the commodification can take place. The three overall discourses that could be established as discursively commodifying sustainability was respectively, a green discourse, a 'us and you' discourse, and lastly a united discourse, these were shaped based on the discourses found in each individual data case. Though, an interesting finding was that the commodification was not so clear by the influencers, as it was by the other brands on the mediums of TV and website.

Furthermore, the occurrence of the commodification became less problematic as long as the companies were more concrete in presenting their sustainable actions or products, compared to when the label of sustainability was just used by the firm. The findings also enabled a discussion of what possible effect it might have to commodify a complex matter such as sustainability. A useful feature of the commodification of sustainability might be that by using branding efforts to communicate regarding sustainability, the matter might become more mainstream and awake a larger interest in the matter. However, there are also issues in commodifying something that is intangible and further not properly defined. Because then the consumers do not know what exactly they are buying into, when exposed to the commodification of sustainability and it can enable a sense of greenwashing and poses questions towards the companies' business conduct, concerning CSR initiatives.

Key terms: sustainability, commodification, discourse, branding, consumption, greenwashing, corporate social responsibility

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Introduction

You can buy a baby doll, a new phone, an avocado, or perhaps that velvet couch you saw in a shop window – these are all commodities that we are consumers of in our intertwined and globalized world. People are to a large extent exposed and flooded with diversified promotional features and branding strategies from companies, with the hope and intention that people will support exactly their firm (Kimmel, 2005: 3), leading to an excessive increase of consumption in the past decades which is linked to environmental issues (Littler, 2009: 92). We see global warming, pollution of water and air and ozone depletion, which is connected with the overpopulation and international overconsumption of the planet's natural resources and that pressures human life as we know it (Miniero et al., 2014: 521; Vogler, 2017: 386; Guest, 2017: 20). These matters are often referred to as environmental or 'green' issues and in the last decades this area has received improved attention both from the media, the politicians, and among consumers and corporations because our consumption patterns are draining the planet's resources (Miniero et al., 2014: 521; Guest, 2017: 21; Prothero et al., 2010: 150). This overconsumption is to a large degree sustained through the capitalistic system, where limitless growth is the goal and environmental welfare is somewhat neglected, and the commodity culture of always desiring more is insatiable (Prothero & Fitchett, 2000: 47).

The problematics overconsumption carries, therefore, makes the matter of acting more sustainable as a global society of great importance. Corporations are seen as one of the societal actors that should be involved in improving the conditions of the environment and care about sustainability since they are one of the actors taking advantage of the planet's resources, but also due to their influential position in our globalized society (Altinbasak-Farina & Burnaz, 2019: vi). The promotion and branding of green and sustainable consumption are therefore seen as a way to manage the problem of overexploitation globally and it might also help corporations become more sustainable in their business conduct (Nguyen et al., 2017: 118). Thereto also comes the fact that consumers are to a larger extend demanding companies to conduct business responsibly and sustainably, thus, there is an increased focus on the environment (Nguyen et al., 2017: 118; Sarkar&Kotler, 2018: Chp.2).

Prothero and Fitchett (2000) have argued that a way to respond to the environmental issues the globe is facing, is to change the discourse concerning commodities and make it 'green' or sustainable, especially through marketing efforts (46). Thus, according to Prothero and Fitchett (2000) marketing efforts through diverse media platforms have in the past accomplished to create a

desire for commodities, due to its ability to be persuasive and communicative, so it should be just as productive in establishing "environmental enlightenment" (46).

Taking note of what Prothero and Fitchett argue and how I in my daily life have noticed; that brands are to a larger extent communicating regarding the matter of sustainability, therefore makes it an interesting matter to look into. Because does such a commodification of sustainability take place? Can firms create a discourse commodifying sustainability and how do they do so? And what happens when something intangible like sustainability becomes a commodity?

To explore the possible commodification of sustainability by brands, I will engage in this study by reviewing the matter of sustainability and connected topics, and ideas related to business and branding, and the notion of commodification. I will be investigating six different brands divided across three different mediums, from where it is possible both as an international or domestic company to communicate and brand themselves. Therefrom, I will use multimodal discourse analysis which allows me to look into the different communicative modes, the six different companies use, through their respective medium, and analyze and interpret how/if a commodification of sustainability is taking place and discuss what outcomes it might have.

Literature Review

Sustainability has become a larger part of the public agenda since the mid-1980s (Portney, 2015: 1) both when discussing politics, ways of living and it has also entered the corporate world both concerning the production of products and also how to conduct business (Butcher, 2017: 216). This literature review will include aspects concerning branding, CSR, sustainability, greenwashing, and the concept of commodification, which will then support the posed problem of investigation for this project.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
One of the first notions concerning corporate firms taking responsibility in society came around back in 1953 when economist Howard Bowen wrote the book 'Social Responsibilities of the Businessman', which is acknowledged among scholars as one of the first written works to consider this notion (Matten & Moon, 2008: 405; Carroll, 1979: 497).

When going through the literature concerning corporate responsibility or corporate social responsibility (CSR) as it developed into (Carroll, 2016: 1), there is a broad consensus among scholars that CSR has no clear definition (Matten & Moon, 2008; Brejning, 2012: 30; Whitehouse, 2003: 300; Carroll, 2016: 2). But examples of different thoughts or conceptualizing of CSR are such as scholar W. Visser, who works with the following definition of CSR: "… the way in which business consistently creates shared value in society through economic development, good governance, stakeholder responsiveness, and environmental improvement" or Kang et al. (2016) who describes CSR as "…company actions that advance social good beyond that which is required by law.." (59). So, what can be extracted is that at its basis CSR is concerned with creating value for the firm and its stakeholders by taking responsible actions in society on their own imitative.

However, one of the more concrete perceptions of what CSR encompasses (Carroll, 2016: 2), was established by scholar, Archie B. Carroll in his work 'A Three-dimensional Conceptual Model of Corporate Performance' (1979), where he describes that the "The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time." (500). Thus, according to Carroll, to be considered a responsible company, one has to take economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary/philanthropic responsibility. This four-part definitional of CSR Carroll later developed into the CSR pyramid, so the priority of the four-part definitions would become clearer (Carroll, 2016: 4). The pyramid was initially built so what was considered to be the most important aspect for the firm was at the bottom of the pyramid. Thus, the pyramid had economy at the bottom, then legal, next ethical, and at the top was philanthropy (Carroll, 2016: 5; Carroll, 1979: 499).

What should be noted is, that Carroll has later on acknowledged, that criticism to this prioritization of the elements of CSR exists, and he recognized that this construction of the pyramid is not fitting. Criticism has especially been towards the economic element in the bottom as being seen as the most important, and Carroll acknowledges that it is up to each company to determine which elements of the CSR model is most important, however, usually economy is the largest priority within companies (Carroll, 2016: 7).

CSR is argued to have been most prominent in the United States compared to Europe and it has become evident in the way companies use language to specify their involvement in society, however, CSR has emerged into the European business culture in the past decades. Nowadays, many companies are using the language and practices that are connected with CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008: 404; Carroll, 2008: 20). Thus, CSR is known on a global scale, however, it

should be acknowledged that CSR practices are more noticeable in developed countries (Carroll, 2008: 20).

Arguably, the different understandings of CSR and lack of a concrete definition is, as claimed by scholars (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Brejning, 2012; Matten & Moon, 2008), due to the different discourses, disciplinary approaches, and contexts of which CRS is used and investigated. Which therefore creates fragmentation when comprehending CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012: 933; Brejning, 2012: 29; Matten & Moon, 2008: 405). Scholars, Matten and Moon further argue that CSR has often been used as an umbrella term (Matten & Moon, 2008: 405), which the other abovementioned reasons for the diffusion of CSR confirm, and it establishes that CSR as a concept is dynamic and open for application (Matten & Moon, 2008: 405).

Literature suggests that companies engage in CSR due to different motivational reasons (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004; Kang et al. 2016). Kang et al. (2016) describe it as the following reasons: one can be because the company is doing well financially and therefore have slack resources. Another is that CSR is included as part of the firm because of good management and it improves the companies' economic performance (Kang et al. 2016: 59). Furthermore, a firm might engage in CSR due to past corporate irresponsibility, and CSR becomes a method of making amends. Moreover, companies might employ CSR, so it builds a base of goodwill, and if or when things go wrong for the company, then their prior CSR efforts work as insurance for the company (Kang et al. 2016: 60). Similarly, it is argued that some companies employ CSR for commercial enhancement and in the self-interest of the firm, and it becomes a marketing confidence trick (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004: 34; Littler, 2009: 50).

Critical Aspects to CSR

This leads to the critical aspects of CSR because if going back to one of the main ideas of CSR, which is that companies take responsibility within society and do more than what is expected by a company, the motivation for this is contested (Doane, 2005: 23). Thus, the motivational factors for companies to engage in CSR is one of the areas where CSR has experienced criticism. CSR can sometimes appear as mere window-dressing and it is argued not to be the proper method to accommodate the fluctuating impact large companies have in a globalized world (Taylor et al., 2018: 973; Lyon et al, 2018:15-16; Visser, 2014: 2). Scholar W. Visser (2014) expresses that many companies use CSR in self-interest, thus, they are more interested in "… being less bad rather than good." (Visser, 2014: 2) and brands, therefore, apply CSR methods when it suits them and so it

looks good. Scholars Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer claim the following concerning CSR: "Corporate responsibility programs—a reaction to external pressure—have emerged largely to improve firms' reputations and are treated as a necessary expense." (Porter & Kramer, 2011: 5, 16), so it is something they have to do to look good, rather than something genuine they want to do. Another obstacle for the concept of CSR, is according to scholar Deborah Doane (2005), that "… trade-offs must be made between the financial health of the company and ethical outcomes." (24) and when it comes to the capitalistic market then "…there is often a wide chasm between what's good for a company and what's good for society as a whole" (25). Thus, the argument is that profit will still conquer over the philanthropic aspects of CSR. It can, thereby, be extracted that CSR motivational factors become a problem when it is used for reputational reasons and financial gain and not for the greater good of society. Additionally, it becomes more difficult to differentiate if the firms are genuine in their responsible initiatives or if they are window-dressing.

These critiques of CSR have also emerged into the development of new business models or concepts that propose how to conduct business responsibly. Thus, an example is scholars Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler who acknowledges, along with other scholars (Kang et al., 2016: 73; Sarkar&Kotler, 2018: Chp.2; Taylor et al., 2017: 972; Lyon et al, 2018: 8; Porter & Kramer, 2011: 4), that we live in a society where consumers are lacking trust in companies and the consumers are becoming more aware and demand firms to take responsibility concerning societal matters, where the environment and sustainability is one of the (Sarkar&Kotler, 2018: Chp.2; Kotler & Keller, 2012: 248).

Hence, Sarkar and Kotler published the book 'Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action' in October 2018 where they had developed a new framework for companies to engage in the society they exist within, thus, Sarkar and Kotler argue that companies have the opportunity and power to be actors of change regarding pressuring societal matters (Sarkar&Kotler, 2018: Chp.2). Sakar and Kotler argue that many companies only have the purpose of helping themselves, which is referred to as conducting business from the 'inside out', and now, according to Sarkar and Kotler, it is time for companies to work with the notion of 'outside in', which is understood as the company looking at society and identifying what society needs from the company (Sarkar&Kotler, 2018: Chp.3). They claim that companies have the opportunity to pursue activistic behavior in the following areas: the environmental, workplace, economic, legal, political, and social area - and thereby respond to societal issues, thus, Sarkar and Kotler also work with the notion that companies

should strive towards what is the common good for all and society, and that should be the core value of the business (Sarkar&Kotler, 2018: Chp.3).

Another example, as an alternative to CSR, is Scholars Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer's suggestion about how companies should engage in the concept of 'shared value'. The main idea behind this concept is, somewhat similar to Brand activism's 'common good', that a company should employ policies and operating practices that promote a company's competitiveness while also developing the social and economic conditions for the society it works within (Porter & Kramer, 2011: 6). 'Shared value' is supposed to direct companies towards beneficial profits, both for them and also society, so society is not weakened, thus, a weak society is not good for a firm (Porter & Kramer, 2011: 5, 17).

What is established in this section is that CSR is to some extent a contested concept, and the understanding of it differs. Furthermore, the motivational factors for firms engaging in CSR approaches are challenged and argued to be window-dressing, thus, it is a matter of reputation and looking good on the surface. However, CSR-like approaches to business are demanded by consumers – and a demand for companies taking responsibility in society exists and for that reason, alternative business approaches were presented. This presents an understanding and overview of what business approaches exist when it comes to taking responsibility for societal matters, such as, the case of sustainability. Furthermore, self-interest, reputation, and thereby promotional tools were established as factors for companies to engage in CSR. The matter of CSR, its points of criticisms, and the alternative business approaches are relevant to touch upon for this research because it creates a context for how companies engage in taking responsibility for the society they exist within. Specifically, this thesis is concerned with how companies go about sustainability and what they make of it communicative.

Sustainability

The matter of sustainability is a widely used term and there are many understandings of what sustainability is and the differentiated definitions of the matter within academia can be traced back to the middle of the 1980s and it has ever since evolved (Portney, 2015: 1).

What should be acknowledged though, is that the concept of sustainability is closely connected to the concept of sustainable development, thus sustainability ".. is a concept that focuses on the conditions of Earth's biophysical environment, particularly concerning the use and depletion of natural resources" (Portney, 2015:4). When we talk about sustainability it is about developing the

world in a steady mode that does not threaten the wellbeing of nature, animals, and humans, but a development that still supports economic growth and the expansion of the human population. Portney shortly describes that "the basic premise of sustainability is that Earth's resources cannot be used, depleted, and damaged indefinitely" (2015:4). Therefore, when sustainability is discussed, development is an inevitable element, but it is usually the prefix sustainable that is the predominant element, and development is implied within (Butcher, 2015: 216; Pope et al., 2004: 597; Purvis et al., 2018: 691.)

However, when going through the literature, the most widely spread understanding of sustainability is the one defined by the United Nations (UN) in 1987, thus, it popularized the idea of sustainable development (Portney, 2015: 1; Purvis et al., 2018: 684; Redclift, 2005: 212; Basiago, 1999: 148). In 1983 the UN created a commission, known as 'the World Commission on Environment and Development' that would have a specific focus on the issues facing the interconnected global world and the environment. Then, in 1987 the commission's work was published in the Brundtland Report, also known as 'Our Common Future'. It provided the following definition concerning sustainable development which is seen as: ".. development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." (United Nations., 1987: 37). That perspective established that sustainability is basically present in anything.

Several scholars acknowledge that the matter of sustainability can be applied within various areas like governments, economy, communities, agriculture, architecture, countries, cities, culture, people, and corporations - basically, within any human activity or phenomena, sustainability is relevant (Butcher, 2017: 216; Portney, 2015: 1; Purvis et al., 2018: 681), and as scholar Jim Butcher argues " 'Sustainable development' can be appropriated by almost anyone for any purpose at any time" (Butcher, 2017: 216). Which therefore makes it a very broad term to comprehend and apply (Portney, 2015: 1). This is also supported by scholars Purvis et al. (2018) who state that due to the differentiated discourses and approaches within various fields of academia, there has not been established any concrete theoretical conception of sustainability (681) and Boyer et al. (2016) also argues that the matter of sustainability within academia is diversified (1), which establishes that there is an agreement among scholars that the understanding of sustainability is varied and it is argued to be context specific (Purvis et al., 2018: 692; Waas et al., 2011: 1639). For that reason, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of what is understood by 'sustainability', 'sustainable' or 'sustainable development' and there are different interpretations and understandings

of the concept or concepts depending on the field or context (Pope et al., 2004: 597; Waas et al., 2011: 1638).

Three Pillars of Sustainability

When discussing sustainability, the three pillars of sustainability often occurs, which is also known as the three dimensions, the three stool legs, or the three components and they are; economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Purvis et al., 2018: 681-2; Basiago, 1999: 149).

However, there are no clear conception or origin of why these three pillars exist and how they support a comprehensive understanding of sustainability (Purvis et al., 2018: 682) and for that reason, there is neither a clear conception of what each of them entails, thus, it also depends on the eyes of the beholder and the context.

For that reason, the three pillars will not be described in depth. But rather some of their general features will be mentioned because the three pillars are recurring ideas when looking into sustainability literature. Economic sustainability is concerned with creating a sustainable economic system in itself, where production meets consumption demands without compromising future needs, while also maintaining profits (Basiago, 1999: 150). Social sustainability is at its basis concerned with human wellbeing and welfare including notions like empowerment, equity, cultural identity, and stable institutions creating sustainable livelihoods for people (Basiago, 1999: 149). Lastly, environmental sustainability encompasses the wellbeing of the planet's ecosystems and biodiversity, and that the natural capital is maintained, and depletion of natural resources is avoided (Basiago, 1999: 150; Edwards, 2020:1).

The three pillars are relevant to present thus, they too emphasize the complexity of understanding sustainability. Despite the lack of a clear perspective and understanding of the pillars, they do exist and can also to some extent help depicting sustainability, so it is more edible for the naked eye and areas of sustainability are categorized. Thus, the three pillars help create areas where sustainability can occur and also from which three overall perspectives sustainability can be viewed. For this thesis I will be zooming in on the environmental pillar and what it entails in connection with consumption.

Sustainable Consumption and Green Consumption

The academic field or interest of this project lies within the area of consumption, and by having sustainability as a main focus the matter of green consumption or sustainable consumption is

relevant to clarify. Thus, these terms represent an understanding of what is understood by both companies and consumers when talking about sustainable production and consumption behavior, regarding marketing and corporations.

Back in 1994, sustainable consumption and production were defined by the Oslo Symposium, the following way: "Sustainable consumption is the use of goods and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emission of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations" (Sustainable consumption and production, n.d.). Which represents an understanding that is similar to what is understood by 'sustainable development'.

Green consumption, which is closely connected to sustainable consumption, can simply be put as "shopping with the planet in mind" (Black & Cherrier, 2010: 438-9). Thus, factors that are often associated with green consumption are the environment, recycling, consuming less, and buying 'green' products (Littler, 2009: 92-3). Hence, the word "…'green' implies conservation of environmental resources." (Nguyen et al., 2017: 119). According to scholar Nguyen et al. (2017), green consumption has never had a clear definition, and it also goes under terms like environmentally friendly consumption or ecologically conscious consumption, which have been used interchangeably (119). This establishes the different connotations that may be used within the academic world of consumption when discussing sustainability. However, the abovementioned notions regarding sustainability, sustainable and green consumption will act as indicators for what to look for in the analysis regarding a commodification of sustainability.

Furthermore, despite that green consumptions lack a definitive definition it has reached much attention in marketing literature, in recent decades (Leonidou et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017; Young et al., 2010; Miniero et al., 2014). According to scholars Nguyen et al. (2017), green consumption arose within marketing literature due to Fisk's theory concerning "… the responsible consumer, (Fisk, 1974), Heninon and Kinnear's concept of ecological marketing (Henion & Kinnear, 1976), and Kardash's related notion of the ecologically concerned consumer (Kardash, 1976)." (118). And it has ever since expanded. Though, what is notable about the notion of green consumption is that "green" indicates an environmental perspective and interest in preserving the earth's resources, while "consumption" encompasses the usage of resources (Nguyen et al., 2017: 119). Green consumption is relevant to elucidate regarding this research because I will be looking

into how this matter of 'green' or 'sustainable' is discursively present in companies' external branding communication on different media platforms and if a commodification is occurring.

What should also be noted when discussing the matter of green consumption in marketing literature is how the idea of 'green marketing' has also risen and it "… refers to the development and marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe (i.e., designed to minimize negative effects on the physical environment or to improve its quality)." (American Marketing Association, n.d.). This is therefore an interesting notion about marketing, and how it goes about sustainability, to disclose for the next section which will be explaining the area of branding.

Brand and Branding

The area of marketing is a very broad academic field, and it includes many different terms within the area of study, such as sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing, or advertising (Imber & Toffler, 2002: iv; Kotler & Keller, 2012), but in this section, it will be the area of brand, branding, and to a shorter extend marketing that will be explained, due to its relevance for this project.

Branding and marketing are two closely connected areas of study and they often fall under the literature area of marketing. According to Kevin Lane Keller and Philip Kotler, who is known as one of the founders of modern marketing (About Phil Kotler, n.d.), branding or having a brand is necessary for marketing to properly manage a company's value, thus, the brand created is according to Keller and Kotler of great value (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 242).

First of all, it is important to establish what a brand is, and Kotler and Keller (2012) have the following definition of a brand: "… a product or service whose dimensions differentiate it in some way from other products or services designed to satisfy the same need." (242). It might be signs, symbols, names, terms, designs or a mixture that distinguishes a brand from other firms. Furthermore, the experienced differences of the brand may occur within the performance of the product, thus, they may be "… functional, rational, or tangible…" (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 242), and a 'brand' can further relate to the emotional, intangible, or symbolic meaning that the brand represents by its differentness and the abstract meaning it shapes for those who are the receivers of the product or service (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 242).

The matter of branding can be seen as an extension of the brand and is at its core concerned with distinguishing one's product from others, and it has been around for centuries, as

seen in the medieval times where craftsman's put their trademark on their products, to ensure the authenticity of their brand (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 241). A more present description of branding is that it is "… a set of short and long-term expressions of the brand to attract and nurture the target audience to become and remain customers" (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). Branding, thereby, happens by creating and shaping a strong and positive perception of a company, through its products or services, and by differentiating itself from other brands (Brand Master Academy, n.d.; Kotler & Keller, 2012: 243). Branding is therefore about expressing what the company represents, and that can be done both verbally, visually, or through other strategies and it can be seen as a differentiation strategy, which is also the core understanding of branding by scholars, but with variances (Brand Master Academy, n.d; Kotler & Keller, 2012: 242).

Marketing in itself is, on the other hand, more focused on sales and profits and can be seen as "… the collection of activities and tactics brands use to place their messages into the market with the goal of influencing the audience to buy." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). Kotler and Keller argue that good marketing is a necessity in the 21st century, thus, the economic environment is in constant change and is unforgiving, and good marketing strategies are therefore necessary for the financial gain and survival of a company (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 4). According to Brand Master Academy, marketing falls under branding, because marketing decisions will reflect on the branding of a firm. After all, marketing is part of the expression of the company and its brand (Brand Master Academy, n.d.).

Brand Communication and Mediums of Branding

It has been established that there are differences between branding and marketing, however, they are still highly intertwined, thus, you do not see branding without some sort of marketing element. When it comes to marketing strategies, then segmentation, targeting, and positioning are the most important aspects. What is understood by the segmentation is that the firm notices a need or a certain group in society, then the company targets those who can benefit from this discovered gap in the market community, then lastly, the company positions itself, so the target group sees and identify the specific image and offerings that the company provides (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 275).

Positioning is interesting, regarding this thesis, thus, it entails "… the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market." (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 276), which arguably is connected to branding, and it is further relevant when discussing the matter of companies incorporating the matter of 'green' or 'sustainability' into

their branding. Brand positioning is successful when it captures the essence of the brand and it is clear to the consumer, and further, that it is showcased distinctively. Kotler and Keller further argue that a brand positioning should be familiar to everyone within the firm or organization, so decision-making can be made in this context regarding the firm's positioning (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 276). The positioning of a brand can then both happen within the company and also on the outside, which is where the act of branding and marketing is relevant, especially regarding this research.

Branding entails elements such as the brand definition (values and purpose), a brand positioning statement, brand identity which involves elements like logo, name, visual design, then there is the area of advertising and outgoing communication which can occur in several arenas such as, magazines, social media, posters, tv, radio or websites (Marion, 2015). Communication is for many marketers a method of creating a positive perception of the brand, thus, brand communication denotes the ways a company or organization communicates with its different stakeholders. Brand communication is used as a tool for marketers, to obtain and sustain effective internal and external communication that is satisfactory for the company and the relationships it attempts to create through communication with possible stakeholders that has an interest in the firm (Abratt & Kleyn, 2010: 1054). Two interesting sub-types of marketing or brand communication is organizational communication, which entails all practices of communication with independent stakeholders, and then there is marketing communication which involves communication promoting the products or services that the company provides and thereby supports sales (Abratt & Kleyn, 2010: 1055).

Kotler and Keller talk about how companies have marketing channels, and a relevant one to mention for this research is what they refer to as the communication channel, hence, where firms can reach their target group. The channels encompass media platforms like magazines, radio, newspapers, video, posters, and television. Additionally, comes the look and verbal communication of the company's websites and social media (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 11) which are also seen as a communication channel for the company. What should be noted is how marketing communication is changing and has changed because a vast variety of new technologies are entering the arena of communication channels, and at the same time are the consumer's expectations, demographics, lifestyles changing, which requires the markets to be aware of these alterations (Kimmel, 2005: 1). A development is, for example, the matter of green marketing and another example is how some marketers are also using influencer marketing, where the company uses an influencer, which for example can be a celebrity or content creator. The purpose of the influencer is to promote the

brands' message and, thereby, reach a larger market and possible consumers (American Marketing Association, n.d.).

This section establishes that communication is an important aspect in branding, especially for the company to position itself the proper way and send the message they pursue as a brand. Note, that the term or concept of advertising has been deliberately avoided, thus, advertising is part of branding and marketing, and advertising has changed. Especially the expansion of the internet has created new ways of communicating as a brand and additional channels (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 535). For this investigation, the interest lies within how sustainability is communicated and promoted by brands and what the effects of it are.

Greenwashing

Back in the 1980s the phrase 'greenwashing' was coined for the first time by the environmentalist Jay Westerveld, who in 1986 wrote a published essay called 'It all comes out in the greenwash', and the term of greenwashing thereafter caught the media's attention (Watson, 2016; Corcione, 2020). A general understanding is that greenwashing is when a company or organization spends "… more time and money claiming to be "green" through advertising and marketing rather than actually implementing business practices that minimize environmental impact" (Acaroglu, 2019; Corcione, 2020). Greenwashing can therefore be seen as behaviors or activities that make a company more edible to people and make them believe that the firm is doing far more to guard the environment than in reality. Greenwashing can, therefore, mislead consumers who want to pursue a sustainable consumption pattern by supporting sustainable and conscious brands (Acaroglu, 2019; Corcione, 2020).

It is most often through a wide range of marketing and PR tools that greenwashing is carried out, sometimes it is unintentional, but most of the time it is intentional strategies promoting the 'green' steps a company is taking. According to Dr. Layla Acaroglu, the problem with greenwashing is that it is often misleading and leads consumers in the wrong direction when it comes to making sustainable choices. Greenwashing, therefore, becomes a bump on the road, when working towards sustainable designs in the world or the pursuit of a circular economy. Hence, it becomes a misdirection and a distraction, and it removes attention from the actual problems such as climate change, air pollution, or global species extinction when a company wrongfully promotes sustainable actions. (Acaroglu, 2019). However, Dr. Acaroglu, also notes that greenwashing by

firms can also happen by mistake, thus, the companies do not know how to act truly sustainable so that it is beneficial and what other actions are not (Acaroglu, 2019).

When looking into the area of greenwashing there exist examples of large firms promoting their own so-called green or sustainable business conduct and then being called out on the matter. A classic example is the case of the oil company Chevron, which in the 1980s ran a campaign called 'People Do', which was promoted in both television and print ads. The campaign demonstrates Chevron employees taking care of butterflies, bears, and in general, being good to nature. These commercials proved effective, thus, it won marketing awards but on the contrary, Chevron was among environmentalists seen as the prime example of greenwashing (Watson, 2016). Chevron's campaign was seen as greenwashing, because in actuality the company was spilling oil into wildlife refuges, and it was violating both the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act (Corcione, 2020). Another example of greenwashing is the chemical company DuPont, which back in 1991 ran a commercial concerning their double hulled oil tankers, claiming them to be "safeguarding" the environment, and the commercial showcased different animals capering along to Beethoven's classic 'Ode to Joy'. The reason for this DuPont commercial being an example of greenwashing is, that later that year the company was announced as the largest polluter in the United States (Corcione, 2020), and the obvious reason for it being a chemical firm, which is rarely good for the environment.

Along the decades greenwashing has changed, but it does still exist and at its basis it is still a disputed way to do marketing and misleads consumers (Watson, 2016; Corcione, 2020), who are, by a higher number, demanding more sustainable and responsible business conduct which have been up in numbers since the 1990s (Watson, 2016; Acaroglu, 2019; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018: Chp: 2). In the 2016 article from The Guardian 'The troubling evolution of corporate greenwashing' by Bruce Watson, the CEO Jonah Sachs, of the branding agency Free Range Studios argues that a newer tendency is that other issues are connected to the matter of sustainability when branding it, examples can be personal health or social issues. A narrative that has been produced is that "…personal health and environmental sustainability are two sides of the same coin,…"(Watson, 2016). The bottled water industry are large users of that connecting narrative of sustainability and personal health; thus, they claim they are better than soda, which entails personal health, and at the same time many of the firms connect themselves to images of running water in the mountains and beautiful lakes, which has the purpose of creating a positive connection to the environment. Meanwhile, the bottled water industry has been reputable as having negative impacts on the

environment (Watson, 2016; Staddon & Fox, 2011: 4). This establishes that greenwashing can exists on its own, but it can also be accompanied by other matters, and thereby appear somewhat in disguise.

When going through the literature on greenwashing one issue that seems repetitive is that a lack of regulatory actions from policymakers, by for example monitoring companies' environmental performance which seems significant to somewhat prohibit communication that greenwashes (Delmas & Burbano, 2011: 84; Laufer, 2003: 259; Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011: 167). Thus, scholars Magali A. Delmas and Venessa Cuerel Burbano argue that "Limited and imperfect information about firm environmental performance, as well as uncertainty about regulatory punishment for greenwashing, contribute to greenwashing." (Delmas & Burbano, 2011: 84). Such standards would also, to some extend prohibit firms from promoting falsehood concerning their 'green' actions and create more transparency concerning companies' environmental performances (Delmas & Burbano, 2011: 84-5).

Another default Delmas and Burbano (2011) point out regarding greenwashing is that it threatens consumers' confidence in brands and an effect of greenwashing can be that it erodes the market of consumers who are interested in green services and products due to the lack of transparency (64). Considering the above-mentioned knowledge about greenwashing, thereby establishes greenwashing as a concept of relevance when looking into how sustainability is portrayed by brands.

Commodification

This section will describe the concept of commodification which will be used as the main theory for this research paper. It will enable an investigation of how companies employ the matter of sustainability as part of their external communication on different mediums and thereby reaching possible stakeholders.

Commodity

In order to comprehend the concept of commodification, one has to understand what a commodity is, and it can be defined as an object that is of use and value, and furthermore, it is usually sold, exchanged, or bought (Coles, 2011:2). The general idea is that a commodity is something that is manufactured to serve as a profit in the capital system, and that does to some degree align with the Marxist conception of commodities (Evans, 2011:2). If one should go with the classic Marxist

notion of what a commodity is, it is "… a product intended principally for exchange, and that such products emerge, by definition, in the institutional, psychological, and economic conditions of capitalism." (Appadurai, 1986: 6). Marx believes that a commodity is simply something that satisfies human needs (Coles, 2011: 2). But scholar Arjun Appadurai argues that a commodity at its foundation is anything that is envisioned to exchange, because value can be seen in anything that is exchanged and it is not about the way things are exchanged, rather it is what is exchanged (Appadurai, 1986: 3).

According to Coles, what can be considered as a 'commodity' is a widely researched area and it is continuously defined and redefined, and its meaning is varying depending on the field (Coles, 2011:2). This project is concerned with the matter of sustainability shaped as a commodity by firms or organizations and how that happens. For that reason, a relatively new perception of 'commodity' is relevant to have in mind. Thus, new development is that the exact understanding of an object or product might not be the same for all – and a commodity might not necessarily be of the classic Marxist's understanding, an exact product. What should be understood is that it is the consumers who assign an object with a certain value and it is not necessarily the product itself, because the commodity of it can be produced somewhere else and by the consumer or receivers of what they see as a "product" (Coles, 2011:5), which further aligns well with the concept of commodification.

Creating a Commodification

The term 'commodification' first came to the surface of attention in the 1970s when it was used by art critics, but it has ever since developed and moved into different fields. Scholar Susan Strasser notes that what can be understood as commodities have changed over time, especially due to that larger extends of the world's population and, the economic activity in the globalized society, which has been integrated into the capitalistic system that we move within (Strasser, 2003: 3). In short, what should be understood as commodification is when something that is not naturally of economic value suddenly is, and it is described as when economic and cultural processes transform objects, activities, or something of symbolic meaning into a commodity (Evans, 2011:2).

Scholar Arjun Appadurai points out is that it is not possible to simply decide that some objects, concepts, or activities are commodities and others are not. Thus, Appadurai argues that every object (or other), basically, can at some point in its lifetime become a commodity and it can enter and reenter this phase and be exchanged (Appadurai, 1986: 16-17). Hence, Appadurai

claims that commodities just like people have social lives (Appadurai, 1986: 3). What can be understood is that commodification can then be seen as a dynamic process, and it is not necessarily static and fixed (Appadurai, 1986:16-17). Working within this notion, Appadurai suggests that what, when, and why something constitutes a commodity can be divided into three areas. First comes the *commodity phase* which entails that any thing can throughout its lifetime move between being a commodity and not being. Second is the notion of *commodity candidacy*, which involves the standards of what an object (or any thing) is expected to be in, to be seen as exchangeable, this is especially with the historical or social context in mind. The third state is the *commodity context* which is concerned with the locations and spaces in which any thing can be placed within and where it reaches the standards of exchange capability and thereby transfer into the commodity phase (Appadurai, 1986:13; Evans, 2011:2). Commodification is when an object (or other) then enters these processes and becomes a commodity and can be of value and exchanged (Evans, 2011:2). This three-part perspective exemplifies how many variables can constitute a commodification process of basically any thing. Any thing or an object can potentially become a commodity, thus, historical, economic, cultural, and social aspects can impact the development of commodification (Evans, 2011:2). By this understanding, any thing can then be commodified eventually and then again become a none-commodity.

Furthermore, Appadurai reasons that it is up to the individual what value or perspective is asserted to any given object or something, thus, what can be seen as a commodity is open to interpretation and manipulation. So, when it comes to commodification, it is also influenced by the eye of the beholder, meaning that it is also up to the individual as to what they think is morally appropriate to consider as a commodity or what might suit their interest (Appadurai, 1986:17).

Following this notion of the connection between a person and commodity, David Evans describes it fittingly: "The point is this: quite apart from being external to the person, our relationships with material things—even those acquired in the commodity form—play a crucial role in constituting who we are and by creating a meaningful social world." (Evans, 2011:3). This quote exemplifies how people can come to put a large emphasis on material things, sometimes it is not necessarily the item in itself but rather what it represents that becomes important to a person.

What is extracted from all of this, is that what can be considered as a commodity is very fluent and up to interpretation, which is why arguably commodification's occur. Some things may always be considered to be static in the object's position as a commodity, like a TV. But that

perception can also be turned around because if one takes the example of an old TV that does not work anymore, some will not see any value in it because it is not functional, however, others might see a treasure in it. Thus, it might not be the commodity of a functional TV someone purchases anymore, rather it is history they buy because they see value in the history an older TV represents and one can arguably then say that they are purchasing history – in this case, history has then become commodified. Evidently, history is one of the things that should not be possible to buy, because it is not graspable or an object, thus, it is not something that is normally considered to be a commodity, but this exemplifies the dynamic of commodification. A thing such as history might be one of the "areas" that have been commodified because one can also buy a piece of the Berlin Wall and say they own part of history. In that sense, nothing can escape the possibility or risk of being commodified. Though, Evans argues that commodification should not necessarily be seen as negative (Evans, 2011:2),

However, scholar Susan Strasser asserts that the concept of commodification has an ingrained critique to it, thus, there is this idea that objects, activities or concepts that are "..not by nature commercial.." (Strasser, 2003: 3) are not to be meddled with because they are special, and twisting and changing these perceptions can cause trouble in society (Strasser, 2003: 3). Especially within consumer culture commodification experience critique because it often includes commodifying things that should never have been a profit-seeking action, thing, or concept. It could be matters like religion, relationships, or the environment (Evans, 2011:2). But what should be noted is that this critique often is delivered with no historic understanding and is used as a critical perspective to the capital system, however, commodity exchange has existed long before the capital system was developed where gifts, goods, and services were exchanged without money (Evans, 2011:2).

There is no distinct answer to whether if commodification is a good or bad thing, but it is a complex and conflicting matter. Commodification in modern consumer culture is contested due to the inequality it at times produces through the established political economy (Evans, 2011: 3). However, commodification can also have beneficial elements because if one for example looks at the job as a dietitian, who arguably sells the commodity of a healthy lifestyle, which is not necessarily something graspable. But when someone purchases a course with a dietitian, it has the purpose of assisting this person to live healthier, and that is a good thing, that this person who bought this course has learned to live healthier, which therefore makes this commodity or commodification resourceful.

Furthermore, scholar Rick Iedema talks about the notion of resemiotization which is a factor to include when going into multimodal discourse analysis, and it is an interesting perspective to link with commodification. Resemiotization is concerned with "… how meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next." (Iedema, 2003: 41). This notion can arguably be seen in close connection with what happens through the stages of commodification. What is meant by this is that resemiotization is concerned with the cultural, historical, social structures that express our time, thus, it is concerned with social constructions, rather than the textual and it wants to support the "…material and historicized dimensions of representation." (Iedema, 2003: 50). This is arguably what happens when sustainability is commodified through companies' outward branding. So, resemiotization aims to understand how semiotics change or translates as they move within a social process and evolves, and further, why these semiotics are chosen in this setting and time (Iedema, 2003: 29). Resemiotization then supports how commodification can be constructed multimodal discursively.

What is established is that the process of commodification is a very fluent and dynamic matter and difficult to completely comprehend. Commodification is discussed by scholars and attention should be paid to it because it helps to place consumption and the effects of it in an economic and social broader arena (Evans, 2011:3), which specifically makes the commodification of sustainability interesting. An exemplar of commodifying sustainability could be when a traveling agency says you can buy a climate compensated flight with them, then they in some sense commodify both climate change and sustainability and people buy into these notions. However, arguably the most sustainable thing would be not to jump on the plane. In this regard, the commodification of sustainability is used negatively because it would have been more sustainable to take the train instead of the plane, but by using sustainability in their branding the company indicates to the consumer that this is a better choice.

Since commodification can both be viewed positively and negatively, it is an interesting concept to dwell on when looking at how the matter of sustainability is used and presented in the arena of business and consumption.

Problem Statement

What is established through this literature review is that sustainability is a very complex matter to comprehend completely. Therefore, it is interesting to look further into what happens when corporations engage in external communication concerning sustainability and when it becomes part

of the company's branding strategy. For that reason, the areas of sustainability have been presented, to get an understanding of what sustainability entails, and it should be mentioned once more that as for this thesis, it is the perspective of 'green' and environmental sustainability and its connection with consumption, that is the object of interest, which is important to note since the many differentiated understandings of what encompasses sustainability. The areas of branding/marketing offer a bassline to understand the companies and their ways of communicating and thereby branding, and why it for some companies might entail incorporating sustainability. CSR and greenwashing are included because they offer background knowledge to how and why some companies promote a discourse or actions concerning sustainability.

Thereto then comes the concept of commodification which suggests that anything can become a commodity, it simply depends on the receiver's end. However, scholars who have written about commodification both suggest that it can have positive and negative effects, which therefore should be elucidated regarding sustainability. Because how do we see commodification happen in multimodal branding efforts? And what happens when it is sustainability that is being commodified?

Arguably, there is a gap within the literature when "green consumption and marketing" exists but there is no definitive understanding of what sustainability entails, because then what is it really the companies are selling, and I want to explore this and contribute to the literature by investigating it through the concept of commodification. The data will therefore consist of six different firms who include sustainability in their external communication on the mediums of, respectively, TV (commercials), company homepage, and on the social media platform, Instagram. Using the method of multimodal discourse analysis, which acknowledges the different modes of where discourses can be found, will enlighten how a commodification of sustainability can occur.

This research has the aim of investigating how it is possible for firms to commodify sustainability through their external communication and thereto discuss what such a commodification might mean. This has led to the following problem formulation:

How is sustainability discursively commodified by brands and what are the possible effects of a commodification?

Methodology

In this section the methodological considerations and choices for this thesis and thereby rationale for my research approach will be presented, and so will the method of data collection and method of analysis, more specifically multimodal discourse analysis, which will enable an investigation of the problem formulation.

Methodology

Philosophy of Science

Ontology is concerned with how meaning is created in the world, and at its basis ontology is about how the world is bolted together and what sense can be made of it, thereby, it works with the notion of 'what' we study (Porta & Keating, 2008: 21). For this research, the ontological stance taken is the one of constructivism. Constructivism is based on the idea that social phenomena's and the meanings they carry with them are continuously being shaped and re-shaped by social actors, so it is the social interactions that create phenomena's and are therefore dynamic (Bryman, 2016: 29).

According to scholar Graham R. Gibbs (2021) what is being said and experienced by humans undergoes the human construct and the ideas it shapes. Therefore, we have socially constructed realities, thus, individuals want to create their own sensemaking. Sometimes these "sense-making" are shared, which makes them more common but not necessarily more real (8).

The constructivist position is appropriate for this project due to the fluidity of sustainability and how the concept of commodification acknowledges that everything can evidently become a commodity in its lifetime. Constructivism, therefore, allows me as a researcher to take in the dynamic of sustainability, and how sustainability is communicated in differentiated ways by brands, thus, the brands can be seen as actors in society, that are part of constructing our reality. For the same reason, the method of multimodal discourse analysis has been chosen to analyze if and how companies commodify sustainability. Multimodal discourse analysis is great for this purpose because it acknowledges the many ways we can communicate, and that meaning is not only shaped by language, thus, the brands use more than language to communicate about sustainability. The constructivist position then allows me to analyze and interpret how a commodification is formed and recognize the possible effects and meanings the commodification of sustainability can have, while still keeping in mind that the social phenomena are constructed by the social actors who make meaning of it.

Epistemology is about what can be seen as actual and acceptable knowledge in the world (Bryman, 2016: 24) and, therefore, epistemology is concerned with 'how' we know, and it entails that reasons are given for what is said to be knowledge in order to convince others of it (Porta & Keating, 2008: 22). Interpretivism will be the epistemological position taken for this thesis. Interpretivism acknowledges that humans and institutions are meaningful actors that create knowledge, and subjective meaning is the center of this knowledge. As an interpretivist researcher, the aim is to recognize the meaningful actions of people and discover their motivations for it and not rely on general "… laws external to the actors" (Porta & Keating, 2008: 24), and further interpret the discoveries in an analysis (Gibbs, 2021: 2). What should be noted is that the analysis conducted by a researcher are themselves interpretation, and are, therefore, also a construction of the world (Gibbs, 2021: 9).

Regarding this research, it is the brands that are the actors which create and shape communication commodifying sustainability and I want to investigate how this happens and if it has any effects. The interpretivist stance allows me as a researcher to analyze and interpret how sustainability is communicated by firms and what the effects are, and what meaning that creates. I want to look into a social phenomenon, and according to Porta and Keating (2008), that is impossible without acknowledging the perceptions people have on the world (24-5). So, by using the method of multimodal discourse analysis to analyze and interpret my collected data an understanding of this social phenomenon, which in this case is the commodification of sustainability, might occur because I will explore how the commodification is shaped. It will allow me as a researcher to create some contextual knowledge, while still acknowledging my presence and interpretation as a researcher.

Qualitative Approach

The research conducted for this thesis is qualitative of nature, hence, qualitative research is often more focused on words instead of numbers (Bryman, 2016: 375). In this examination words or text are also understood and recognized as the multimodal elements of pictures, video, sound, and what multimodal analysis else entails. In qualitative research, the observer is situated in the world and takes in a naturalistic and interpretive approach to the world, where it is about seeing things in their natural settings and trying to interpret and make sense of phenomena's and the meanings which actors bring to it (Brinkman, 2017: 4).

There is great diversity within qualitative data, and it can be everything from interviews, e-mails, various documents, web pages, online social networking pages or advertisements, both printed or video, and so on (Gibbs, 2021: 3), where the latter threes are the chosen data for this paper. For analyzing the collected data for this paper multimodal discourse analysis will be used, and Gibbs states that when being involved in a discourse analysis it is important to recognize that "…qualitative data are meaningful and need to be interpreted in analysis, not just to reveal the range of subject matter people are talking about but also to recognize and analyze the ways in which they frame and mould their communications and even the ways these communications frame and mould them and their actions." (Gibbs, 20212). So, I as the researcher is engaged in interpretive research where meanings are embedded in the different data I have collected, and I want to reflect upon it in terms of the discursive commodification of sustainability. I have chosen data that entails external communication from six different brands, within three mediums, which will be presented more in-depth later.

For that reason, the qualitative research approach is suitable for this thesis, because it allows for interpretation and seeing the data in its social context and from there on make meaning of it. In this case, it will be an interpretation of how companies communicate about sustainability and how that can be seen as a commodification, which will then lead to a discussion taking the literature review into account.

This method also entails the iterative approach as I am being both deductive and inductive. Deductive traits are seen in the sense that I have accumulated knowledge surrounding the topic that is relevant for this thesis (Bryman, 2016: 22), which has been in the areas of branding, CSR, greenwashing, sustainability, and commodification. The deductive approach often has a theory first, which in this case is the literature and knowledge obtained, and then comes the observations and findings (Bryman, 2016: 21). Whereas the inductive approach is concerned with drawing out more generalizable observations or similar circumstances and from there shape a theory (Bryman, 2016: 22; Gibbs, 2021: 5). Theory creation is not the exact intention of this paper; however, the intention is to get a better understanding and investigate the social phenomena of the possible commodification of sustainability by companies, and inductive traits are therefore seen in the research. Thus, iterative is the approach used for this paper, because it allows for more flexibility and it makes it possible to adapt to the collected data, the research design, and information, as the analysis is conducted, and I can move back and forth between my data as I code it and explore the discursive practice in the data (Bassett, 2010: 2). The iterative approach allows

for more fluidity and one can move between the data from the different brands, analysis, the obtained knowledge, and the theory of commodification.

Research Design

The research design for this thesis will be the one of multiple-case study research based on similarities and differences (Bryman, 2016: 69, 65). The reason for this research design carries the matter of similarity is due to the fact that a requirement for including the brands as data, the matter of sustainability should be present in some way or another in the company's outgoing communication and branding, which thereby is a similarity among the chosen data (Bryman, 2016: 69). The comparative case design is showcased in that I also want to compare the different cases in how the companies brand sustainability and if a commodification happens and what effects it has. Thus, Bryman also suggests that "… we can understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases…" (Bryman, 2016: 65). So, the similarity of branding sustainability is present in all of the sampled companies, but how they do it still differs, which makes for a comparative case study as well.

Additionally, by having multiple cases, Bryman (2016) suggests that it can improve theory building (67) or elaborate and create an understanding of social phenomena. So, looking at multiple companies who brands sustainability and perhaps commodifies it, has the possibility to contribute to theories or concepts that are relevant within the field of for example branding and marketing or sustainable consumption. Thus, having multiple cases of firms communicating about sustainability externally and analyzing and comparing them serves the purpose of understanding the social phenomena of commodifying sustainability.

Method of Data Collection

This section will depict the data that has been chosen for this thesis to illuminate and answer the posed problem formulation, and it will clarify what, why, and how this data is of relevance and has been chosen.

Purposive sampling is particularly concerned with sampling cases that are of relevance to the problem asked and meets the criteria for what is being investigated (Bryman, 2016: 408), and that is the sampling method chosen for this data collection. Since the research question is concerned with how companies include sustainability in their external communication on different media platforms, I have conducted a purposive sampling of data, thus, I needed data where this

factor was somewhat or extensively present in the brand's communication. Furthermore, I also wanted to collect a variety of different firms and from different external communication outlets. Because what is at the core of this thesis, it not the specific company that communicates about sustainability but the fact that the company does, and then how that is done and if a commodification of sustainability occurs.

I have chosen to look at data from three different platforms or mediums from six different brands. The world has over 7.8 billion people and more than 4.5 billion of them are on the internet (Smith, 2019), so for that reason, it seemed fitting to look at some of the platforms that most people have access to and where brands are present and can capture most people with their external communication, thus, data was collected from respectively: Instagram, the social media platform; websites, more specifically the homepage of two different brands, and lastly TV commercials, which can also be found on the online platform of Youtube. These three channels are also, as formerly mentioned, channels that Kotler and Keller talk about as places to reach the consumers, and branding can transpire (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 11). Furthermore, since I will be looking at online platforms it also gives an international perspective, because anyone with online accessibility can enter these platforms.

Once again it is important to emphasize that neither is it the exact mediums, which are of interest for the research, but rather the fact that firms are communicating about sustainability on a variety of platforms where their external communication has access to many people.

Six different brands were sampled for analysis, and these brands, except from two Danish ones, are multinational organizations that are marketed globally and have consumer segments across the world, and most of them are well-recognized organizations across borders. So, the data consists of a mix of multinational organizations and two danish ones, thus, the essential factor was, that the organizations brand sustainability and perhaps create a commodification. Some of the cases were found coincidental and others were specifically searched for, thus, based on knowing that these brands were communicating about sustainability in some way or another, which matches the criterion for the purposive sampling conducted – sustainability should be present in one way or another in the data.

Here I will present the six different brands and their channel of communication, and why exactly these mediums were chosen:

Website

Concerning the medium of a website, it is more specifically the homepage of the companies that will be analyzed, thus, the homepage of a firm can in some sense be seen as their public image and what one is faced with when entering their webpage. For that reason, it is interesting to see if some companies are more outspoken concerning sustainability, other than perhaps seen in the regular navigation tabs found on the homepage of a company.

Appendix A)

The first homepage is the one of the international clothing brand Levi's, who is especially known for its denim production.

Appendix B)

Then there is the homepage of the clothing brand Patagonia, known globally for its outdoor and activewear.

Instagram

When looking at the channel of Instagram it is specifically influencers on social media that is the focus, thus, a marketing strategy mentioned earlier is Influencer marketing, and I found that interesting to look into, rather than looking at what a brand post on their own social media account. Moreover, it can also be argued that influencers are themselves a brand (Jin & Muqaddam, 2018: 522), and if they promote sustainability that is an interesting perspective to look into.

Appendix C)

The Danish influencer, known under the name 'Fredesblog', has a collaboration with the world-known sports brand, Adidas, where she promotes the bands' sneakers model 'Stan Smith', thus, the brand is starting to use recycled polyester for their production. 'Fredesblog' has made several posts regarding this collaboration, and I have chosen one of these posts to analyze. The post was published on the 13th of April, 2021, and includes six pictures and some text.

Appendix D)

The second influencer is also a Danish woman known under 'Emilysalomon' on Instagram. She has made a post in collaboration with Copenhagen's municipality about sorting trash. It was posted on the 5th of January 2021, and it includes one picture and text.

TV commercial

A video commercial is interesting because it both involves, visual, textual, and sound instruments in order to capture its viewer thereto come the fact that these commercials were both branded through the medium of TV and also the internet, through YouTube, so one can access the commercial on several channels.

Appendix E)

The first TV commercial is from the international clothing company, H&M, which sent out a commercial called 'Conscious Points' in March 2021. The commercial is 30 seconds long and it has both been running on TV and can be found on Youtube.

Appendix F)

The second TV commercial was created by the Danish pension fund, PFA, who released the video back in November 2020. The commercial is 30 seconds long and it has been running on danish national TV and can be found on Youtube as well.

This is a short presentation of the selected data, and it can be found in its respective appendixes A, B, C, D, E, and F. For the commercials and the homepages, the links are provided in the appendixes for access, and relevant and illustrative screenshots have been included. Furthermore, the textual or verbal elements of the data have been transcribed and translated if necessary.

Amount of Data

Regarding the size of the data collection, there is a broad disagreement about what is an appropriate sample size (Bryman, 2016: 420). But scholars Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) state that when conducting qualitative research, the sample size should not be too small, however, neither should it be too large so that a comprehensive analysis is difficult to conduct (289). Bearing this in mind, having six different cases of brands communicating about sustainability, seems appropriate to

establish if a commodification of sustainability is happening and if so, how. Additionally, having two cases within each of the chosen platforms also allows for a possible comparison of the platforms and across the whole line, a comparison of the six cases and how they touch upon sustainability and the possible commodification they create.

Ethical Considerations

When approaching data, one should consider if there are any ethical considerations to be taken, to maintain the integrity of the research (Bryman, 2016: 120). Since most of the data used for this thesis are directly produced by companies and is communication they have chosen to send out in a public forum through the internet, no ethical considerations were necessary (Bryman, 2016: 140). Additionally, one could think that perhaps ethical considerations were needed when looking at the influencers, however, they are arguably also part of the public domain of Instagram and are therefore accessible to whoever is on the platform, and their posts are publicly accessible, and for that reason, there was not asked permission to analyze their Instagram posts. Though, if they had stated on their profile or along with the post, that permission to use their posts was needed, then permission would have been petitioned for. Thereto also comes, that arguably the influencer and the brand, product or action they are promoting, are interested in as many people as possible see the post, so, therefore, are their communication up for grasp just as any company.

Method of Data Analysis

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The method that will be used to analyze the collected data is multimodal discourse analysis, firstly, however, the theory of semiotics will be presented, thus, it is from here multimodal discourse analysis originates and are closely connected and from there multimodal discourse analysis will be described.

Social Semiotics and Discourse

Social semiotics is about meaning-making and meaning-makers, and it is concerned with the media of and modes of communication that humans use and cultivate to create a communicative understanding of the world (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016: 145). At its core, semiotic is the science of signs (Berger, 2011: 2). Social semiotic origins from scholar Michael Halliday who worked with functional linguistics (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016: 145), and argued that language was a system of

meaning and thereby a semiotic system, from where meaning was developed and exchanged. According to Halliday, language is one of the most complex semiotic systems from where humans exchange meaning (Halliday & Webster, 2003: 2). The work Halliday did within linguistic was to move the attention from only the sentences and over to the text and how that constituted "… a mode of social action (Iedema, 2003: 31). Thus, it allows to look at semiosis through "… socially meaningful tensions and oppositions…" (Iedema, 2003: 31) and not just through settled structures and this notion is known as the systemic-relational principle (Iedema, 2003: 31).

Alongside Halliday's work, development was also made within the area of discourse analysis, where scholars like Norman Fairclough, started to see how discourse analysis could be more than clause and sentence analysis but it could also include connecting textual features to power and ideology (Iedema, 2003: 31). A discourse should be understood as something that "… works above the level of grammar and semantics to capture what happens when these language forms are played out in different social, political and cultural arenas." (Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 5). The essence of discourse is that it both apprehends the effects language or other modes can have, and the meanings it establishes, and additionally, the strategies used by those who produce the discourse and the interpretation of it is taken into consideration (Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 5).

Simpson and Mayr outline what one should look out for when looking at textual discourses. In the vocabulary one should be aware if there are used ideologically contested words, like sexist terms; if there is a use of both formal and informal word or a mix of both; is there an expressive value in the words used, is there, for instance, used evaluative words; and is there a use of metaphors? Moving over to the grammatical aspects, one should look for the types of verbs used, are they describing an activity or a state; is agency clear or unclear; Are there strong features of modality, meaning if statements are made directly and with certainty or are they toned down or hedged? And one should look out for modal verbs like 'can' or 'might', and adverbs like 'probably' or 'obviously', because these express the writer/sender's opinion; and lastly are pronouns used such as 'I', 'we' or 'you', and how are they used? (Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 110).

Multimodal Discourse Analysis
The idea of the systemic-relational principle by Halliday, containing the idea that meaning-making could occur in other things than language got its grip on several scholars who developed on the notion, and moved it into the area of visual representation, and the frontrunners for this development were especially scholars Gunther Kress, Robert Hodge and Theo van Leeuwen (Jewitt

& Henriksen, 2016: 145; Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 87; Iedema, 2003: 32). It was through this development that the term multimodality started to gain attention and it became a discourse analytical term that emphasized meaning-making, both through text but also through other modes (Iedema, 2003: 32).

Thus, in 1990, Kress and van Leeuwen published the book 'Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design' where they argue that there is an equivalence between the grammar in language and what is seen in visual culture (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 195). Just as the linguistic structures can create meaning and contribute to an indented message, so can visual structures and other modes of communication, and it is therefore of great importance to analyze the visual structure of communication through a multimodal approach (Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 87). Thus, what these scholars claim is that communication is more than just language, because communication among humans is rarely monomodally, but rather multimodally, as meaning-making can be constituted in several ways other than just through words (Iedema, 2003: 29). Therefore, taking in the notion that communication is more than just words and it also includes visuals and other elements are often referred to as multimodality and specifically for this research, multimodal discourse analysis (Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 87).

The term multimodality, thus, enables one to take in semiotics other than just plain language (Iedema, 2003: 33). What is meant is that communication and meaning-making can occur both through, gestures or body language, language, visual images, sound, signs, videos, illustrations or drawings, websites, or the written word (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 195; Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 87; Iedema, 2003: 33). Elements such as perspective, color, choice of font and size, composition, layout, design, and framing are all elements that also "…communicate meaning or act as rhetorical devices." (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 195; Iedema, 2003: 40). These elements should therefore be taken into consideration when conducting multimodal discourse analysis because those elements also communicate.

Within multimodality the matter of mode is also relevant to touch upon, thus, mode represents the area that has the ability to communicate, exemplars are an image, gesture, writing, or perhaps a speech (Kress, 2010: 84). If looking at a mode with social semiotic eyes, then what constitutes a mode, is whatever a community decides to see and use as mode (Kress, 2010: 87), so in that sense, almost anything can be considered as a mode of communication. Yet, Kress, states that one can ask the question of "What are the potentials and what are the limitations of this mode?"

(Kress, 2010: 84), and this question concerns all modes and can help better establish the mode of communication.

Kress states that nowadays it is "… impossible to make sense of texts… without having a clear idea of what these other features might be contributing to the text." (Kress, 2000: 337). Multimodal discourse analysis, therefore, enables one to look at the "whole" of what is presented to one and thereby make meaning of it, because every aspect or choice that is made, which is used in a TV commercial, website, or social media, communicates something and multimodality allows one to consider that and interpret on it.

Other than the elements in multimodal discourse analysis described above, such as looking at the text, the visual composition, or colors Kress and Van Leeuwen also works with the notion of *real* and *ideal* when looking at communication. What should be understood by this is that the composition of communication often includes having the idealized and sweeping information at the top, making it the *ideal*. At the bottom, one will find the more practical, factual, and perhaps not so exciting information, which is then considered as the *real*, because it is more down to earth (Simpson & Mayr, 2010: 87).

Furthermore, within multimodal discourse analysis, one can also look at what is *foregrounded* and what is *backgrounded* in the communication and why that is, which offers a strategy to look at how the communication is shaped and what discourse it enables (Iedema, 2003: 40, 47). What is meant by these terms is that it can be established what can be seen as the dominant communication element in a representation or data, which would be the *foreground*, and the lesser dominant element is the *background*. For example, one can go through a PowerPoint show where it is the visual elements that are dominant, meaning at the foreground.

The need for multimodality is according to Kress, due to the fact, that the world of communication has changed and still is and that is due to the global changes within economy, technology, culture, and the social arena (Kress, 2010: 5). This entails that our discourse practices are becoming more complex both culturally and socially due to the influence that the development of electronic communication has had, and the interconnected global world both politically, businesswise, and culturally has, which challenges the semiotic landscape (Iedema, 2003: 33). So, multimodality is a necessary means to meaning making because Kress and Van Leeuwen state that "Global flows of capital and information of all kinds, of commodities, and of people, dissolve not only cultural and political boundaries but also semiotic boundaries." (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 36). Multimodal discourse analysis, along with Iedemas notion of resemiotization which is

concerned with meaning-making and how it changes from context to context (Iedema, 2003: 41), therefore recognizes the times we live in and offers a method to analyze data thoroughly through the different modes of communication.

One of the main ideas behind this thesis is to look at how companies include sustainability in their communication and thereby, possibly commodify sustainability, leading to a discussion surrounding the matter. In order to analyze the communication, I need a method that also allows me to look at the visual aspects of the company. Because I believe those elements say just as much as the written word when it comes to the company's webpage, a televised commercial, or the use of influencers on Instagram, and for that reason, multimodal discourse analysis was chosen as my method of analysis. Hence, it allows me as a researcher to dig into all aspects and analyze the company's outward communication, such as text, layout, colors, or font. Furthermore, it also offers the tools of real/ideal, background/foreground, and the notion of resemiotization, where the latter allows for a context setting, which is interesting in terms of identifying a possible commodification of sustainability by companies.

Furthermore, this method is centered around meaning-making and is open for interpretations, and acknowledges that meaning and knowledge are constructed through social actions and actors, which aligns with the constructionist and interpretivist paradigm taken for this thesis.

The Use of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The research design and approach have been explained and here I will outline the specific steps taken to conduct the multimodal discourse analysis.

Inspired by Simpson and Mayr's description of how to approach textual data concerning discourse, I will use those notions earlier mentioned concerning vocabulary and grammar, such as use of pronouns, agency, metaphors, formal and informal words, etc., as it gives a process of how to approach the textual elements of the analysis. Thereto comes Kress and Van Leeuwen's acknowledgment of how different modes produces communication just as well as language, thus, images, sound, color, font of the text, perspective and layout, and such are also meaningful communication creators. Hence, I will engage in a multimodal discourse analysis examining the textual and visual, and sound components of the six data cases sampled for this study - and I will be examining them specifically for instances of commodification.

The matter of commodification and its different angles and variables has been presented earlier, however, shortly, I define commodification as "when something that is not a commodity turns into a commodity through discourses", which is what I will be looking for in the data. For example, sustainability is not a commodity, but it can be transformed into one through these mediums and companies' branding effort. I will, therefore, be looking for moments in the data where sustainability is commodified through different discursive instruments.

I will conduct this study in four steps, which is presented below.
Note that steps one and two will be conducted separately on each individual data case, and then in step three a comparison will be made among the same medium or channel, respectively, TV, website, and social media.

Step 1)

Consists of studying the *textual level* for each case, respectively, the commercials, website homepage, and Instagram post, which all consist of two examples. I will watch and re-watch all the posts, websites, and videos, to closely examine the vocabulary and grammar, as presented by Simpson and Mayr earlier, code it and look for instances of a commodification of sustainability and disclose how that is done. What should be noted is that emojis will also be analyzed in this step, thus, they are used in connection with text.

Step 2)

Entails the study of the *visual and sound level*. Once again, each case will be looked at with visuals in mind. Hence, I will be looking at images, sound, color, perspective, angles, layout, font and font size, etc., and thereto also comes Kress and Van Leeuwen's notion about Real/Ideal, and Iedema's perception on foreground/background. Thus, anything that communicates visually or through sound will be interpreted and establish if a commodification of sustainability is done and, if so, how that is done.

Step 3)

Here a comparison of the two cases present in each medium will be executed. I will look for similarities and differences in how a possible commodification takes place regarding sustainability.

So, the two sampled data from the same medium will be compared, respectively, TV, website, and social media.

Step 4)

Then lastly, I will compare across mediums and look for similarities and differences in how a possible commodification of sustainability is occurring and if there are noticeable differences among the mediums.

Thereafter, I will move into my discussion where my findings will be discussed and put in context with the information presented in the literature review.

Limitations

One of the largest limitations for this research is my own bias, and how I as a researcher is present in the analysis and interpretation of the collected data among the six companies. However, this is also an acknowledged factor when the paradigms for this research is the ones of interpretivism and constructivism, which also have been stated earlier on.

Another possible limitation is that more literature concerning the commodification of sustainability exists, however, it is still unidentified for this specific examination. A reason can be that other terms, perspectives or approaches has been taken when approaching this subject matter, and for that reason it has not been possible to present in relation to this research.

Furthermore, there is also the limitation of that it is not possible to generalize upon my findings, however, that was neither the intention as it more was to enlighten and see how a possible commodification of sustainability is established and consider what effect it might have, and thereby contribute to the research within this area.

Analysis

In this section the analysis will be conducted by interpreting the collected data, from the six brands and their respective medium, through multimodal discourse analysis, which will follow the abovementioned four steps.

Homepages

Appendix A - Levi's

Step 1 – Textual Level

When you enter the homepage of the clothing brand Levi's, the first thing that meets the eye is a short video around 15 seconds long, and above the video, the following is written "We're on a mission to change the clothing industry. For good. See how sustainability is woven into our products and practices." (p.1) Here Levi's explicitly voices the matter of sustainability and claim they will change the industry by incorporating sustainability into their business conduct, and they form a discourse where they say that Levi's, as a firm, is taking action, especially by using the pronouns of 'we' and 'our'. Additionally, the punctuation between 'For good' works as a way to make Levi's statement about changing the industry stand even stronger, and along with the pronouns, it creates a sense of agency. Levi's discourse, shaping them as agents, is constructed through informal language by using the contraction of 'we're' and by using short sentences. Thereto also comes the metaphor made by using the word 'woven', hence it is a reference to the industry of clothing, where it is a method to make fabrics, and here Levi's say sustainability is woven into how they conduct business, which is also a jokingly way to say it, maintaining a sense of informality. Though, by using 'woven' it also appears as genuine, because if sustainability is woven into Levi's business, it must genuinely be part of their business conduct and grounded in the company. Right under this text there are two links to click and they are called "Learn more" and "Shop now", so one can get more information about how Levi's is being sustainable, otherwise, sustainability is not mentioned on the website except when you scroll to the bottom of their homepage, then there is a tap called "sustainability".

So, these written statements create the sense that if one purchase something from Levi's, then it is sustainably produced, and it becomes more believable because Levi's state that they want to change the industry, which creates a sense of action, so they must be sustainable. In this written mode Levi's claim themselves as being sustainable actors and shapes the discourse of 'us'.

Moving on to the video clip, it begins with showing the artist Jaden Smith who is wearing a bunch of clothes. While zooming in on him, the following text pops up in a flickering white text and in sections as he also says it, first comes "Global consumption" then "has doubled in" and lastly "the last 15 years" (p.3), so the first part of the text fades out and leaves the last for a bit. This is an informative small piece of text, which arguably has the function of capturing the viewer, so they pay attention to what comes next, and it is further supported by a white line that underlines the text as it appears, which arguably serves the purpose of making this fact about global consumption stand stronger.

What follows, this information about global consumptions is that Jaden nods his head and say "We can change that", once again the pronoun 'we' is used, but since it is stated by Jaden, who is a person outside Levi's (though I am acknowledging the company has hired him, and in that sense, he is connected to the firm). But because he is not part of the firm, the pronoun 'we' arguably also addresses people outside the firm, the consumer or the 'you', as an actor that can change that. Jaden's 'That' is arguably referencing to how we consume and what we consume, thus, his statement came after the information about global consumption. This narrative is supported by a female voice seconds later, when she states, "When we buy better – we can wear longer". 'We' is used again, and now by an unidentified woman, which arguably emphasis how Levi's addresses that the various consumers have a responsibility when purchasing items, and since it is this unidentified voice, it could be whoever saying it, making it more relatable, but also creating agency in how 'you' as a consumer can change that.

In the video sustainability is not mentioned, however, the female saying, "When we buy better – we can wear longer" and especially the part 'we can wear longer' is arguably an implicit reference of sustainability, saying that when buying Levi's products, you are then better regarding sustainability. Hence, implicitly, Levi's is claiming to be the better choice because their products last longer, which arguably is sustainable. Then at the end of the clip, "Buy better. Wear longer" (p.6) is written and it is also used above the clip on the website and functions as a campaign slogan. In this slogan, Levi's use the imperative form of the verb 'buy' which indicates firmness and almost sound like a command to the consumer - an implicit command about being sustainable in their consumption choices which one arguably obtain when purchasing from Levi's, because you can wear that longer, and you are, therefore "better" in your consumption pattern. In the video Levi's forms a new discourse, the 'you' by now incorporating the consumer into the story, by using the pronouns differently and implying that how people choose to consume matters.

Moreover, the discourse created at the textual level, both the discourse about Levi's sustainability measures and the discourse about how they want the consumer to be sustainable, arguably represents a commodification of sustainability. Because if you buy something from Levi's then it lasts longer, which is sustainable, and they have already stated that sustainability is 'woven' into the firm. So, in that sense, when one purchases clothing from Levi's, then one also gets the stamp of being sustainable, and in that sense, sustainability is arguably then commodified because the consumer gets that alongside the item they purchase.

Step 2 – Visual and Sound Level

When the video clip starts we see Jaden from the back with the camera turning upside-down (p.2), and then we zoom in on him from the front while the text described above flickers over Jaden, and lightning sounds in the back and flashes from cameras in the studio appear as lightning strikes. We see Jaden standing in a relatively dark photo studio surrounded by purposively staged flowers and green plants, and he is covered in layers of clothes. When the textual statement about global consumption has passed, Jaden verbally states, "We can change that" and all the clothes pops of him and the otherwise slower music blasts louder as all the extra layers of clothes disappears (p.4). So, the visuals and sound in the video follow what he says – they change and creates a sense of agency. Hence, all the excessive clothing is removed as Jaden says the phrase of change, arguably this is a visual representation of the text about overconsumption that had flickered across the screen. The use of lightning sounds and flashes arguably carries a symbolic meaning as they create this sense of eruption and eeriness, as, arguably the overconsumption happening now can create. But when Jaden says 'change' there is a camera flash and the lightning stops, because now it is time to stop this behavior and buy better as they narrate it. Then they clip to several individual people standing in different surroundings both natural and urban (p.4-5) while maintaining a faster beat to the music which creates a sense of action. The visual mode and the one of sound underline the discourse of 'you' as actors being able to make the indirectly showcased sustainable change of 'buy better', because they showcase different people who can arguably take matters into their own hands and buy better.

In the studio, Jaden is surrounded by flowers, grass, and plants, along with static studio equipment such as cameras, light mounting, and screens (p.3). However, the greens are closest to Jaden, which might be Levi's way of saying that nature is becoming more important to them, compared to all the flashy and usually staged photo studios, and in the past, they did not embrace nature, and implicitly sustainability in their firm, but now they do. Thus, what is noteworthy is that in the last scene filming Jaden, before clipping to the slogan, Jaden is now wearing a small flower above his ear which he was not in the first scene (p.5). So, one could see the video as a story about the development, that Levi's have been through since they became aware of the overconsumption. Thus, by placing a flower on Jaden, sustainable change is now part of the firm and those who chose to support them. So, change has already been made since the first scene, since nature is now so close to Jaden and almost a part of him, as it is also part of the firm. Levi's establish a connection with nature, which is arguably highly connected with sustainability because

if seeing thriving nature, one will easily associate that with a good environment and therefore also sustainability, because those two are often linked. These visuals are all part of creating a green discourse.

Additionally, a girl in one of the clips is wearing a denim jacket with butterflies, flowers, and a heart-shaped planet drawn on it (p.4), which creates the idea that nature is present in Levi's clothing. So, Levi's creates this green discourse through how they have incorporated nature into the video. Arguably, this green discourse can be seen as a commodification of sustainability, because using green plants, and showing people in natural outdoor settings creates a connection to nature. It shapes a visual narrative where nature is part of the brand, and it can catch the consumer's eye and make them think that when they buy something from Levi's, then they are sustainable, which can then be seen as a commodification of sustainability by Levi's.

Subsequently, when going through the textual and visual levels of Levi's homepage, three discourses are shaped, respectively one where Levi's, the 'us' claim to be sustainable actors and that consumers are thereby indirectly sustainable if they choose to buy their products because you can wear Levi's longer, which can be considered sustainable. Then there is the discourse that refers to how it is the consumer's responsibility to make the sustainable choice, the 'you' where Levi's indirectly is said to be that choice. Lastly, is the green discourse which is mostly shaped by the visual mode by using nature in the video, and those three discourses together arguably establishes a commodification of sustainability, because Levi's connects their brand to a high degree with sustainability and it is easy to get a sense of, that when one buys a Levi's product then one also buys the label of being sustainable.

Appendix B – Patagonia
Step 1 – Textual Level
When clicking into the homepage of the outdoor clothing brand Patagonia one is met with large letters saying, "Changing Seas" and underneath there is a small headline explaining that Patagonia has made a collection which focus is to show "...the impacts of human consumption on our oceans and our ability to rapidly change our behavior" (p.1). The campaign of "Changing seas" can be seen as a metaphor for how Patagonia want to encourage a change of behavior, which is the sea, and at the same time, Patagonia also wishes to 'change the actual seas' by highlighting the effects of human consumption patterns and thereby alter it. This is an interesting way to catch the consumer's attention and it gives a sense that their actions count. Sustainability is not explicitly voiced here, but

when talking about consumption impact and change of behavior, arguably, sustainability is implicitly voiced. In that regard, if buying into this collection, one is also buying into the matter of sustainability, thus, it is part of the product and it becomes an idea Patagonia sells, and arguably a commodification is taking place. Adding to this commodification Patagonia also informs at the top of the page that they use paperless shipping, which emphasizes, that when you purchase something from them, then you are saving paper and thereby trees.

Furthermore, scrolling down on Patagonia's homepage, they use words and phrases like "energy", "consuming less energy", "wasting less water", "creating less trash", "Impact", "Planet", "Preservation", and "restoration of natural environment" (p.2-3), which all can be associated with the environment and how it is treated, which is arguably connected with the matter of sustainability. Many of these words and phrases are used at the bottom of the page, and they inform about Patagonia's dimensions of being a responsible business, thus, two headlines are as following "We guarantee everything we make" and "Know how your clothes are made" (p.3). What is interesting is that they do not once mention sustainability on their websites' homepage rather Patagonia dig a bit more into the measurements needed to be sustainable by voicing that water waste should be lessened and the same goes with trash or restoring natural environments (p.3), hence sustainability is implicitly present in Patagonia's discourse, and in this regard, it creates a green discourse.

What is noteworthy is that when it comes to Patagonia and their inclusion of the sustainable measurements, they use two pronouns a lot, respectively 'we' (p.2-3) and 'our' (p.1, 3), which create a sense of togetherness. Because Patagonia does not separate the company's actions from the consumers, rather they assemble them and say that the firm and the consumers are in this together. Such as when Patagonia writes "*our* ability to rapidly change *our* behavior" (p.1) when it comes to actions toward sustainable oceans. Another example is a heading they have saying "We – The power" and underneath "The future of energy is community-owned" (p.2) is written. Once again Patagonia is figurative in their words. Thus, they talk about the usage of energy and create the parallel of that 'we' are the same as power, so it becomes a metaphor which can both be understood as the power in the people but also the power of energy, and the following phrase emphasize this notion and connects it by talking about energy as community owned. Additionally, interdiscursivity (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 62) can also be seen in the "We – The power" phrase, thus, it arguably borrows from the structure of the U.S. Constitutions Preamble "We the people" (Interactive Constitution, n.d.). These textual decisions create a sense of community regarding the matter of

energy, where arguably, sustainability lies indirectly in the phrase 'the future of energy'. So, a community discourse regarding sustainability is shaped through the use of especially pronouns and other lexical choices.

Step 2 – Visual and Sound Level

When looking at the visual level one of the first things that meet you when entering the website is a large photo of a somewhat scenic landscape and the ocean and then the slogan "Changing Seas" in white (p.1). There are some green plants in the photo, but then there are also many areas that appear futile in this landscape. The colors of the picture are not bright, but rather they are downplayed a bit like there is a filter of smock over it, which could be a way of symbolizing the pollution consumption creates.

Patagonia may purposively have chosen a downplayed picture of nature that is not too scenic to support their narrative about the impacts of human consumption. If they really wanted to support that narrative, then they could also have used a picture of the contaminated sea, but that might have been too much and would scare off their consumers. So, one can think that to maintain the consumers and make them support a change of behavior Patagonia has used a somewhat neutral picture, yet it sends a message that things could be better. This mode supports the green discourse concerning sustainability and enforces the commodification of sustainability. Because it visualizes what people are encouraged to help, particularly portrayed through the blue sea, even though it is downplayed it is the blue color along with the green, that creates the idea of a sustainable nature which one could be contributing to if supporting Patagonia's campaign "Changing Seas".

What should be further mentioned in the visual mode is that the community discourse is further supported by the font size of 'we' (p.2). It is written in a much larger font compared to everything else written on the homepage. Since it comes in connection to the sustainable matter of energy, the font size emphasis that Patagonia sees sustainable measurement as something everyone is or should be in on, and for those agreeing on this matter, it becomes easier to buy into when creating this community discourse.

Scrolling almost down to the bottom of the homepage a completely black background emerges with the information, written in white (p.3), about how Patagonia is being a responsible brand, referring to their sustainable measurements. Using black and white as the only colors here creates a sense of seriousness, and arguably a sense of credibility because Patagonia is not "playing" around when it comes to the matter of taking responsibility. This can be supported by

Kress and Van Leeuwen's notion about real and ideal because at the top of Patagonia's homepage they have the large and scenic picture with the slogan "Changing Seas" (p.1), which can be seen as the ideal. Thus, ideally, Patagonia wants people to tap into the idea of changing their consumption behavior and thereby help the sea. Then at the bottom, they present how they as a firm are acting responsible and are taking action toward sustainable measurements (p.3) and how they offer sustainable choices to the consumer, however, it might not be so exciting and thrilling for the receiver, because it is factual and thereby identifiable as the real. But this composition creates some credibility regarding that sustainability is something Patagonia as a firm is pursuing, and they are transparent in their actions.

Showing more openly what sustainable measurements, the brand take might just be informative and comply with notions of CSR, but on the other hand, showcasing it on the homepage might be a purchasing factor for consumers and thereby a commodification. So, the interplay between the ideal and real, can arguably be seen as a commodification of sustainability, because Patagonia appears genuine in their discourse concerning sustainability, and the fact that they have a large focus on sustainability becomes a reason for purchasing Patagonia's items, hence a commodification.

Subsequently, Patagonia commodifies sustainability, even though they do not mention the specific word. But through their different modes of communication, they create discourses, respectively the green and community discourse, where receivers of these discourses can be prone to support and purchase from this brand because they know they would also support sustainable initiatives then. A commodification of sustainability is present because that would be a by-product of buying from Patagonia.

Step 3 – Comparison of Levi's and Patagonia:

An interesting thing to take note of is that both firms used white text in their implicit messages concerning sustainability, respectively in Levi's' video and Patagonia's "Changing Seas", this could symbolize the purity of their message because white symbolizes clarity and the fight for what is right (Sensational Color, n.d.). Pursuing sustainable measurements is arguably the right thing to do, and by using white the brands send a message that sustainability is something they truly pursue as brands or that is what they want people to believe.

Both homepages of the brands created a green discourse, where both of them used the visual mode, and Patagonia particularly also did it through their choice of words, which enabled a

commodification of sustainability by both firms. What was interesting was that Patagonia created a community discourse where one got a sense that Patagonia saw themselves and the consumers as a unit that could manage sustainability issues together. Whereas the discourse from Levi's was a bit more separating as they voiced clearer what the consumers should do, and not so much what they did themselves other than weaving sustainability into the company.

Moving further into that notion, there was also the difference of that Levi's write the actual word "sustainability" on their homepage, whereas Patagonia does not, rather they go more into detail concerning the actions they take, which can be considered sustainable and describe them. Hence, their communication concerning sustainability actually becomes more concrete compared to Levi's, which just uses the word, without giving any information about how they are sustainable. In some sense, how Patagonia is being more informative in their sustainable actions on their websites, arguably signals that they are not afraid to be "boring" and perhaps it seems more genuine in how Patagonia promotes sustainability compared to Levi's, because it seems like Levi's go through a whole lot, by making the video, to create this sustainable discourse, whereas Patagonia simply informs. However, they are both commodifying sustainability to an extent, because Patagonia has actually created a collection that is branded as putting a focus on the impact consumption has on seas and how consumption behavior should change, and Levi's are using nature in the visual mode to create this green discourse and telling the consumers to buy better, embracing Levi's as the "better". So, they have similar discourses that create this commodification, but how these discourses are shaped and by what elements and modes differs. Arguably, the visual played a large role for Levi's whereas it was more the textual mode for Patagonia.

Instagram

Appendix C – Fredesblog – Advertisement for Adidas

Step 1 – Textual Level

The influencer Fredesblog has made a collaboration with Adidas concerning their sneakers model Stan Smith, and for that reason, she has made a post on Instagram. Looking at the textual level of her post one can see that sustainability is not mentioned, however, it is implied in how she presents that Stan Smith will now have "… an upper part made in recycled polyester, as a part of adidas goal of only using recycled polyester, called primegreen, in 2024" (p. 1). The word 'recycled' is used twice and is arguably highly linked with sustainable efforts, so sustainability is indirectly present. Furthermore, she states that Adidas as a company has a goal that by 2024, they will only use

recycled polyester, which they call 'primegreen'. When Adidas uses green in the name of this polyester it also sends the signal that this is good for nature and the environment, thus, they are easily associated with one another. Thereto comes that Adidas combine it with 'prime', which indicates that this material could not be better, so combining it with 'green' it is easy to believe that this must really be sustainable material and if you want to do good by the planet then one should buy these sneakers because they are sustainable, hence a commodification of sustainability is created, through this green discourse.

The commodification is also enforced by the use of respectively a green and white heart emoji (p. 2), where green represents progress and is a symbol of rebirth (Sensational Color, n.d.), and connecting that with the purity of the white color a narrative is arguably shaped, where one supports the progress of sustainability and are thereby doing good by purchasing these sneakers. Additionally, Fredesblog makes use of an interesting hashtag "#endplasticwaste" (p. 2), which supports the green discourse creating the commodification. When making a hashtag on social media it can create a movement among her followers, so it encourages them to stop plastic waste and be part of the change, which they for instance can be if supporting Adidas. Notable is that Adidas as a brand is behind the name 'primegreen' and the goal they have set, where Fredsblog becomes an outlet for this information. But choosing the heart emojis is probably her choice, and the hashtag might be Fredesblog's own making or something Adidas promotes along with their 'primegreen' initiative.

One can say that the structure of her text, which is underneath the picture she posted, has an ideal and real structure (p. 2). Because she starts out with this dreamy and playful narrative claiming that "Good coffee and good sneakers" are the most essential items in the morning. One might think that sneakers would not be just as important as perhaps brushing your teeth in the morning, but she makes it personal by talking about the coffee, while she also draws attention to the product she is paid to advertise for. So, this is the ideal part of the text, but then at the end, she becomes more informative and talks about Adidas' goal of being more sustainable, which can be seen as the real because it has this informative level, and some might not find it so interesting. Though arguably, the ideal should not only be coffee and sneakers, the ideal is also sustainable products which Adidas' primegreen pursues, and in that sense, the whole post becomes the ideal. This composition and context of social media might be a factor for having influencers promote companies or their products. Because the influencers can create a certain narrative and a more

personal one, which can become ideal for those who follow the influencer because they look up to them and are inspired by the influencers.

Additionally, Fredesblog is able to create this more personal sentiment because she is promoting Adidas on her own personal Instagram platform, and she also does it by using evaluative wording, such as 'favorite silhouettes' and the personal pronoun 'my' and just before those expressions she expressed 'good sneakers' followed by a red heart emoji (p. 2), which implicitly refers to Adidas or at least their Stan Smith model. This all establishes this personal discourse which helps enforce why one should not only buy the sneakers because they are good, but also because then you are sustainable, and you end plastic waste, equaling a commodification of sustainability.

In this case, it is arguably the green discourse in the textual level that creates the commodification, however, it is supported by the personal discourse Fredesblog creates by using her persona in the textual and especially the visual mode. Hence, the personal discourse makes the promotion of the Adidas Stan Smith sneaker more relatable and people might buy into it because they want to be like her, which also entails buying partially recycled sneakers, thus people are buying into the commodification of sustainability.

Step 2 – Visual and Sound Level

Looking at the visual level, the personal discourse from Fredesblog continues. Because what is interesting about the six pictures in this post is that it is mostly Fredesblog who is in focus, and the shoes take up very little space in this post. In total, she posted six pictures with this post, and the last picture is the only one precisely of the sneakers (p. 7), still covered partially by a dog and in three of the pictures, one can barely see the sneakers or not at all (p. 3, 5, 6). Rather it is pictures of her standing in her kitchen preparing and drinking her coffee and playing around with her dog.

An argument for doing it that way may be because Fredsblog does not want the post to look like an advertisement and that she is receiving money for promoting Adidas sneakers, other than she is textually stating that it is an advertisement. But visually, she wants to catch the receiver's attention so they are enchanted by this visual narrative about her morning routine and playing with her dog because it might be easier for people to buy into that visual story instead of a heavier visual story that was more direct about the recycling matters of the sneakers. One can say that it is almost as if Fredeblog uses her morning routine as a tool to make the story about the recycled sneakers more edible for her followers. This is similar to what has been established in the

literature review, that some markets try to connect other things with sustainability, such as health, so the matter of sustainability becomes more tolerable or interesting to buy into, and a morning routine is on the lighter scale, but perhaps effective, because everyone has one, even when they do not.

A commodification is not really present at the visual level in Fredesblog's post, however, it is interesting to take note of how she is portrayed in a bright and mostly white kitchen, while also wearing a white blouse and light blue pants. The light and white colors create this sense of good and purity, and combined with the text about recycled polyester, it enforces that when buying those sneakers now, then you are doing a good deed. Because you are buying partially recycled sneakers, and are thereby being sustainable – so, sustainability becomes a selling point for purchasing the sneakers.

Appendix D – Emilysalomon – Advertisement for Copenhagen Municipality
Step 1 – Textual Level
The Instagram post from Emilysalomon is a collaboration with Copenhagen municipality about sorting trash, where she is promoting the matter of sorting trash and giving information about how to do so.

At the beginning of her text, she states that her husband has questioned why she wanted a picture in front of the dumpster (p.1), which creates a personal level because she lets the viewer into her personal life by incorporating her husband. Moreover, in the first paragraph, Emilysalomon is present in the textual level by using the personal pronouns of 'I' (p.1) and 'my' (p.1), and she names herself 'Madam trash' (p.1), so a personal discourse is quickly established. In the first paragraph there is a sense of informality established through the use of her character in the text, and how she uses the proverb 'call a spade a spade' (p.1), which is a jokingly transition over to what she wants to talk about, seen in how she then follows up with 'or trash for trash' (p.1).

Then the narrative slowly switches, which is accomplished by Emilysalomon asking "Or should one?" (p.1), because that question insinuates that trash might be more than just trash. Following this question, there is a transition between her being present in the text and then moving over to being more informative about how trash is resourceful, and she states that it is something she wants to highlight in collaboration with Copenhagen's municipality (p.1), along with how she prompts sorting trash as "…a great and somewhat easy new year's resolution, if you haven't started yet" (p.1) which creates agency in her message. Then in the next paragraphs, she becomes

informative about what effects sorting trash can have on the planet, such as "And 1 kg recycled plastic saves the climate for 1,5 kg CO2." (p.1). And she then starts to give recommendations about how to sort and treat trash, like "You do NOT need to rinse plastic, glass and metal before you throw it in the containers" followed by an OK-hand sign emoji (p.1), the capital lettering of 'not' is arguably to make it clear and emphasize to the receivers that it is very easy to recycle. These exemplars arguably shape an informative green discourse concerning recycling and sustainability, as Emilysalomon herself connects it with when she writes "Ps. Check out the story highlight 'Sustainable' for more waste talk and other (recyclable emoji)" (p.1).

What is interesting about this transition in her narrative is, that in the first paragraph where she is being personal, no emojis were used. However, as she moves into the more informative level of her text, emojis are used often (p.1), which could be seen as Emilysalomon trying to loosen up these heavier pieces of information, and still to some extent showing her presence in the text and maintaining a sense of informality. But sometimes the emojis are also used to enforce what she is saying, or it acts as a little treat for the reader. Such as when she uses the hand-clapping emoji (p.3), after asking the readers of this message to fold their cardboards, which implies that it is a good thing to do and she is figuratively applauding those who do this. Additionally, Emilysalomon also uses figurative text, like calling people a 'trash-hero' (p.1) if they fold up the cardboard while recycling or the metaphor of 'tighten our buttocks' (p.1), referring to that people should act on and engage in recycling, and to maintain a good mood while asking people to tighten their reins, she also uses the peach emoji, which is a jokingly reference to the buttocks. So, this somewhat informal tone is still maintained while being informative, which also fits well with the medium of social media.

Arguably, influencers are a brand in themselves that promotes things they like and additionally gets money from other brands to promote their products. What can be argued when going through Emilysalomons text is that she creates a discourse where there is asserted value to the activity of sorting trash and recycling, as she claims that "…sorting one's trash can therefore pay off,.." (p.1), which can be seen as a sustainable initiative and behavior, that is of value. So, because there is asserted value to the matter of sorting trash and to trash, one can say that a possible commodification is present.

Emilysalomon as a brand, arguably believes in the matter of recycling, which is a sustainable action, and she promotes it in collaboration with Copenhagen municipality, and one can say that what is exchanged and of value in this instance is knowledge about the sustainable initiative

of recycling. It can to some extent, therefore, be seen as her promoting knowledge about recycling, and thereby sustainability, on behalf of Copenhagen municipality but also herself. Those who receive this information can choose to buy into this message and act on it, and that can arguably be seen as commodifying sustainability to an extent. Hence, by following the recommendations she puts out there, one is implicitly buying into a more sustainable future because that is arguably what sustainable actions can entail. So, by using this personal discourse along with this informative green discourse about recycling she in some sense sells the idea, that people should be sustainable just like she is.

Step 2 – Visual and Sound Level

One picture accompanied Emilysalomon's post on Instagram and depicts her standing outside in front of several dumpsters (p.2). She is putting some trash in one of the dumpsters while looking pleased towards the camera. She is wearing earthy colors in terms of a softened green coat and beige pants, which creates this downplayed look. Additionally, there are some green bushes or trees to her left side, and to her right, there are a weaved nature basket and a green basket standing on the ground. The downplayed earthy coloring look and these other elements create this more down-to-earth setting and bring a small sense of nature vibes, and it is relatable compared to if she was standing there in stilettoes and glitter.

She is positioned in the middle of the picture which puts her and her action in focus, hence she is throwing out trash and recycling, and that was the important message she wanted to promote. Her posture creates a sense of agency which supports her textual mode, hence, in Emilysalomon's case the main message is to sort trash and visually she accomplishes that, but arguably there would not be the same agency in her discourse if she left out the textual mode. One can say that in this post, it is the text that is foregrounded because that is where the essential part of the communication is obtained, however, the visual mode through the picture, supports the textual level and visualizes what she is talking about – sorting trash and it exemplifies a person doing it. Moreover, it exemplifies her doing it, which makes it more relatable, and people following her will perhaps find her inspirational and an argument can be that they are more likely to sort trash when they see a person like her doing so, and it perhaps becomes more persuasive.

A commodification is not per se present in the visual mode; however, her personal discourse is one of the elements that helps establish the commodification of knowledge about recycling and thereby also sustainability, and the personal discourse is present in the visual mode by

posing and sorting trash on the picture herself. Along with the transition into the more informative green discourse at the textual level about recycling, these are elements that arguably create a commodification or at least a sense of a commodification.

Step 3 – Comparison of Fredesblog and Emilysalomon

What is interesting about the Instagram posts from respectively Fredesblog and Emilysalomon is that, on the visual mode, a commodification is not really present. An argument for that could be that often on the platform of Instagram, the influencers show off their daily lives and it is often the picture that needs to catch the follower's attention, and still be true to the style that the influencer uses on her/his platform. So, if the picture were too staged and filled with effects, then people would perhaps not relate to it. If they were in a studio staged and perhaps surrounded by waste that would not fit the visual image they have on their profile, as Emilysalomon herself states just by standing by the dumpster "This might be the first and last time with a picture of dumpsters here on my 'nice' feed" (Appendix D, p.1). Additionally, such a staged picture might also scare the followers off, whereas these everyday pictures are a sneaky way to send a message.

These pictures are of course also staged, but differently and are more down to earth. But that might also depend on the type of influencer one is, because some people are on the platform to see the lavish life of some influencers or famous people. But arguably these two women are not that type of influencers and that might also be the reason why Adidas and Copenhagen municipality has collaborated with these women to promote their cause or product. Because these women have the followers, whom the brand and institution want to gain attention from. Hence, these influencers might have followers, who are more likely to buy into sustainable actions and perhaps also care more about the matter. Arguably, it is those people the brand and institution want to target, while perhaps gaining other's attention along the way.

The two influencers share some similarities in their promotion of sustainable initiatives. Visually, both influencers are located in the center of the frame, and they, therefore, become the center of attention, both maintaining the personal discourse which they then both obtain in the visual and textual mode by exposing themselves and using pronouns. Furthermore, they are both using informal language, for instance, seen in their use of emojis which sometimes also functions as a period. Additionally, they are also informative, thus, they share knowledge about the product or actions they are promoting, especially Emilysalomon shares a great bit of information about recycling, and both influences do it with the same build-up. Hence, they present their own

personal discourse at the beginning of the textual level and then they become informative, and that can arguably be seen as a strategy for captivating the followers because then they catch their attention through a personal discourse which then transforms into a more informative green one regarding sustainable matters. This can be seen as a smart move, because they may be more likely to actually get their message through to the followers.

Where the influencers differ, is in the matter of what they are promoting and how a commodification of sustainability occurs. Fredesblog is promoting Adidas' initiative about using recycled polyester in their production of sneakers, which, as argued creates a commodification of sustainability because that notion becomes a reason for purchasing the sneakers. However, Emilysalomons "product" is a bit different, because what she is promoting is not in itself a product, as the sneakers were, rather she is promoting knowledge and action regarding recycling. But Emilysalomon attaches value to the trash while exchanging knowledge about recycling, and thereby also sustainability, which is why it to some extent can be seen as a commodification. The fact that Emilysalomon is collaborating with an institution, in terms of Copenhagen municipality, also creates some differences, because one does not see the municipality as a brand, but in some sense, it is, because it also serves its citizens with services secured through the taxes they pay. So, the followers are buying into an action they should themselves act out, which they may do if they assert value to the action of recycling. One could therefore argue that a possible commodification of sustainability is happening through the action of sorting trash, but not in the sense as with Fredesblog. Because the exchange of value seen on Fredesblog, is perhaps clearer, whereas the exchange of value and what Emilysalomon "sells" is blurrier, not what she promotes, but more the commodification because 'knowledge about trash management', may not be seen as an obvious exchangeable notion.

TV commercials

Appendix E – H&M

Step 1 – Textual Level

The commercial starts with a female voice stating "A new way of rewarding our members" (p.2), and what follows is in written text and it states that in the spring of 2021 H&M will be launching "Conscious points" (p.2), and hereafter everything else is said by a female voice while subtitles are used, except from the last two statements. H&M targets a message towards the consumers saying, "Get points for making conscious choices" (p.3), and then they start to inform what actions will

generate these points. Such as "So, start the day in recycled polyester" (p.3) or "Use eco-friendly transportation in hemp waste" (p.4). The coordinating conjunction of 'so' is used to start the enumeration and emphasize these actions that H&M members should take, according to the firm, and what H&M defines as conscious actions. The word conscious means, according to Oxford Languages, being "aware of and responding to one's surroundings" (Oxford Languages, n.d.), which also corresponds well with the meaning of sustainability, for instance being aware of how the planet is treated. What can be extracted is that H&M has chosen to avoid the word sustainable and exchanged it with 'conscious' instead, thus, the actions H&M claim to be conscious of is what sustainable actions also would entail. Though, in the end, H&M does connect it with sustainability by writing in the video "Learn more about Conscious points at hm.com/sustainability" (p.7), hence here H&M does make the sustainable connection.

What is interesting is that H&M then talk about sustainable actions, without ever using the word, except at the end, and they in some sense create their own discourse about sustainability, because they use the word 'conscious' instead, but it still entails the same things as sustainable actions. So, when H&M says "A new way of rewarding our members" (p.2), it almost feels like a closed club for conscious consumers, and something you want to part of. Thus, it creates the sense that it is only 'our members' who can be part of this, and it can be extracted that it is those who consume from H&M who will get these conscious points. Hence, it can arguably create the sentiment that you need to be an H&M member to be sustainable and if you are, you will be rewarded for it. Therefore, one can argue that this creates a commodification of sustainability, because if supporting H&M and follow their recommendations, then one will also get these sustainable points, and be part of that movement.

This conscious discourse, shaping a commodification, is supported by other textual elements, enforcing the discourse. One can say that the language is informative because it informs about some sustainable actions the consumers can take, but it also carries agency in its expression, because at the same time it tells the consumers what they should do, which is seen in the use of the imperative verbs 'take', 'use', (p.4) and 'wear' (p.5). Additionally, this agency concerning what actions the consumers can take is also seen in how H&M use pronouns to address the consumers, as seen in these examples "Take your own shopping bag to town (25 points)" (p.4) or "And recycle your unlucky underwear (100 points)" (p.5). By using the pronoun of 'your' it thereby becomes more personal, because H&M calls out specifically what you can do to pursue this sustainable behavior which H&M promotes, enabling the 'you' discourse. Agency is further seen in how H&M

ends the video by writing "Let's change fashion" (p.6), thus the contraction of the verb 'let' and the pronoun 'us' creates a sense of action and that both the consumers and the company are on this journey of pursuing sustainable actions together, creating a more united discourse in the end, and that can be a sentiment to buy into. Thus, if a goal as a consumer is to be more sustainable, then they might buy into this idea of changing fashion through sustainable initiatives and actions, leading to a commodification because value is asserted to that idea.

Furthermore, H&M is also playful in their narrative, as seen in the exemplar about 'unlucky underwear' (p.5) which arguably is a metaphor for not having success in the dating arena, as this example is supported visually by a man and a woman jumping around in their underwear. Thereto comes how a woman figuratively says, "Foresee the future in recycled nylon (349 points)" (p. 6), which can be seen as a metaphor for that when wearing recycled nylon, you can then look into the future because you are preserving the future by making the sustainable choice of wearing recycled nylon. This playfulness creates a sense of informality making it more relatable along with the use of pronouns, and it arguably shapes a balance to the recommendations made by H&M, some of them in an imperative form. These are instruments that add to the desire of wanting to buy into this conscious discourse.

Another thing to notice is how H&M also writes down the number of points each action will give, as seen in the examples above. These points can arguably function as a treat and be a reason to engage in such conscious or sustainable behavior, which is arguably the aim for H&M. What is further interesting, is that the exemplars given about being sustainable are a mix of being centered around clothing, such as 'wear Tencel' (p.5) or 'start the day in recycled polyester' (p.3), but some are about other than clothing such as "Take your own shopping bag to town" (p.4), though it may be connected to clothing shopping or "Use eco-friendly transportation in hemp waste"(p.4), so in that sense, it is not necessarily their own products which are in focus, as being the only sustainable element. Adding the concept of the conscious points, one gets the feeling that H&M is just as interested in selling the idea of sustainability as they are in selling products. It almost appears like their commercial is more about selling the idea of being sustainable, perhaps due to the representation of the conscious points, rather than it is about selling H&M products, hence a commodification of sustainability is present, but they still include their actual products in the narrative.

Step 2 – Visual and Sound Level

Moving on to the visual level, what meets the eye within the first two seconds is a large green tree and a blue sky and a woman blowing on a dandelion (p.2), while one hears a female voice say "A new way of rewarding our members", and then the rest of the scenes are shot in urban areas, within homes and in a store containing crystals, depicting people doing different things in these settings. So, there is not that much nature present other than in the beginning. Though, what is noticeable is, that in every location a green plant is present at some point, so H&M does make sure to maintain the idea of nature at a lowkey level. Arguably the tree and the woman, in the beginning, blowing on the dandelion helps set the tone and connects consciousness or sustainability with nature.

The notion about doing sustainable actions does not become too out of reach, because H&M exemplifies it in somewhat relatable settings. Thus, the models are in a city, walking their dog there and moving items, or talking to a friend while sitting in the bathtub, and in general, they have playful interactions. Whereas, if they were running around on a field the message and promotion of sustainable behavior would arguably seem more out of reach, so seeing the models do everyday things makes it more relatable. This taps into and supports the more personal sentiment that was created at the textual level by the use of pronouns.

One thing is also clear on the visual level and that is, that what H&M talks about they show or the other way around. So, when they say, "Take your own shopping bag to town." (p.4), we see a woman walking her dog who is carrying a bag in its mouth, which resembles what they say in a playful manner. Or when they say "Wear Tencel when exploring the great outdoors" (p.5), one cannot specifically see that the women in that scene are wearing Tencel, but one can assume so, also because the points collected for that action pops up and when they are on the screen, the clip also pauses for a second, as they do with every example, which creates the sense of approval about this statement. Additionally, seeing people do these things strengthens the 'you' discourse. Another interesting example is when H&M state "Foresee the future in recycled nylon" (p.6). Because it showcases a woman looking through a glass ball or crystal, which arguably can be associated with a fortune teller, which further emphasizes the metaphor of foreseeing the future and how conscious choices are important for the future. Which arguably is a notion H&M wants the consumer to buy into, creating the commodification.

Interesting sound elements are also used, and one is heard at the beginning of the commercial when they clip to the tree, thus, what one can hear under the tune playing, is chippering birds and that enforces the connection to nature, which H&M try to establish in the beginning.

Thereto comes that when the conscious points pop up on the screen, then one can also hear a little bell ring which makes one think they are doing good. Thus, there would be approval in the sustainable actions or purchases, in terms of the clothing, H&M recommends. Furthermore, having a narrator throughout the commercial, stating H&M's message also makes the statements stand stronger and easier to get captivated by, compared to if it was only text, thus one can be looking away from the TV, but still receive the message. Both having H&M's message verbally and textually present, once again in white color, arguably also strengthens the message, and the white color of the text creates a sense of purity and cleanness.

In some sense, H&M is very transparent in their message, because the visual mode and the textual/speech mode support each other. Sustainability is present in H&M's communication, however, it is just hidden or blurred behind the brands' use of the word 'conscious', because it quickly becomes clear, that H&M encourages sustainable behavior through the 'you' discourse and a way to pursue that is by buying supposedly sustainable clothing products, preferably from them. Thus, through the 'you' and united discourse it comes across as if you are buying H&M, then you are sustainable, equaling a commodification of the matter. Because H&M does use sustainability, though the conscious discourse, as an argument to why one should buy their products, and H&M asserts value to the matter through their conscious points.

Appendix F – PFA Pension Fund

Step 1 – Textual Level

In the commercial from the Danish pension fund, PFA, one sees a young woman walking through the woods while talking to the camera, and it quickly becomes clear that the commercial has climate change and the wellbeing of the planet in mind, thus, the woman mentions it in her first line "Who would like to have all of us think about the climate and our planet."(p.1). However, the word sustainability in not once mentioned, but implicitly it is present already from the beginning due to the woman talking about climate change and the planet. So, between the lines, sustainability is present through the whole commercial. After stating her concern for the climate and planet, she moves over to showing gratitude for climate friendly or sustainable actions as resembled in the next examples "So, I say thank you for meat free days – thank you." or "And hey, thanks to you with the electric car." (p.1), which can be seen as sustainable behavior and actions she is grateful for.

Adding to the examples above, what is interesting is that a narrative is created as if she is speaking on behalf of her whole generation concerning the matter of climate, as seen in how

she introduces herself in the beginning, shown here "I am a voice from next generation." (p.1), and then follows her appreciation to those who are taking action, a little action, but action as seen her "All of that reduces CO2, a bit, but good." (p.1). Then comes a transition in the narrative through the use of a phrase starting with the coordinating conjunction of "But your pension can do even more for my future." (p.1). What happens here is that she asks other generations to contribute to the matter of sustainable behavior, thus she starts to use the pronouns 'you' and 'your' to tell people that they can do even more to pursue sustainable initiatives or actions, as seen in this example "You see, at PFA you can invest your pension extra climate-friendly." (p.1). This establishes a sense of the 'you' discourse because she recommends what the viewer additionally can do concerning sustainable actions.

It is arguably in this transition in the narrative that one can see a commodification of sustainability. It can in some sense be seen as an openly commodification. Because PFA encourages people to invest climate friendly, which is a possibility at PFA, so it is almost like you can purchase sustainability at PFA, and that can arguably be seen as a commodification of sustainability. What PFA say is that if you invest your pension in climate-friendly initiatives and thereby sustainable initiatives then in exchange you get next-generation kindness, seen in how the young woman follows up with this statement "That is kindness or maybe rather next-generation kindness" (p.1), and the next generation can be seen as valuable or value is created for the next generation by investing in matters relating to climate change.

The spoken language and written language in the commercial are somewhat simple, though it is somewhat informative about what can be seen as sustainable actions, and about the matter of being climate friendly through investments. The language is rather plain, and the only metaphor used is when the young woman says she is the voice of a generation. But arguably, what makes this language stand out is the use of pathos, which is one of the three modes of persuasion (MasterClass staff, 2021). Thus, there is an appeal to kindness and thinking about future generations, by pursuing sustainable behavior and investments, and PFA's intention is arguably to evoke feelings in those who see this commercial, so they thereby buy into this idea of sustainable behavior.

There is a sense of a us vs. them/you narrative, shaped in the way how the young woman represents a voice of the next generation, being the 'us', and then there is the narrative about what 'you' or 'them' can do to help 'us' or the next generation. This narrative arguably then evolves into the overall discourse about humanity or kindness, which was initiated at the beginning

of the commercial by talking about 'generations' and then this kindness discourse is rounded up as the commercial ends on the written statement, which the young woman also states seconds earlier, "Next-generation kindness" (p.1). So, there is created this discourse of kindness, where the aim is to encourage people not only to make sustainable choices in their everyday life but also to invest sustainably. Thus, that is a sustainable choice which is beneficial for everyone and humanitarian. This humanitarian or kindness discourse supports the commodification of sustainability because the idea of being good to the planet and thereby its citizens can arguably be appealing and be something that people want to buy into.

Step 2 – Visual and Sound Level
Looking into the visual level PFA basically visualizes what the young woman is talking about, to the extent possible, so PFA show what they say or say what they show. The commercial starts with the young woman looking directly into the camera in a closeup and then they slowly zoom out (p.2), this is arguably to put a face on this next generation she is referring to, making it relatable for people. As the camera zoom out one can see that the location of the video is a forest, and it showcases the young woman walking down a path while encountering people replicating the sustainable actions she talks about, respectively, a couple eating dinner with no meat (p.2) and a woman with her electric car (p.3). From each of these two encounters, the young woman receives a small red balloon. What is noticeable is that when she has received those small balloons, then just as she also makes the verbal transition of "But your pension can do even more for my future.", she also walks towards a staged door and opens it (p.3). This door arguably represents that she is opening the door to new possibilities, hence the possibility of investing in climate-friendly measurements, and thereby sustainability, which is what she verbally expresses as she walks through the door and also receives a third and larger red balloon.

Arguably, there is symbolism in the red balloons. As one can argue that the balloons represent the climate friendly and sustainable actions one can partake in, and each of the sizes represents the effect those actions can have. Thus, those two balloons she receives from the meat-free couple and the woman with the electric car are small, just as she verbally also says the actions are, hence "All of that reduces CO2, a bit, but good." (p.1). Whereas the investment is seen as an even better and perhaps more effective sustainable action, thus, she receives a larger balloon, when mentioning that (p.4). This adds to the commodification of sustainability because PFA wants the viewer to see that investing climate-friendly and thereby being sustainable, is even better, and you

and others get more out of it, hence the large balloon. Additionally, the balloons are also given to the young woman, which could be a symbol of saying that climate friendly and sustainable actions are something that we share and give to each other, and benefits everyone which fits with the discourse of kindness, which PFA also verbally express through pathos. Moreover, it is also interesting that the color red has been chosen for the balloons, because red is a powerful color and can be emotionally charged and induce feelings of both love and anger (Sensational color, n.d.). In this case, the red color of the balloons arguably represents the power to invest in the future, but also the love for the future, and it supports the discourse of kindness that has been established.

   As mentioned, the whole commercial takes place in a forest, and this arguably establishes a connection to nature and therefore also climate change, because that is one of the things that can be affected by a non-sustainable behavior. So, along with the actions, the young woman says thank you for, and how it is recommended to invest climate-friendly and this very nature-heavy setting, a green discourse is arguably shaped. Furthermore, the young woman is walking forward and down a path in the forest throughout the commercial, while taking some small detours when thanking people. This motion can arguably be seen as her symbolically walking towards a more sustainable future obtained by the actions demonstrated. As she says her last line into the camera "That is kindness or maybe rather next-generation kindness", she stops walking and the camera starts to zoom out (p.4), which can be seen as PFA saying that one should look at the larger picture, and everything we do can contribute to a climate-friendly and sustainable future.

   On top of that, there is calming piano music playing in the commercial, while one also can hear chippering birds throughout the commercial which also contributes to this green discourse. Arguably, the purpose with the green discourse is that the receivers start to associate the sustainable actions applauded in the beginning and the recommendation of investing climate friendly with how those actions are good for the planet, our climate and nature which is visually represented, and that enhance the commodification of sustainability.

   Subsequently, it is the discourse of kindness and the green discourse, which is well represented in the visual mode, that PFA uses and thereby creates a commodification of sustainability. Thus, through those discourses, PFA enforces and shapes the idea of investing climate-friendly, which suggests a commodification of sustainability. So if investing as PFA recommends, then one also buys into the idea of being climate-friendly, which entails sustainability.

Step 3 – Comparison of H&M and PFA

When going through the two commercials from respectively, H&M and PFA, they share some similarities. One of them is that they show what they say, or they say what they show. Thus, the verbal mode and the visual mode, appear to be almost equally present in each commercial, and the communication from each mode supports each other and enforces the brand's messages, which are concerned with sustainability. Though the exact word is only written once in H&M's commercial and not present in PFA's, however, it is implicitly present in both. A possible reason for why the verbal and visual mode is highly present in both of these commercials might be due to the medium of the TV, thus, the brands want to get people's attention and by touching on the two senses of hearing and seeing, they have the chance to empower their message and catch the viewers' attention.

One can also argue, that in a tv commercial the message should be somewhat clear because people do not have time to sit and think about the message. If it is too abstract, then you lose the viewer, but then on the other hand, sometimes when the commercial does not make sense, that is when you remember them best. However, the purpose in these two commercials is arguably to get the sustainable message through – because the brands want to encourage sustainable behavior, but still through what they sell. In that sense, both commercials are informative in the regard to what the brands want the consumer to do, which benefits the brands.

Additionally, one can also say that H&M and PFA have made the matter of sustainability more graspable in their commercials. They have in some sense created a clearer described commodity that entails sustainability, respectively conscious points and climate friendly investments. Hence, buying into these ideas or concepts, created by the firms, shapes a commodification of sustainability, because if following what the companies say then one also sees value in the matter of sustainability, and it arguably becomes a consumption factor, entailing the commodification.

Even though the two commercials have a resemblance, it is still two different commercials and brands, and differences are present. One difference might be that H&M shapes their discourse through more playful instruments such as using more verbal metaphors or having a dog carrying a shopping bag. It creates a youthful and playful tone, also due to that all the models or actors used in the commercial are situated in playful or relaxed interactions, such as playing croquet on a rooftop or walking through the city with some moving boxes. Meanwhile, the models are also expressing that they are having a good time through their smiling faces, the mode of body language.

Whereas PFA is steadier in their tone, however, highly playing into people's feelings by talking about human kindness, making use of pathos. They only focus on the young woman as she drifts through the forest while having short interactions with the staged people, which creates a calmer pace compared to the H&M commercial. Arguably, this difference seen in the commercials could have something to do with the consumer group the companies are targeting, hence it might not be the same people that a clothing brand is targeting as a pension fund.

In some way, H&M and PFA are more transparent in their commodification of sustainability, because they are somewhat clear in their discourses which shapes the commodification. Though, H&M disguise its sustainable element by saying conscious instead, when they might as well have said sustainability. PFA is clear in their two discourse of green and kindness discourse, hence they talk about the sustainable actions one can take, enforcing the green discourse along with the setting in the woods, and the kindness discourse is somewhat explicit constructed by the young woman's verbal expressions and also to some extent the visual mode. Subsequently, it becomes rather clear that the two brands are promoting sustainability, and they want people to buy into their sustainable initiatives and discourses.

Step 4 – Comparison Across Mediums

First of all, what can be argued is that all of the brands are using segmentation, thus, they have noticed the larger demand for responsible and sustainable business conduct demanded by more consumers, as established in the literature review. What can be said is that these brands have noticed this demand and they then target and positions themselves through discourses that entail sustainability in one way or another, and that is when the commodification occurs, through differentiated approaches to sustainability, which is then happening across mediums.

For the purpose of presenting a common feature or simplify how sustainability is commodified across the different mediums, one can look at the overall discourses shaping the commodification. The analysis' of the six different cases, has led to that three overall discourses, established through the individual cases, can be extracted as overall discourses that create the commodification of sustainability. Hence, they are present one way or another in the different mediums. A common discourse that is present is the green discourse. The green discourse entails using a mode to either communicate or make a connection with nature and being informative concerning sustainable actions or behavior, whether sustainability is explicitly or implicitly present through a communicative mode. Then a common discourse is the one which can be identified as an

'us and you' discourse, which could be seen in how the company informs about their sustainable behavior or is more personal in their discourse, seen as the 'us' and then how the brand recommends others to behave concerning sustainable matters, the 'you'. Then there is the united discourse which often was established through the 'us and you' discourse, leading to a discourse of what the brand and the consumer can do together regarding sustainable actions.

These discourses were all part of shaping the commodification in each of the mediums, through different modes of communication, as exemplified through the individual analysis of each case. The green discourse was present in all in some way or another. The 'us and you' discourse were present in different ways in the mediums, thus, some emphasized the 'us' or 'me' more, and others the 'you' to a larger extent, but both were present. The discourse of unity differentiated in its level of presence, but all cases managed to establish at some point in their discourses, that being sustainable is a united action, however, Levi's, on the medium of homepages, was the only brand that did not accomplish to create a believable discourse of unity.

Some modes shaping the commodification could however be detected as being more present in some mediums. Thus, in the commercials, it was somewhat equal between the video/visual mode. On the social media platform of Instagram, it was mostly through the textual mode, that the influencers created a commodification. Then on the websites, it differentiated, partly due to Levi's use of the video, where the commodification was shaped almost equally through the textual, verbal, and visual level. Whereas Patagonia was stronger through their textual mode in shaping a commodification.

Nonetheless, it is not possible to simplify the commodification as being specific to each medium and its modes. Thus, they make use of the different discourses through different modes and it differentiated how the discourses and modes interacted with one another and shaped the commodification, as showcased in the individual analysis of the cases and the comparison within one medium.

However, taking Appadurai's three notions about how and when something can be considered a commodity is interesting to take on. Because Appadurai talks about how the third state of creating a commodity is concerned with the context in which one sees the commodity. Thus, when being introduced to these sustainable discourses, by the companies, through mediums where one is used to seeing branding efforts and it is mediums that represents the exchangeable idea of "we have what you want", then it becomes somewhat easy to shape a commodity out of sustainability, due to the context it is seen within - hence it is a commercialized context. Therefore,

it is also interesting to consider the matter of resemiotization to understand some similarities and differences because it is similar to Appadurai's notion.

The TV medium almost made equal use of the verbal mode and visual mode, more specifically the video mode, which is also expected from this mediums stage. Hence, they showed what they said or said what they showed. This equality between the two modes arguably strengthens the commodification, compared to the other mediums, where one mode was more dominant than the others. Because one can argue that the interplay between modes enhances the message the brands want to promote concerning sustainability and it becomes easier to create strong discourses concerning sustainability when playing on several modes, which people might feel attracted to and want to buy into. Thus, if looking into the social media platform, where the influences were interpreted, then it was arguably the textual mode that shaped discourses, which led to a commodification of sustainability. This discovery is rather interesting, since Instagram is mostly known to be a platform to post pictures on, so one would think that it would be the visual mode that was most noticeable regarding shaping a commodification, thus, that is what is culturally expected from that platform, taking note of resemiotization.

But looking into the practice of being an influencer, some of them might go for an image that is as down to earth as possible, and therefore are they also prone to use more down to earth images, as seen in how one is standing in front of the dumpster and the other is standing in her kitchen. So, when they are selling something that is more sustainable or the action of being sustainable, then they need to create a relatable discourse, why arguably both of them shaped a personal discourse and in connection with Fredesblog green discourse and Emilysalomons informative concerning sustainability, then they create a commodification of sustainability, but a more downplayed one. One can argue that consumers are not yet completely used to seeing influences as brands who also promote things, so perhaps the commodification was not as clear on Instagram and by the influencers. But that might also be effective, because then the consumers are more open to the branding that happens on a social media platform like Instagram, because they are not aware of it, to the same extent as one the other mediums. So, the influencers have the ability to be relatable and did not appear to use excessive means to catch their receiver's eyes, as when the communication came directly from the companies. The influencers were not as busy with positioning themselves as the companies were.

One could also argue, if considering the notion of resemiotization then, one could say that the commodification's were clearer and more open in the TV medium. The reason for that

might be that the context of the TV medium is a stage where one is used to being "persuaded" into buying things and that is why the commodification appears somewhat stronger in this medium, compared to the others. But it could also be the effect of using a video, because Levi's homepage showcasing a short video, also accomplished to create strong discourses surrounding the matter of sustainability, and thereby the commodification of it.

Looking into the website as a medium, it is also interesting to consider the matter of context and practice, as Iedema includes in the notion of resemiotization. Because the homepage of a brand has certain expectations asserted to it, thus, when entering a brand's homepage, then one expects promotional features, it is now just interesting that sustainability is one of them, and due to the brand's discourses and ways of presenting sustainability either explicit or implicit, then a commodification is shaped. Thus, when one enters a company website it is usually to buy something from the brand, so they are in the practice of shopping and if sustainability is of clear presence on the brand's homepage and it is presented as a factor to buy from this brand through discursive tools, then a commodification occurs, noting Appadurai's commodity phase of context. One can think that people are perhaps more prone to buy into this commodification, because they are already engaging in the practice of shopping, and for that reason, the commodification can appear clearer.

Another thing to make note of was Levi's use of the video mode and how it interplayed with the textual mode, thus, it created a sense that Levi's were not interested in presenting the exact sustainable actions they were taken as a company, and they just put the label of sustainability out there, hence the commodification appeared stronger. Whereas Patagonia was more informative in their actual actions pursuing sustainability, and thereto comes that they did not use the label of sustainability, so a commodification was still shaped, but a more lowkey one compared to Levi's. In that sense, it was two somewhat differentiated ways of commodifying sustainability on the website medium. Levi's is more similar to the approaches used in the TV medium, and Patagonia showcases elements both used by TV and influencers. However, it is not possible to lump each of the mediums altogether, when it comes to a commodification of sustainability, because they all differ from one another and to what extent different discourses are present.

The medium of which the six brands make use of to create this commodification is a resource to communicate about sustainability, but it is not the essence, rather the essence is how the

differentiated modes of communication can shape a commodification which consumers might buy into.

Discussion

Modes and Discourses

In the analysis, it is established that one cannot truly say that it is one mode more than another which shapes the commodification, because what the analysis of the six different brands showcased was, that it was largely the interplay between the established discourses, shaped by different modes that created the commodification and further enforced it. However, if an overview of the most used mode within a specific medium were desirable, then for the influencers, it was surprisingly the textual mode that mostly formed a commodification, which Patagonia, on the website medium, also could fall under. The two TV commercials and Levi's, also on the website medium, were more an equal mix of the verbal, textual, sound, and visual mode.

On one hand, one could say that it was the visual level that served as the largest commodifier because for example by using green plants in the Levi's video on their homepage, or by locating the PFA TV commercial in the middle of the woods, then the companies really incorporated nature into their discourse and tried to sell the idea of sustainability and thereby commodified it. But on the other hand, if Levi's and PFA were verbally talking about different matters, such as if Levi's removed the words of overconsumption in the video and PFA said invest your money in gasoline, then one would not think about sustainability, then perhaps one would just see at as pretty locations and one would not associate the visual mode with sustainability. Thus, arguably, it is the interplay among the different modes, that shapes the commodification in these analyzed cases, and furthermore, it is also up to the eye of those who see these commercials, homepages, or influencers, because some people might be more aware of the visual mode while others pay attention to the verbal or textual mode.

Thereto comes that when looking at the influencers, the commodification becomes somewhat blurry, because a clear commodification was not present the same way, as within the companies. It almost appeared as mere recommendations what they did, but that could also be due to that one is not used to acknowledging these people as brands, the same way as one is with actual brands. That is where the matter of resemiotization is interesting because the social construction of

what an influencer entails and can do is not necessarily clear, and one might not see them as actual brands, because having these influencers promoting various things is a somewhat new phenomenon. Furthermore, when regular brands move into the arena of social media disguised behind an influencer, it creates a new context for these companies to brand themselves, and likewise a new context and practice for how the consumers take in what is communicated by the brands through the influencers. For that reason, the commodification may not seem as present as within the other mediums. However, one could think that when it is both a brand and an influencer, who communicates regarding sustainability that could enforce the commodification, but since it is the mix of a somewhat regular person or at least a more relatable person along with a company, it might downplay the commodification, because it is not a context where one is usually used to experience branding.

Sustainability

Further, what is an interesting perspective to include is how all of the six analyzed brands managed to create discourses that created a commodification sustainability, to some extent. Because what is essential to remember is how there is no clear definition of what sustainability exactly entails. For this research, the matter of sustainability has been narrowed down to sustainability regarding the environment and what is categorized as green sustainability, and it has been the somewhat universal understanding of what is connected with green or sustainable consumption, such as recycling, buying less, the environment and purchasing so-called 'green' products (Littler, 2018: 92-3). These notions concerning sustainability have acted as indicators for what I would look for creating a commodification in the analysis. So, there is some understanding of how sustainability can be seen and understood, but it is not precise. However, the analyzed companies still managed to commodify sustainability, through various discourses, where especially the overall green discourse was a great instrument.

On one hand, it is great that the companies accomplish creating discourses that highlight sustainability when there is no clear-cut understanding of the matter. But on the other hand, one can also wonder if those are the right discourses, because are the companies the right actors, and are they using the right mediums to create this shared understanding of what sustainability is. Thus, what if the companies' discourses concerning sustainability create the wrong understandings of what sustainability entails, then it can become an issue. Especially, when company marketing is so widespread and reaches so many different people, because what if a

wrong discourse becomes the dominant one. Hence, Prothero and Fitchett (2000) mentioned that in the past, marketing strategies had success with creating commodity discourses, making people desire more commodities thinking that would equal happiness (50), which in some sense is what society is paying for now. Thus, one can wonder what happens if the companies do not succeed in shaping the right discourse concerning sustainable behaviors and products and what the consequences then will be. Hence the companies might be guiding the consumers in the wrong direction, unintentionally. Because the fact is that sustainability is to a large extent undefinable, and that can make one question what it really is that people are buying into when sustainability is commodified.

Additionally, what is also interesting about the matter of commodifying sustainability, is that sustainability is not tangible or easily visualized, while also having in mind, that no clear definition of the matter truly exists, then the commodification becomes even more complex. Thus, arguably, if a brand were commodifying the social matter of body positivity, then it might be easier to locate as a consumer because that would perhaps include using models in different sizes. But when a commodification of sustainability happens, it is arguably harder to comprehend and know exactly what subject you buy into. Because if taking the example of Levi's saying that they have 'woven' sustainability into their business, then the consumer might wonder in what regard. Because it can be 'sustainability' regarding that the company has now chosen that everyone within Levi's is now drinking from paper cups instead of plastic cups, thus, paper is arguably more sustainable. But it could also be that every material sourced for clothing production within Levi's is now 100% organic material. However, that is not easy to know as a consumer, when sustainability is just mentioned, and more details are not voiced. What further can be extracted from that is that sustainability as a label is somewhat easy to just attach to one's business, which can be seen as a problematic matter to which I will return.

Another thing to note is that if we were to look at sustainability and the essence of the matter, then it is concerned with respecting the earth's resources and acknowledging they cannot be used endlessly, while still paying attention to both present and future generation's needs. Then it can seem paradoxical that those actors, the companies, who are one of the largest contributors to the extraction of resources, while acknowledging that consumers also play a role, are selling the matter of sustainability by commodifying it. Because how can firms, who play an active role in overconsumption, promote sustainability. Thus, it seems somewhat ironic, that when you enter a homepage of a firm, who is branding sustainability, then you also have a tap saying 'Shop', which

is then contributing to even more consumption. Arguably the most sustainable thing, at least for the environment, would be not to shop at all. But it might then be a matter of creating discourses that then brand consumption in a more sustainable direction.

Branding

As established earlier, then we live in a society that is used to high branding efforts where people are constantly exposed to promotional features from companies and organizations. Furthermore, it has also been established that people are to a larger extent asking companies for more sustainable products and services, and it appears so after conducting the analysis that the companies have listened, to some extent. Because what the analysis shows is that a commodification of sustainability is present in all six cases, thus, the companies have through their communicative tools and branding efforts managed to create discourses that turn the idea of sustainability into a commodity one buys along with the products the company offers.

The companies intention might not have been to commodify sustainability or it might have. However, incorporating sustainability in a setting and practice of branding, where people are used to receiving promotional communication that the companies want people to buy into, creates a context where sustainability can easily be seen as a commodity. Thereto comes that the matter of sustainability has been an active choice in the branding strategy and perhaps also how the companies want to position themselves as sustainable actors or caring about sustainability, so in that sense, using sustainability in their marketing communication is on purpose.

Shaping sustainability as a commodity through branding efforts and discourses might both be a good and a bad thing, thus, taking in the context of where these commodification's of sustainability happens and the practice of it through branding is important. Because seeing sustainability as a commodity, might be a way to make it more edible for some people, especially because the matter is sneaked in through a commercialized context where people might be more receivable compared to if a politician was talking about the matter. But it might also be disregarded because people are used to receiving so many promotional features daily. Yet, because it is a somewhat new thing to include sustainability in branding and shaping it as a commodity, then it might be something that people pay more attention to. However, a problem might be if sustainability becomes a promotional feature and is only seen like that, due to the context these discourses are received in. Because when we talk about how there exists a commodity culture, which branding plays a large part in, then it might just be a matter of time before something new is

desired. Thereto also comes the fact that Kotler and Keller, among other scholars, talk about how branding is about differentiating and stand out as a brand. Then one can think that promoting sustainability is just temporary and a way for woke firms to stand out, position themselves and gain consumers. Though, since the consumers are asking for more sustainable business conduct and products, then promoting and to some extent sell sustainability as a by-product along with a more tangible product might be more than temporary.

CSR and Greenwashing

CSR is a relevant matter to include when talking about how brands commodify sustainability, because CSR is about how businesses can take responsibility in the society they exist within and give back, and the matter of sustainability is important in that regard. However, it has also been a criticized approach to business conduct, especially because it has had a reputation of being window dressing, and CSR initiatives were only pursued for reputational reasons. Yet, the main idea of business taking responsibility to pressuring societal issues is an important factor because that is what is expected to a larger extent nowadays, which is also seen in the alternative business approaches to CSR such as 'shared value' and 'brand activism'. Additionally, Prophero and Fitchett (2000), argue, as established in the introduction, that one way to combat environmental issues, where the matter of sustainability plays an important role, is to have companies and marketing efforts establish a green commodity discourse.

So, if considering these notions, one might say that the commodification of sustainability is a way of meeting these CSR-alike demands that is to a higher degree expected by consumers, and in some sense, it is a merch of a green commodity discourse and CSR elements. The commodification of sustainability by brands can be seen as a way to mainstream the matter through differentiated discourses, also considering its context of branding, and thereby make it more accessible.

On one hand, one can say that it is a good thing that CSR matters, like sustainability, are receiving more awareness and that companies are to a larger degree communicating about it. On the other hand, it might still be seen and received as something the companies do to look good and have a nice reputation, referring to the notion of window dressing. Because it becomes difficult to distinguish if the companies are true in how they communicate about sustainability, which also creates the commodification, or if it is simple branding and profit monger, leading to the notion of greenwashing. For that reason, it can also make one question the concept of green marketing,

because it is concerned with branding products or services 'presumed' to be environmentally friendly, which then also makes one return to the matter of what sustainability truly entails. Because it can make one wonder if the company is pursuing sustainability both within and outside the firm genuinely. Or are these sustainable discourses, creating the commodification, only constructed to make a profit and appear interested in sustainability, because segmentation shows that is what some people in society demand. For that reason, it can be confusing when there is no guidance or clarification of what can be considered as sustainable, and brands can thereby quickly be marked as greenwashing, even though, they were acting with their best intentions at heart.

What is further interesting to reflect on, is how the exact word sustainability was rarely voiced by any of the companies, as established in the analysis. One can think that it might be because the companies know that sustainability is a somewhat undefinable term, and using it, may therefore be problematic and it is not transparent in its understanding, since it can refer to many things. Thus, using the term sustainability without any description of exact actions can be seen as just using the label of sustainability and enabling a sense of greenwashing by the company. Another way to look at it could also be that when a company actively avoids using the term sustainability, then it can be seen as the company trying to dodge the label of greenwashing, even though, it might be what they are doing implicitly. An interesting exemplar from the analysis is H&M, who in their commercial used the word conscious instead of sustainability, which quickly popped up in the end. But that could be seen as H&M deliberately avoiding the word sustainability because they know it can be a loaded word. So, rather they make use of a different word, that still shapes the same understanding as if they had used sustainability, and implicitly they mention sustainable actions one can take or the products one can purchase from them.

What can be argued is that the sustainable actions or products become more believable when the exact sustainable actions or how the product is sustainable are communicated by the firm, and sustainability is not just attached as a simple label. It could be the case of more communication speaks louder than one word. Thus, what can be extracted from the findings, is that a recommendation for the companies could be to be more concrete and transparent when they communicate regarding sustainability in branding efforts. Also, so the commodification is at least clearer for the consumers. Thus, the companies should avoid using sustainability as a label and instead be more accurate about their own actions or what they want the consumers to do regarding sustainability, otherwise, it may appear as greenwashing and create a bad connotation towards the brands' CSR or similar efforts.

Reflections

In some ways, the commodification of sustainability is good because it puts the matter out there and, on the agenda, to the broader public, because we are all consumers and are daily exposed to diversified branding regarding various products. So why not take a pressuring societal matter, like that of what sustainability entails and create awareness, and make people buy into these discourses. But the negative aspect of commodifying sustainability is that sustainability is such a complex matter and undefinable. Therefore, it can be problematic to comprehend what we as consumers are buying into when brands commodify sustainability. But what could be seen in the analysis was, that PFA was selling sustainability through environmentally friendly investments. H&M was commodifying sustainability by communicating implicitly about how some of their products were sustainable and other actions one can take. The influencer Emilysalomon was in collaboration with Copenhagen municipality selling the action of sorting trash, and the other influencer Fredesblog was promoting Adidas' new initiative about wanting to use only recycled polyester by 2024. Patagonia was on their homepage communicating about human consumption, and what we as a society can do, and what they do as a firm, where the firm's discourses created a commodification of sustainability. These five cases were somewhat more concrete in what sustainable measurements they were 'selling', which then made it easier for a possible consumer to know. Whereas in the case of Levi's homepage they were not so concrete in how they were sustainable, they just used the word and told people to 'Buy better. Wear longer', which implicitly referred to Levi's as being more sustainable, but they do not inform in which way they are better. Thus, the consumer would have to actively click further into the page to find out about the sustainable measures. Taking this into consideration, when a company is not more concrete in its communication that commodifies sustainability, then it creates a sense of the company is just smacking the label of sustainability on, because it sounds good which enforces a sense of greenwashing, and especially when it is used in the context of branding.

Conclusion

This thesis had the intention of investigating: *How is sustainability discursively commodified by brands and what are the possible effects of a commodification?*
Through the analysis of the six different brands distributed on three media mediums, it can be established that a commodification of sustainability is occurring. The analysis established that it is

the interplay among the different modes that create discourses that then constitutes a commodification of sustainability. It was especially the modes of verbal, visual, textual, and sound that shaped discourses enabling a commodification. Each of the six cases had its own discourses or some shared ones that made it possible to identify three overall discourses, respectively; the green discourse, the 'us and you' discourse, and then there is the united discourse entailing that sustainability is something that consumers and brands pursue together. The companies branded through these overall discourses and created a commodification of sustainability.

The mediums did not per se stand out, thus, the modes that were most present on the respective platforms, were as expected. However, the influencers, on the social media platform of Instagram stood out, because they did not use the visual mode to the extent expected by that platform. Furthermore, the commodification shaped by the influencers was not as acute as the one shaped directly by the firms. Though, the mediums did have something to do with the commodification because it was the context of branding outlets, which these analyzed cases were present on that arguably enforced a commodification. The medium of TV and websites are known as being platforms where branding and promotional features are highly present, whereas it is less expected on social media, which can explain the more downplayed commodification. But what could be established is that a commodification of sustainability is happening across mediums.

There is complexity in how we see the world and how we shape the world through differentiated understandings. When we are dealing with a concept like commodification and how that is happening to the undefinable and complex matter of sustainability, then it is important to acknowledge that there is no straightforward way of defining a commodification or how it is shaped, but one can identify when it is happening or has happened. So, when that happens, it is important to look into what that can mean and what effect it might have on the object, activity, or in this case the societal matter of sustainability.

When looking into the possible effects of commodifying sustainability it is first important to acknowledge that it is a complex matter and has yet to have a comprehensive definition. Therefore, it can also be a critical matter to commodify, because there is no exact answer to what the consumer is actually buying when sustainability is commodified, and that can be problematic and create a sense of greenwashing. But another and more positive effect can be that when sustainability is commodified, and through branding efforts then it might affect people from a different angle and mainstream it more. Because they are then made aware of the matter in a new

context compared to what they are used to, which might give sustainability a better chance to captivate people so they will pay attention to it and take action.

As established in the introduction, then scholars are talking about how a green commodity discourse was needed to be established and that marketing or branding has the chance and also an obligation to do so. Taking this into consideration, then the findings in this thesis, contribute to how firms then create a commodity out of sustainability, and it discusses what some of the possible effects can be of such a commodification. It is not possible to determine if it is an exact commodification of sustainability that has been the intention of the brands, nevertheless, that is what is happening. What is important is to create awareness about this commodification. Because it is not necessarily something consumers are aware of, that they perhaps are being lured in by companies through a commodification of sustainability constructed through discourses and branding efforts. Thus, in a world of overconsumption, one needs to ask, if commodifying the action or idea that arguably should counteract this situation, is the way forward.

If further investigations within this area were to be conducted, it could be interesting, then to dig deeper into if consumers notice that sustainability is used by companies and made into a commodity and a purchasing factor and thereby explore the effects. Furthermore, in general, it could be relevant to look into what happens when societal matters are commodified and why that is.

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