SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY ON THE MOST SUSTAINABLE BRANDS IN FINLAND

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ABSTRACT

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Title of thesis Sustainability Communication on Social Media: A Study on the Most Sustainable Brands in Finland	
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Abstract Today's consumers are becoming increasingly conscious about sustainability issues. For this reason, it is essentially important for companies to not only address these issues, but also transparently and authentically communicate about them. Social media created various possibilities for companies to communicate about their sustainability initiatives in an engaging way in order to establish a positive brand image and reputation, as well as meaningful organization-stakeholder relationships. The need for additional research on the topic of sustainability communication on social media led to development of the key objective of this thesis, which is to gain understanding of the role of social media in sustainability communication through the prism of the most sustainable Finnish brands. The research goal was achieved through studying the prior literature on the topic, as well as conducting both qualitative and quantitative content analyses. As a result of this study, it was possible to understand the main focus of social media communication of the sustainable Finnish brands, to analyse how sustainability-related messages are communication on social media of these brands, as well as to test whether sustainability communication on these brands' social media affect stakeholder engagement. Also, as a result of achieving the key objective, practical recommendations for communicating sustainability initiatives were developed and proposed for the companies. Thus, the crucial importance of sustainability communication has been emphasized in both previous literature on the topic, as well as the empirical findings of this study. In addition to confirming the overall value of sustainability communication on the corporate social media channels, it has also been identified that companies acknowledge all three essentially important elements of sustainability and actively utilise different opportunities provided by social media for communicating sustainability in an interesting and engaging way. However, some differences related to the influence of sustainability-related content on stakeholder engagement were identified in this study as well.	
Keywords sustainability, sustainability communication, social media communication, sustainable brands, Finnish brands	
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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Research background

Today more consumers than ever are concerned about sustainability and claim to be affected by it when making their purchasing decisions (SB Insight AB, 2019). As consumers become more aware of the sustainability issues, it is crucially important for companies to not only embed sustainability into their business strategies, but also communicate it in an effective and engaging way. Thus, companies face an ever-changing business environment with the new ways of communicating with stakeholders (i.e. social media communication) and new measures of firm performance (i.e. sustainability initiatives) (Reilly & Hynan, 2014).

Many companies have realized the important role of social media as an effective tool to communicate sustainability and therefore, to reflect the organizational values and to engage with their stakeholders while improving the corporate image, reputation and stakeholder trust (Eberle, Berens & Li, 2013). However, regardless of this fact, there is a need for more research on how organizations use social media for communicating with their stakeholders and especially in relation to sustainability (Valentini, Elving, & van Zoonen, 2014).

In addition to that, the importance of this thesis topic can also be justified through the fact that a better understanding of how Finnish companies use social media for sustainability communication is required due to the lack of research on this topic in the context of Finland. According to multiple studies focused on the differences in companies' sustainability communication internationally (e.g. Hartman, Rubin & Dhanda, 2007; Jose & Lee, 2006; Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008; Wanderley, Lucian, Farache & de Sousa Filho, 2008), a country of origin as well as an industry type are crucially important factors influencing firms' sustainability communication. Moreover, it has been established that Finland is among the top countries, where consumers acknowledge the importance of companies communicating about sustainability, as it affects their perception of the brands and also, their buying decisions (SB Insight AB, 2019). It is thus assumed that Finnish brands recognize the value of sustainability communication and will provide a solid understanding of how companies address the needs and expectations of their consumers and integrate the aspect of sustainability in their corporate communications strategies.

It is also worth mentioning that a great majority of studies on companies' sustainability communication focused on the firms selected based on their brand value (e.g. Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Jose & Lee, 2006; Lee, Oh & Kim; Reilly, 2013; Tuğrul & Göçer, 2017; Valentini et al., 2014), whereas this study will investigate how companies that are perceived as the most sustainable ones in Finland communicate about sustainability. By focusing on the companies with the highest sustainability brand rankings this thesis will provide a valuable information on the effective methods to communicate sustainability on social media. Hence,

it is assumed in this thesis that the selected brands are perceived as highly sustainable as a result of their efficient sustainability communication on social media. Therefore, learning from these brands, which are perceived as the most sustainable in their industries, would be highly beneficial for other companies willing to enhance their sustainability communication strategies. For this reason, it can be stated that the topic of sustainability communication on social media by the Finnish companies is unique and valuable both for the research and practice.

Several research papers (e.g. Eberle et al., 2013; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007; Tuğrul & Göçer, 2017) highlight various advantages of sustainability communication for companies, including strengthening a brand, improving reputation, as well as establishing meaningful relationships with their audiences. Also, as stated by Signitzer and Prexl (2007), companies have different motives to communicate sustainability, including marketing goals (e.g. improving corporate image, enhancing sales performance), business goals (e.g. increasing customer satisfaction, fulfilling various shareholder demands) and societal goals (e.g. raising awareness and knowledge of the issue). Similarly, Hartman et al. (2007) discussed that companies communicating sustainability might view it as a long-term strategic interest, a way to reduce the risks of negative publicity and to improve the brand image and reputation, as well as a value to society and stakeholders.

According to Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007), the positive outcomes of communicating sustainability do not only include the improved image and reputation of a brand, but also, enhanced company-stakeholder interactions. Various scientific papers focusing on sustainability communication (e.g. Castelló, Morsing, & Schultz, 2013; Eberle et al., 2013; Nwagbara & Reid, 2013; Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Valentini et al., 2014) confirm the fact that the emergence of new interactive media has transformed the ways how companies communicate with their stakeholders. Thus, social media allowed companies to not only effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives, but also engage with their audience and connect with them through a dialogue, which is considered as the most ethical way of communication between an organization and its publics (Romenti, Valentini, Murtarelli & Meggiorin, 2016).

However, many studies (e.g. First & Khetriwal, 2008; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007; Reilly, 2009) argue that the positive effect of sustainability communication can be considered only when the communication is accurate and consistent with a firm's real actions. As it was stated by Elving & van Vuuren (2011), today's stakeholders have become more sceptical than ever as far as sustainability communication is concerned and for this reason, it is crucially important that companies clearly and authentically communicate their messages to avoid any accusations of greenwashing.

As already mentioned, different authors (e.g. Hartman et al., 2007; Jose & Lee, 2006; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008) claim the importance of considering the country- and industry-specific factors in the evaluation of a firm's sustainability communication. There are many studies that analysed how companies in different countries communicate about their sustainability initiatives. For example, Valentini et al. (2014) and their research on how the top European corporations

use social media for communicating CSR topics; Reilly and Hynan (2014) with their study on the CSR communication by global companies; Hartman et al. (2007) and their analysis of the American and European companies' CSR communication; Morsing, Schultz and Nielsen (2008) with their research on the Danish corporate CSR communication; Tuğrul and Göçer (2017) and their study on the social media sustainability communication by the brands in Turkey, as well as many others.

As stated by Olkkonen and Quarshie (2019), the topic of sustainability in the context of Finland is a constantly evolving phenomenon and thus, research related to sustainability communication of the Finnish companies would be timely and beneficial for a better understanding of the issue. The relevancy of the research can also be demonstrated through the fact that sustainability is an extremely important issue for the Finnish consumers (SB Insight AB, 2019). Thus, according to the data provided by the Sustainable Brand Index official report on Finland, which is Europe's largest brand study with the focus on sustainability, 76% of Finns claim that sustainability has an impact on their buying decisions and moreover, in 2019 Finland had the highest percentage of people discussing sustainability compared to the previous years (SB Insight AB, 2019). For this reason, building a sustainable brand and revising the traditional marketing and communications practises in the pursuit of sustainability communication is more critical than ever before.

1.2   Research objective and research questions

The key objective of this thesis is *to gain understanding of the role of social media in sustainability communication through the prism of the most sustainable Finnish brands.* As a result, achieving this objective will lead to the development of recommendations for communicating sustainability initiatives. Consequently, the following research questions were developed for this study:

> RQ1: What is the focus of social media communication of the sustainable Finnish brands?
> RQ2: How are sustainability-themed messages communicated on social media among the sustainable brands in Finland?
> RQ3: How does the brands' sustainability communication on social media affect stakeholder engagement?

To start with, the first question will focus on what the companies, which were ranked as the most sustainable ones by the Sustainable Brand Index study mentioned earlier, communicate on their social media channels. It is important to understand what the major aspects of their social media communication are and whether the topic of sustainability is present in their social media content. The purpose of the second question is to investigate how sustainability is com-

municated by these brands, including the most popular topics discussed, different content types and communication strategies used. The final question will study whether the companies' social media sustainability communication has an influence on stakeholder interest and engagement, hence their online interaction with the brands through likes, comments and shares.

1.3   Research structure

The structure of this study includes the introductory chapter, which is followed by the major theory part consisting of three key topics as the subchapters: sustainability, social media communication and sustainability communication on social media, as well as the summary chapter. More specifically, it begins with introducing sustainability as a concept and discussing its various definitions, as well as explaining how sustainability is viewed in this study. The chapter continues by discussing various aspects of social media communication, including social media channels, content typology, the most common social media content format types and finally, stakeholder engagement. Thereafter, the focus is shifted on the sustainability communication on social media and more precisely, various sustainability topics, as well as different sustainability communication formats.

The next part focuses on the methodology applied in this research. Both qualitative and quantitative content analyses were selected for the purpose of this study. The research problem and therefore, the study design is descriptive with the elements of exploratory research, as the aim of this thesis is to investigate the social media sustainability communication of the selected Finnish brands. The abductive approach was implemented for this study with the purpose of developing the existing theories. Thus, the main methodological considerations and choices for this thesis are discussed in detail in this chapter.

The next chapter presents the research findings as the results of this study, after which the theoretical contributions, managerial implications, research evaluation and limitation, as well as the recommendations for further research are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Sustainability

Despite the numerous studies in the field of sustainability, it remains an open concept with the context-specific understanding (Purvis, Mao & Robinson, 2018). Thus, there are various definitions of the term "sustainability". However, it is generally accepted that the core idea of sustainability is that it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", as defined in The Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (United Nations, 1987, p. 16).

It is important to mention that the concept of sustainability is strongly related to corporate social responsibility (CSR). As studied by Montiel (2008) in his research on the differences between these two concepts, there is no clear distinction between these terms and they work synonymously as they both aim at creating and maximising the environmental, economic and social values (Baumgartner, 2014). However, as illustrated in Figure 1 and explained by Tureac, Turtureanu, Bordean & Georgeta (2010), sustainable development or sustainability is a complex system that incorporates economic, environmental and social dimensions, whereas CSR is considered as a social aspect of the overall sustainability system.
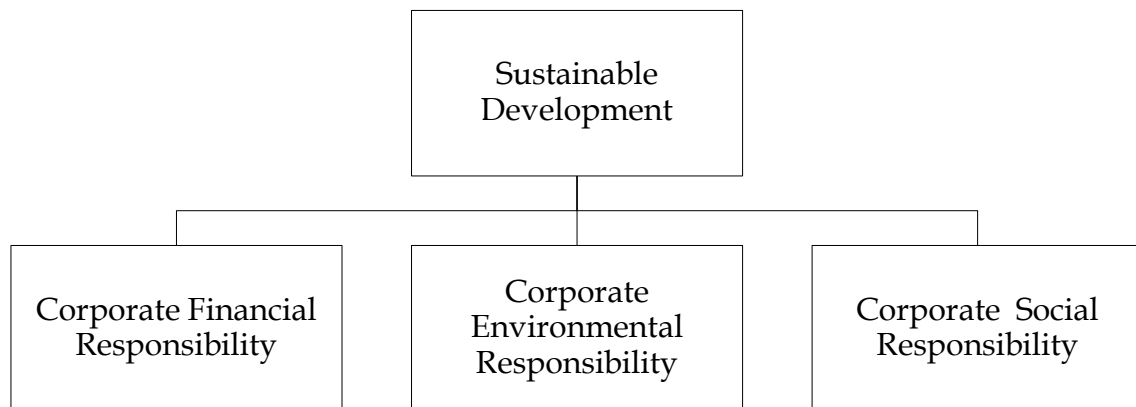
FIGURE 1 Relationship between SD and CSR (Tureac et al., 2010)

Although, the definition of CSR and the distinction between CSR and sustainability is described differently by various sources, which makes it difficult to understand the clear difference between these two terms (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). As defined by the European Commission (2019, p. 3), CSR refers to the companies' process of integrating "social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close

collaboration with their stakeholders". On the other hand, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) supports the view of CSR as a social aspect of the broad sustainability concept, as already discussed earlier. (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). Thus, according to WBCSD, CSR is the "business' commitment to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve their quality of life" (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p. 3).

Another difference in how scientific literature defines CSR and sustainability is related to the stakeholder approach, which is often applied to CSR. Moir (2001) considers CSR as an ethical commitment of a company to satisfy the needs of its stakeholders. Hopkins (2005), for example, also argues that CSR's main concern is to treat stakeholders ethically or in a socially responsible way and to meet their interests effectively, as stated by Maignan and Ferrell (2004). Whereas sustainability is frequently defined in the literature as the performance of companies in the long term and more focused on their commitments to protecting the environment and reducing their ecological footprint (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that a great number of scientific articles view CSR as the current and community-based approach of companies, while sustainability is often considered as more future-oriented and focused on the production side of business.

It is important to mention that this study will focus on the Brundtland definition of sustainability mentioned before and in addition to that, it will consider CSR as a subset of the broader concept of sustainability, as suggested by various sources. This opinion is also shared by Korhonen (2013), who stated that despite the disagreements in the literature regarding CSR and sustainability, the notion of sustainability is a basis for CSR. As stated by Ebner and Baumgartner (2006), the Brundtland view is the most common definition of sustainability and in addition to that, its advantage is in its holistic and generic perspective, whereas other studies consider sustainability as a separate concept. Hence, the term used to describe ethical, environmentally friendly and socially responsible behaviour of companies in this thesis will be "sustainability" and the theory related to CSR will be considered from the perspective of sustainability as well.

This thesis will also consider the three pillars sustainability approach that analyses sustainability from the perspective of three key dimensions: environmental, economic and social. According to this approach, environmental sustainability focuses on the company's interaction with the physical environment, economic impact refers to the organization's role in the larger economic system, whereas social dimension defines the company's impact on the communities in which it operates (Purvis et al., 2018).

The following subchapters will discuss in detail various definitions of sustainability mentioned in different scientific sources, as well as thoroughly analyse each of the three pillars of sustainability.

2.1.1 Terminology

To start with, understanding the development of sustainability as a term is of primary importance due to its varying meanings, interpretations and contexts (Hartman et al., 2007). Thus, the most credited introduction of sustainability concept dates to the early 1970s, when it first appeared in a document of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Sneddon, 2000). This first frequently cited conceptualization of the term had a major impact on the development of the concept, which later in 1987 was presented in the previously mentioned Brundtland Report defining sustainable development as a common view (Purvis et al., 2018).

As argued by Giddings, Hopwood and O'Brien (2002), there are so many definitions and interpretations of the concept that it is safe to assume that there is not a commonly accepted one. In the academic literature various authors have defined sustainability in different ways referring to the same meaning: more humane, ethical and transparent way of doing business (van Marrewijk, 2003).

TABLE 1 Sustainability definitions

Definition	Interpretation
Process of achieving human development (widening or enlarging the range of people's choices) in an inclusive, connected, equitable, prudent, and secure manner. Inclusiveness implies human development over time and space. Connectivity entails an embrace of ecological, social, and economic interdependence. Equity suggests intergenerational, intragenerational, and interspecies fairness. Prudence connotes duties of care and prevention: technologically, scientifically, and politically. Security demands safety from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption (Gladwin, Kennelly & Krause, 1995).	The definition proposes that sustainable development is subjected to five main constraints, including environmental, economic, technological, scientific, and political aspects of sustainability.
Building a society in which a proper balance is created between economic, social and ecological aims (Székely & Knirsch, 2005).	The definition stresses the importance of the balance between economic, social and ecological aspects of sustainability.
The commitments of an organisation and its relationship with its different kinds of publics in the fulfilment of its economic, social, and environmental	The definition highlights the economic, social and environmental commitments as part of sustainable behaviour of an organization.

<div align="right">(Continues)</div>

TABLE 1 (continues)

duties; in the fulfilment of its commitments to information transparency and ethical behaviour; in the management of the company; in the development of its products, services, and business; and in the evaluation and control of the fulfilment of these commitments (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007).	
The efforts to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer issues into business operations and core strategy (European Commission, 2011).	The definition incorporates social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer issues in the organizational sustainability strategy.
An ongoing process of equitably including a highly interconnected set of seemingly incompatible social, ecological, and economic systems through collaborative theorization of coordinated approaches that harness the collective cognitive and operational capabilities of multiple local and global social, ecological, and economic stakeholders operating as a unified network or system (Valente, 2012).	The definition puts the emphasis on the social, ecological and economic aspects of sustainability.

As already mentioned earlier in this thesis, the most widely adopted definition of sustainability is that used by the World Commission on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1987). However, as argued by Gimenez, Sierra and Rodon (2012), this WCED's definition is too broad and generalized for organizations to apply in practice. For this reason, it is operationalized through the integration of social, economic and environmental considerations (Gimenez et al., 2012).

Some of the most thorough definitions introduced in the literature on sustainability are provided above in Table 1. Thus, starting from the first mentions in the management literature in 1995 by Gladwin et al., it was defined and discussed by various other sources over the years and still remains an open and widely discussed concept (Purvis et al., 2018).

As it can be seen from the definitions presented in Table 1, all the definitions consider the importance of balancing three key aspects of the concept and refer to the common representation of sustainability through three pillars: the environmental pillar, the social pillar, and the economic pillar, which will be discussed in detail in the next subchapter of this thesis.

2.1.2 The three pillars of sustainability

The key elements of sustainability or as also defined as its "aspects" (e.g. Lozano 2008; Tanguay, Rajaonson, Lefebvre & Lanoie, 2010), "components" (e.g. Du Pisani, 2006; White, 2005), "dimensions" (e.g. Carter & Moir, 2012; Lehtonen, 2004; Mori & Christodoulou, 2012), "legs" (Dawe & Ryan, 2003; Newport, Chesnes & Lindner, 2003) or "perspectives" (Arushanyan, Ekener & Moberg, 2017; Vinodh, 2010), as well as other various terms used in the literature, encompass the economic, environmental and social contexts of sustainability. However, as already mentioned earlier, this thesis will focus on the concept of three pillars of sustainability originated from thee Brundtland Report and institutionalized through the triple bottom line (TBL) concept developed by Elkington in 1994 (Gimenez et al., 2012). The philosophy behind the TBL framework, similarly to the sustainability definitions discussed earlier, focuses on the impact of the above-mentioned aspects of sustainability, or the so-called 3P's – people, planet and profit, on the organizations (Elkington, 1998).

There are many ways to illustrate these interchangeably used elements of sustainability, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Thus, while a commonly used Venn diagram (left in Figure 2) depicts the interconnected circles of social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainability, which is placed at their intersection, some alternative ways of considering the key elements are demonstrated through the use of independent circles and literal "pillars" (right in Figure 2).
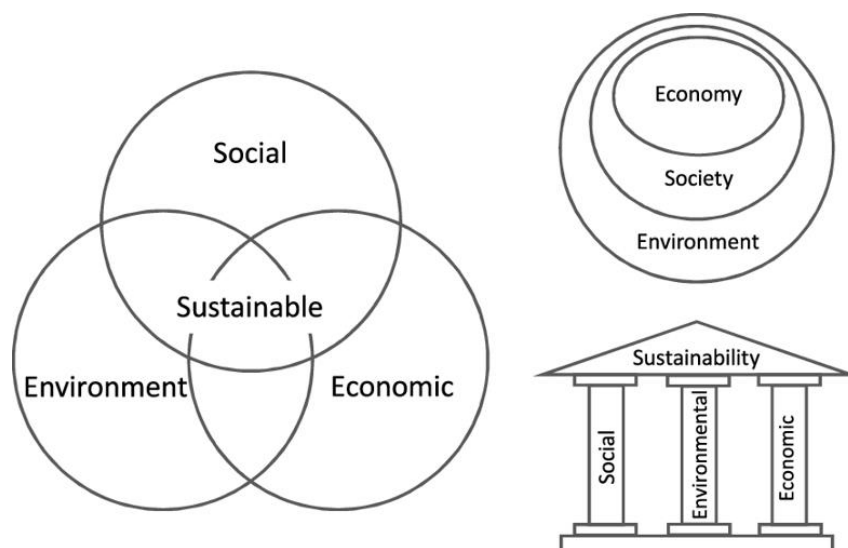
FIGURE 2 Representation of sustainability (Purvis et al., 2018)

Thus, it can be concluded that there are multiple ways to consider the three pillars of sustainability. In addition to that, as discussed by Purvis et al. (2018), some authors acknowledge the existence of some additional pillars, such as institutional (e.g. Boström, 2012; Spangenberg, 2002), cultural (e.g. Hawkes, 2001; Soini and Birkeland 2014) and technical (Agyekum-Mensah, Knight, & Coffey, 2012; Hill & Bowen, 1997).

Nonetheless, it is important to understand that despite numerous definitions and interpretations of the concept, they all highlight the value of balancing environmental, social and economic aspects. As discussed by Reilly and Hynan (2014), environmental pillar is the most recognizable one and represents the organizational interaction with the physical environment. Thus, environmental sustainability often refers to the efficient use of resources, pollution reduction, as well as the overall environmental footprint produced as a result of business operations (Gimenez et al., 2012). Social sustainability represents the company's impact on the local communities (Reilly & Hynan, 2014) and is created through, for example, adopting and implementing ethical business practises and building value for all the stakeholders (Székely & Knirsch, 2005). Finally, the economic pillar of sustainability involves sustaining the economic growth, shareholder value (Székely & Knirsch, 2005), as well as the general contribution of an organization to the larger economic system (Reilly & Hynan, 2014).

However, when discussing the concept of three pillars, it is also crucially important to mention its criticism by different authors. For instance, as discussed by Giddings et al. (2002), the weakness and the limitation of the model is the view of environment, economy and society as autonomous and separate from each other, whereas they are in fact interconnected and cannot exist independently. At the same time, the authors also claim that considering the model as a unified entity is misguiding, as there is not a single economy or society and diversity is an essential part of sustainability (Giddings et al., 2002).

In addition to that, as argued by Valente (2012), the framework leaves a fundamental gap between the theory and its empirical confirmation at the firm level. Hence, how organizations integrate the three pillars of sustainability into their business operations in practise. This viewpoint is also supported by Norman and MacDonald (2004), who argued that equally achieving all three aspects of sustainability is in fact impossible and thus, the pillars cannot be perceived as mutually supportive.

Despite the arguments regarding the three pillars concept, the view of environment, society and economy as the core elements of sustainability was widely recognized and supported in most of the research on the subject. As stated by Vos (2007), various definitions and interpretations of sustainability are not necessarily a problem and instead, they provide a broader view of the concept. Moreover, the differences in understandings of the subject are natural due to its complexity and versatility (Vos, 2007).

On the basis of various definitions of sustainability proposed in the literature, the following interpretation was developed and used in this thesis: responsible and proactive organizational behaviour in relation to equally important and interconnected environmental, social and economic issues. Also, as mentioned before, this thesis will consider sustainability from the perspective of the three pillars concept. This will allow analysing the companies' communication on different levels of their sustainability and gaining a broader understanding of the concept. Additionally, identifying the specific factors determining each of the pillars of sustainability while implementing a content analysis as a research method

in this thesis, will help to institutionalize the concept and examine the sustainability communication of the brands.

2.2   Social media communication

The next section of this thesis will shift the focus on another essentially important area of this study – social media communication. There is no doubt that with the emergence of the Internet as a technological innovation, it greatly transformed the communication processes. (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001). As also noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), it allowed firms to engage with their stakeholders in timely and direct contact at relatively low cost and high levels of efficiency.

Therefore, social media has evolved into the important tool for companies to influence public opinions and significantly impact the firm's reputation (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). In addition to that, social media channels have become a media for reflecting the core organizational values (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Thus, with the new media communication gained new dynamics, such as speed, connectivity and plurality (Castelló et al., 2013). As a result of its speed of transporting information, companies are now able to communicate quickly and timely with their audiences and independently from any third parties and bypassing journalists or mass media (Castells, 2008). The new media also reduced the technical, financial and legal barriers of communication, enabling communication regardless of the geographical distance between individuals and therefore, creating more connected world (Castelló et al., 2013). Finally, communication technologies enabled a pluralization of voices, where individuals can openly express their varying opinions, engage in conversations and exchange their points of view (Castelló et al., 2013).

The characteristics of social media communication have also been discussed by Lee et al. (2013). Similarly to the studies discussed above, the authors state that social media is uncontrollable, which means that the communication process is created by numerous users, making the information flow independent from any control or manipulation (Lee et al., 2013). Furthermore, social media communication is characterised through the easiness of information access. Thus, stakeholders are actively and freely sharing their experiences, which are then accessible, searchable and traceable for publics, making the communication uncoordinated and transparent (Lee et al., 2013). Most importantly, the most distinctive characteristics of social media communication is that it is dialogic (Lee et al., 2013). This two-way mode of communication is an ultimate foundation of the new media and what differentiates it from the traditional means of communication (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011). Thus, the focus of the traditional media on managing a one-sided communication is shifted to establishing dialogic relationships and engagement with stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 2002). However, it is worth mentioning that in practice social media channels of the brands do not

necessarily imply the widely discussed in the theory two-way communication and often lack organization-stakeholders engagement and interaction.

In addition to the above-mentioned discussions on how social media transformed today's communication, many other benefits of using social media for the organizational communications have been highlighted in various research papers. Among the benefits of social media communication discussed in the literature is the above-mentioned uncontrolled and unfiltered communication without any gatekeepers involved (e.g. Kent, 2013; Linke & Zerfass, 2013); the ability to build and maintain dialogic communication (e.g. Kelleher, 2009; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012); its positive influence on the firm's brand image, visibility, reputation (e.g. Gilpin, 2010; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014); as well as enhanced customer opinions, attitudes and behaviours (e.g. Hajli, 2014; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

However, despite the popularity of the topic of social media communication in research, Kent (2013) pointed out that it is important to critically assess the benefits of social media and consider its negative sides as well, which are often ignored by the scholars. Valentini (2015) also argued that the literature tends to be overly positive about digital technologies and particularly social media. Hence, both studies explain the importance of critical reflection on the implications of social media communication and thorough risk assessment (Kent, 2013; Valentini, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is crucially important to highlight the importance of understanding that relationship building is a primary focus of social media contrary to the commonly sought business interests (Kent, 2013). It is generally known that there is a wide range of stakeholder groups following brands and more specifically, the content they produce, on social media. These groups greatly vary by their characteristics, information needs and expectations.

The influence of different stakeholder groups has been thoroughly studied by Luoma-aho (2015), who distinguished three main types of stakeholder relationships with a company: faith-holders, hateholders and fakeholders, as demonstrated in Figure 3.
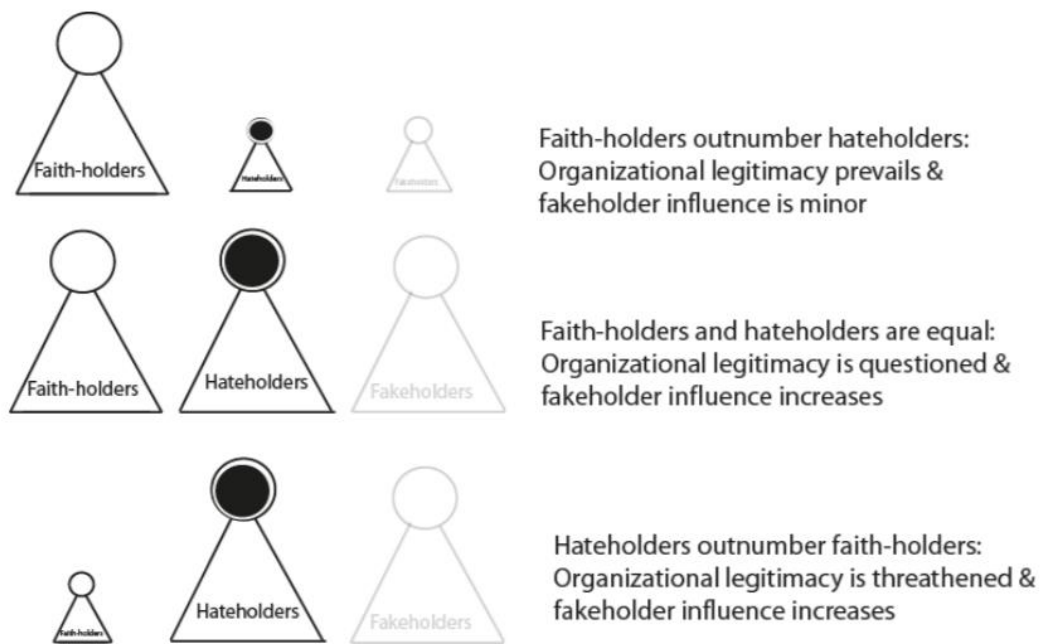
FIGURE 3 The division of faith-holders, hateholders and consequences to organizational legitimacy (Luoma-aho, 2015)

As illustrated in the figure above, the first stakeholder group or faith-holders are positively engaged stakeholders, who like the organization, trust it and recommend it to the others (Luoma-aho, 2015). The role of faith-holders is especially crucial in the challenging times for the organization, as they are willing to support it and its reputation during crisis (Luoma-aho, 2015). For this reason, it was proposed by Luoma-aho (2015) that it is essentially important for organizations to focus on keeping and supporting the existing faith-holders, as the satisfied stakeholders will naturally attract new ones (Luoma-aho, 2015).

The opposite group of stakeholders are the negatively engaged hateholders, who, in contrast to the previously discussed faith-holders, are negatively engaged and dissatisfied due to a negative experience with a brand or unresponsiveness from it (Luoma-aho, 2015). Thus, Luoma-aho (2015) stated that it is crucially important for organizations to actively monitor issues involving hateholders, as they might have major consequences for an organization, such as reputational risks. Despite of that, in some cases, hateholders should also be perceived as an opportunity for an organization to address any unresolved issues, as well as turn the negatively oriented stakeholders into loyal faith-holders (Luoma-aho, 2015).

The third group of fakeholders are artificially generated stakeholders, who produce fake messages for some specific purpose (Luoma-aho, 2015). The real danger of such engagement is in the influence of fakeholders on other stakeholder groups that can either be transformed into positively or negatively engaged stakeholders (Luoma-aho, 2015).

Thus, as it is demonstrated in Figure 3, understanding the orientation of different stakeholder groups is essentially important for firms in order to preserve organizational legitimacy and credibility. The next subchapter will focus on examining different social media channels used by companies for establishing organization-publics relationships.

2.2.1 Social media channels

Castelló et al. (2013) state that social media is often seen as a tool for enhancing stakeholder engagement, better understanding and perception of their behaviour, as well as improving corporate image and business performance. Moreover, Valentini et al. (2014) state that social media is a platform that can be used for establishing stakeholder dialogue, engagement and relationship building.

These opportunities provided for companies by social media for building meaningful relationships with their consumers can be justified through the key characteristics of social media platforms defined by Panahi, Watson and Partridge (2012). Thus, according to the authors, social media is characterised through its four key features: user-generated content, peer to peer communication, networking and multimedia orientation (Panahi et al., 2012). Firstly, as it has already been mentioned earlier in this thesis, nowadays social media users are able to not only consume content produced by companies, but also co-create it and actively engage by generating own content, as well as reacting to, commenting on and sharing the original content (Panahi et al., 2012). Secondly, social media enables users to interact, communicate and connect in real time and globally, which is undoubtedly one of the key characteristics of social media and its main difference and advantage compared to the old traditional technologies (Panahi et al., 2012). The third feature is related to the previous one and highlights the possibility to connect and build communities on social media (Panahi et al., 2012). Finally, Panahi et al. (2012) also mentioned the possibility to consume, produce and distribute content in a wide range of formats supported by social media, including text, images, videos, audios and other interactive formats as well.

Similar characteristics of social media were also discussed by Kietzmann et al. (2011), who developed the honeycomb framework illustrating today's wide and diverse landscape of social media platforms. As demonstrated below in Figure 4, there are seven functional social media blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Importantly, this framework discusses the fundamental implications for firms and thus, represents the organizational point of view of social media functionality.
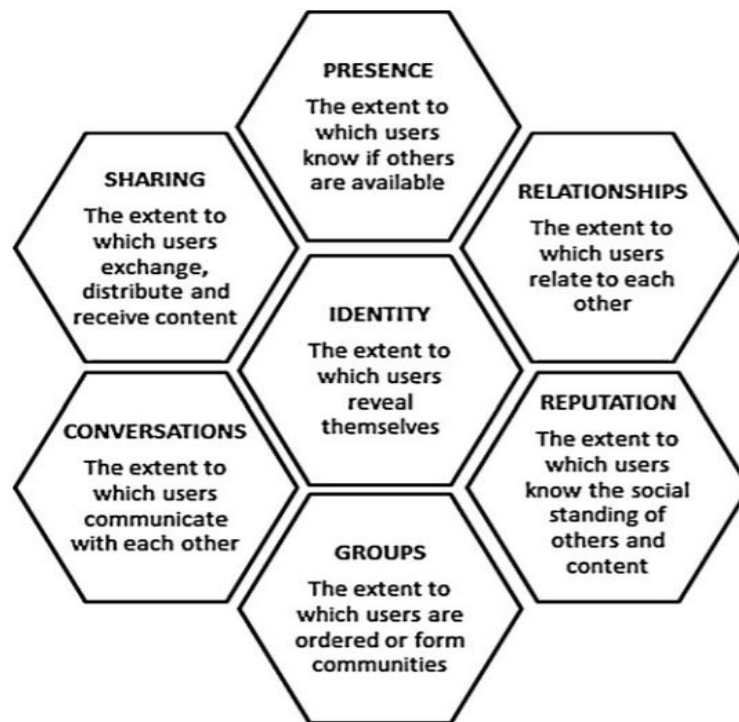
FIGURE 4 Social media functionality (Kietzmann et al., 2011)

As stated by the authors, social media channels greatly vary based on their scope and functionality and it is crucially important for companies to not only understand the general characteristics of social media, as discussed earlier, but also consider the functional traits and fundamental implications of different platforms (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Understanding the diverse ecology of social media can help companies seeking stakeholder engagement on their social media to do it using the right channels and tools (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

To start with, the identity element of the framework relates to users' self-disclosure on social media through, for example, their profiles and personal information they share online (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The conversations block represents the communication setting of a social media platform and incorporates dialogs between people online (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The sharing aspect of the framework focuses on how users exchange, distribute and receive content. The presence block relates to the information about accessibility of users and availability of this information for other users (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The relationships element symbolizes the extent of association between users and the type of interaction between them (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The reputation block represents the extent of users' standing in relation to each other (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The final functional block – groups focuses on various forms of communication within a network (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Thus, each social media platform to some extent represents different functionalities discussed above. Examples provided by Kietzmann et al. (2011) include Facebook with its clear focus on the relationships aspect, YouTube and its key feature of sharing, as well as LinkedIn and the importance of identity on that social media platform.

Undoubtedly, it is crucially important to take into consideration different characteristics and functionality elements of social media channels when assessing a company's social media communication. For this reason, when selecting social media channels for the analysis of corporate communication of the selected companies in this study, these factors were taken into account as well.

Thus, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were considered as the most suitable channels for the objectives of this thesis. This can be justified through the fact that all three channels can be characterised through the key features of social media developed by Panahi et al. (2012) and in addition to that, they all focus on some of the main functional blocks discussed by Kietzmann et al. (2011). Hence, all three channels enable users to create user-generated content, communicate, network and produce various formats of social media content. In addition to that, Facebook, for example, provides users with various opportunities to build relationships (e.g. through friend requests, communities and networks) and therefore, can be characterised by the relationships building block, according to Kietzmann et al. (2011). Twitter, however, is more centred around exchanging short messages (i.e. tweets), as mentioned by Kaplan and Haenlein (2011), hence the conversations block of the social media functionality framework (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Finally, according to Abbott, Donaghey, Hare and Hopkins (2013), Instagram has a strong focus on identity and therefore, corresponds to the identity block of the framework by Kietzmann et al. (2011).

It is worth mentioning that despite that some channels focus on specific blocks of the framework by Kietzmann et al. (2011) more than the others, several functionalities can however characterise a single social media channel. Moreover, as stated by the authors of the framework Kietzmann et al. (2011, p. 249), "none of today's major social media sites focus solely on just one block".

Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly beneficial for this study to consider various social media channels with various functionalities in order to gain a broader understanding of different corporate communication styles and topics on all three social media channels. Additionally, this will be done for the purpose of considering various possibilities, as well as limitations for effective sustainability communication on different social media platforms. However, the choice of social media channels will be discussed in detail in the methodological part of this thesis, whereas the next subchapter will discuss various content types defined in the prior literature.

2.2.2 Content typology

As previously mentioned, Kietzmann et al. (2011) discussed that social media transformed corporate communication in today's world. As discussed by Shankar & Carpenter (2012), this transformation opened a wide range of possibilities for companies to target various market segments through diversifying their content and creating successful social media marketing messages that resonate with their consumers.

As explained by de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012), companies communicate online with their consumers by publishing posts, or in other words,

publications including text, images, videos and other features that enhance inter-action among users. These publications can be designed using various formats, as well as related to different categories depending on their content.

However, as argued by Coursaris, van Osch and Balogh (2013), despite the general understanding of the variety of social media messages, there is not a lot of literature and studies on social media messaging typologies. They state that most of the existing literature is either too limited for understanding corporate communication on social media compared to traditional i.e. offline messaging, or in addition to that, they only focus on specific categories of brands or message categories (Coursaris et al., 2013). In addition to that, there are different studies (e.g. de Vries et al., 2012; Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015; Rauschnabel, Praxmarer & Ivens, 2012; Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate & Lebherz, 2014) that pri-marily focus on various numerical metrics resulting from the influence of certain media elements (e.g. text, image, video etc.) on consumer responses through likes, comments and shares without analysing the topics discussed in social media posts. The limitations of the existing literature on the topic was also discussed by Coelho, de Oliveira and de Almeida (2016), who mentioned that studies related to content typology are extremely diversified and even controversial, as they con-sider social media content, as well as its impact on engagement rates differently.

Figure 5 below depicts previous studies on social media content typology and demonstrates the differences and similarities in various categories of social media posts that have been analysed by the authors.

Authors	Content Typology Framework	Social Networking Site
Caseiro and Barbosa (2011)	Advertising/Services/Campaign Information Offers/Contests/Hobbies	Facebook
Coelho, Oliveira and Almeida (2016)	Advertising Fan Events Information Promotion	Facebook Instagram
De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012)	Information Entertainment	Facebook
Shen and Bissel (2013)	Event Product Promotion Entertainment Other	Facebook
Coursaris, Van Osch and Balogh (2013)	Brand Awareness Corporate Social Responsibility Customer Service Engagement Product Awareness Promotional Seasonal	Facebook
Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013)	Entertainment Information Remuneration	Facebook
Swani, Milne and Brown (2013)	Corporate branding Emotional content Calls to purchases	Facebook

FIGURE 5 Prior literature on content typology analysis (Chemela, 2019)

For instance, Caseiro and Barbosa (2011), as well as Coelho et al. (2016) analysed similar types of social media content and focused in their research on the influence of post typology on customer engagement measured by different metrics, including likes, comments and shares. As a result, the findings revealed that the hedonic content is more effective on social media compared to the commercial one (Coelho et al., 2016). Shen and Bissell (2013), who studied social media content of beauty brands, came to the similar conclusion that the entertainment category of social media posts perform better as far as engagement rates are concerned. A more generalized study was conducted by de Vries et al. (2012), but the findings differ from the previously mentioned conclusions and indicated that the type of brand post has no influence on the popularity of this post. However, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013), who conducted a similar study, but added one more content type to the list from the previously mentioned study by de Vries et al. (2012), established that the entertainment-related content significantly impacts engagement rates. Swani, Milne and Brown (2013) provided similar research

findings and concluded that the emotional content is more effective for consumer engagement on social media compared to the promotional and the sales-oriented posts. Finally, Coursaris et al. (2013) developed a multi-grounded theory approach that encompasses seven key categories of social media content: brand awareness, corporate social responsibility, customer service, engagement, product awareness, promotional and seasonal content.

After conducting a thorough research on different content typology studies, it has been confirmed that when analysing social media content, it is important to select a comprehensible typology that could be applied to different industries and message categories, yet not taking too generalized but holistic approach. In addition to that, as it can be seen from the content typology frameworks found in the prior literature and shown on Figure 5, not all of the studies designate a separate content type for the content related to sustainability, although its importance for the corporate communication has been discussed earlier in this thesis. For this reason, after a detailed comparison of the previously discussed studies, it has been decided to select the framework developed by Coursaris et al. (2013), which takes a holistic approach and takes into account sustainability-related content as well. Thus, this approach will be used in this study for classifying different categories of social media posts.

As already mentioned earlier, the approach by Coursaris et al. (2013) differentiates various social media posts based on their content type. According to the authors, their framework is beneficial for the research on social media content, as well as practice, considering the opportunities it provides to companies for learning about how various types of content influence marketing strategy efficiency, customer experience, stakeholder engagement and other valuable metrics (Coursaris et al., 2013). Importantly, even though the approach primarily focuses on Facebook as a social media platform, it can also be generalized and applied to different industries and other social media channels as well (Chemela, 2019).

It is also important to mention that the typology was adjusted in accordance with the objective of this thesis and in addition to that, the frameworks used in other studies were also taken into account as well, when deciding the suitable classification for this research. However, this will be discussed later in detail in the Methodology part of this thesis.

Finally, Coursaris et al. (2013) stated that understanding and utilizing different types of social media content is crucially important to effectively implement these tools in a company's marketing strategy with the purpose of positively influencing consumer engagement. As also discussed by Shankar & Carpenter (2012), the key to improve a company's social media strategy is to understand consumer motivations to use it. Thus, listening, responding to consumer demands and most importantly, actively engaging with them will allow companies to create effective and useful content, while enhancing customer experience (Shankar & Carpenter, 2012). The next chapter will discuss in detail different content formats used by companies in their social media communication.

2.2.3 Content formats

As discussed by Fortin & Dholakia (2005), brands are continuously using different forms of media in their content to target various target markets. According to Sabate et al. (2014), various content formats influence consumer response to a social media content in a different way. The reason is in the influence of the richness or vividness of the content, which was discussed in various literature related to the topic (e.g. Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; de Vries et al., 2012; Sabate et al., 2014) and which are measured through various elements or dimensions, senses and cues (e.g. colours, graphics, audio and video elements) (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005).

There is a wide range of literature focusing on the interrelations between specific content types and engagement rates (e.g. Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; de Vries et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2015; Kwok & Yu, 2012; Sabate et al., 2014 etc.). For example, in the studies by Cvijikj, Spiegler and Michahelles (2011), as well as Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013), the findings demonstrated that social media content including images and videos had a more positive effect on consumer interaction compared to posts consisting of text only. This has also been discussed by Sabate et al. (2014), who mentioned that social media posts including different dynamic elements, such as images, videos and links (or richness of the post, as discussed earlier), stimulate active interactions with the post and therefore, leading to positive effects on engagement. It has also been mentioned that the use of multi-media format and the inclusion of various dynamic and interactive content elements (especially images) result in a more effective performance of social media posts in comparison with text-only posts (Sabate et al., 2014).

Thus, based on the above-mentioned studies, it is obvious that the choice of content type plays an important role in any brand's social media communication strategy. However, according to the study conducted by Kim et al. (2015), it is also crucially important to take into account the specifics of different social media channels when considering various content formats. As also stated by Smith, Fischer and Yongjian (2012), each social media channel has own unique architecture, culture and norms. Additionally, users' intentions for using different sites, as well as the ways they interact, greatly differ depending on the platform they are using (Smith et al., 2012). For instance, social media posts including images perform more effectively on Facebook and Instagram compared to text and video posts, whereas Twitter's interface, on the contrary, is appropriate for text-based posts and YouTube is a good channel for communicating in a video format (Kim et al., 2015).

For this reason, for the purpose of this study, different characteristics of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – the channels that were selected for the analysis of sustainability communication in this thesis, were taken into consideration when determining content format types. Thus, those content formats that are supported by all three channels were used to analyse sustainability-related social media posts by the given companies. In addition to that, the grounded theory approach was taken for the purpose of determining the most commonly used formats, which will be covered in detail in the Methodology part, whereas the

next subchapter will focus on one of the main elements of social media communication – engagement.

2.2.4 Stakeholder engagement

As already discussed before, social media offers various opportunities for stakeholder engagement (Yang & Kent, 2014). Luoma-aho (2015) defines stakeholder engagement as a relationship between organizations and their stakeholders with the involvement of cognitive and emotional aspects. Shared responsibility, information exchange, as well as open and respectful dialogue are the key elements of stakeholder engagement process (Waddock, 2001). In addition to that, Burchell and Cook (2006) highlight the importance of trust for successful stakeholder engagement.

As mentioned by Oh, Roumani, Nwankpa and Hu (2017), stakeholder engagement is usually associated with customer satisfaction (Banyte & Dovaliene, 2014) leading to brand loyalty (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014) and consequently, enhanced corporate reputation (Blackburn, Hooper, Abratt & Brown, 2018). Thus, the view of stakeholder engagement as the win-win process of value creation for both companies and their stakeholders has been consistent in the literature (Blackburn et al., 2018).

Despite the widely discussed benefits of stakeholder engagement, it is also worth mentioning that there are opposite discussions in the literature as well (Luoma-aho, 2015). For instance, it has been argued that negatively engaged hateholders (Luoma-aho, 2015), which were discussed earlier, can provoke negative behaviours and therefore, harm the organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2014) or have other negative consequences (van Doorn et al., 2010). Importantly, not only negative engagement can contribute to negative outcomes. Thus, as discussed by Luoma-aho (2015), unauthentic fakeholders, which were also defined earlier, need to be actively monitored, as they can question the organization's legitimacy and have a negative impact by converting new stakeholder groups into hateholders (Paloviita & Luoma-aho, 2010).

According to Romenti et al. (2016), social media has been praised for enabling the two-way relationships between organizations and their publics through direct communication and engagement. Heinonen (2011) also established that stakeholder engagement on social media involves various activities, including content consumption, stakeholder interaction and participation in discussions. Moreover, as stated by McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016), engagement of users is one of the key elements and factors of the social media effectiveness.

Jiang, Luo and Kulemeka (2016) developed a framework, according to which social media engagement is a collection of experiences consisting of four key elements: involvement, interaction, intimacy and influence, as demonstrated in Figure 6.
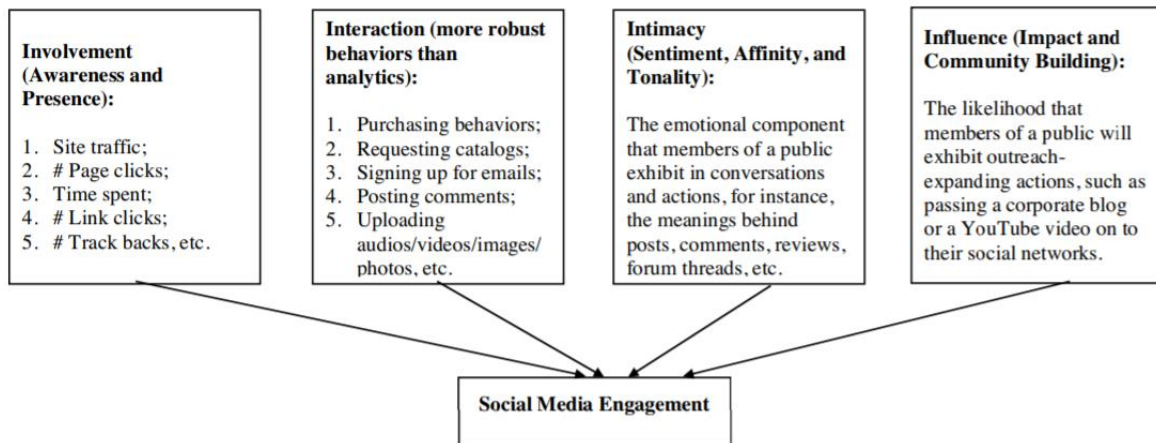
FIGURE 6 A tentative measurement model of social media engagement (Jiang et al., 2016)

According to this framework presented above, involvement assesses how aware and involved stakeholders are and measures it through analytical data, such as amount of traffic, clicks and views (Jiang et al., 2016). Next, interaction measures more robust behaviour of stakeholders and considers different forms of engagement, such as making purchases, requesting additional information, commenting on the posts and creating content (Jiang et al., 2016). As for intimacy, if focuses on the emotional aspects of stakeholders' behaviour that can be analysed through, for example, the meanings behind their posts and comments (Jiang et al., 2016). Lastly, influence evaluates how likely stakeholders will share their opinions and recommendations with their social networks and includes measures, such as shares (Jiang et al., 2016), also called as retweets and reposts, depending on the social media platform.

Thus, the model illustrated in Figure 6 takes into consideration both tangible and intangible factors influencing social media engagement and goes beyond analytics (Jiang et al., 2016). However, stakeholder engagement is usually analysed through the commonly used quantified measures, such as number of followers, likes, shares, clicks, views and such (Fulgoni, 2016).

Although, as argued by different sources (e.g. Baym, 2013; Jiang et al., 2016; Lipsman, Mudd, Rich & Bruich, 2012; Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni & Pauwels, 2013) it is crucially important to understand the multidimensionality of the concept and take into consideration various qualitative metrics as well. It is also worth mentioning that Valentini et al. (2014) claimed that even though liking social media posts or following pages on social media may demonstrate stakeholder awareness and interest, it does not necessarily indicate stakeholder engagement. For this reason, it is essential to take into account the dialogic loop to assess a dialogic communication between organizations and their stakeholders (Valentini et al., 2014), considering that engagement is determined by the presence of a meaningful organization-stakeholder dialogue (Jiang et al., 2016).

Furthermore, as discussed by Lipsman et al. (2012), often the raw numerical data fails to interpret the real value of engaged stakeholders and for this rea-

son, it is extremely important to consider a broader framework leading to dramatically better understanding of stakeholder engagement process. Similarly, Baym (2013, para. 87) highlighted the importance of qualitative metrics as far as social media is concerned, as they help to "see what numbers cannot". In addition to that, Peters et al. (2013) noted that analysing any phenomenon on social media requires a holistic approach, hence balancing quantity and quality metrics.

For this reason, the approach used in this thesis will take into account various metrics in order to gain a broader understanding of the issue Thus, this study will analyse the engagement metrics, such as the number of likes and shares measuring the popularity and virality of a brand's social media content (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013), as well as more robust measures, such as the amount of comments (Jiang et al., 2016) to take into account the company-stakeholder interaction. Hence, the involvement, interaction, intimacy and influence aspects of stakeholder engagement on social media will be analysed in this study.

2.3   Sustainability communication on social media

As stated by Valentini et al. (2014), the emergence of social media has changed the way companies communicate their ethical standards and more and more companies use the new media as a tool to communicate about their sustainability performance (Jose & Lee, 2006). The CSR research conducted by Dawkins (2005) demonstrated that more than the majority of respondents would be influenced in their buying decisions if they had more information about companies' sustainability. Thus, companies are increasingly acknowledging the opportunities associated with sustainability and actively working towards communicating it to their stakeholders in the most effective way (Dawkins, 2005).

There are various studies (e.g. Hartman et al., 2007; Jose & Lee, 2006; Nieminen & Niskanen, 2001; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008; Wanderley et al., 2008 etc.) that discuss the impact of different contextual variables, such as the company size, industry type and geographic location and cultural aspects, on sustainability communication of a brand. Interestingly, as discussed in the KPMG's Survey of Corporate Sustainability Reporting, if in the past sustainability was mostly communicated by the companies from the industrialized regions and with a high environmental impact, today firms from all industries and all over the world realize the importance of sustainability-related information sharing and are actively exploring new possibilities for its communication (Jose & Lee, 2006). This view was also supported by Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007), who discussed that socially mature businesses incorporate sustainability principles in their conducts and communicate it using the integrated corporate communication strategy.

However, as argued by First and Khetriwal (2008), firms are not sufficiently communicating about their sustainability performance. According to Ax-

elrod (2000), despite the fact that companies are increasingly dedicating their efforts towards making their business practices more sustainable, only a few are taking advantage of the full value of communicating about this.

It is also crucially important to mention that in addition to different opportunities, when discussing sustainability communication, it is also necessary to consider that there are certain challenges as well, as claimed by Dawkins (2005). Hence, scepticism towards sustainability-related messages and a higher risk of criticism from consumers, activists, media and other stakeholders (Dawkins, 2005). In addition to that, a scope of the sustainability matter and diverse expectations and requirements from various stakeholder groups are also considered as sustainability communication challenges by Dawkins (2005). Thus, different stakeholders are actively expressing their both supportive or, oppositely, conflicting opinions and perceptions of brands and their sustainability practices (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). As also discussed by Castelló et al. (2013), especially in the context of sustainability communication on social media, activists widely use the new media for expressing their opinions, as well as criticizing corporate behaviour hereby reaching people's awareness and affecting organizations in question.

The roles of faith-holders, hateholders and fakeholders, which were discussed earlier in this thesis, are especially relevant in the content of sustainability communication on social media. As discussed by Eberle et al. (2013), information and feedback from other stakeholders are generally perceived as more credible compared to sustainability-related messages communicated by the company itself. Thus, the opinion of positively engaged stakeholders (i.e. faith-holders) might have a strong influence on how the company's sustainability communication legitimacy is perceived by its stakeholders. Similarly to faith-holders, hateholders also play an essentially important role in sustainability communication of a company, as the harmful impact of negative engagement for sustainability-related messages on the organizational legitimacy, credibility and finally, reputation has also been widely discussed by Eberle et al. (2013).

For this reason, Dawkins (2005) suggests in her paper that effective sustainability communication requires a clear strategy identifying opportunities and challenges for the brands and tailoring messages according to expectations of different stakeholder groups, while embedding sustainability into the whole corporate communication system. Thus, according to the author, there are various stakeholder groups that have diverse expectations, needs and behaviours, such as the experts and activists, who are looking for evidence of a company's sustainability programmes; the investors, who are mostly interested in the economic aspect of sustainability; the general audience or the people, who look for a broader explanation of sustainability aspects of a company and their impacts (Dawkins, 2005). Dawkins (2005) also discussed that in addition to differences in the information needs and interests, stakeholder groups and their expectations also vary depending on the cultural factors and geography. For instance, the community-oriented contributions i.e. the social aspect of sustainability, is extremely valued by American stakeholders, whereas the environmental side of sustainability is

prioritized in the Northern Europe and the economic issues are of crucial importance to the Japanese audience (Dawkins, 2005).

Different groups of stakeholders and their behaviours were also identified in the Sustainable Brand Index study (SB Insight AB, 2019). In addition to that, the study also supported the above-discussed arguments about the influence of geography and culture on sustainability awareness and behaviour. For instance, as discussed in the study, Finland is among the top countries with a high percentage of people discussing sustainability and claiming to be affected by it in their buying decisions (SB Insight AB, 2019). In addition to that, it has been determined that most Nordic consumers are optimistic in relation to climate issues and believe that individuals need to make own efforts to solve these issues through, for example, reduced consumption. (SB Insight AB, 2019).

There are four behaviour groups that were established in the Sustainable Brand Index report (SB Insight AB, 2019): ego group, moderate group, smart group and dedicated group. To start with, the first ego group represents people with no interest in sustainability, who usually have strong traditional values and egocentric values e.g. satisfying own needs without thinking about consequences (SB Insight AB, 2019). In Finland, for example, there are about as many people in this group as there are in the smart behaviour group (SB Insight AB, 2019). The smart group incorporates people, who are curious and interested in the sustainability issues and willing to make choices that would make a difference while, however, satisfying own needs (SB Insight AB, 2019). The majority of Finnish consumers can be related to the moderate behaviour group that describes average people, who are more of followers when it comes to sustainable lifestyle and although being slightly interested in the topic, do not make any extra effort or changes in their ways of doing things (SB Insight AB, 2019). The final and the smallest dedicated behaviour group includes individuals, who are aware and well-informed of sustainability issues and continuously seek new information, but most importantly, take action through living consciously themselves and critically questioning corporations and their environmental footprint (SB Insight AB, 2019).

As it can be seen from the multiple studies and their different categorizations of stakeholders, there are many groups that companies need to consider when communicating on social media and especially discussing sustainability issues. It is obvious that satisfying such diverse requirements of different stakeholder groups can be a great challenge for companies, but it is also clear that the identification and alignment of sustainability communication with concerns and information requirements of the key stakeholder groups is a key to engagement. (Dawkins, 2005). The importance of listening and addressing stakeholders' needs and expectations was emphasized by Olkkonen and Luoma-aho (2014) as well.

It is also extremely important to discuss the greenwashing aspect when talking about sustainability communication. Hence, brands amplifying or simply lying about their usual practices for the purpose of improving their image and reputation (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). As a consequence, consumer cynicism and caution towards brands communicating about their sustainability efforts (Laufer,

2003; Ramus & Montiel, 2005). The positive impact of sustainability communication on a brand image, corporate reputation, trust and customer loyalty have been discussed in a number of literature on the topic (e.g. Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; First and Khetriwal, 2008; Lewis, 2003; Middlemiss, 2003; Park & Kim, 2016 etc.) However, as argued by Valentini et al. (2014), even though organizations have realized the positive effects of sustainability communication on their business performance and reputation, they also faced the negative aspects through the assumptions of greenwashing.

In order to avoid the above-mentioned accusations, companies need to communicate about their sustainability in a transparent and authentic way. As stated by Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007), the lack of transparency in sustainability communication can lead to serious consequences for a brand and even damage it. Hence, brands communicating sustainability are strongly advised to not use the term "sustainable" without regarding to the actual practices of a company (Hartman et al., 2007) and thus, being honest and transparent (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) are essential components of the success of corporate communication on social media (Lee et al., 2013).

There is no doubt that it is a big challenge for companies to understand how and most importantly, what sustainability aspects should be discussed on social media. For this reason, different categorizations of sustainability topics will be discussed in the next subchapter of this thesis.

2.3.1 Sustainability topics

As it has already been discussed earlier in this thesis and as it was mentioned by Hartman et al. (2007), the term "sustainability" can be defined, interpreted and used in various ways. This fact is also demonstrated by multiple dimensions of how corporate sustainability is measured and rated (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008).

According to Hartman et al. (2007), some of the most common systems assessing sustainable performance of companies are the FTSE4Good Index Series measuring the environmental, social and governance practices of companies (FTSE Russell, 2020), the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) family tracking the economic, environmental and social criteria of companies worldwide (S&P Global Inc., 2020) and the Ethibel Sustainability Index analysing the firms' environmental, social and governance responsibility standards (Vigeo Eiris, 2020). In addition to these, First and Khetriwal (2008) also mentioned the oekom research AG (currently named as ISS-oekom), which rates environmental, social and governance data of companies internationally (Institutional Shareholder Services Inc., 2020), as well as Business in the Environment (BiE) Index, which also ranks firms based on their sustainability performance. Furthermore, Searcy and Elkhawas (2012) also named the above-mentioned global sustainability measurement systems and in addition to these, also added the MSCI ESG to the list, which, similarly to the previously discussed indices, considers environmental, social and governance issues in a firm's sustainability performance.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a wide range of measuring systems that assess different sustainability criteria of businesses. For the purpose of this

thesis it was decided to use the DJSI family, which takes into consideration all three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and in addition to that, is widely used in other research works focused on sustainability communication (e.g. Hartman et al. (2007); Valentini et al., 2014 etc.). Thus, sustainability communication of brands in this thesis will be measured by 14 criteria belonging to three dimensions of sustainability, based on the DJSI assessment. The detailed list of the DJSI criteria is demonstrated in Figure 7.

Dimension	Criteria	Weighting (%)
Economic	Codes of Conduct/Compliance/Corruption & Bribery	4.8
	Corporate Governance	4.8
	Customer Relationship Management	4.2
	Investor Relations	4.2
	Risk & Crisis Management	4.8
	Industry Specific Criteria	Depends on Industry
Environment	Environmental Policy/Management	4.8
	Environmental Performance (Eco–Efficiency)	6.0
	Environmental Reporting[a]	2.4
	Industry Specific Criteria	Depends on Industry
Social	Corporate Citizenship/Philanthropy	3
	Stakeholders Engagement	4.2
	Labor Practice Indicators	4.8
	Human Capital Development	4.8
	Social Reporting[a]	2.4
	Talent Attraction & Retention	4.8
	Industry Specific Criteria	Depends on Industry

FIGURE 7 DJSI EURO STOXX Index: corporate sustainability assessment criteria Dimension (Hartman et al., 2007)

According to the criteria demonstrated in the figure above, the economic dimension of a firm's sustainability performance includes its transparent reporting of its implementation and any breaches of the code of conduct; the information related to the company's board structure; the content related to the brand's interaction with its customers; any information related to operational and financial performance of the business; as well as the content related to planning, preparation and mitigation of any threats and incidents. The environment dimension incorporates the information related to laws, regulations and policies implemented by the company and related to environmental issues on a broader level; the content related to the company's environmental footprint and operational eco-efficiency; as well as the reporting of information contained in the corporate environmental reports. The final social dimension describes the information related to the companies' contributions to society; their relationships with stakeholders; information related to the standards of labour and human rights; content focusing on the companies' approach to developing human capital; as well as the information from the companies' social reports.

As discussed by Brown, de Jong and Levy (2009), a number of companies rely on reporting standards in their sustainability information sharing. However,

several studies criticized different sustainability index systems (e.g. Chatterji & Toffel, 2010; Delmas and Blass, 2010; Gray & Herremans, 2012 etc.) for the lack of standardization, credibility, transparency and independence, as well as bias and trade-offs (Windolph, 2011). Nevertheless, multiple studies highlight the value of these ratings including their ability to provide the overall information on a firm's sustainability performance (Chatterji, Levine & Toffel, 2009). In addition to that, different papers (e.g. Adam & Shavit, 2008; Chatterji & Toffel, 2010; Scalet & Kelly, 2010) focused on looking into the link between sustainability index ranking of a company and its factual sustainability performance. Thus, according to Adam and Shavit (2008), public ranking could create an incentive for firms to invest and work on their sustainability. Chatterji and Toffel (2010) found out that firms that received low sustainability ratings are likely to take measures and work on their sustainability performance to improve it, whereas Scalet & Kelly (2010) came to a similar conclusion and identified that rankings have an influence on the extent to which companies improve their sustainable behaviour.

Considering the earlier-discussed studies with the focus on sustainability communication that are widely using sustainability rankings in their research, as well as the above-mentioned benefits of the indices, it can be concluded that sustainability rankings do provide a good perspective of a company's sustainability performance. Consequently, they can be treated as a helpful framework for different sustainability topics that companies should focus on and communicate about in order to be perceived as sustainable by their stakeholders. For this reason, the sustainability topics of one of the most well-known and widely used sustainability assessment systems – DJSI (Searcy & Elkhawas, 2012), were used in the analysis in this study. However, this and other methodological considerations will be discussed in detail in the Methodology part of this thesis.

2.3.2 Sustainability communication formats

Even though the content formats of sustainability-oriented messages on social media can be also related to the ones discussed in the Content formats chapter of this thesis, it is important to mention that there are a number of studies considering different content types for sustainability content (e.g. Capriotti and Moreno, 2007; Isenmann, Bey & Welter, 2007; Kang & Park, 2018; Khan, Wang, Ehsan, Nurunnabi & Hashmi, 2019).

According to Capriotti and Moreno (2007), there are two most common ways to communicate sustainability information. The first format of communication includes expositive resources, such as graphics (e.g. text and images, photos, graphics) and audio-visual (e.g. audio and video) are aimed at the distribution of information, whereas users passively and receptively consume it (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). The second type of content format are interactive resources (e.g. hyperlinks, interactive graphics, charts etc.) that require active interaction from users in order to obtain information (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007).

As it was stated by Kang and Park (2018), the structural features of sustainability-related messages on social media can significantly affect the customer perceptions, attitudes and even purchase intentions. The authors also suggested

that the interactive ways of communicating sustainability, when companies are engaging in active dialogues with their stakeholders instead of simply pushing sustainability messages on them, are the most effective for sustainability communication on social media (Kang and Park (2018).

The same trend towards creating a company-stakeholder dialogue, as well as engaging and involving stakeholders instead of the one-way company-controlled communication has also been mentioned by Isenmann et al. (2007), who discussed sustainability communication online. Moreover, the authors also discussed the importance of customized approach to communicating sustainability, when different needs and requirements of the key target groups and stakeholders are taken into account.

In the study of different cues on sustainability content performance on social media it was identified that visual cues (i.e. interactive media, including text, images, audios, videos etc.) gain more attention and interest among consumers and therefore, benefit sustainability communication (Khan et al., 2019). In addition to that, the use of social cues (i.e. reviews, ratings, comments, as well as giveaways and event launches) in sustainability communication has also been discussed as vital for the positive consumer perception (Khan et al., 2019). Finally, it has also been established that security cues (i.e. security and privacy policies) positively influences sustainability communication as well, as they strengthen reliability of the brand and its image (Khan et al., 2019).

To summarise, there are different ways of communicating sustainability and it is important that companies critically consider their goals for sustainability communication. Depending on these, they should create tailored messages about specific topics relevant for their target audience and communicate these messages to them using the right tools.

Content formats used for the analysis of both sustainability and non-sustainability communication on social media in this study will be discussed further in the Methodology part of this thesis.

2.4   Summary of theoretical findings

After conducting a thorough analysis of the prior studies on the overall issue of sustainability, as well as social media communication and sustainability communication on social media in particular, some valuable findings were identified for this study.

To start with, the concept of sustainability has been widely discussed in the earlier literature and various definitions were developed and proposed by different sources. Firstly, it is crucially important to emphasise the difference between the concepts of sustainability and CSR, as both of the terms have been discussed in the prior literature. Thus, despite the fact that there is no clear and generally accepted distinction between these terms, CSR is considered in various sources as a social aspect of the overall sustainability system. Additionally, CSR

is often viewed as ethical commitments of businesses to society hence community-based approach, whereas sustainability is generally considered from the perspective of long-term commitments of companies in relation to their environmental footprint.

Nevertheless, it has been identified that most of the literature confirms the view of sustainability as a complex system consisting of three interconnected and interdependent aspects or dimensions: environmental, social and economic. For the clarity of this study, the following definition was developed on the basis of the prior literature and used in the research in this thesis: responsible and proactive organizational behaviour in relation to equally important and interconnected environmental, social and economic issues.

After defining sustainability term, as well as understanding the difference between the concepts of sustainability and CSR, the prior literature on social media communication was reviewed next in this thesis. Various characteristics of social media, including its speed, connectivity and plurality were widely discussed in the literature. In addition to that, the possibilities provided by social media for companies in relation to relationships with their stakeholders were also significantly important findings that were discussed in the literature.

Thus, social media enabled companies to engage with their stakeholders in a timely and direct manner. However, some criticism related to overly positive characteristics of social media communication were covered as well and as discussed in various studies on the topic, it is crucially important to critically assess the implications of social media and also, consider possible risks. Some of the major risks include different types of stakeholders and their diverse needs and knowledge requirements, as well as their orientation, which has a direct influence on the brand image, reputation, as well as organizational legitimacy and credibility. A good example of such could be positively engaged faith-holders, who are supporting the organization and its reputation, as well as the opposite group of hateholders, who are negatively engaged and might have major consequences for a brand and its reputation.

In addition to that, various social media channels and their characteristics were considered in detail as well. Based on the framework describing the diverse landscape of social media platforms, different social media channels were analysed and their characteristics and functionality elements, which are essentially important for a proper assessment of a company's social media communication, were considered as well. Thus, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were considered as the most suitable channels for the objectives of this thesis, as all of these channels can be characterised through the key features of social media and in addition to that, they all focus on some of the key functional blocks of social media, including the function to create user-generated content, communication functionality, network building functionality and finally, the ability to produce various formats of social media content.

As for various content typologies and formats, the differences and similarities between previous studies were discussed and the selected approach was especially covered in detail as well. Hence, a comprehensive typology that could be applied to different industries and message categories, while taking a holistic

approach and also, considering sustainability-related content in particular, was selected for classifying different categories of social media posts in this study. In practice, the framework encompasses seven key categories of social media content: brand awareness, corporate social responsibility, customer service, engagement, product awareness, promotional and seasonal content. Various literature on content formats and the positive effect of dynamic elements, such as colours, graphics, audio and video, was discussed as well and it has been established that the grounded theory approach, as well as different characteristics of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram mentioned earlier, will be taken into consideration when analysing the brands' social media communication.

Finally, the aspect of stakeholder engagement, which is undoubtedly one of the main elements of social media communication, was thoroughly analysed as well. In addition to covering the positive aspects of social media in relation to stakeholder engagement, the negative engagement was also covered, and the critics found in the prior literature on the topic were included in the discussion as well. It has been established that it is crucially important to consider both tangible and intangible factors influencing social media engagement and in addition to the generally accepted quantitative metrics, such as likes, shares, clicks, views and such, it is also extremely important to take a holistic approach to analysing stakeholder engagement process and take into account the qualitative metrics as well.

The next major part of this thesis covered in detail sustainability-related communication on social media. Various opportunities and value for a brand image and reputation, which are associated with sustainability communication were found and analysed in the previous literature. However, some challenges related to sustainability communication discussed in the prior literature were covered as well and more specifically, diverse expectations and requirements from various stakeholder groups, as well as the aspect of greenwashing were also discussed in this part of the thesis.

Finally, sustainability topics used for the analysis of sustainability-related content in this thesis were selected based on various sustainability measurement systems, as well as previous studies on the topic of sustainability communication. Hence, it was decided to use the DJSI sustainability criteria, which takes into consideration all three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and in addition to that, is widely used in other research works focused on sustainability communication. Lastly, even though the content formats of sustainability-related messages can also be related to those formats mentioned earlier, some specific features of sustainability content on social media, including the use of expositive and interactive resources, were also discussed in the literature review part of this thesis.

However, as it was clarified from the previous chapters, additional research is needed for studying sustainability communication on social media and especially, in the context of Finland. More specifically, it is important to understand whether companies acknowledge the importance of sustainability communication, as well as how sustainability-related messages are communicated by the brands and what is their influence on stakeholder engagement. This and other

issues related to sustainability communication on social media of the Finnish brands will be analysed in the following chapters of this thesis for the purpose of identifying whether the theoretical propositions that were discussed by various literature on the topic were implemented by these brands in practice and had an effect on positive stakeholder perception of these brands.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

According to by Patton (2002), research strategy is a plan that justifies methodological decisions made by the researcher, whereas Ghauri and Gronhaug (2002) discussed that the methodological approach and research design are influenced by the research topic, the problem and the purpose of the study. A good way to illustrate the overall research process and its stages is the research onion framework developed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009). This framework consists of six key layers or stages of the research design process: philosophy, approach, strategy, choices of research methods, time horizons and finally, data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). On the basis of stages defined in the research onion this chapter will explain in detail the research design approach used in this study.

As already mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, the key goal of this thesis is to analyse the sustainability communication of the Finnish brands on social media and to gain new insights into the influence of sustainability communication on these brands' engagement. Based on that, the descriptive study design with the exploratory research elements was applied to this study. As discussed by Bryman (2012), the descriptive research puts an emphasis on the context and tends to examine the specific situation or phenomenon, such as, for example, the social media communication by the Finnish sustainable brands. However, as discussed earlier, the topic of sustainability communication on the Finnish brands' social media channels was not studied sufficiently in prior research. For this reason, some characteristics of the exploratory research, such as the lack of pre-existing information about an issue or the newness of the topic (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015) are applicable to the research in this study.

In addition to that, the abductive approach was taken in this study for the purpose of developing the existing theories. According to Bryman & Bell (2015), the abductive reasoning overcomes the limitations of inductive and deductive approaches and involves the interrelation of the existing theories and empirical findings. In practice, this implies that the goal of this study is not to test the existing theories and frameworks, nor it is to create new ones, but rather, this thesis focuses on applying the existing knowledge to the context of Finland and the Finnish brands.

In accordance with the given research objective (*to gain understanding of the role of social media in sustainability communication through the prism of the most sustainable Finnish brands*) and research questions (*RQ1: What is the focus of social media communication of the sustainable Finnish brands? RQ2: How are sustainability-themed messages communicated on social media among the sustainable brands in Finland?*

RQ3: How does the brands' sustainability communication on social media affect stake-holder engagement?), both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in this study.

More specifically, the qualitative content analysis was chosen for the first and the second research questions, whereas the quantitative content analysis was selected for the third research question. As discussed by Sweeney and Coughlan (2008), content analysis was defined in various literature and can be described as a research technique for determining the presence of certain concepts in a data and drawing conclusions based on the observations of content. In addition to that, Sweeney and Coughlan (2008) stated that content analysis research method has been widely used in research on sustainability and is the most commonly applied technique for analysing CSR disclosure of firms.

As discussed by Hair et al. (2015, p. 153), "qualitative data represents textual or visual rather than numerical descriptions". As the first two research questions focus on the social media content and more specifically, the text-based posts, images and videos, the qualitative research is the most suitable research method to examine and gain the most appropriate data. As also mentioned by Hair et al. (2015, p. 153), "quantitative data refers to measurements in which numbers are used directly to represent the characteristics of something". As far as the last research question is concerned, it is important to understand the connection between the sustainability-related content on the brands' social media and their engagement rates. Hence, the quantitative data, including the number of likes, comments and shares was studied using the quantitative content analysis as a research method. To sum up, both research approaches were used for analysing data in this study and as stated by Hair et al. (2015), the sufficient research findings usually require input from both quantitative and qualitative approaches that complement each other.

Finally, this study can be considered as longitudinal, as the data was examined during the various time periods (Hair et al., 2015). Hence, social media posts of the Finnish brands' during the randomly selected periods of time within a year enabling to track any potential patterns.

3.2   Case selection

A multi-case study approach discussed by Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2003) was applied in this study. It was decided to examine five brands that were ranked as the most sustainable in their industries in Finland according to the Sustainability Brand Index ranking – the Europe's largest brand study with the focus on sustainability (SB Insight AB, 2019). According to Patton (2002), the effective sampling strategy implies that the cases are selected based on their informational richness and usefulness as far as the research phenomenon is concerned. Following the guidelines of the purposeful sampling by Patton (2002) and to ensure the valuable contribution to the purposes of the given study, three main criteria for the choice of case companies were the following: Finland as their country of

origin, their sustainability ranking based on consumer perceptions, as well as their industry type. In order to diversify the data, the most sustainable brands from various industries were selected as case companies.

Thus, based on the data provided in the Sustainable Brand Index report (SB Insight AB, 2019), the following five sustainable brands and industry leaders were examined in this study:

- Valio (#1 in the overall ranking and #1 in the food & beverage industry ranking)
- S-market or S-Group in this study (#3 in the overall ranking and #1 in the grocery stores industry ranking)
- VR (#6 in the overall ranking and #1 in the transport industry ranking)
- Fiskars (#8 in the overall ranking and #1 in the furniture, decoration & leisure ranking)
- Partioaitta (#10 in the overall ranking and #1 in the clothing industry ranking).

For the purpose of this study it was crucially important to identify and consider those organizations, which are perceived as the most effective communicators of sustainability in Finland. Therefore, only the companies in the leading positions in the Sustainable Brand Index ranking (Sb Insight AB, 2019) were analysed in this thesis in order to look into the best communication practices instead of averages (Hartman et al., 2007). The full list of sustainable Finnish brands and their overall, as well as industry rankings is provided in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Importantly, S-Group's brand was not a part of the ranking, but instead, one of the cooperative's separate brands – S-market was ranked third as the most sustainable brand in Finland and the leader in the grocery stores industry. However, due to the fact that S-market has multiple social media channels depending on the stores' location and the published content greatly varies among the channels, it was therefore established that analysing S-Group's main channels would be more accurate and beneficial for this research.

Next, the brands' social media platforms were analysed for the purpose of identifying their most actively used channels. Thus, it has been determined that all the brands are present and active on the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Importantly, only the brands' official and main social media accounts, which are mentioned on the corporate websites, were considered in this study.

Finally, as it has already been mentioned earlier, this study analysed the brands' social media content during the randomly chosen periods of time. Hence, every three months within a year, or quarterly (e.g. January, April, July, October). As discussed by Romenti et al. (2016), random time periods guarantee data to be independent from any major discussions or behaviours that could influence the quality of online communication. Undoubtedly, some dates or events might have

affected the brands' sustainability communication during the specific time periods and this fact will be taken into consideration when analysing the research findings, as well as the limitations of the study.

It should also be mentioned that, as discussed earlier, the brands analysed in this study are Finnish and all five brands communicate on their main social media channels using Finnish language. Thus, the data collected was in Finnish, but analysed using English.

3.3   Data collection

The process of data collection was written out in detail in the coding book (see Appendix 3) that was also used as the guidelines for the second coder required for the intercoder reliability testing. Importantly, the data collection and coding method used in this study was adapted from the research paper on CSR communication on social media by Valentini et al. (2014) and its research design.

As discussed earlier, the social media communication data on three channels of five brands during four months was collected and coded in the Excel file consisting of five separate sheets per each brand. Each sheet contains a table that includes the following information: the post identifier, date, social media channel, likes, comments, shares or retweets, format, as well as social media communication topic and sustainability communication topic. The companies' social media posts were established as coding units and each unit or post created by a company (excluding shares/retweets without a company's comments, as well as replies) was supposed to be analysed and coded according to the earlier mentioned 9 variables.

The first three columns of the Excel file include general information about the social media posts, such as their unique identification codes, the date of publication, as well as social media channel, where this post has been published. The next three columns contain different observed variables, such as likes, comments and shares or retweets, which will help to analyse stakeholder engagement, as previously discussed in the theory part of this thesis. It is also worth mentioning that shares could not be counted for Instagram due to the functional characteristics of this platform. However, this fact was taken into consideration when analysing the collected data. The following column is meant for different social media communication formats that were selected using the grounded theory approach, according to which theory is constructed from data (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). In practice, different formats have been selected during the pilot testing and were also based on the most common ways brands communicate on social media, which was discussed in the literature review part of this thesis. Thus, 13 different types of social media communication formats were identified and used for coding the collected data (see Appendix 3). The final two columns include the crucially important for this study latent variables, such as social media communication topics and sustainability communication topics. Different

types of corporate communication on social media, as well as sustainability communication topics have also been discussed earlier in the previous chapters. Thus, different social media communication types were selected based on the study by Coursaris et al. (2013), although the variables selected for this study slightly differ from the original source, as they were modified according to the study's points of interest and the objective. In addition to that, in the research paper by Coursaris et al. (2013), CSR is measured as one of the social media communication types, but as this study focused on sustainability, the second variable and its description were modified according to the context of this thesis. Altogether, five different types of social media content were used for data analysis in this study (see Appendix 3). As for different sustainability communication topics, they are based on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index family (DJSI) mentioned earlier and the variables used for coding the data in this study were adapted from Hartman et al. (2007). Overall, 14 topics were used for coding sustainability-related messages by the brands considered in this study (see Appendix 3). It should also be noted that social media posts could contain more than one topic and therefore, some posts have been coded several times in order to analyse all aspects discussed.

3.4 Data analysis

In order to ensure reliability of the data collected, the intercoder reliability test was completed during the early stages of the data analysis process. Similarly to the study by Romenti, Murtarelli and Valentini (2014), the sets of data were selected from the full sample and coded separately by two researchers (the author and another student), after which it was reviewed for consistency. As suggested by Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2002), the size of the sample should be around 10% of the full sample, but more than 50 units and less than 300 units. As the full data sample collected was quite large (931 social media posts in total and 1763 rows of Excel data), it was decided to test the coded data of one brand.

TABLE 2 Intercoder reliability tests

Variable	Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Aplha
Social media communication topics	84.2 % (sufficient)	0.797	0.798	0.798
Sustainability communication topics	85.7% (sufficient)	0.821	0.822	0.824

Similarly to the study by Valentini et al. (2014), the focus in the intercoder reliability test was on analysing only the latent variables. Hence, social media communication topics and sustainability communication topics. For a higher

level of reliability, both topics were tested separately and as demonstrated above in Table 2, the results of two tests indicated the sufficient level of reliability. However, it is important to mention that the sufficient percentage of agreement was achieved after the second round of coding, when all discrepancies that occurred during the first coding round were clarified and both coders reached a common understanding of the data interpretation.

After ensuring the satisfactory levels of reliability with another coder's results, collected data was summarised and analysed using various methods. In addition to general findings that were evident from the coded data, additional analysis was conducted as well for the purpose of answering the research questions and reaching the objective of this thesis.

Considering the research questions and the objective of this study, the first two research questions were summarised and analysed using descriptive statistics (e.g. Pivot tables and charts) and different variables were analysed for the purpose of understanding the overall social media communication of the given brands, as well as the specifics of sustainability communication on their social media channels. Thus, the focus of the brands' social media communication was analysed through the information on what topics they communicate online the most, during which periods of time and what social media platforms they use for that. These findings also demonstrated general trends towards sustainability communication among these brands. However, the analysis for the second research question focused more specifically on the sustainability-related content and looked into the interrelations of different social media channels, as well as various social media content formats and sustainability topics. The final research question focusing on the influence of social media content on the engagement rates was answered using the statistical hypothesis t-tests, which determine the probability of the relationships between variables and how significant this difference is (Saunders et al., 2009). It is also worth mentioning that a number of research articles that analysed the influence of certain content type on the brand's engagement rates (e.g. prior literature on content typology analysis demonstrated in Figure 5) also used the similar approach in their studies.

Importantly, as discussed by Sabate et al. (2014), likes, comments, as well as shares/retweets are different in terms of engagement and effort from stakeholders. For this reason, to ensure the validity of the findings, three separate t-tests were conducted for analysing the influence of sustainability and non-sustainability communication on different engagement rates (i.e. likes, comments and shares or retweets). The findings of the data analysis process will be discussed in detail in the following chapter of this thesis.

4 RESULTS

4.1 General findings

To start with, the total amount of data collected from three channels of five brands during four months was 931 units i.e. social media posts. As mentioned earlier, in most cases, each social media post included more than one topic and therefore, was coded several times. This resulted in 1763 rows of Excel data. It is also crucially important to mention that the reweighting formula was added to the Excel file to avoid any statistical errors in the cases when several topics could apply to a single post. Thus, all calculations were made in accordance with the reweighted values of the units and also, the numbers were rounded for simplifying the analysis of the findings.

The amount of social media posts per company greatly differed and the findings in the descending order were the following: Valio (273 posts), VR (239 posts), Partioaitta (220 posts), S-Group (104 posts) and Fiskars (95 posts). As for the sustainability-related content, in total 149 posts or around 16% of all content were dedicated to the discussions of sustainability issues. Similarly to the overall scores, how frequently each brand communicated sustainability-related topics also differed and the findings in the descending order were the following: S-Group (43 sustainability posts), Valio (41 sustainability posts), Partioaitta (37 sustainability posts), Fiskars (15 sustainability posts) and VR (13 sustainability posts). However, in relation to the overall content, sustainability content was distributed among the brands in the following order: S-Group (41%), Partioaitta (17%), Fiskars (16%), Valio (15%) and VR (5%).

TABLE 3 The correlation between the brands' sustainability rankings and social media content during the following months: 01.19, 04.19, 07.19, 10.19

Sustainability ranking	Social media posts in total	Sustainability-related posts	% of sustainability content
Valio (1)	Valio (273)	S-Group (43)	S-Group (41%)
S-Group (3)	VR (239)	Valio (41)	Partioaitta (17%)
VR (6)	Partioaitta (220)	Partioaitta (37)	Fiskars (16%)
Fiskars (8)	S-Group (104)	Fiskars (15)	Valio (15%)
Partioaitta (10)	Fiskars (95)	VR (13)	VR (5%)

Thus, the connection between the brands' sustainability ranking (according to the Sustainability Brand Index report), the amount of social media posts communication during the given periods of time, as well the amount of sustainability-related posts in particular, is demonstrated in Table 3.

Based on the data collected it was possible to gain the overall understanding of social media content of the studied brands. Thus, if some brands mostly posted product-related and sales-oriented content on their social media (e.g. Fiskars), other brands focused more on the engagement aspect in their social media content and tended to ask questions from the audience, share some advice and information relevant to their followers and in general actively engage with them (e.g. Valio and VR). Additionally, some brands offered a wide range of real-life experiences for their audience, including various events and brand-related activities (e.g. Partioaitta), whereas other brands frequently organized and announced different competitions and giveaways for their audience on their social media (e.g. S-Ryhmä). However, generally the social media content of the given brands was quite diverse and even though some brands focused on certain aspects of social media communication more than the others, all brands were actively utilising different social media communication tactics and tools. It was also possible to identify that some brands took a personal approach in their social media communication and used human voice when communicating with their audience (e.g. Valio and VR). Interestingly, all five brands had a mention of the Sustainable Brand Index ranking in their social media content. The mention typically included some appreciation message, where brands thanked customers for their trust.

To sum up, the general findings provided a broad understanding of each brands' social media communication content and style and in addition to that, some similarities and differences between the brands were identified as well. This helped to draw a parallel between the brands' social media communication and more specifically, sustainability-related communication and their sustainability rankings. However, more specific findings and answers to the research questions will be provided in the following chapters of this thesis.

4.2 Overall social media communication of the brands

The findings of the first research question (*RQ1: What is the focus of social media communication of the sustainable Finnish brands?*) were summarised and analysed using Pivot tables and charts that allowed to compare different variables, as well as identify any interrelations, patterns and trends. The data was analysed both collectively for all five brands in order to obtain a general understanding of the issue and also, separately per each brand to gain brand-specific information. However, this chapter will mostly discuss the collective findings of the data analysis, in order to get a holistic and overall image of how the Finnish sustainable brands communicate about sustainability on their social media channels.

TABLE 4 The focus of social media communication of the brands (channels & topics)

	Topics					
Channels	**Engagement**	**Promotional**	**Sustainability**	**Products & Services**	**Seasonal**	**Grand Total**
Facebook	131	67	44	58	43	**343**
Twitter	90	107	85	21	9	**313**
Instagram	109	57	20	48	41	**275**
Grand Total	**330**	**231**	**149**	**127**	**93**	**931**

Table 4 demonstrates the topics communicated by the given brands on all three channels. As it can be seen from the table, engagement content i.e. posts that build connections and communities through the company-consumer interactions (i.e. questions, requests, polls, appreciation messages) was the most commonly communicated content on the brands' social media channels (around 35%). The second most common content was promotional (i.e. posts that build the brand's presence and increate its attractiveness e.g. ads/promotions with the focus on the brand, events, collaborations, brand history, behind-the-scenes, deals, contests, giveaways) (around 25%). As already mentioned before, around 16% of the content was dedicated to sustainability-related topics (i.e. posts related to the company's strategy in relation to environmental, social and economic issues) and a little less than that – 14% incorporated the posts related to products and services (i.e. posts that build and increase customer awareness, understanding and knowledge of the company's products and services e.g. ads/promotions with the focus on the specific product/service, information about the specific product/service). Finally, the last category of posts (around 10%) was seasonal content (i.e. posts related to seasonal and annual events e.g. holidays, seasons, events).

As illustrated in Figure 8, the findings partly differed between three channels. Thus, Facebook was the most popular platform for social media communication among the given brands, whereas Twitter was the second and Instagram was the last, as far as frequency of corporate communication on the following social media channels is concerned.

Moreover, the most commonly communicated topics by the brands were quite similar on Facebook and Instagram (Engagement, Promotional, Products & Services). Although sustainability-related topics were discussed on Facebook slightly more than seasonal content, whereas on Instagram, seasonal content was oppositely more common than sustainability-related one. Alternatively, as Figure 8 shows, the analysis of the brands' content on Twitter indicated that the most common content was promotional and it was followed by almost equally communicated sustainability and engagement content, whereas the tweets dedicated to the products and services and finally, seasonal content were communicated the least.

Additionally, the findings also indicated that engagement content was communicated the most on Facebook, promotional posts were the most common on Twitter, sustainability-related communication was prevalent on Twitter, posts dedicated to the information on products and services were frequent on Facebook, whereas seasonal content prevailed on Facebook as well in comparison with other social media platforms.
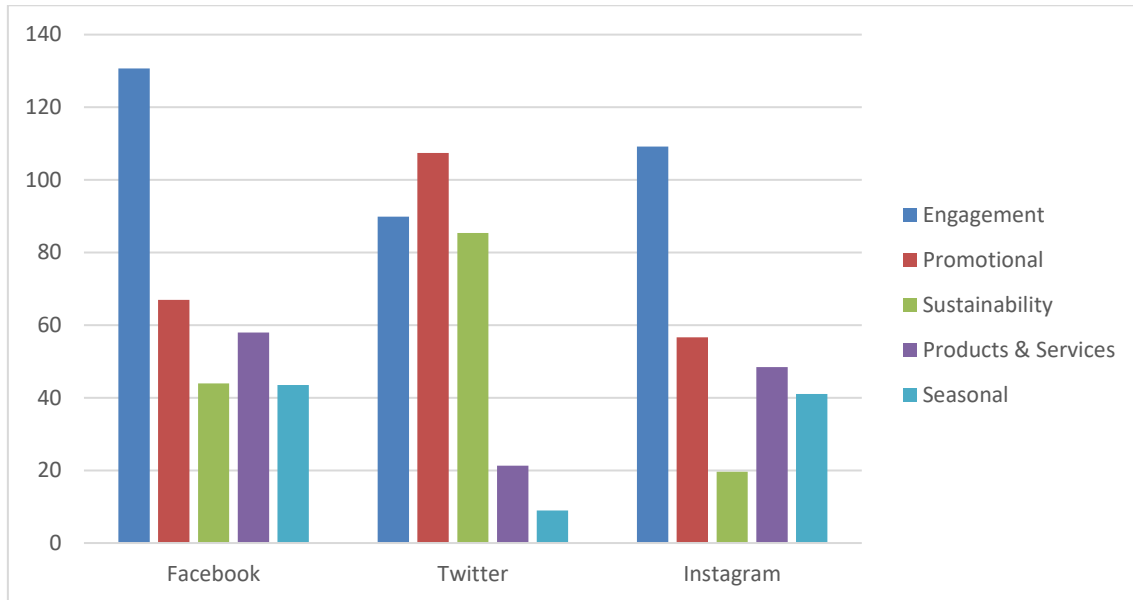
FIGURE 8 The focus of social media communication of the brands (channels & topics)

Next, different topics communicated by the brands on their social media were analysed in terms of different time periods.

TABLE 5 The focus of social media communication of the brands (time periods & topics)

	Topics					
Month	Engagement	Promotional	Sustainability	Products & Services	Seasonal	**Grand Total**
January	82	57	39	32	12	**222**
April	82	57	30	23	37	**230**
July	99	68	29	40	17	**252**
October	67	49	51	32	27	**227**
Grand Total	**329**	**231**	**149**	**127**	**93**	**931**

As indicated in Table 5, as well as illustrated in Figure 9, the amount of social media posts communicated by the brands on their social media was nearly equal with the slight increase in July during all four months being analysed. During all four months the most communicated content were posts related to engage-

ment and promotional topics with a small exception in October and the prevailing number of sustainability-related posts then, whereas the rest of the topics differed between four months.

Moreover, based on this data, it was possible to determine when each specific category of post was communicated the most during the given periods of time. Thus, engagement and promotional content, as well as posts related to products and services prevailed in July, whereas posts dedicated to sustainability topics were by far the most common in October. Finally, seasonal content was communicated the most in April.
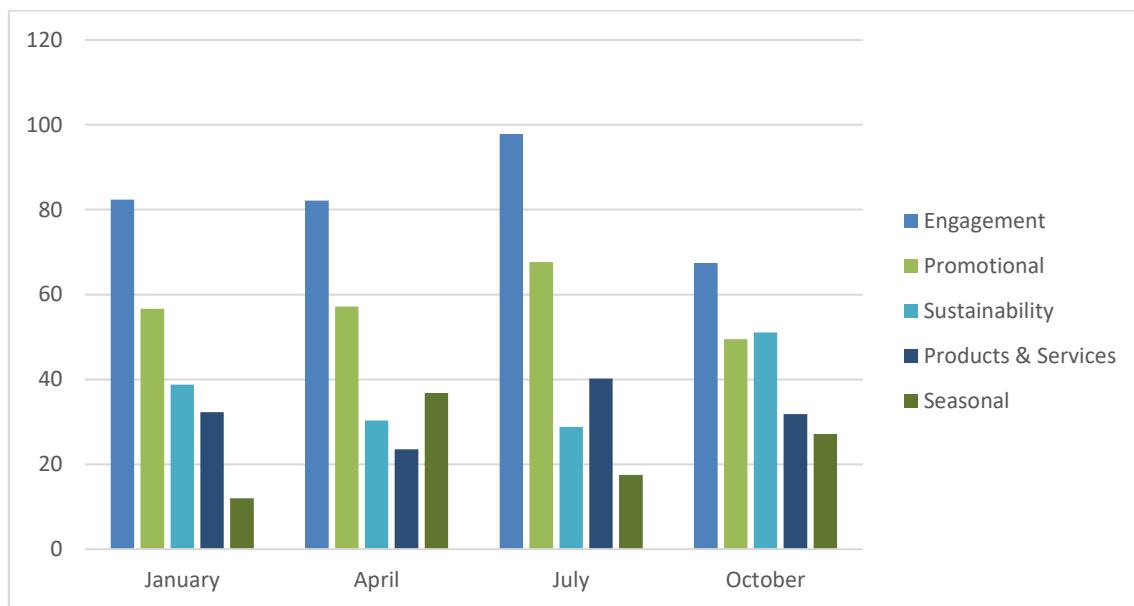
FIGURE 9 The focus of social media communication of the brands (time periods & topics)

As already mentioned earlier, the above-discussed findings provided a general understanding of the brands' social media communication, as well as the influence of different social media platforms and time periods on the topic of communication. Once it has been identified that brands do communicate sustainability on their social media, the second research question focused primarily on sustainability-related posts and the findings will be discussed in detail in the following subchapter.

4.3   Sustainability communication of the brands

The findings of the second research question (*RQ2: How are sustainability-themed messages communicated on social media among the sustainable brands in Finland?*) were also summarised and analysed using Pivot tables and charts, which allowed the comparison of different variables and their influence on sustainability communication on the brands' social media channels. Similarly to the first research

question, the data was analysed both collectively for all five brands and separately per each brand to gain the general and brand-specific information as far as sustainability communication on social media is concerned.

TABLE 6 Sustainability communication on the brands' social media (channels & topics)

	Channels			
Sustainability topics	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	Grand Total
Env. Performance (Eco-Efficiency)	44	36	19	99
Talent Attraction & Retention	21	17	5	43
Corporate Citizenship/ Philanthropy	4	22	15	41
Customer Relationship Management	12	10	7	29
Env. Policy/ Management	21	2	1	24
Investor Relations	20		0	20
Labour Practice Indicators	3	1	0	4
Human Capital Development	2	0	0	2
Corporate Governance	1	0	0	1
Grand Total	128	88	47	263

First, only those posts that were labelled as sustainability-related were analysed for the purpose of identifying the key sustainability issues discussed. Thus, the brands' social media channels and the presence of different sustainability topics were examined, and the findings are demonstrated above in Table 6.

As shown in the table, by far the biggest amount of posts (around 37%) were dedicated to the topic of the brands' environmental performance, hence the information on the companies' environmental footprint and their operational ecoefficiency (i.e. Env. Performance (Eco-Efficiency)). The content on the brands' social media channels contained an almost equal amount of posts (around 16%) related to companies' strategies and behaviours towards attracting and retaining existing and potential talents (i.e. Talent Attraction & Retention), as well as companies' responsibilities towards society in the form of financial contributions, time and resources (i.e. Corporate Citizenship/Philanthropy). Around 10% of social media posts were related to the information on the brands' interaction with their current and potential customers (i.e. Customer Relationship Management), their laws, regulations and policies concerning environmental issues on a broad level (i.e. Environmental Policy/Management), as well as their operational and financial performance and other information related to finance, communication, marketing and law compliance (i.e. Investor Relations). The least amount (around 1%) of topics discussed in sustainability-related social media posts of the

brands were the information related to recognition and application of international standards of labour and human rights (i.e. Labour Practice Indicators), the firms' approach to maintaining and improving human and intellectual capital (i.e. Human Capital Development), as well as the companies' board structure, its composition and responsibilities of its members (i.e. Corporate Governance).

In addition to that, as already mentioned earlier and illustrated in Figure 10, the amount of sustainability content prevailed on Twitter compared to the second most common for sustainability content Facebook and lastly, Instagram.
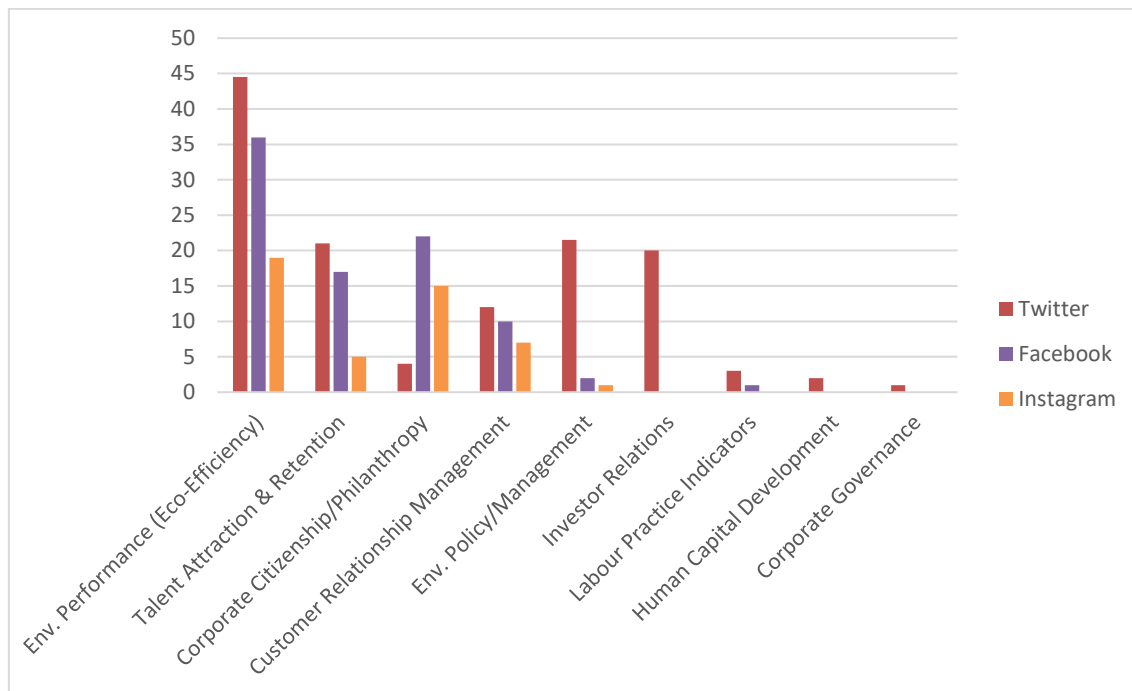
FIGURE 10 Sustainability communication on the brands' social media (channels & topics)

Based on the data provided above, it is also possible to identify the patterns related to each aspect of sustainability and the social media channel on which the given brands communicated it to their stakeholders the most. For instance, if the topics related to the environment element of sustainability (e.g. Environmental Performance (Eco-Efficiency), Environmental Policy/Management) were communicated a lot more on Twitter in comparison with other platforms, the issues related to the social aspect of sustainability (e.g. Corporate Citizenship/Philanthropy) were largely discussed on Facebook. However, the findings show that the sustainability topics varied on each of three channels.

In addition to analysing sustainability-related topics discussed on different channels, the findings also provided valuable information on various content types used for communicating sustainability content.

TABLE 7 Sustainability communication on the brands' social media (formats & topics)

Sustainability topics	Format											
	Text+image+link (internal)	Text+image	Text+link (internal)	Text+video+link (internal)	Text+image+link (external)	Text	Text+video	Text+link (external)	Text+links	Text+image+video	Text+image+links	Grand Total
Env. Performance(Eco-Efficiency)	33	22	5	5	12	14	4	3	0	1	0	99
Talent Attraction/Retention	21	5	6	7	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	43
Corporate Citizenship/Philanthropy	14	14	1	7	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	41
Customer Relationship Management	11	4	2	5	3	0	3	1	0	0	0	29
Env. Policy/Management	1	14	3	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	24
Investor Relations	4	2	9	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	20
Labor Practice Indicators	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Human Capital Development	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Corporate Governance		1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	86	62	28	25	19	16	13	11	1	1	1	263

According to the findings shown above in Table 7, the most commonly used (around 33%) content format by the brands for communicating sustainability-related messages on social media was text + image + link to an internal channel of the brand (e.g. corporate website/social media channel etc.) Text + image was also commonly used (24%) among the brands when communicating sustainability issues on social media. Almost equally were used the formats, such as text + link (internal) and text + video + link (internal) (around 10%), text + image + link to an external channel (e.g. another company's website/social media channel etc.) and text (around 7%), as well as text + video and text + link (external) (around 4%). The least commonly used (around 1%) content formats for sustainability communication were the following: text + multiple links, text + image + video, as well as text + image + multiple links.

Figure 11 below demonstrates in detail the differences between each specific sustainability topics and the choice of the content format for its communication. For instance, text + image + link (internal) content format had a prevailing number of posts related to the social aspect of sustainability (e.g. Talent Attraction & Retention, Customer Relationship Management, Human Capital Development) whereas the format text + image has been largely used for social media posts discussing the environmental and economic aspects of sustainability (e.g. Env. Policy/Management, Corporate Governance). However, the rest of the formats were widely spread between different sustainability topics.
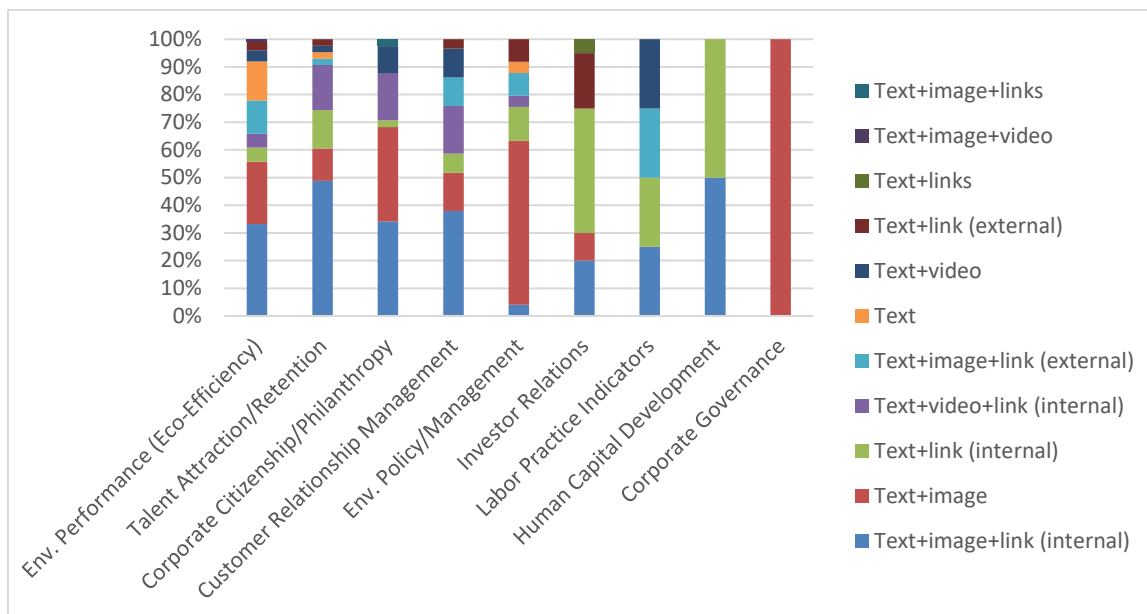
FIGURE 11 Sustainability communication on the brands' social media (formats & topics)

After thoroughly analysing the brands' social media communication in general, as well as sustainability communication in particular, a statistical hypothesis test – t-test was conducted for the purpose of identifying how significant is the difference between the sustainability and non-sustainability posts in relation to the brands' engagement rates (i.e. likes, comments, shares/retweets).

4.4 Social media sustainability communication and engagement rates

As already stated earlier, the findings of the third research question (*RQ3: How does the brands' sustainability communication on social media affect stakeholder engagement?*) were obtained using the two-sample t-tests that assume that the variances of both samples are equal. As already mentioned before, as likes, comments and shares/retweets represent different forms of engagement, three separate t-tests were conducted to analyse if there is a significant difference between sustainability and non-sustainability posts and likes, comments and shares/retweets.

TABLE 8 T-tests findings

Engagement metric	p-value	Difference
Likes	0.03	Significant
Comments	0.12	Not significant
Shares/retweets	0.19	Not significant

As demonstrated above in Table 8, three separate tests were completed and resulted in different levels of significance. The first t-test compared the influence of sustainability and non-sustainability social media posts on the number of likes. As it can be seen from the findings, the p-value (0.03) is less than alpha (0.05), hence rejects the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the means of each sample. In practise, this means that the topic (sustainability or non-sustainability) of a post impacted the amount of likes it gained.

The second t-test looked into the influence of sustainability and non-sustainability posts on the number of comments. In contract with the first t-test, the p-value (0.12) is greater than alpha (0.05) and therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the variances of both samples is accepted. Hence, the number of comments was not largely affected by whether a social media post was related to sustainability or not.

The final t-test analysed the difference in the number of shares influenced by sustainability and non-sustainability posts. The p-value (0.19) is, similarly to the second t-test, greater than alpha (0.05), which leads to the non-confirmation of hypothesis that significant difference would exist in the variances of the samples. Thus, sustainability-related or non-related posts did not largely differ, as far as the number of shares or retweets is concerned.

Additionally, a descriptive analysis was conducted for the purpose of analysing how differently sustainability-related and non-related posts performed as far as likes are concerned. As demonstrated in Figure 12 below, the amount of likes for non-sustainability posts (Sum = 230670, mean = 346.87) was by far greater than the number of likes gained for the sustainability-related social media posts (Sum = 40683, mean = 346.87).
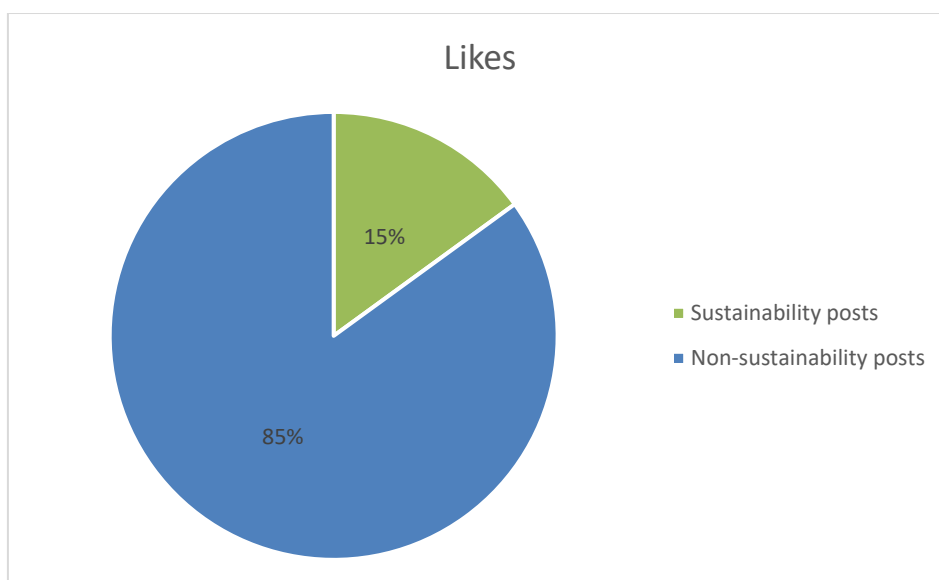

FIGURE 12 Likes: sustainability and non-sustainability posts

In the following chapters of this thesis, some conclusions will be made based on the data findings discussed, as well as the theory will be connected with the research results in order to analyse how it applies to the empirical findings.

4.5   Discussion of the results

Even though the empirical findings of this study mostly supported the previous research analysed in the literature review part of this thesis, there were some differences as well. First and foremost, the crucial importance of sustainability communication has been emphasized in both previous literature on the topic, as well as the empirical findings of this study. As stated by Signitzer and Prexl (2007), sustainability nowadays became a corporate value and an essential part of the business strategy in a number of companies. Additionally, as suggested by Lee et al. (2013), sustainability is increasingly becoming a critical foundation of value creation and social media is an effective platform where brands can communicate about it. The results of the research in this study go in line with these statements and it has been confirmed that sustainability communication plays an important role in the overall corporate communication system and is the third most commonly communicated type of content on social media channels of the researched brands. The reputational value, as well as positive influence on the brand-consumer relationships of sustainability communication discussed by Werther and Chandler (2005) has also been justified through the research findings. Hence, the fact that these brands, which recognize the importance of sustainability communication on their social media, have the reputation of the most sustainable brands in the country based on the consumer perceptions.

In addition to confirming the value of sustainability communication and the important role of addressing sustainability-related issues on social media, it has also been identified that companies acknowledge all three essentially important elements of sustainability, which were previously discussed in the theory part of this thesis. According to Capriotti and Moreno (2007), the concept of sustainability incorporates commitments of a company in relation to all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic and the communication aspect is an essential part of the whole system. As it was demonstrated through the empirical findings, the Finnish sustainable brands address various sustainability-related issues on their social media. For instance, some of the most commonly communicates sustainability topics of the given brands include Environmental Performance (Eco-Efficiency) and Environmental Policy/Management, which are related to the environmental aspect of sustainability, Talent Attraction & Retention and Corporate Citizenship/Philanthropy related to the social element of sustainability and finally, Customer Relationship Management and Investor Relations that refer to the economic pillar of sustainability. Although all three pillars are not communicated equally by the companies (environmental – 124, social – 90 and economic – 50 of the total amount of sustainability-related posts), it is still undoubtedly important that the brands take a wholistic and multi-dimensional approach to their sustainability communication on social media, which is also consistent with the research on the topic (e.g. First & Khetriwal, 2008; Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Tuğrul & Göçer, 2017 etc.)

In addition to that, it has also been established from the empirical findings that brands are actively utilising different opportunities provided by social media for communicating sustainability in an interesting and engaging way, while targeting various target audiences. This also supports the previous research suggesting that nowadays digital tools have replaced the old ways of communicating sustainability and the growth of digital media allowed companies to communicate sustainability messages across various platforms and using different content formats, including the use of visual cues, rather than text-only content (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). As it was discussed in the Results section, the topic of sustainability is discussed by the brands' on all three social media channels and in addition to that, some of the most commonly used content formats of the brands for sustainability communication include the use of images, videos and links.

It has also been established that the brands' content on each social media channel varies, which has also been discussed in the prior research on different stakeholders and target groups. As it was discussed by Luoma-aho (2015), it is crucially important that brands recognize the importance of faith-holders and focus on keeping and supporting them. Although, none of the brands in this study have communicated about crisis situations during the given periods of time, which would have helped to see how in practice faith-holders support the brand image and reputation during these times. Despite this, all the brands prioritized engagement content, as well as actively communicated with their faith-holders e.g. through the appreciation messages. In addition to that, the style of communication greatly differed between the channels of the brands, which is also consistent with the previously-discussed theory in accordance to which different groups of stakeholders have different needs and therefore, brands need to take their stakeholders' concerns into consideration when deciding what to communicate, how and where (Dawkins, 2005).

For instance, as the empirical findings showed, Facebook content is targeted at wider audience or general audience (Dawkins, 2005) and therefore, it is more informational and well-polished in comparison with the content on other channels. As it has been discovered from the findings, Facebook is the most used social media channel for corporate communication and therefore, is intended for diverse audiences. In addition to that, the topics on Facebook are typically discussed broadly, whereas on Twitter, for example, the content is generally targeted at more explicit groups of stakeholders, who are interested and even often involved in the operations of a company and therefore, interested in more timely and factual content, as discussed by Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007), especially regarding the sustainability issues. As for Instagram, it has been established that because of the functional characteristics of this platform, images and videos to some extent play an essentially important role for the communication on Instagram. It has also been identified that brands are frequently communicating about collaborations on Instagram (partnerships, influencer marketing etc.), which is also oriented towards specific target audience. In addition to the visual aspect of Instagram content, it has also been discovered that, similarly to Facebook, the content is quite generalized and targeted at broad stakeholder

groups. Moreover, the brands' communication on Facebook and Instagram is more customer-oriented and brands create a lot interactive and engaging content on these channels, whereas Twitter contains more company-related information and as far as sustainability is concerned, it is the most commonly used channel for communicating about this issue.

However, despite various benefits of sustainability communication on a corporate image, reputation and relationships with stakeholders, as discussed in various literature (e.g. Eberle et al., 2013; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007; Tuğrul & Göçer, 2017) and the initial assumption that sustainability content will positively influence the brands' engagement rates compared to non-sustainability content, this was not discovered from the empirical findings. Thus, even though a significant difference in the amount of likes between two types of content was established from the research findings, non-sustainability posts were determined to gain more likes than sustainability-relates ones. Whereas the amount of comments and shares/retweets were not significantly influenced by whether content was related to sustainability or not.

One of the reasons for such difference in the amount of likes in favour of non-related to sustainability posts could be the highly interactive and engaging way in which brands communicate promotional and engagement types of content. The examples include different contents, giveaways, events, collaborations, questions, requests, polls, appreciation messages etc. As discussed in the literature on the topic of social media communication, engaging with stakeholders on social media rather than "pushing" the content on them is crucially importance for the effective and successful social media communication (Khan et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2013). In addition to that, as stated by Eberle et al. (2013), interactivity of the message leads to a higher level of credibility, stronger feeling of identification with the brand and as a result, improves corporate reputation and promotes word-of-mouth. As also mentioned by Castelló et al. (2013) and Eberle et al. (2013), using more interactive tools and channels to communicate sustainability messages can have a positive effect on the brand reputation and stakeholder attitudes towards the brand and as a consequence, boost engagement metrics.

In practice, if brands would communicate sustainability in a similar way as promotional and engagement content, hence creating incentives for stakeholders to recognize and react to sustainability content (e.g. contests, giveaways), encouraging the sharing of this content (e.g. requests to share), actively involving stakeholders in sustainability communication (e.g. asking questions, encouraging opinion sharing, establishing dialogues), this would potentially improve the engagement metrics. However, this and other practical implications of this study will be discussed further in the Managerial implications chapter of this thesis.

To conclude, the empirical findings of this study were compared with the earlier discussed previous research on the topics of social media communication and sustainability communication on social media and the similarities, as well as differences between them were discussed with the application to the research questions and problem stated in this study, as well as perspective of Finland and Finnish sustainable brands.

Undoubtedly, these findings do not only support the prior research on the topic of sustainability communication on social media, but also offer valuable findings related to Finland. As previously discussed in this thesis, sustainability-related research is especially relevant in the context of Finland, as sustainability issues play an increasingly important role for Finnish consumers. For this reason, companies in Finland are expected and required to communicate about the sustainability aspect of their businesses and do it in a transparent and authentic way due to how informed and aware Finnish consumers are, as far as sustainability is concerned (SB Insight AB, 2019). Thus, the knowledge of how this was done by the brands with the image and reputation of sustainable brands, is a valuable information related to effective sustainability communication on social media.

The next chapters of this thesis will further focus on the theoretical contributions and managerial implications produced as a result of this study. In addition to that, the research in this study will be evaluated and the main limitations will be discussed. Finally, some suggestions for future research will be suggested as well.

5   CONCLUSIONS

5.1   Theoretical contributions

As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study mostly support the prior theoretical knowledge, although some distinctions were identified, analysed and based on that, further recommendations were developed as well. As for the theoretical contributions of this study, some valuable discoveries were made in relation so sustainability communication on social media.

To start with, this thesis supported the initially stated assumptions that Finnish brands recognize the value of sustainability communication on social media and that it has an influence on how the brands are perceived by their stakeholders. In addition to the theoretical findings mentioning the link between the brands' social media communication and especially the communication of sustainability issues on social media, and the corporate image (e.g. First & Khetriwal, 2008; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007 etc.), the empirical evidence also supported this view.

More specifically, the study focused on analysing how brands that are perceived as the most sustainable communicate on social media and whether sustainability topics are discussed on their online channels. As already mentioned in the research findings section, sustainability content was identified on the social media channels of all brands and thus, it can be concluded that in order to be perceived as sustainable, companies need to address the issue of sustainability and openly and transparently communicate about it on their social media channels (Castelló et al., 2013; First & Khetriwal, 2008; Lee et al., 2013; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007).

In addition to the importance of sustainability communication for the brand image and perception, the need for a clear and consistent strategy required for effective sustainability communication has been established as well. Importantly, this was also argued in various literature on the topic (e.g. Castelló et al., 2013; First & Khetriwal, 2008; Lee et al., 2013; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007). As also discussed by Dawkins (2005), in order to successfully communicate sustainability, brands are required to develop a strategy that would identify opportunities and challenges and tailor messages in accordance with varying expectations and needs of different stakeholder groups.

In addition to the general need for a clear communications strategy, some considerations regarding the choice of social media channels for communication of specific topics and sustainability topics in particular, as well as the choice of content formats were examined as well. Thus, if Facebook was determined to be the most commonly used channel for corporate communication in general, Twitter was established to be used the most for sustainability-related communication.

In addition to that, the benefits of engagement content, which was widely discussed in prior research (e.g. Hajli, 2014; Khan et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2013;

McCay-Peet & Quan-Haasel, 2016 etc.) has been supported as well, as engagement posts were established as the most commonly communicated by the brands in this study. As for sustainability communication, this study supported the previous research on the topic (e.g. First & Khetriwal, 2008; Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Tuğrul & Göçer, 2017 etc.) and confirmed the importance of multi-dimensional approach to communicating sustainability hence the communication about all crucial aspects of sustainability i.e. environmental, social and economic.

In terms of different content formats, this study also goes in accordance with the prior theory (e.g. Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; de Vries et al., 2012; Fortin & Dholakia, 2005; Kwok & Yu, 2012; Sabate et al., 2014 etc.) discussing the effectiveness of using visual cues and interactive elements in social media communication. Hence, content formats including images, videos and links that were identified as the most commonly used by the brands, as demonstrated in the Results chapter of this thesis. It is important to mention that the formats, where text-based posts included images and both images and links were by far the most popular among the brands both for social media communication in general and sustainability communication in particular.

Besides, this finding is also consistent with prior theory, which stated that despite the evident positive effects of rich and vivid content on consumer interaction, it is also crucially important to consider the specifics of different social media platforms when choosing the most appropriate content format (Kim et al., 2015). Thus, both the empirical findings and prior research established that social media posts with images perform more effectively on Facebook and Instagram than text and video posts, whereas Twitter on the other hand, is a suitable channel for communicating using text-only formats (Kim et al., 2015). Altogether, the value of multi-media content formats and the use of dynamic and interactive content elements for the overall social media communication and especially for sustainability communication has been notably emphasized in this study.

In addition to the above-discussed findings, the comparison of sustainability and non-sustainability content allowed to analyse how sustainability content influences engagement rates. However, it has been identified that the choice of topic might not be as crucial as the way it is communicated. Moreover, the influence of how social media posts are communicated (e.g. format, style etc.) has also been widely discussed in various literature (e.g. Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; de Vries et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2015; Kwok & Yu, 2012; Sabate et al., 2014 etc.) Hence, communicating in an engaging and interactive way in order to interest the audience has been highlighted repeatedly both in prior research (e.g. Castelló et al., 2013; Eberle et al., 2013; Khan et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2013 etc.) and empirical findings.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that as discussed in the beginning of this thesis, the topic of sustainability communication among the Finnish brands would benefit from addition research on the issue and in addition to the new perspective of Finnish brands, this study also focused on the brands that are perceived as the most sustainable ones, which was also a new and unique approach as well. Thus, it can also be concluded that this study also fills in the gap in the previous research related to sustainability communication on social media.

All things considered, this study conducted a thorough analysis of how brands, which have the image and reputation of sustainability leaders, communicate about their sustainability initiatives on social media. Hence, the initially stated research objective of this study was achieved, and valuable findings related to how brands that are perceived as sustainable by their stakeholders communicate sustainability and practical contributions were provided both for theory and practice. Next, the practical benefits drawn from this study will be discussed in detail in the following chapter of this thesis.

5.2   Managerial implications

To start with, various benefits of sustainability communication for the brand image, reputation and customer relationships have been widely discussed in this thesis and supported by previous research (e.g. Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; First and Khetriwal, 2008; Lewis, 2003; Middlemiss, 2003; Park & Kim, 2016 etc.) Furthermore, as it has been stated by Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007), the question for companies today is not whether to communicate, but rather how to communicate.

As discussed earlier, this includes developing a clear integrated corporate communication strategy that would consider what to communicate, to whom and how often (Dawkins, 2005; Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007). In addition to that, it also involves incorporating sustainability matters in the overall corporate communication strategy, as argued by Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007). According to Jose & Lee (2006), stakeholders are not only expecting companies to work on their sustainability performance, but also be accountable for it and communicate about it clearly and openly.

Thus, based on the analysis of the companies, which are seen as sustainable by the publics, it was possible to conclude that sustainability communication plays an important role for a brand's image and reputation among its consumers. In other words, in order to be perceived as sustainable, companies are expected to communicate about their sustainability performance and in order to do that effectively, the well-developed strategy is required.

In addition to the general need of a clear and thorough strategy, both the empirical and theoretical findings of this research also offer practical implications for companies willing to effectively communicate about their sustainability initiatives on social media, while addressing the challenges of sustainability communication, including its multidimensionality, as well as general scepticism and critics from stakeholders (Dawkins, 2005).

Understanding the diverse stakeholder concerns and information requirements and aligning sustainability communicating strategy according to them is essentially important for brands in order to break through the communications barrier and establish a meaningful interaction between brands and their stakeholders (Dawkins, 2005). However, as stated by Dawkins (2005) and discussed earlier, satisfying these diverse expectations can be another great challenge for

companies and for this reason, it is crucially important to determine the target audience for each specific type of communication and identify the information needs of this audience in order to ensure that the right message is communicated to the right people using the right channels. Hence, as also explained by Dawkins (2005), tailoring the content, style of communication, content format, as well as the channel in accordance with diverse expectations of different stakeholder groups and audiences. Although, as already mentioned earlier, it is also important to keep the communication consistent and maintain the overall coherence of the brand's corporate image and communication (Dawkins, 2005).

In addition to that, one of the crucially important elements of effective sustainability communication is credibility. As discussed by Dawkins (2005), the matters that brands communicate about have to be aligned and consistent with the brand image and most importantly, its behaviour. As also discussed by Valentini et al. (2014), sustainability-related information should not be disclosed only as a promotional activity and because of its benefits for the brand's image and reputation, but instead, it should be coherent with the company's actions and communicated in consideration of society and environment. Otherwise, as already mentioned earlier in this thesis, brands' credibility and as a consequence, stakeholder attitudes can be negatively affected (Eberle et al., 2013) and brands also risk being accused of greenwashing or even trying to cover up their unethical behaviour (Dawkins, 2005; First & Khetriwal, 2008).

Content-wise, creative communication solutions, as it has already been discussed previously, are essential in order to communicate sustainability in a way that will be interesting, understandable and relevant for the audience (Dawkins, 2005). This includes both the style of communication and the format as well. As also discussed by Hartman et al. (2007), an emotional aspect plays an especially important role in sustainability communication. Finally, as widely discussed before, the inclusion of visual elements and interactive media positively affect consumer behaviour and thus, plays a significant role in sustainability communication (Khan et al., 2019).

Social media created many possibilities for brands to diversify their sustainability communication and also, firms now have the ability to engage with their stakeholders and discuss these issues with them (Castelló et al., 2013). Additionally, as suggested by Morsing and Schultz (2006), social media allows brands to involve stakeholders in their communication strategy and seek mutual construction of sustainability communication. Furthermore, conversational posts receive more engagement and hence, positively influence the brand's relationships with its audience compared to the one-way communication (Kwok & Yu, 2012).

Thus, besides of making sustainability content appealing to the audience, brands are strongly advised to focus on the engagement aspect of their communication on social media. As suggested by Lee et al. (2013), it is crucially important to engage with the audience and establish a meaningful two-way communication and interaction with them, rather that one-sidedly pushing the content on them. This view was also discussed by Maignan & Ferrell (2004), who stated that sustainability communication is not only meant to create awareness

about the company's sustainability performance and improve the image of a brand, but also it can be considered as a bond between the company and its stakeholders.

In addition to the above-discussed points, Hartman et al. (2007), Reilly and Hynan (2014), as well as Tuğrul & Göçer (2017) also included taking into account the cultural differences, as well as the differences across industry sectors, as companies from different countries of origin and industries may prioritize different aspects of sustainability.

To summarise, there are various aspects of sustainability communication concluded from the empirical findings of this study, as well as previous research on the topic, that brands are strongly advised to consider for an effective sustainability communication to the target audience of a brand. However, as in any study, the quality of research needs to be evaluated in order to identify research limitations, as well as propose ideas for further investigation. These aspects will be discussed in the following chapters of this thesis.

5.3   Research evaluation

According to Bryman (2012), the most commonly used criteria for the social research evaluation are its reliability, replication and validity. Reliability refers to the repeatability of study results, as in whether the results would differ if the same study would be conducted by another researcher at a different time, but with the same measures (Yin, 2003). The next criterion – replication is very similar to reliability and is concerned with how replicable the given study is.

For the reliability and replicability of this study, all steps of the research conduction were described in detail in the Methodology part of this thesis. In addition to that, the coding book was provided in the appendices as well in order to enable the repetition of this research. Naturally, the findings would slightly differ depending on the choice of the brands being studies, as well as the content they post online during specific periods of time. In addition to the detailed description of methodological considerations, the process of data analysis was described in detail as well. Both the methods used to analyse the data collected, as well as the criteria used to analyse the data were communication transparently and in detail in this thesis as well. In addition to that, the examples were included as well to support the data interpretation. Finally, the intercoder reliability testing, which was also described in detail in the Methodology part of this thesis, was also conducted to ensure the reliability of the research and showed the sufficient percentage of agreement between two coders, which allowed to ensure the reliability of the data analysis and research findings.

As for validity, it can be stated that it is the most important criterion of research, which focuses on the integrity of the conclusions drawn from the research (Bryman, 2012) or in other words, how well these conclusions capture the reality of the phenomenon that was studied (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Roe & Just, 2009). In practice, in this study it was achieved by the adoption of different

perspectives on the studied issue, as suggested by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). The main data was acquired using both qualitative and quantitative content analyses, as well as confirmed with other complementary data. Also, all the measures used in this study fit the theoretical context of the study and in addition to that, they were adapted from the other peer-reviewed scientific sources, although some were modified in accordance with the context of this research.

All things considered, the study reached its key objective and answered all three research questions, while providing both theoretical and managerial implications that could be used bot in theory and practice. However, as in any study, there were some limitations as well, which will be covered in the following chapter of this thesis.

5.4 Research limitations

Undoubtedly, the biggest limitation of this study is the issue of objectivity. However, as it has already been discussed before, the criteria used for data analysis in this study were based on previous studies and theory on the topic, which helped to ensure the objectivity of the research. In addition to that, the intercoder reliability testing was conducted as well in order to ensure that the views of both researchers are alike and it was conducted several times until the sufficient percentage of agreement was achieved and all discrepancies that occurred during the first coding round were clarified and both coders reached a common understanding of data interpretation.

In addition to the general issue of objectivity, there were some other practical limitations as well. First and foremost, the issue of differentiation between the concepts of CSR and sustainability is another major limitation of this study, as these two concepts can relate to different aspects of the company's responsible behaviour. Hence, the inclusion of three pillars (environmental, social and economic) in the concept of sustainability in comparison to CSR, which is generally related to the economic aspect of the company's commitments. Additionally, the approaches of companies in relation to sustainability, which is often viewed as future-oriented and CSR with its focus on the present, might also have a strong effect on the analysis of the quality of the brands' sustainability communication. Even though this issue has been widely discussed in the beginning of this thesis and two terms were critically discussed and the final definition of sustainability used for this research was introduced as well, it is still important to emphasize this limitation.

Apart from this, some of the topics used to analyse social media communication, as well as sustainability communication of the brands were too broad, whereas some were quite narrow, which undoubtedly influenced the number of frequencies. Although, as mentioned earlier, all of the topics were based on the previous research on the topic to ensure the validity of the study, and modified in accordance with the context of this research as well. Also, the fact that several

categories could apply to a single post helped to ensure that the quality of coding would not be affected by that.

It also worth mentioning that due to the specifics of Instagram, it was not possible to include the data on shares, which could have affected the findings of this study.

Finally, it is also important to address the limitation related to the selected time periods. Thus, as mentioned in the Methodology part of this thesis, the brands' sustainability communication could have possibly been affected by some events happening during the selected periods of time e.g. global sustainability issues, crisis situations, CSR reporting periods etc. To ensure the validity of the findings, random periods of time were selected for the analysis in this study, although the possible effect of external factors influencing the brands' social media communication has been taken into account as well.

Naturally, there were limitations in this study, but as already mentioned earlier, all in all, it provided valuable theoretical and managerial implications, whereas the mentioned limitations create further research possibilities, which will be discussed in the next and final chapter of this thesis.

5.5   Future research suggestions

To start with, several authors have discussed the need for additional research on sustainability communication on social media (e.g. Tuğrul & Göçer, 2017; Valentini, Elving, & van Zoonen, 2014 etc.) As also mentioned by Hartman et al. (2007), there are various avenues for future research on the communication of sustainability.

Firstly, if this study provided general findings regarding the use of social media for sustainability communication among the Finnish brands, other studies could focus on analysing specific strategies used by the brands for communicating about their sustainability initiatives on social media. This includes analysing the choice of social media channels for communicating specific sustainability-related topics, as well as the choice of content formats for communicating specific aspects of sustainability. Also, the influence of specific time periods and events, as discussed earlier, on sustainability communication could also be an interesting topic for the further investigation.

In addition to that, although the role of sustainability communication in the organization-stakeholder relationships was highlighted in this thesis, a more thorough analysis related to stakeholder and target groups would greatly benefit research on the topic of corporate communication of sustainability on social media.

Moreover, the topic of sustainability communication could also benefit from the future research focusing on the stakeholder's viewpoint. Hence, further studies could consider stakeholders' perspectives in relation to the corporate communication of sustainability on social media, including their main concerns,

information needs and expectations. This could be done using focus groups, interviews or questionnaires. Also, a comparative study between the stakeholder perception of the sustainability communication and the firm perception could be interesting for identifying any gaps in the corporate communication of sustainability.

Finally, conducting the research on sustainability communication of the brands at regular intervals could be beneficial for identifying and measuring the changes in the influence of sustainability orientation of the brand on its image, reputation and value.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 Sustainable Brand Index ranking 2019 – Finland (SB Insight AB, 2019)

1. Valio +
2. Fazer
3. S-market +
4. Prisma
5. Myllyn Paras
6. VR +
7. K-supermarket
8. Fiskars +
9. Yliopiston Apteekki
10. Partioaitta +
11. Kotimaista
12. K-Citymarket
13. K-market
14. Finlayson
15. Paulig
16. Alko
17. Vaasan
18. Sokos Hotels +
19. Oululainen
20. Hackman
21. Pirkka
22. Tesla +
23. The Body Shop +
24. Marimekko
25. Kesko
26. S-Pankki +
27. Lumene
28. iittala
29. Saarioinen
30. Arla
31. Kariniemen
32. OP
33. S Group
34. Arabia
35. Snellman
36. Sokos
37. Kotipizza +
38. Lidl
39. Ingman
40. Finnair +
41. Hartwall
42. Neste +
43. Hesburger
44. Vattenfall +
45. Scandic
46. Atria
47. Panda
48. Fortum
49. Meira
50. Lapland Hotels
51. Helen
52. Apetit
53. Lähi-Tapiola +
54. St1
55. K-Rauta
56. ABC
57. IKEA
58. Sinebrychoff
59. Volvo
60. Pouttu
61. HK
62. Omnibus
63. Vantaan Energia
64. DNA +
65. If
66. Elisa

67. Turku Energia
68. Radisson Blu
69. Verkkokauppa.com
70. Stockmann
71. Telia
72. Findus
73. Tarmo lähikauppa
74. Säästöpankki
75. Felix
76. Cumulus
77. Sale
78. R-kioski
79. Ilmarinen +
80. Toyota
81. Subway
82. Elo
83. POP Pankki
84. Tokmanni
85. Gigantti
86. Coffee House
87. Alepa
88. Asko
89. Rainbow
90. INTERSPORT
91. Mercedes-Benz
92. Halonen
93. Vepsäläinen
94. Varma
95. KEVA
96. Stadium
97. Picnic
98. Clas Ohlson
99. Aurinkomatkat +
100. McDonald's
101. Aktia
102. Norwegian
103. Rosso
104. Coca-Cola
105. Omena Hotels
106. Holiday Inn
107. Skoda
108. Best Western
109. Jumbo
110. Nordea
111. XXL
112. Expert
113. Ålandsbanken
114. Nissan
115. Veikon Kone
116. Power
117. Matkavekka
118. Jysk
119. Tekniset
120. Sotka
121. Handelsbanken
122. Audi
123. Biltema
124. Volkswagen
125. Rax
126. Lindex
127. Tjäreborg
128. TopSport
129. BMW
130. KappAhl
131. Pepsi
132. Budget Sport

133. Danske Bank
134. Honda
135. Burger King
136. H&M
137. SAS
138. Mandatum Life
139. Teboil
140. TUI
141. Shell
142. Ford
143. Scanburger
144. Peugeot
145. Lufthansa
146. Byggmax
147. KLM
148. Masku
149. Apollomatkat
150. Opel
151. Jack&Jones
152. Cubus
153. Stemma
154. Aleksi13
155. Unilever
156. Carlings
157. Rolls
158. Mitsubishi
159. Mazda
160. Sibylla
161. Vila
162. Hyundai
163. KIA
164. Gina Tricot
165. Subaru
166. Citroën
167. British Airways
168. Suzuki
169. Fiat
170. Zara
171. Renault
172. BikBok
173. Vero Moda
174. AirFrance

\+ = Industry leader

ABOUT THE RANKING IN SUSTAINABLE BRAND INDEX™

The ranking is based on the percentage of consumers who assess the company's sustainability efforts as good (4) or very good (5) on a scale of 1-5 + "don't know." The maximum score is 200%. A company that has 200%, performs very well within both environmental and social responsibility according to consumers, ie. 100% have then answered 4 or 5 (a company like that does not exist).

APPENDIX 2 Sustainable Brand Index industry ranking 2019 – Finland (SB Insight AB, 2019)

1	VALIO	FOOD & BEVERAGE
3	S-MARKET	GROCERY STORES
6	VR	TRANSPORT
8	FISKARS	FURNITURE, DECORATION & LEISURE
10	PARTIOAITTA	CLOTHING
18	SOKOS HOTELS	HOTELS
22	TESLA	CARS
23	THE BODY SHOP	BEAUTY
26	S-PANKKI	BANKS
37	KOTIPIZZA	FAST FOOD
40	FINNAIR	AIRLINES
42	NESTE	FUEL
44	VATTENFALL	ELECTRICITY
53	LÄHI-TAPIOLA	INSURANCE
64	DNA	TELECOMMUNICATIONS
79	ILMARINEN	PENSION
99	AURINKOMATKAT	TRAVEL

APPENDIX 3 Coding book (adapted from Valentini et al., 2014)

1 INSTRUCTIONS

As a participant in the intercoder reliability testing for the study on sustainability communication on social media by the most sustainable Finnish brands, you are expected to analyse and then code the companies' social media posts according to the following requirements:

- You will be provided with the data (social media posts of the brands being studied (Valio, S-Group, VR, Fiskars, Partioaitta) on their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels)
- Please carefully analyse the contents of the posts and record them accordingly to the Excel file provided by the researcher
- Before coding, it is important to familiarize yourself with the purpose of this study, as well as methodological considerations provided later on in this coding manual

2 THESIS OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this thesis is *to gain understanding of the role of social media in sustainability communication through the prism of the most sustainable Finnish brands.* The research questions are the following:

RQ1: *What is the focus of social media communication of the sustainable Finnish brands?*
RQ2: *How are sustainability-themed messages communicated on social media among the sustainable brands in Finland?*
RQ3: *How does the brands' sustainability communication on social media affect stakeholder engagement?*

The first question will study what do the companies ranked as the most sustainable ones by the Sustainable Brand Index communicate on their social media platforms. Hence, the key aspects of their social media communication and the presence of the sustainability-related content. The second question will focus on the ways of communicating sustainability, including different topics, content types, communication strategies etc. Finally, the third question will analyse the influence of sustainability communication on the stakeholder engagement with the brands through the metrics such as likes, comments and shares/retweets.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Content analysis

In accordance with the previously mentioned research objective and research questions, both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be used in this

study. More specifically, the qualitative content analysis was chosen for the first and the second research questions, whereas the quantitative content analysis was selected for the third research question. As the first two research questions will focus on the social media content and more specifically, the text-based posts, images and videos, the qualitative research will be the most suitable research method to examine and gain the most appropriate data. As far as the last research question is concerned, it is important to understand the connection between the sustainability-related content on the brands' social media and their engagement rates. Hence, the quantitative data, including the number of likes, comments and shares will be studied using the quantitative content analysis as a research method.

3.2 Case selection

For the purpose of this study it was decided to examine five brands that were ranked as the most sustainable in Finland according to the Sustainability Brand Index ranking – the Europe's largest brand study with the focus on sustainability. It is important to mention that three main criteria for the choice of case companies were Finland as their country of origin, their sustainability ranking based on the consumer perceptions, as well as their industry type. Thus, the following five brands from various industries were selected for this study: Valio (#1, food & beverage industry leader), S-Group, VR (#6, transport industry leader), Fiskars (#8, furniture, decoration & leisure industry leader) and Partioaitta (#10, clothing industry leader). Importantly, S-Group's brand was not a part of the ranking, but instead, one of the cooperative's separate brands – S-market was ranked third as the most sustainable brand in Finland and the leader in the grocery stores industry. However, due to the fact that S-market has multiple social media channels depending on the stores' location and the published content greatly varies among the channels, it was therefore established that analysing S-Group's main channels would be more accurate and beneficial for this research.

Next, the brands' social media platforms were analysed for the purpose of identifying their most actively used channels. Thus, it has been determined that all the brands are present and active on the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Finally, this study will analyse the brands' social media content during the randomly chosen periods of time. Hence, every 3 months within a year (2019), or quarterly (i.e. January, April, July, October).

3.3 Data collection

The Excel file

The Excel file consists of five sheets for each of the companies mentioned earlier: Valio, S-Group, VR, Fiskars and Partioaitta. Each sheet contains a table that includes the following information: the post identifier, date, social media channel,

likes, comments, shares or retweets, format, as well as social media communication topic and sustainability communication topic. You are expected to fill each cell of the table with a number corresponding to the codes listed in the following pages of this coding book.
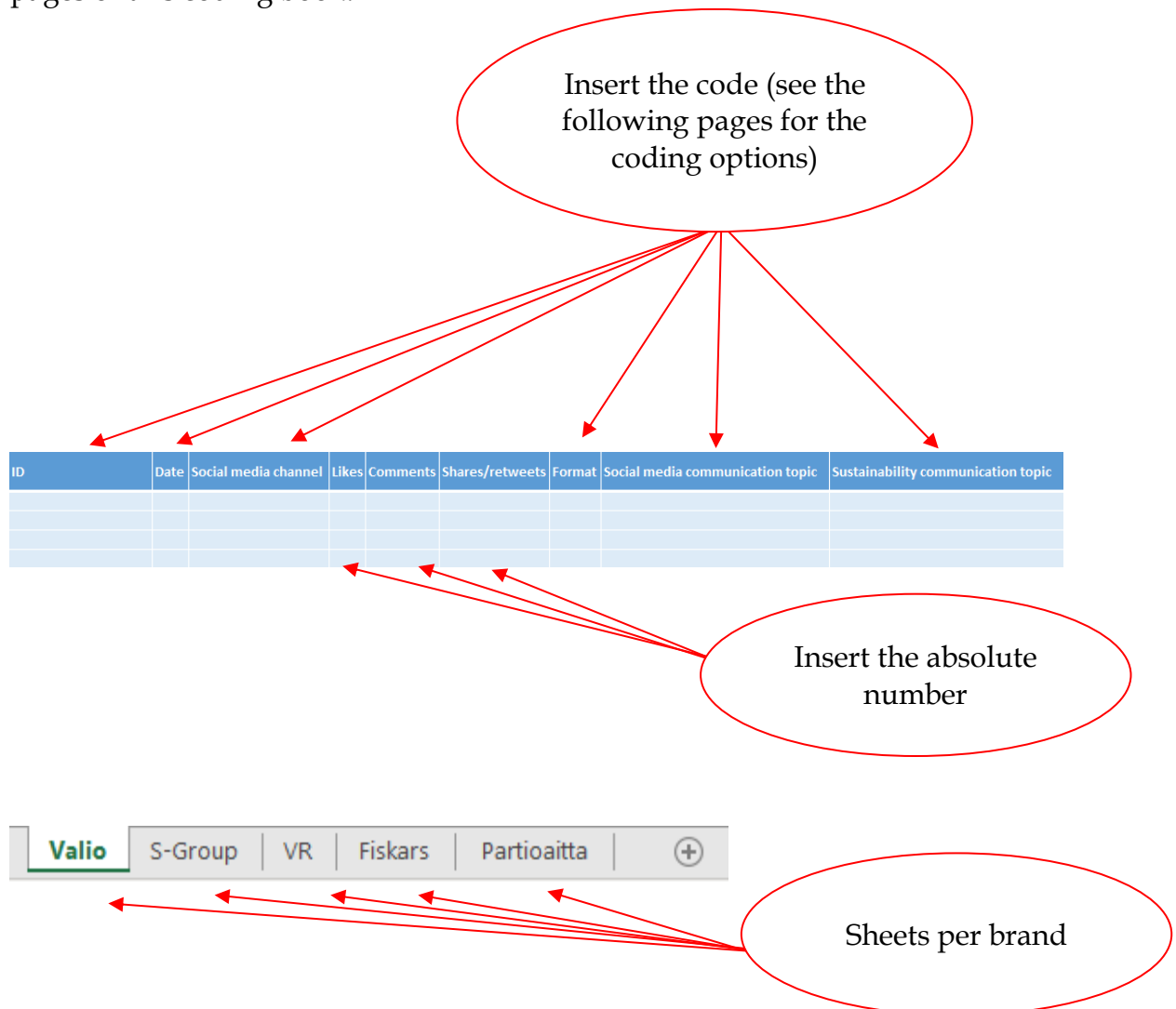

FIGURE 1 The Excel file

The coding units and variables

Importantly, the coding method used in this study was adapted from the research paper on CSR communication on social media (Valentini, C., Elving, W., & van Zoonen, W. (2014). Old Wine in New Bottles: Social Media Are No Dialogue Strategy in Company Ethics: An Empirical Investigation of Europe Top Companies Use of Social Media. EUPRERA 2014 Congress) and its research design. Thus, the coding units for this study are the companies' social media posts. Each post created by a company (excluding shares/retweets without a company's comments, as well as replies) is considered a single coding unit. Each unit needs to be analysed and coded using separate rows of the table and in accordance with different variables related to nine columns explained below.

To start with, the first column **(ID)** needs to be filled with the specific identifier codes describing each unit (i.e. social media post) and consisting of the name of the brand (Valio/S-Group/VR/Fiskars/Partioaitta), the social media channel abbreviation (FB/TW/IG), the posting date (dd.mm.yyyy) and the lowercase letters (e.g. a, b, c etc.) in case several posts have been posted on the same day. For example, ID can be the following: Valio_FB_01.01.2020_a, Valio_FB_01.01.2020_b etc.

The second column **(Date)** should be filled with the posting month number (i.e. 1 for January, 4 for April, 7 for July and 10 for October).

The third column **(Social media channel)** is to be filled with the code corresponding to the social media channel in question (i.e. 1 for Facebook, 2 for Twitter and 3 or Instagram).

The next columns **(Likes, Comments and Shares or Retweets)** should be filled with the absolute numbers depending on how many of these metrics does a unit have at the moment. Importantly, as the main idea of counting these metrics is to analyse engagement, all the emoji reactions on Facebook are going to be counted as likes as well. In addition to that, as it is not possible to track shares on Instagram for other accounts, please insert "0" in the column for shares and retweets when analysing Instagram posts. This fact will be taken into account when analysing data.

The next column **(Format)** needs to be filled with the numeric codes corresponding to the specific social media communication formats listed below in Table 1. Importantly, these formats have been selected during the pilot testing and are based on the most common ways the brands being studied communicate on social media. However, in case additional formats occur, please code them in the numerical order (i.e. 10, 11, 12 etc.) and make sure to clarify the format in the brackets.

TABLE 1 Social media communication formats

Format	*Coding*
Text	1
Text + image	2
Text + video	3
Text + link (internal: corporate website/social media channel etc.)	4
Text + link (external: another company's website/social media channel etc.)	5

Text + image + link (internal)	6
Text + image + link (external)	7
Text + video + link (internal)	8
Text + video + link (external)	9
Text + image + multiple links (external and internal)	10
Text + video + multiple links (external and internal)	11
Text + multiple links (external and internal)	12
Text + image + video	13
Other formats (please specify)	14, 15, 16…

The next column **(Social media communication topic)** includes the analysis of all social media posts communicated by the companies. Different categories or variables related to the social media communication types were selected based on the study by Coursaris, C.K., Osch, W.V., & Balogh, B.A. (2013). A Social Media Marketing Typology: Classifying Brand Facebook Page Messages for Strategic Consumer Engagement. ECIS. Importantly, the variables selected for this study slightly differ from the original source, as they were modified according to the study's points of interest and the objective. In addition to that, in the research paper by Coursaris et al. (2013), CSR is measured as one of the social media communication types, but as this study focused on sustainability, the second variable and its description were modified according to the context of this thesis.

Similarly to the previous columns, it needs to be filled with the numeric codes corresponding to the issues listed in Table 2 and being discussed in a social media post. It is possible that more than one variable applies to each unit and therefore, all elements of a social media post must to be analysed carefully. In this case, it is important to code this unit several times and add a new row for each extra variable. Moreover, if a post does not correspond to any category in the table in your opinion, code it as "Other", but make sure to explain in the brackets which category this posts belongs to. However, this scenario should be exceptional and please consider the given variables first.

TABLE 2 Social media communication topics

Variables	Descriptions	Coding
Promotional	Posts that build a brand's presence and increase its attractiveness (e.g. ads/promotions with the focus on a brand, events, collaborations, brand history, behind-the-scenes, deals, contests, giveaways)	1
Products & Services	Posts that build and increase customer awareness, understanding and knowledge of a company's pro-	2

	ducts and services (e.g. ads/promotions with the focus on a specific product/service, information about a specific product/service)	
Sustainability	Posts related to a company's strategy in relation to environmental, social and economic issues (e.g. topics included in Table 3)	3
Engagement	Posts that build connections and communities through the company-consumer interactions (e.g. questions, requests, polls, appreciation messages)	4
Seasonal	Posts related to seasonal and annual events (e.g. holidays, seasons, events)	5
Other	Posts that do not belong to any of the topics listed	100

The final column **(Sustainability communication topic)** especially considers those posts that were labelled as sustainability-themed in the previous column. Different sustainability communication topics used to analyse sustainability-related social media posts are based on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index family (DJSI) that tracks the world's leading companies' economic, environmental and social performance. The variables illustrated in Table 3 were adapted from Hartman, L., Rubin, R., & Dhanda, K. (2007). The Communication of Corporate Social Responsibility: United States and European Union Multinational Corporations. Journal of Business Ethics, 74(4), 373-389.

Similarly to the social media communication topics, it is possible that more than one variable can be applied to a single unit. In this case, code this unit more than once and make sure to take into account the coding in the previous column (i.e. add a new row for each new variable).

If there is no sustainability topic discussed in a post, please select "No sustainability topics" option and in case none of the variables apply, please select the option "Other" and clarify in the brackets which sustainability topic is discussed in this post in your opinion. However, consider selecting one of the given variables first.

TABLE 3 Sustainability communication topics

Variables	Descriptions	Coding
No sustainability topics	Posts that do not contain any sustainability-related topics	0
Codes of Conduct/ Compliance/ Corruption & Bribery	Content related to companies' codes of conduct and their implementation, as well as transparent reporting of breaches and occurrence of corruption, bribery and anti-competitive practices	1
Corporate Governance	Content related to companies' board structure, its composition and responsibilities of its members	2

Customer Relationship Management	Content related to companies' interaction with their current and potential customers	3
Investor Relations	Content related to companies' operational and financial performance and other information related to finance, communication, marketing and law compliance	4
Risk & Crisis Management	Content related to how companies plan, prepare and mitigate threats, as well as manage unanticipated incidents	5
Environmental Policy/ Management	Content related to companies', as well as general laws, regulations and policies concerning environmental issues	6
Environmental Performance (Eco-Efficiency)	Content related to companies' environmental footprint, as well as their operational eco-efficiency	7
Environmental Reporting	Content related to information contained in companies' environmental reports	8
Corporate Citizenship/ Philanthropy	Content related to companies' responsibilities towards society in the form of financial contributions, time and resources	9
Stakeholders Engagement	Content related to how companies engage with those who affect or are affected by them and their operations	10
Labour Practice Indicators	Content related to companies' recognition and application of international standards of labour and human rights, including safe and healthy working environment, equality, diversity, freedom etc.	11
Human Capital Development	Content related to companies' approach to maintaining and improving human and intellectual capital by identifying knowledge gaps and developing systems to share skills across their staff	12
Social Reporting	Content related to information contained in companies' social reports	13
Talent Attraction & Retention	Content related to companies' strategies and behaviours towards attracting and retaining existing and potential talents by developing career advancement systems, implementing appropriate compensation and reward frameworks and creating career opportunities	14
Other	Posts that do not belong to any of the topics listed	100