



The role of sustainability in social media marketing

A study on the value of communicating a brand's sustainable products and practices on consumer attitude and behavior.

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July 2023

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Abstract

In recent years, the topic of sustainability has gained increasing attention from both consumers and companies. With increasing consumer awareness regarding the environmental and social consequences of their purchasing choices, there is a rising demand for sustainable products and brands. Simultaneously, companies are acknowledging the significance of integrating sustainability into their practices to enhance their environmental and social performance, while also meeting customer expectations.

Social media platforms have emerged as a powerful tool for companies to connect with consumers and promote their sustainable products and practices. With the vast reach of social media platforms and the ability to target specific audiences, companies can use social media marketing to raise awareness about sustainability, showcase their sustainability efforts, and engage with consumers on sustainability-related issues. However, despite the potential benefits, there are also challenges associated with using social media to promote sustainability, such as the risk of ‘greenwashing’ or negative consumer reactions.

This thesis aims to explore the question, What role does sustainability play within a premium brand’s content marketing strategy on social media, in shaping consumer attitude and behavior? Specifically, it will examine the strategies that companies can use to effectively promote sustainability on social media platforms, the potential benefits and risks associated with sustainable marketing on social media, and the role of social media in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability. By answering this question, this thesis will contribute to our understanding of how companies can leverage social media to promote sustainability, whilst simultaneously providing insights about the role of consumers in the discussion about sustainability and climate change.

This study employs a competitor analysis, as well as the administration of a poll and a survey, to examine the potential for brands to utilize Instagram as a platform for sustainable messaging. The findings indicate an overall positive response from the participants, highlighting the value of incorporating sustainability into the content marketing strategies of premium brands. While there are slight variations in attitudes and behaviors between men and women, the study suggests that sustainability can be a valuable feature for brands to prioritize.

Based on the results, this study recommends that brands focus on integrating sustainable messaging into their content marketing strategies. Additionally, it emphasizes the

importance of using Instagram as a means to interact with followers, while also informing, inspiring, and creating valuable content. By adopting these practices, brands can effectively leverage Instagram to enhance their sustainable messaging and foster positive consumer engagement.

Keywords: Social media marketing, sustainability, consumer behavior, consumer attitude, content marketing

1. Introduction

Social media platforms are changing the field of marketing communication, from the traditional, push advertising to social networks that offer customers the opportunity to respond and interact with brands, content, and others. Social Media can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of content” (Kaplan AM & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Platforms and their algorithms give users the possibility to tailor content and information based on their personal preferences and interests (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Global social media statistics show 4.76 billion social media users in 2023 worldwide with an increase of 137 million new users within the last 12 months and an expected increase to almost 6 billion in 2027. Statistics also show an average daily usage of 2 hours and 31 minutes (Statista, 2023). Companies can use these platforms as a powerful tool to actively engage with their customers, build brand awareness and promote and sell their products or services.

Because consumers have access to a great amount of online information, the approach from consumer towards brand has shifted. Customers are now more actively searching for relevant product and brand information before purchasing and are more involved with brand values. To adapt to this new form of online consumption, brands need to be visible throughout the entire customer journey with the needed information. This is called content marketing. More extensively defined by the Content Marketing Institute as “the process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action”. Brands employ content marketing as a strategic approach to deliver highly relevant content that engages consumers, piques their curiosity about future content, and encourages them to share it with others. Unlike other communication strategies, content marketing prioritizes the needs and interests of the user. It is commonly showcased on platforms owned by the company or brand itself (Antheunis et al., 2016).

Consumers are becoming more and more involved with topics such as sustainability, durability and quality. Because of global warming and climate change, consumers are getting more concerned about the environment than ever before (Malmqvist, 2022). This study found that concern about climate change and nature is increasing globally with 63%. Moreover, consumers express a strong desire to make changes to the way they live to be more environmentally friendly. Yet this study also shows a large aspiration-action gap, as only 22% of consumers have said they have made major changes in the past year to accomplish an

eco-friendlier lifestyle. Consumer response was the need for more support from government and companies to facilitate this, suggesting more engagement from businesses will likely drive more individual behavioral change. With the growing emphasis on sustainability, many consumers regard themselves as "green", and are ready to purchase green products. The Business Dictionary indicates that a green business is “a business functioning in a capacity where no negative impact is made on the local or global environment, the community, or the economy” (Business Dictionary, n.d.). In the Handbook of Research on Green Economic Development Initiatives and Strategies a ‘green product’ is defined as “a product that consumers prefer because it helps to protect the environment during the manufacture, use, and disposal of the product. Generally organic, ecological, recyclable, and energy-saving products are called green products” (Erdogdu et al., 2016). Research from Unilever (2017) also suggests that sustainable brands are preferred by one third of consumers. However, there appears to be a discrepancy between consumers' attitudes toward sustainability and their real purchasing behavior of green products (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015).

According to Vermeir and Verbeke (2005) the main reason for this attitude-behavior gap in sustainability is the access and amount of information and awareness a consumer has about the sustainable product or brand. Chery (2020) concluded the less information accessible about sustainable goods, the more uncertain buyers may be about which product to choose.

Through the use of social media, companies can promote and send out their sustainable efforts and products and reach a large group of potential consumers who are interested in this information because of, previously mentioned, personal preferences. This is called green advertising. Companies use this strategy in communicating brand values as well as persuade consumers into making conscious purchasing decisions.

However there remains some doubts about the effects of using ‘green’ brand or product information as a social media strategy. Because of today’s social media landscape, consumers are becoming more skeptical about green statements by brands (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014). This is called greenwashing. “The act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (Parquel et al., 2011, p. 127). Recent study on the effectiveness of communicating green content on social media is limited. There is no clear evidence of whether or not green content drives or influences consumers in their purchase decision.

This research is done in collaboration with the household company Brabantia. They will be used as a case study, including customer data, buyer persona and brand values. This

increases practical and sufficient information for answering the research question. With the insight obtained from literary review, case studies and a survey, future recommendations can be made.

This study will focus only on the platform Instagram based on the length of this study, Brabantia's priority, but also the nature of the platform. To find the best strategies for the company's content marketing, it is possible to investigate customer interaction with sustainable messages via social media, notably Instagram. Given that consumers have expressed a greater interest in social and environmental sustainability issues (Chery, 2020).

Therefore sustainability within social media marketing is researched in the current study. The aim of this research is to give insights into contemporary attitudes towards sustainability practices by brands and the consumer behaviors towards social media content about this topic. Hence, the research question of this study is formulated as:

RQ: What role does sustainability play within a premium brand's content marketing strategy on social media, in shaping consumer attitude and behavior.

2. Theoretical framework

In the first theoretical chapter, literature will be studied to conceptualize the different aspects such as corporate sustainability, consumer attitude, content marketing and social media. This chapter provides the theoretical background needed for answering the research question. In order to create a cohesive foundation, the link between corporate sustainability and consumer attitude will be discussed first since this is the drive and motivation for creating a social media marketing strategy focussed on sustainability. Furthermore, the risks and challenges of consumer perception towards green marketing will be pointed out.

2.1 Corporate sustainability and consumer attitude

Sustainability is a broad concept, which includes many dimensions and knows many different definitions. The concept emerged in the 1970s, in response to concerns about the impact of economic growth and development on the environment. The Brundtland report by The World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainability as the ability of individuals, organizations, and societies to meet their present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Mullins, 2002, p. 1). Sustainability encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions and emphasizes the need for balance and integration among these themes. It has become an increasingly important topic in recent years.

Due to society's growing awareness, more and more businesses are starting to communicate their sustainable practices through their marketing activities (Kumar & Kumar, 2013). According to McGinn (2009), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the commitment a business makes to contribute to sustainable economic development, collaborating with employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to enhance quality of life in environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Environmental impact is a company's influence on the physical environment, and it is typically most visible to customers through measurements such as carbon footprint or water pollution—in other words, being green. In 2001, CSR was defined “as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Commission Green Paper, 2001).

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) challenges are becoming increasingly important

in CSR practices. The three steps of ESG factor implementation are as follows: redefining the company's identity, codifying the new identity, and developing a supporting organizational culture (Eccles et al., 2012). The ESG criteria are useful instruments for monitoring and comparing the performance of sustainable businesses. Key performance indicators (KPIs) for sustainability are particular metrics used to define corporate plans and monitor economic, social and environmental performance using predetermined goals (Dissanayake, 2020). One example of a frequently used KPI is measuring the click through rate on social media: the number of clicks that lead visitors from a brand's social media channels to the corporate website.

By expressing and communicating responsible and sustainable activities, companies are able to generate positive consumer attitudes as well as positive behaviors in the long run. By doing so, they are creating credible brand image and consumer relation (Du et al., 2010). Brønn and Vrioni (2001) noted a significant shift in consumer attention towards products and organizations, with a notable emphasis on sustainability. The increasing popularity of sustainability has had a clear impact on consumer interest and behavior.

Rudawska (2018) found that many consumers hold businesses accountable for negative environmental issues. This resulted, on the other hand, in opportunities for businesses. Sustainability is now regarded as a competitive advantage among firms, contributing to increased value.

2.2 Social media marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) is a digital marketing technique that uses social media platforms to promote a brand, product, or service. It involves creating and sharing content on social media channels, engaging with the target audience, and driving traffic to a website or landing page to achieve business goals. Social media marketing is a crucial aspect of modern marketing strategies, as social media platforms have become a popular medium for communication, entertainment, and information dissemination.

According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), social media marketing involves the use of social media channels to build brand awareness, engage with customers, and promote products or services. It is a way of creating and maintaining relationships with customers through social media platforms. Social media marketing can be used to achieve a variety of business objectives, such as increasing website traffic, generating leads, building brand awareness, and driving sales. One of the key benefits of social media marketing is its ability to reach a large and diverse audience. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram, and LinkedIn have millions of users, making them an ideal medium for promoting products or services. As noted by Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media platforms allow businesses to reach their target audience based on demographics, interests, behavior, and location, which enables them to tailor their marketing messages to specific groups of people. Because of their ability to create interactions and communications useful for identifying changes and opportunities in business creation, developing new ideas for starting a business, reaching target customers, knowing customers' views and feedback, and recruiting employees, social media can be considered valuable tools for entrepreneurship (Park et al., 2017).

However, social media marketing also presents some challenges. One of the main challenges is measuring the return on investment (ROI). According to Li and Bernoff (2008), many businesses struggle to measure the effectiveness of their social media marketing efforts. Social media platforms are constantly evolving, and the metrics used to measure success may vary depending on the platform and the business objective.

Another challenge of social media marketing is managing brand reputation. Social media platforms allow customers to voice their opinions and experiences publicly, which can have a significant impact on a business's reputation. As noted by Godes and Mayzlin (2004), negative reviews or comments on social media can damage a brand's image and erode customer trust. Businesses must therefore monitor social media channels and respond promptly to negative feedback to mitigate reputational damage.

2.2.1 Instagram

Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as a prominent player, providing an interactive platform for businesses to connect with their audience. Users can share, comment, like and post visual content, but also shop. Instagram has developed into a marketing communication tool which most companies include in their marketing strategy. According to Casaló et al. (2018), Instagram users get inspiration from the content for future searches or shopping behaviors. Furthermore others label Instagram as one of the most important social media platforms for corporate communication (Miles, 2014).

2.3 Social media and sustainability

Previous research has shown the benefits of social media to engage with consumers on a brand's sustainable developments (Ali et al., 2015; Du et al., 2010). Using social media for corporate sustainability communication offers both opportunities as challenges (Corstjens & Umbljls, 2012). In their advertising, businesses are increasingly emphasizing the "greenness"

of their products, services, and operations (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Reaching a large but specific target audience with minimum costs is the main benefit of using social media platforms. However, it might also lead to adverse reactions from consumers if they suspect unethical behavior, or misleading information. The false promises made by businesses that seem sustainable but are seen as ambiguous or, in some cases, inaccurate are called 'greenwashing'. This is defined as "intentionally deceiving and misleading consumers with false claims about a firm's environmental practices and impact" (Nyilasy et al., 2014, p. 693). Consequently, the lack of ethical practices in the industry undermines consumer confidence in brands and products. This widespread unethical behavior has led consumers to question the honesty of corporations as a whole. A major concern arises from the fact that genuine businesses with sincere environmental goals or causes are negatively affected by this prevailing trend (Furlow, 2010).

According to Friestad and Wright (1999) when consumers receive incoming information, they process it using a set of beliefs that they have established over time. This depends on what consumers believe a persuasive message is attempting to accomplish. Consumers often disregard or ignore messages that do not appear convincing. The credibility of corporate communication is therefore critical in shaping consumer attitudes towards a brand (Moore & Rodgers, 2005).

2.4 Content Marketing

Previous research has shown a decline in the effectiveness of traditional advertising (de Bakker, 2017). Consumers have created an evasive behavior towards manipulative advertisements and began using conscious or unconscious avoidance mechanisms. According to the Persuasion knowledge model by Friestad and Wright (1994), consumers developed an awareness to protect oneself from persuasion attempts by businesses. This model suggests that consumers have a certain knowledge about the persuasion tactics, which affects how they respond to the advertisements and message. With this knowledge they interpret and evaluate the credibility and intentions of the advertiser. By doing so, enabling consumers to select and execute coping tactics against pushing messages. Theory implies a negative consumer attitude based on the critical evaluation a consumer makes of a persuasive intended message. As a result, traditional push-advertising, such as television, radio and newspapers, has become less effective. This also includes negative attitudes towards internet advertising because of its abounding and deceptional exposure (Cho et al., 2004).

As a solution for these consumer aversion tactics, marketers started to focus more on content marketing. Content marketing is the strategic marketing approach that involves creating and sharing valuable and relevant content to attract and retain a target audience. The primary goal of content marketing is to drive profitable customer action, such as increasing website traffic, generating leads, and driving sales. Content marketing differs from traditional advertising in that it focuses on providing useful and informative content rather than promoting a specific product or service. It is user focused and primarily executed on brand owned media channels (Antheunis et al., 2016). This approach is known as pull content marketing. In contrast to a push marketing strategy that centers around the organization's resources, competences, and capacity, a pull marketing strategy emphasizes the market's needs. It recognizes that successful marketing involves aligning with and responding to the demands and preferences of the target market. As a result, many organizations adopt a combination of both push and pull marketing strategies, leveraging their internal strengths while also prioritizing customer-centric approaches to maximize effectiveness (Grundström, 2015).

One of the key benefits of content marketing is its ability to establish a business as a thought leader in its industry. By providing valuable and informative content, businesses can demonstrate their expertise and build trust with their target audience. As noted by Schaefer and Smith (2016), content marketing can help businesses position themselves as authoritative sources of information and build a loyal following.

Another benefit of content marketing is its ability to improve search engine rankings. Search engines like Google prioritize high-quality, relevant content in their search results. By creating valuable and optimized content, businesses can improve their search engine rankings and attract more organic traffic to their website.

However, content marketing also presents some challenges. One of the main challenges is creating high-quality and engaging content that resonates with the target audience. As noted by Zarella (2009), content that is boring, irrelevant, or overly promotional is unlikely to attract and retain a target audience. Businesses must therefore invest time and resources in creating content that is informative, entertaining, and valuable to their target audience.

Another challenge of content marketing is measuring its effectiveness. According to Petersen (2017), many businesses struggle to measure the impact of their content marketing efforts, as the metrics used to measure success may vary depending on the business objective.

Businesses must therefore define clear goals and metrics for their content marketing campaigns to measure their effectiveness accurately.

As mentioned before, the algorithms and nature of social media platforms are designed in a way that users are exposed to a tailor made, personal profile and are seemingly able to avoid content not in line with their values or personal situations. Consumers are more selectively searching for information; this is where marketers try to pull consumers with their content marketing strategy. Giving the consumer relevant and appealing content on social media, which they voluntarily adopt has therefore become important within a brands marketing strategy.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, existing research indicates that incorporating green marketing and advertising can have a positive impact on brand attitude and perceived brand trustworthiness. The literature review suggests that leveraging social media platforms to communicate a brand's sustainable practices can lead to favorable brand attitudes and behaviors. By integrating sustainable messaging within content marketing strategies, consumers are less likely to employ defensive strategies against the message, thereby enhancing message credibility and reducing consumer skepticism. While previous studies have primarily focused on how social media use influences the sustainability performance of organizations, present research will examine an under-researched but relevant field, namely that of premium household companies, using an interesting case study.

3. Method

To answer the research question: What role does sustainability play within a premium brand's content marketing strategy on social media, in shaping consumer attitude and behavior, two related sub-question were formulated. These questions are used to break down and further explore particular aspects of the main question. The sub-questions are as follows:

- 1. What are the key characteristics of a brand's social media messaging to promote sustainable products and practices?*
- 2. How do consumers perceive and respond to sustainability messaging on social media?*

3.1 Case study context

From the preceding literature review, we can conclude that the above literature review, the topic of sustainability, gains increasing attention from both consumers and companies. Many businesses are exploring ways to incorporate sustainable practices into their operations.

One such company is Brabantia, a family company founded in 1919. They offer a range of premium household products such as waste bins, laundry care, and other household essentials. Their headquarters is based in Valkenswaard and as of 2020, the company has around 1000 employees worldwide. They operate in over 100 countries with production facilities in Europe and Asia. The company is known for its focus on sustainability and innovation and has introduced eco-friendly products such as bins made from recycled materials and products designed for energy efficient use. Moreover, Brabantia has just received the certificate B Corp (Benefit Corporations), a recognition for having a positive impact on people and the environment.

Brabantia's vision is "to enrich the quality of life and living" with their mission "to create beautiful and sustainable solutions to make domestic chores more pleasurable" as stated in the company's brand book. When analyzing the brandbook it becomes clear that their strategy is to not only sell products, but also inspire and motivate their customers in sustainable living. They operate this by using mainly pull content marketing, as mentioned in the literature review, by providing useful blogs and guidelines that speak to their audience.

From the customer profiles the target audience from Brabantia is clearly visualized. The main characteristics of the persona is around 30, higher educated, interested in design and sustainability. The products are designed to appeal to individuals who prioritize sustainability and eco-friendliness, as the company places a strong emphasis on using environmentally responsible materials and production methods. Additionally, the company's products are designed to be functional and user-friendly, with innovative features that make household tasks more efficient and enjoyable.

Brabantia tries to voice their values on social media. They want to "inspire, engage, create, discover, inform and tell stories about our products in a way that our consumers will really relate to" (Brabantia, 2021). On Instagram they use english as one general language,

with short and mainly inspirational messages. They often make use of emoji’s and use hashtags to make the message stronger, as well as hashtags for search purposes.

A study done by Brabantia itself, to measure the overall brand image (Appendix D), found that 72% of Dutch participants perceive Brabantia as sustainable. This percentage however, is substantially lower than the other two pillars, ‘nice design’ and ‘worth the money’. This might be because of the lack of sustainable messaging on social media, because as stated in the figure, brabantia’s main focus in campaigns are the pillars that focus on beautiful imagery.

This study will use Brabantia as a case study to explore the question, What role does sustainability play within a premium brand’s content marketing strategy on social media, in shaping consumer attitude and behavior? By examining Brabantia's social media marketing strategies, a practical analysis will be made which can also be applicable in other markets. This thesis will provide insights into best practices for sustainable marketing on social media platforms and offer recommendations for Brabantia as well as other companies on how they can leverage social media to promote their sustainable products and practices.

3.2 Design

To answer the sub-questions and the overarching research question for this study, a number of different research methods were selected.

Table 1.
Sub-questions and related research methods

Sub-questions	Method	Objectives	Focus
1. <i>What are the key characteristics of a brand’s social media messaging to promote sustainable products and practices?</i>	Deskresearch: Competitors analysis + Poll	Analyzing the instagram content from other sustainability focussed brands. Analyzing the results from the poll	Focus on similarities or frequency.

		on the Brabantia account	
2. <i>How do consumers perceive and respond to sustainability messaging on social media?</i>	Survey + Poll	Asking participants questions about their attitude, behavior and opinion on the stimuli.	Differences between age or gender. Differences between the types of content.

3.2.1 Operationalization

For this research the independent variable is the type of content, the sustainability messaging on social media by premium brands. This variable will be operationalized by analyzing the language and imagery used by premium brands to promote sustainability on their platforms. The second independent variable are the key characteristics, which will be operationalized by analyzing the content of sustainable marketing campaigns on social media platforms, looking at factors such as storytelling, personalization and visual aspects. In this research, the influence of sustainability content on consumer attitude and behavior will be looked at. The dependent variables in this study are consumer attitude and behavior, with a specific focus on consumer behavior towards sustainability messaging on social media. The research methodology consists of two main components. Firstly, an orientational poll will be conducted on the Brabantia Instagram account. Secondly, a survey will be administered to participants, where they will be asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements related to the stimuli and other attitudes.

Consumer behavior, in the context of this research, refers to the intention to engage in various actions. These behaviors may include purchasing sustainable products, sharing and commenting on sustainability messaging, or visiting the website after encountering the stimuli. The survey will also gather information on participants' general interests and current behaviors related to sustainability, social media, and premium brands.

To gain insights into effective strategies for communicating greenness on social media, desk research was conducted. This involved examining the strategies employed by other companies

in their social media communications. By comparing Brabantia's strategy with that of competitors, key characteristics of effective campaigns and communication were identified. The analysis encompassed various social media practices and different subjects or types of information.

Based on the findings of the desk research, specific types of content can be tested on Brabantia's followers. This will be achieved through a poll conducted on the Brabantia Instagram account, where followers will be asked to provide their opinion on types of sustainable messaging.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of using a poll. Since it does not collect demographic or personal information, there is a lack of data in those areas. Additionally, the poll may be subject to response bias, as participants are Brabantia followers who might already have an interest in sustainability. To address these limitations and gain a better understanding of demographic details, general interests, customer attitudes, and behaviors, a survey will be conducted alongside the poll. This will provide deeper insights and allow for a better understanding of potential differences, relationships, or characteristics.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Small competitor analysis on sustainability and online communication

As mentioned in the literary review, various branding messages are communicated via social media (Briggs, 2010). Understanding effective customer interaction strategies is crucial for organizations navigating social media communications, especially when 'sustainability' messaging is included. Therefore, in order to find similarities, specific characteristics and differences within the online communication about sustainability, a small analysis of Brabantia competitors was done. The aim of this content analysis is to find out what strategy other companies use and what elements are most effective. As mentioned before, this study primarily focuses on the content that is posted on the platform Instagram about sustainable efforts and products by similar brands. Note that effective sustainability messaging on Instagram may vary depending on the brand's target audience, brand identity, and overall marketing strategy. It's essential to understand the preferences and interests of the specific audience you're trying to engage and tailor the messaging accordingly.

For this analysis, besides Brabantia four competing brands have been selected. Two direct competitors: Ikea and Leifheit. And two indirect competitors known for their sustainability messaging: Patagonia and Ecover. For this research, only the specific visual and textual content will be analyzed. The technique used in this study is content analysis as

described by Holsti (1969) “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages”, as visible in Table 2. An interpretive and objective approach will be used. By doing so, this research is trying to find valuable insights into social media content by identifying trends, keywords, style and communicative language.

Table 2.

Competitor analysis sustainable Instagram content

Brand	Messaging	Visual Appeal	Themes
IKEA (@ikeanederland)	- Highlights renewable materials and energy efficiency - Promotes circular economy goals and initiatives - Educates about sustainable living through tips and advice	- Lifestyle and product images. - Captivating room setups showcasing sustainable products - Behind-the-scenes videos of sustainable production	- Sustainable living - Upcycling and repurposing - Eco-friendly furniture and lighting
Joseph Joseph (josephjosephofficial)	- Highlighting sustainable materials used in their products - Showcasing eco-friendly	- Clean and minimalist visuals - Visuals showcasing their products in use	- Sustainable practices using their products - Efficient cleaning and organizing solutions

	functionalities and features		
	- Educating followers about sustainable kitchen practices	- Behind-the-scenes content on manufacturing processes	- Waste reduction
Patagonia (patagonia)	- Advocates for environmental conservation and activism	- Outdoor and adventure visuals.	- Nature preservation
	- Shares stories of environmental campaigns and initiatives	- Landscapes and nature	- Fair trade and ethically sourced products
	- Encourages followers to participate in environmental actions	- User-generated content featuring Patagonia products	- Sustainable outdoor gear and apparel
Ecover (ecover_nl)	- Promotes eco-friendly cleaning products and practices	- Clean and minimalist design aesthetics using a lot of text	- Non-toxic and biodegradable cleaning solutions
	- Educates about the environmental impact of conventional cleaning	- Visuals showcasing Ecover products in real-life settings	- Plastic waste reduction and recycling

	- Encourages sustainable living through tips and advice	- Nature-inspired imagery with compelling colors: green and blue	- Eco-friendly household cleaning
Brabantia (@brabantia)	- Highlights recyclability and Cradle to Cradle® certification	- Vibrant and visually appealing product shots	- Waste management and recycling
	- Engages followers through sustainability challenges and tips	- Lifestyle imagery with Brabantia products in use	- Love for nature and environmental awareness
	- Collaborates with environmental organizations	- Reposts user-generated content featuring Brabantia products	- Sustainable and stylish household solutions

IKEA has made significant efforts in trying to improve its sustainability practices in recent years. They focus on using renewable materials, promoting energy efficiency, and reducing waste. IKEA's Instagram account often features posts and stories that highlight their sustainable initiatives. They showcase sustainable products, such as furniture made from recycled materials or eco-friendly lighting solutions. They also share information about their commitment to renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions. But most of all, IKEA engages with followers by providing sustainability tips and encouraging sustainable living practices. They organize events that focus on creating awareness to promote sustainability such as “Bring Back Friday” or “Date voor de planeet”.

The houseware company Joseph Joseph places a strong emphasis on sustainable design and materials. They aim to minimize waste and environmental impact by using recycled and recyclable materials in their products. Joseph Joseph also focuses on designing products that promote efficiency and reduce resource consumption, such as space-saving kitchenware and reusable storage solutions. Joseph Joseph communicates its sustainability efforts through its

website and product packaging. However, it is not as prominently visible on their Instagram as IKEA. They do highlight the use of recycled materials, reduced packaging waste, and the overall eco-friendly design approach. Joseph Joseph emphasizes the benefits of their sustainable products, such as reducing single-use plastic and promoting sustainable living practices.

The fashion brand Patagonia is widely recognized for its strong commitment to environmental issues. They have sustainability as their core value and identity. For example, their Instagram bio says: “We're in business to save our home planet”. They prioritize responsible sourcing, fair labor practices, and reducing their carbon footprint. Patagonia actively supports environmental causes through initiatives like 1% for the Planet, donating a portion of their sales to environmental organizations. They also offer repair services to extend the lifespan of their products. They communicate their environmental initiatives through their website, social media, and marketing campaigns. Patagonia openly shares information about their supply chain, environmental impact, and ongoing efforts to improve sustainability. On Instagram they focus mainly on content marketing by posting a lot of stories from inspiring people or educational publications. They focus their messaging on being outdoors and active rather than pushing their products. Moreover, pushing people to join them for protests or signing petitions. But also communicating their own brand initiatives such as collaborations or political statements.

Ecover is a brand that focuses on sustainable cleaning and personal care products. They prioritize using plant-based ingredients, renewable resources, and biodegradable packaging. Ecover also promotes responsible manufacturing practices and works towards reducing water and energy consumption in their production processes. Ecover's communication strategy revolves around transparency and educating consumers about their sustainable practices. They highlight the use of natural ingredients, environmentally friendly packaging, and the reduction of chemical waste. Ecover's communication channels, including their website and social media, emphasize the benefits of choosing eco-friendly cleaning products and provide information on their sustainability achievements. When taking a glance at their Instagram account it is immediately visible that their focus is on communicating their ‘greenness’. This is visible in their style, icons, language and colors. They make use of big and bold messaging that grabs the attention. And try to give the customers tips and useful information about their brand, products and savings.

As mentioned before Brabantia integrates sustainability into its product design and manufacturing processes. They focus on producing durable and long-lasting products and reducing waste through repair and recycling programs. Brabantia also supports environmental causes through partnerships and initiatives. Brabantia communicates its sustainability commitments through its website, packaging, and marketing materials. They emphasize the durability and longevity of their products as a sustainable alternative to disposable options. Brabantia encourages customers to make conscious choices, recycle their products, and reduce waste. However, when taking a closer look at their communication on Instagram, being sustainable does not come to light directly. They provide followers with stylish images and home inspiration. They additionally repost user-generated content. Sustainability is more on the background but is being addressed occasionally when messaging about their green partnerships or certifications.

3.3.2 Poll

Current study researches the influence of content on social media about sustainability on consumer attitude and behavior. In order to know what type of content consumers want to see on Instagram, a small poll was conducted on the Brabantia business account on Instagram. By posting several questions on different types of 'green' content. A poll is a research method used to collect data from a specific, large group of individuals about their opinions, attitudes etc. In this case the specific group will be the Brabantia Instagram followers, these are likely people that are interested in the brand or have purchased something, therefore they are the target audience. Three stories were posted with different topics and questions on which the followers could vote. The poll was created using Canva with assistance of the Brabantia marketing team to conform them to the company's image and identity. The questions were distributed on the account on 7 Juli 2023. The story was visible for 24 hours. After that time, the results were saved and sent to the researcher.

3.3.3 Stimuli

In the survey, participants were presented with various types of sustainable content in the form of Instagram posts. Following exposure to these stimuli, they were subsequently asked a series of questions and statements. The stimuli were classified into three categories: brand information, lifestyle, and product information, as visible in the following figures. These

categorizations were determined by analyzing the existing content available on the Brabantia account.

Figure 1.

Post 1. Sustainable Brand Information



Figure 2.

Post 2. Sustainable Lifestyle



Figure 3.

Post 3. Sustainable Product Information



3.3.4 Survey

To understand opinions and attitudes regarding sustainable messaging on social media, a survey was conducted, aiming to collect data on relationships between sustainability and variables such as age and gender. The online questionnaire technique was chosen for its efficiency, time-saving, and cost-saving benefits (Kown, 2012). The survey was created using the online questionnaire tool Qualtrix. Participants were gathered through convenience and snowball sampling methods, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, efforts were made to ensure diversity among respondents in terms of age, gender, education level, and occupation.

The survey was widely distributed using a link shared across various channels and personal contacts, including Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Different stimuli were incorporated in the survey to make the questions more concrete and easily answerable for participants. From the literature review, a distinction was made between push and pull content, with consumers exhibiting aversion towards push content. Therefore, only pull content, specifically content marketing, was included in the questionnaire.

Before beginning the survey, participants were informed that they would be participating in a questionnaire related to sustainability marketing, which would take approximately 15 minutes to complete. They were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and would be used solely for analysis purposes.

The survey consisted of four sections. The first section included general questions about participants' use of Instagram and the features they considered important when purchasing household products. To ensure comprehensive data, forced response formats were used for most of the questions, encouraging participants to provide complete answers.

In the second section, participants' attitudes towards sustainability content were measured by presenting three different types of stimuli and asking for their opinions on each. A 5-point bipolar matrix table was utilized, with participants rating the relevance of the stimuli, for example, from unimportant to relevant. The same set of questions was asked for each stimulus to maintain consistency and measure differences in attitude across the types.

To assess subsequent customer behavior and the extension of attitudes towards sustainability content, five statements were presented, starting with "after seeing these posts...". Participants were asked to rate their agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The final question on the sustainability topic queried participants' willingness to pay more for a sustainable brand, if at all, and requested the percentage by which they would be willing to pay more. Demographic information, including age, gender, and education level, was collected in the last section.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, summarizing responses and identifying patterns and trends. Connections between demographics and different variables were also examined. The survey results were presented through tables and charts to provide a clear and concise overview of the findings. Open-ended questions were subjected to content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in respondents' comments. The entire survey can be found in Appendix C.

3.4 Participants

From the around 1300 instagram users who viewed the story on the Brabantia instagram account, 50 participants took part in the first poll and 56 in the second. The demographics of participants are not visible in the Instagram data. The results of the poll are not statistically significant therefore a survey was needed to draw final conclusions.

A total of 227 respondents took part in the survey, of which 92 did not completely finish it. With the use of excel, the data was cleaned and missing values and outliers were deleted, which left 130 useful responses. The characteristics of the final 130 participants who were included for analysis are visible in Table 3. The biggest group of the study sample was present in the second category from 25-34 years, the division can be seen in Figure 4. The biggest group of participants were between the age of 18-24 (34%) and the smallest group was 65 or older (4%). From the participants 62% (N=81) were female, 37% (N= 48) identified as male and one participant identified as non binary or third gender. From the participants around 72% have a bachelor degree or higher (n=93) and the other category (28%, N=36) was linked as lower education. The most participants (33%) were in the category HBO. These demographics are used for further analyses with the independent and general variables.

Table 3.

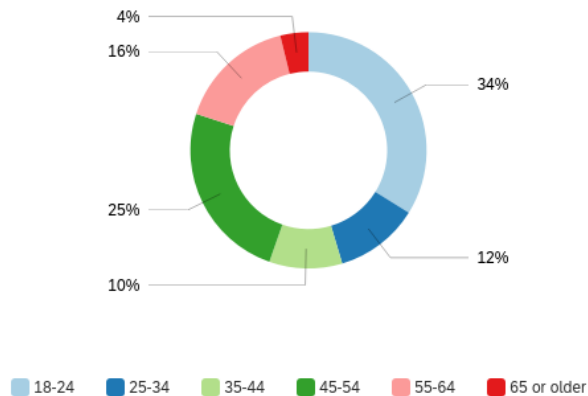
Demographic data of the participants (N = 130)

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>	<i>130</i>	
<i>Age</i>		
18-24	<i>44</i>	<i>34</i>
25-34	<i>15</i>	<i>12</i>
35-44	<i>13</i>	<i>10</i>
44-54	<i>32</i>	<i>25</i>
55-64	<i>21</i>	<i>16</i>
65 or older	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	<i>48</i>	<i>37</i>
Female	<i>81</i>	<i>62</i>
Non binary/ Third gender	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Education level</i>		
High	<i>93</i>	<i>72</i>
Low	<i>36</i>	<i>28</i>

Note: Education level high is bachelor degree or higher

Figure 4.

Age group division participants in percentages



4. Results

This chapter presents the findings and results of a comprehensive research study conducted to examine and analyze characteristics of sustainable content on Instagram and the subsequent consumer attitude and behavior. The results are based on a competitor analysis of the premium household brand Brabantia, a poll on their Instagram account, and by conducting a survey. The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the market dynamics and consumer preferences within the context of a sustainable brand, for a higher segment.

4.1 Competitor analysis

All mentioned companies value sustainability and integrate it into their business practices. However they differ in their online communication and messaging. After analyzing the brand accounts and content, key characteristics and best practices can be concluded. Firstly, the majority of the brands use visual storytelling by posting engaging visuals to showcase sustainable products, initiatives and behind-the-scenes content. And share images or videos that highlight eco-friendly materials, recycling processes, or sustainable manufacturing practices. Also incorporating lifestyle imagery that resonates with environmentally conscious consumers is often displayed.

Secondly, it seems important to be transparent within your online communication strategy. Many brands provide transparent information about sustainability efforts such as responsible sourcing and eco-friendly packaging. By using Instagram captions and stories to share facts, tips, and success stories related to sustainability.

Seemingly, being authentic and consistent with sustainable messaging is of great importance to avoid greenwashing. Brands can do this by ensuring that sustainability is an integral part of their brand values and aligns with their overall messaging.

Another widely used practice is using user-generated content. In this way a brand can encourage its audience to participate by sharing their experiences with sustainable products or practices. Create branded hashtags to gather user-generated content that showcases sustainability in action. Share and highlight user stories and testimonials on the Instagram feed or stories to foster a sense of community and engagement. As can be concluded from the literary review, this enhances your brand credibility and consumer trust. In Brabantia's case this could mean showing how a customer uses a drying rack instead of a dryer.

Another frequently used element is a call-to-action. This encourages the audience to think or act sustainably using your products. This also includes enhancing active engagement with followers by responding to comments, messages, and inquiries related to sustainability. Foster discussions and answer questions about your sustainability practices. This demonstrates your commitment and builds a loyal and engaged community.

4.2 Poll

In the poll, participants were asked to select the aspect they found most interesting among several options. The choices were as follows: A) Brabantia's impact on the environment (e.g., certifications, goals), B) The sustainability of Brabantia's products (e.g., made of recycled materials, recyclability), C) How Brabantia's products can be used to live a more sustainable lifestyle (e.g., drying naturally with their rotary dryer), or D) All of the above. The results showed that both options A and B received 24% of the votes, option C received 30%, and option D received 20% of the votes. These results indicate that there is not a substantial difference in preference for sustainable content on Brabantia's account. However, the findings suggest that content related to sustainable lifestyle, such as tips, is slightly more valued by the participants.

In the second poll question, participants were asked if they would like to see more behind-the-scenes content. An overwhelming majority of 86% voted in favor of this option. This result indicates that visitors to the Brabantia account are interested in and would like to see more content related to the supply chain, manufacturing processes, and office-related aspects. The detailed results can be found in Appendix A.2.

4.3 Survey

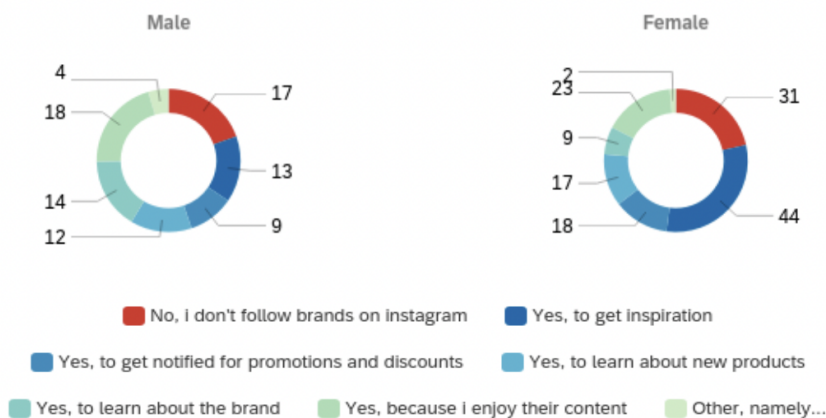
Out of the total 130 participants, more than half (57%, N=74) use Instagram multiple times a day ($\mu = 1.96$, $SD = 1.22$). When examining demographic differences it becomes evident that women use Instagram more frequently than men, with 64% of women indicating multiple daily usage compared to 44% of men. Among the participants, those between the ages of 18-34 were found to be the most active and visible on the platform.

Regarding the question “Do you follow a brand account on Instagram? And if so, for what reason?” participants were allowed to choose multiple options. Among the 130 participants, 48 stated that they do not follow any brands on Instagram. For those who do follow brands, the primary motives were to gain inspiration (N=57), followed by enjoyment of the brand's content (N=42), and a desire to learn about new products (N=29). Additionally, some participants selected the ‘other, namely’ option and mentioned that they follow brands for work-related purposes.

In examining the gender differences, it is important to note that the non-binary participant was excluded from the gender comparison. As illustrated in Figure 5, there is an equal distribution among men and women who do not follow brands on Instagram. However, when considering the motives for following brands, women (54%) predominantly cited inspiration as their primary reason, while a smaller percentage mentioned a desire to learn about the brand (11%). On the other hand, men were more inclined to follow brands because they enjoy the content (38%) and want to acquire knowledge about the brand (29%).

Figure 5.

Choice responses on motives for following brands on Instagram, and differences between gender



Next, the participants were presented with two questions: "What features are most important to you when buying a household product?" and "What qualities are most important to you in a premium brand?". Both questions utilized a rank order format with a drag and drop interface. Participants were instructed to rank the features from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). As becomes clear from the chart in Figure 6, for the first question, the feature ranked as the most important was ‘usefulness’ ($\mu = 2.72$, $SD=2.00$). On the other hand, Opinion of others was perceived as the least important feature, with 57 participants ranking it as their lowest priority ($\mu = 5.81$, $SD=1.50$). ‘Sustainability’ was mostly ranked at 5 or 6. In Figure 7, the results for the second question are visualized, showing that ‘high quality’ ($\mu = 1.95$, $SD=1.28$) and ‘trustworthiness’ ($\mu = 2.98$, $SD=1.52$) were mostly ranked 1 and 2. ‘Status’ ($\mu = 5.95$, $SD=1.49$) and ‘inspirational’ ($\mu = 4.78$, $SD=1.52$) were ranked last. For this question ‘sustainability’ was ranked higher at average than the previous question. Here participants ranked it mostly at place 4 ($\mu = 4.46$, $SD=1.76$).

Figure 6.
Number of choice counts, ranking place from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important) for the question: What features are most important to you when buying a household product?

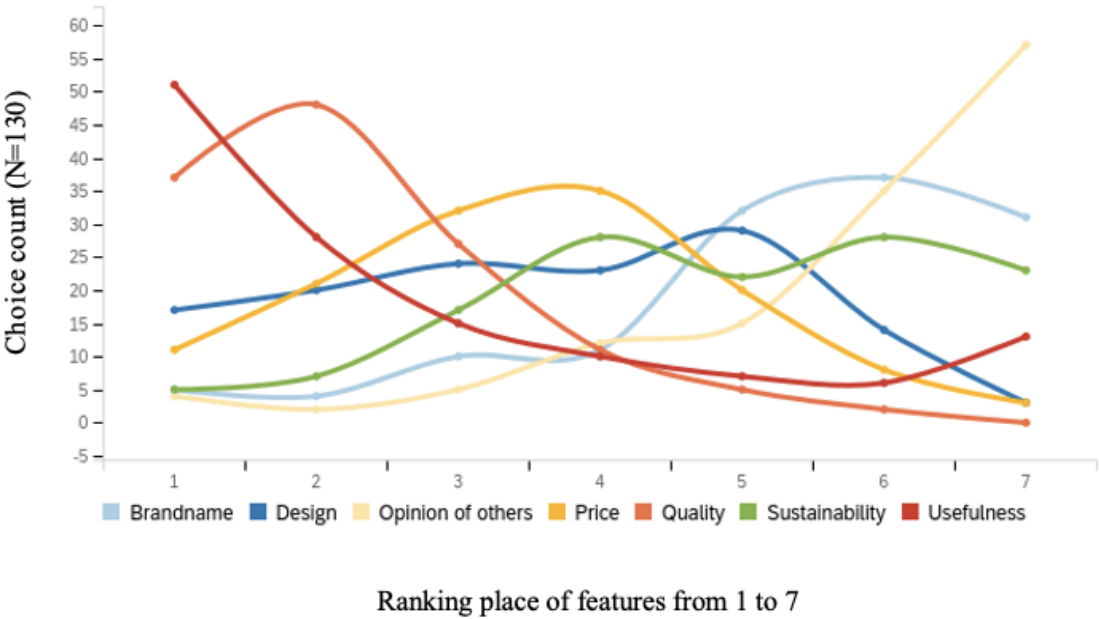
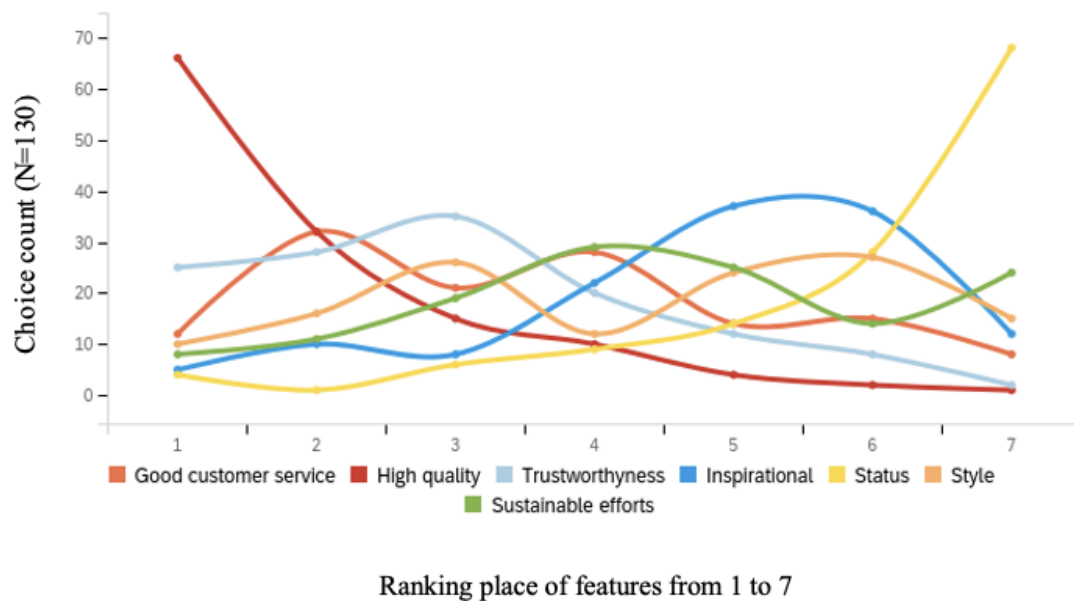


Figure 7.

Number of choice counts , ranking place from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important) for the question: What qualities are most important to you in a premium brand?



The participants were asked to indicate their general attitude towards sustainability, ranging from ‘not at all important’ to extremely important’. On average, the responses fell between moderately important (N=54) and very important (N=40), with an overall mean of 3.21 (SD=0.87). There was a slight difference between male and female participants in their values regarding sustainability. Women ($\mu = 3.33$, SD=0.75) perceived sustainability as slightly more important than men ($\mu = 3.02$, SD=0.99).

Next, the stimuli of sustainable Instagram content were introduced to test the dependent variables (attitude and behavior) against the independent variables. Participants were exposed to a post followed by a bipolar matrix table with five statements and five scale points. The complete score distribution can be found in Appendix 3. Analyzing Table 4, it is evident that for the first post, ‘Brand information’, the overall attitude was more positive than negative, with a mean of 3.6. The statement ‘doubtful’ to ‘credible’ received the most negative rating ($\mu = 3.15$, SD=1.05) among the five statements. The statement from negative to positive was rated the highest ($\mu = 4.07$, SD=0.9), and participants found this post to be the most clear out of the three ($\mu = 3.85$, SD=1.08).

The overall rating for the second post, ‘Lifestyle’, was the same as the first post ($\mu = 3.6$). However, participants perceived this post to be slightly more credible ($\mu = 3.64$, $SD=0.99$) and rated it as the least interesting ($\mu = 3.19$, $SD=1.18$) among the three posts. Out of the three posts, the statements for the last post, ‘Product information’, received the most positive responses overall ($\mu = 3.69$). This post was also rated as the most interesting ($\mu = 3.5$, $SD=1.3$). Notably, one participant provided a comment stating: "I preferred the post on recycled material because it tells me more about what the company does to produce sustainably."

Table 4.

Means and SD, attitude towards posts, statements (N = 130)

	<i>Post 1. Brand Information</i>		<i>Post 2. Lifestyle</i>		<i>Post 3. Product Information</i>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Boring:Interesting	3,3	1,1	3,2	1,2	3,5	1,2
Doubtful:Credible	3,1	1,1	3,6	1,0	3,6	1,1
Unimportant:Relevant	3,7	0,9	3,5	1,1	3,6	1,0
Unclear:Clear	3,8	1,2	3,7	1,1	3,7	1,1
Negative:Positive	4,1	0,9	3,9	0,9	4,0	0,9

Furthermore, possible differences in reactions towards the posts between gender have also been analyzed. It becomes clear that there was not a big difference between men and women for having a more positive attitude towards the last post on ‘Product information’ (M: $\mu = 3.68$, F: $\mu = 3.7$). The male participants found the first post on ‘Brand information’ the least interesting ($\mu = 3.1$, $SD=1.2$), however also the most clear ($\mu = 4.1$, $SD=1$) and both genders rated this more positive ($\mu = 4.1$, $SD=0,9$). Female participants found this post the most relevant ($\mu = 3.8$, $SD = 1$). The second post on ‘Lifestyle’ was perceived the least interesting by women ($\mu = 3.1$, $SD=1.2$), however they did find it more credible ($\mu = 3.7$, $SD=1$). This post was overall answered with the slightest variation in outcome. As mentioned

above the third post on 'Product information' had the highest response scores. This post was perceived as slightly more clear by men ($M:\mu = 3.8, F:3.6, SD=1$). And both men and women found this post the most interesting ($M:\mu = 3.4, SD=1.1 : F=3.6, SD =1.2$).

For testing the behavior towards the stimuli, the participants were asked to choose how they would likely react to the three posts, they could select multiple options. As can be seen in Table 5, for all the posts, the most chosen response is 'ignore'. The last post received this response (ignore) the least. (Post 1: N=69, Post 2 : N=66, Post 3 : N=58) . The behaviors of 'share' and 'comment on' were rarely selected for all three posts, with each receiving approximately 8% of the responses. The options 'like' and 'click for more information' were more popular. For the first post, 35% (N=45) chose 'like' and 29% (N=37) chose 'click for more information'. The second post had the highest likelihood of being shared among the three (7%, N=9), but it was not as frequently clicked for more information (18%, N=23). The last post received the most engagement, with 34% (N=44) indicating they would click for more information, and 33% (N=42) stating they would like the post.

Table 5.

N and percentage behavior towards the three posts, question: It is likely that I would ... this post (N = 130)

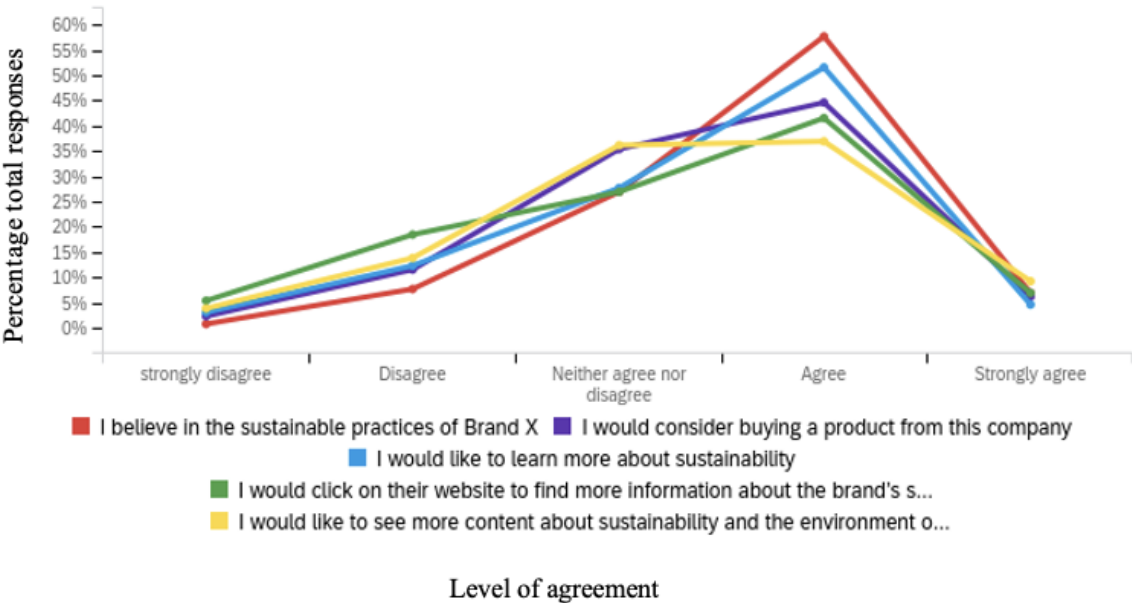
	<i>Post 1. Brand Information</i>		<i>Post 2. Lifestyle</i>		<i>Post 3. Product Information</i>	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Like	35	45	30	39	33	42
Share	4	5	7	9	4	5
Comment on	2	2	2	2	4	5
Click for more information	29	37	18	23	34	44
Ignore	53	69	51	66	45	58
Other, namely	4	5	5	7	1	1

When analyzing the differences between male and female attitude and behavior, it becomes clear that on average the male participants were more likely to share and comment

on the content as opposed to females. Women would ‘like’(36%) the first post and ‘ignore’(49%) the last, while men would ‘like’ (40%) the last post and ‘ignore’ (54%) the first.

After being exposed to the stimuli, the participants were asked to respond to 5 following statements by means of a 5-point likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. As visible in Figure 8, the overall response was positive. Statements 1, 3 and 5 are on attitude and 2 and 4 about behavior. On average, statement one was rated the highest ($\mu = 3.63, SD=0.76$), and statement 4 the lowest ($\mu = 3.26, SD=1.02$). Overall women had a more positive attitude towards learning more about sustainability than men. Seemingly, they would also be more likely to click on the website to learn more about the sustainable efforts (9% more positive). When asked whether the participants believed in the sustainable practices of Brand X the overall response was the most positive out of all statements, however women (32%) had a more neutral stance than men (19%) and chose neither to agree nor disagree. More than half the respondents would be likely to consider buying a product.

Figure 8.
Scores in percentage of responses on statements about sustainable consumer behavior and attitude; on a 5 point likert-scale

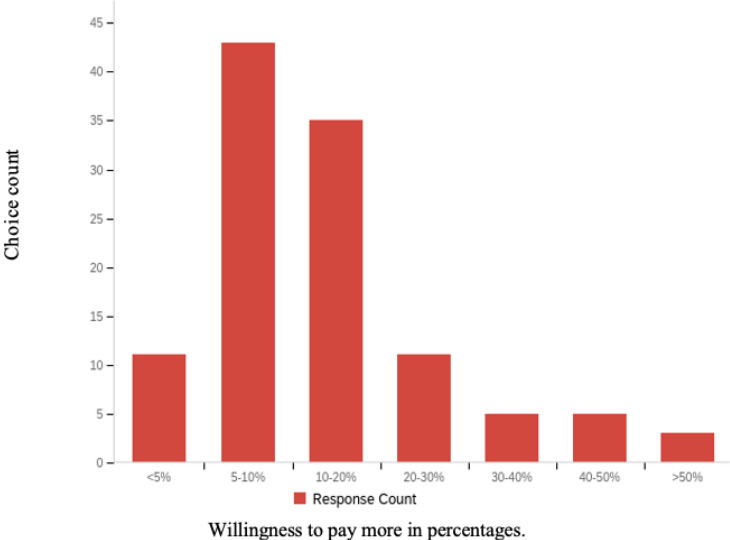


From all participants, 13% said they would not be willing to pay more for a household product of Brand X (made in a sustainable way) than a similar product from household Brand Y (not clear whether or not made sustainably). Most respondents would be willing to pay between 5 and 20% more, as visible in Figure 9. The groups in age 45-54 ($\mu = 3.94$,

SD=1.56), 55-64 ($\mu = 3.67$, SD=1.86) and 64 or older ($\mu = 4.0$, SD=1.10) were willing to pay slightly more on average.

Figure 9.

Scores in response count on the question: How much more (in percentages) would you be willing to pay?



5. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the role of sustainability within the content marketing strategy of premium brands on social media. The research question, *What role does sustainability play within a premium brand's content marketing strategy on social media, in shaping consumer attitude and behavior?* and sub-questions were addressed through a comprehensive study that included a competitor analysis, a poll conducted on the Brabantia's Instagram account, and a survey.

The literary study provided clear insights into the key concepts and their interconnection between corporate sustainability, content marketing and social media. The chapter discusses the link between corporate sustainability and consumer attitude, emphasizing the importance of balancing economic, social and environmental dimensions. Because consumers are getting more concerned about the environment than ever before (Kumar & Kumar, 2013; Malmqvist, 2022). The rise of sustainability as a competitive advantage among firms is highlighted, showcasing how businesses can generate positive consumer attitudes and behaviors by expressing and communicating responsible and sustainable activities. As mentioned by Du et al. (2010), companies are able to foster favorable consumer attitudes as well as beneficial behaviors over time by expressing and conveying ethical and sustainable activities. They are building a trustworthy brand image and customer relationship in the process. Furthermore it stresses the significance of social media marketing in modern marketing strategies. However, also acknowledging the challenges such as “greenwashing” and consumer marketing aversive tactics. Content marketing is introduced as a solution to avoid these challenges and is presented as a strategic approach where brands share and create valuable content to attract and retain their audience (de Bakker, 2017). Providing informative, high-quality and credible content that resonates with the consumers is crucial. These practices could enhance consumer attitude, trust and engagement with sustainable brands.

To investigate the first sub-question, *What are the key characteristics of a brand's social media messaging to promote sustainable products and practices?* competitor analysis was done which revealed that premium brands value sustainability and integrate it into their business practices. The online communication and messaging strategies vary, however trends and similarities could be established. It revealed that visual storytelling plays a significant role, as brands used engaging visuals to showcase sustainable products, initiatives and behind-the-scenes content. Transparency was also emphasized with brands providing

information about their activities and efforts through captions and stories. Authenticity and consistency in sustainable messaging were highlighted to avoid greenwashing. Also the use of user-generated content is often reposted and leveraged to create trust. Call-to-actions are used to encourage the audience to participate in sustainable thinking and engage with the brand.

The second question: *How do consumers perceive and respond to sustainability messaging on social media?* was answered by means of a poll and survey. The poll conducted on Brabantia's Instagram account indicated that sustainable lifestyle content, such as tips, was slightly more valued by the audience compared to the other sustainability-related topics: product information and brand information. However it showed no notable distinction and therefore cannot be generalized. Additionally, the poll showed a high interest in behind-the-scenes content, indicating that visitors of the account want to see more content besides the products or visually appealing images. Which can be confirmed by the competitor analysis, where other brands also make use of story-telling and behind-the-scenes content of their sustainable products or green efforts. Therefore, a positive content marketing strategy could be to include more sustainable storytelling as relevant and valuable information for consumers.

Additionally, the results from the survey reinforce the idea that participants value sustainability as Brønn and Vrioni (2001) mention. However, it appears that participants also engage with green content. The survey, which was completed by 130 participants, focussed on general attitude towards sustainability, product and brand preferences, specific Instagram content and the related consumer attitude and behavior. The study also investigates participants' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability after exposure to the stimuli. Firstly, the results of the survey indicate that the motives of Instagram users to follow brands, is seeking inspiration, like their content or learning about their products. As previously mentioned, brands can make use of content marketing to meet these needs. Besides other features for a premium or household product, sustainability was ranked relatively high in terms of importance especially when this is not a materialistic feature, but an additional value. The participants' general attitude towards sustainability was moderately to very important for most, with women placing slightly higher importance on sustainability compared to men. The stimuli of sustainable Instagram content presented in the survey had a positive overall impact on the respondents attitudes. The three posts focussing on Brand information, Lifestyle, and Product information were generally well-received, with the latter perceived as most

interesting. Participants were more likely to engage with the content by liking it or clicking for more information, while sharing and commenting were less common behaviors. The overall response to sustainability and the content was positive, with female participants expressing more willingness to learn more about sustainability. The overall willingness for considering a purchase was also high. Women showed a more positive attitude towards sustainability and a higher likelihood of clicking on the website to learn more about sustainable efforts, while men were more positive towards the overall sustainable image of the brand. Lastly, when asked about their willingness to pay more for a sustainable household product from Brand X compared to a similar product from Brand Y, the majority of respondents expressed a willingness to pay between 5% and 20% more, with 45 years and older willing to pay more than 20% more often than the younger groups. The responses suggest no sign of greenwashing as majority of respondents said to believe the sustainable efforts and rated the posts as credible. One of the participants gave context to their answer saying: “I see brands falling in a similar trap on sustainability marketing as they did before on e.g. ethnic and gender marketing effort: riddled with preconceptions and platitudes at best and sheer greenwashing at worst. It is a process we have to go through and hope we’ll find the key to market sustainability in an honest, truthful and non-condescending way. Sure this research helps to nudge brands in a better direction”.

From this study, it can be established that by communicating responsible and sustainable activities, companies are able to generate positive consumer attitudes as well as positive behaviors. It is crucial to create and distribute consistent and transparent content, to ensure brand trust. Instagram can be an effective platform for communicating this type of sustainable content, as it provides the visual as well as informational opportunities and the ability to interact with followers. Moreover, it shows how sustainability is something that society values more and more, and seems to play a part in people's buying processes. These results are not only useful for brands, but suggest a positive social interest towards saving the environment. This research demonstrates that prioritizing sustainability has a positive impact on nature but it can also be a profitable value.

5.1 Discussion and limitations

The current study has its limitations that should be addressed for further research. Firstly, this study was done in collaboration with a premium established brand, therefore the results and focus was already altered by preconceptions and limitations towards a specific market. This

could also have had an impact on the poll, as the participants were already familiar with the brand and could therefore be biased. The competitor analysis was also done by taking the case study as a starting point, and might therefore not be usable for other branches. Secondly, the survey was distributed mostly amongst personal channels, therefore some groups such as women and adolescence were overrepresented. This limits the generalizability of the results. A suggestion for future research is to investigate a bigger sample, or focus on a certain target audience.

Furthermore, it became clear that many participants started the survey but stopped in the beginning. This could have meant that using English as language caused many to leave the survey. Another explanation for leaving the survey could have been not having an Instagram account, this was intended because those answers would not have been useful. Additionally, it became evident that a significant number of participants started the survey but discontinued it early on. This could potentially be attributed to the use of English as the survey language, which might have led many participants to abandon the survey. Another plausible reason for participants leaving the survey could be the absence of an Instagram account. However this criterion was intended to ensure the relevance and usefulness of their responses.

An additional constraint emerged from the study wherein the survey encompassed self-generated posts, incorporating indistinct content related to Brabantia. This particular aspect might have been identifiable by individuals familiar with the brand, potentially leading to a biased inclination. Furthermore, numerous other factors could have influenced the respondents' attitudes towards the content, such as personal interest or visual appeal. The exclusive focus on the Instagram platform, can also be seen as a limitation as it excludes other social media platforms. Future research endeavors should delve more comprehensively into the underlying motivations driving consumer choices or explore alternative platforms to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

Lastly, another limitation of current research is ecological validity. The participants had to visualize their attitude and behavior, the real-life reactions could be different than what people think they would do. Other research could extend on these results and test whether this is indeed the case in practice.

Current study provides insights for an under researched and relatively new and interesting field. Showing how brands should implement and communicate sustainability, as well as the subsequent consumer attitude and behavior. Previous studies imply that sustainability is

becoming more and more important for brands and consumers, however little is known on data to establish a detailed content analysis, or differences between topics. There are also conflicting findings on customer attitude because of challenges such as greenwashing. As mentioned in the conclusion, the current study establishes a positive effect of sustainable messaging and can serve as a guide for further content analysis for specific target audiences, motives or extended testing on content types.

5.2 Recommendations for social media marketing on sustainability

Based on the findings of the previous study, it is recommended to incorporate sustainability into a brand's social media marketing strategy on Instagram for the purpose of content marketing. Firstly, it is essential to prioritize sustainability as a fundamental value of the brand across social, economic, and environmental dimensions. This emphasis on sustainability should be effectively communicated to the target audience. Depending on the specific audience, brands should tailor the content to be relevant and useful to consumers. By presenting a sustainability strategy and communicating it as such, brands can add value, foster positive consumer associations, and cultivate a green brand image. Engaging actively with the audience on social media platforms builds trust and strengthens consumer-brand relationships.

Premium brands should invest in creating personalized content that aligns with consumer preferences. According to the survey results, this content should include credible and useful information about the products. It is advisable to create and share valuable content that educates, informs, and inspires consumers about sustainability. This may involve sharing green product information, providing sustainable living tips, or showcasing the brand's initiatives, with a particular focus on the information on the sustainability of a product based on the survey findings. To avoid consumer skepticism and accusations of greenwashing, businesses should prioritize transparency and credibility in their communication efforts. Therefore, sharing more behind-the-scenes content, as indicated by the poll, can be beneficial as it demonstrates transparency and highlights sustainable production practices.

Furthermore, communicating a brand's sustainable efforts and products contributes to a more positive brand image for premium brands, as consumers value sustainability as an important feature. Consequently, consumers may be willing to pay a premium for products from brands that prioritize sustainability. By implementing these recommendations, businesses can effectively leverage social media and content marketing to communicate their sustainable practices, enhance consumer attitudes, and encourage sustainable behaviors.

Evidently, sustainability is something that plays a role in today's society and cannot be ignored by brands. Consumers value brands of which their beliefs and values mirror their own, and this attitude is only expected to grow even more.

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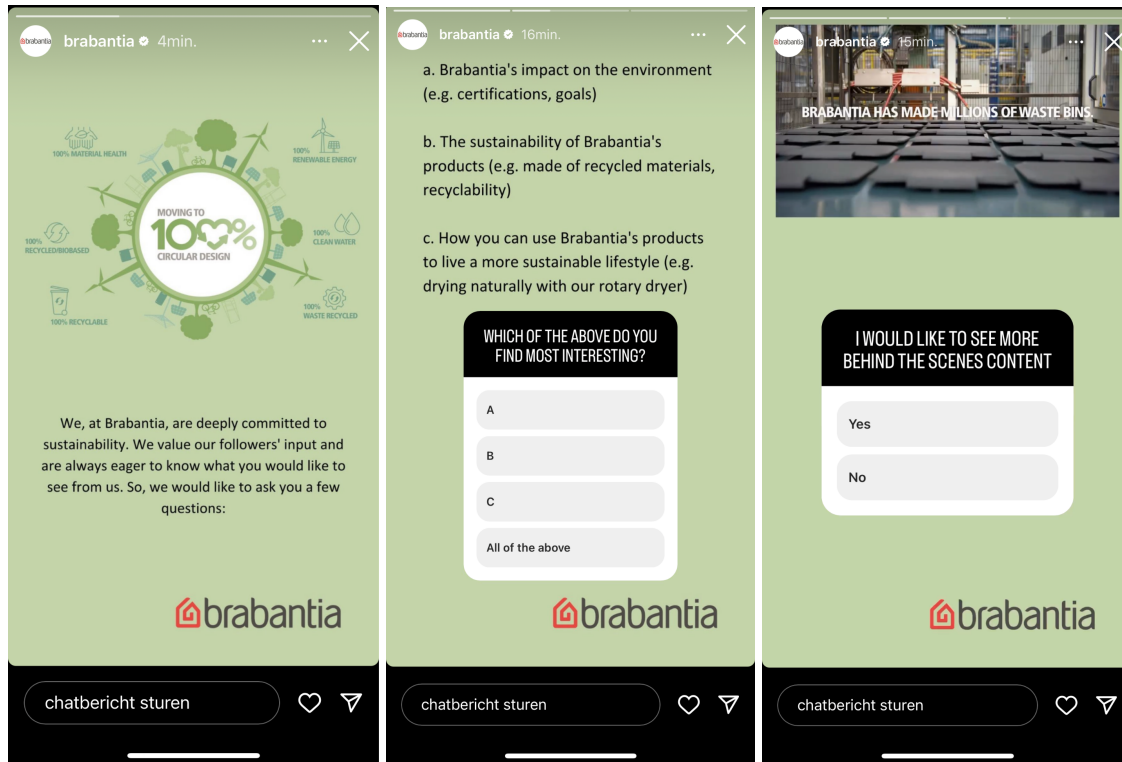
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Appendix:

A.

1. Poll on the Brabantia Instagram account.

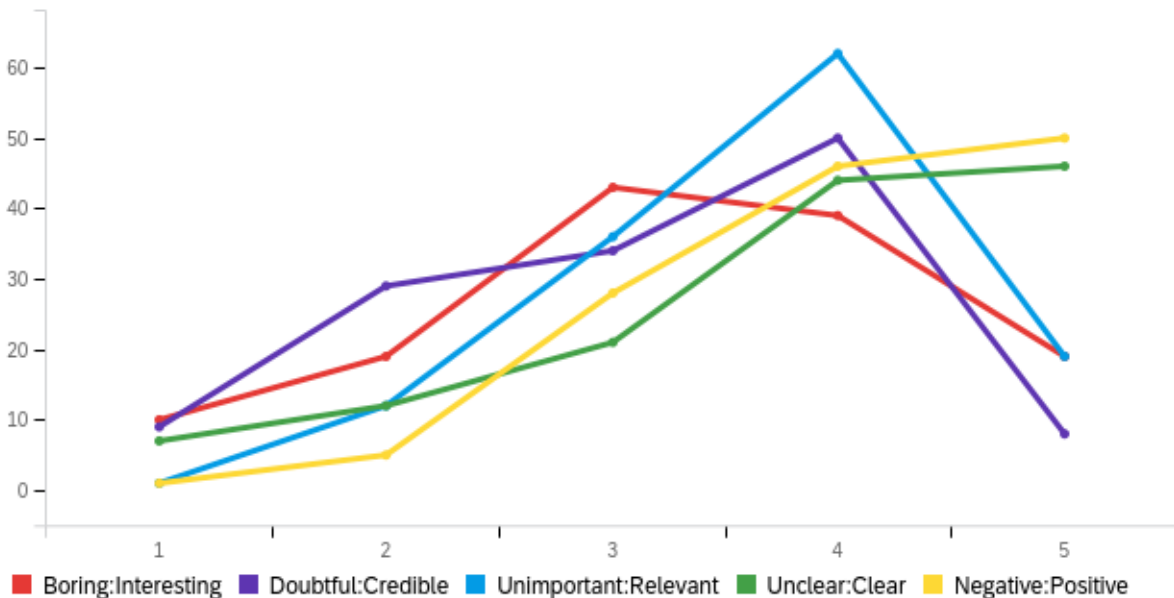


2. Poll results

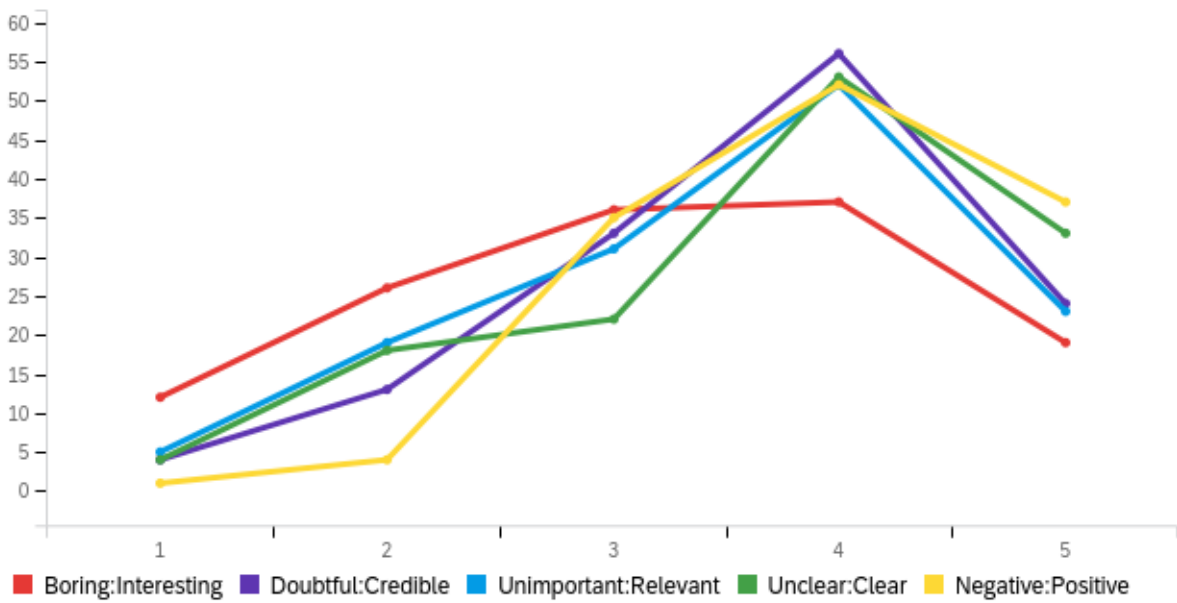


B.

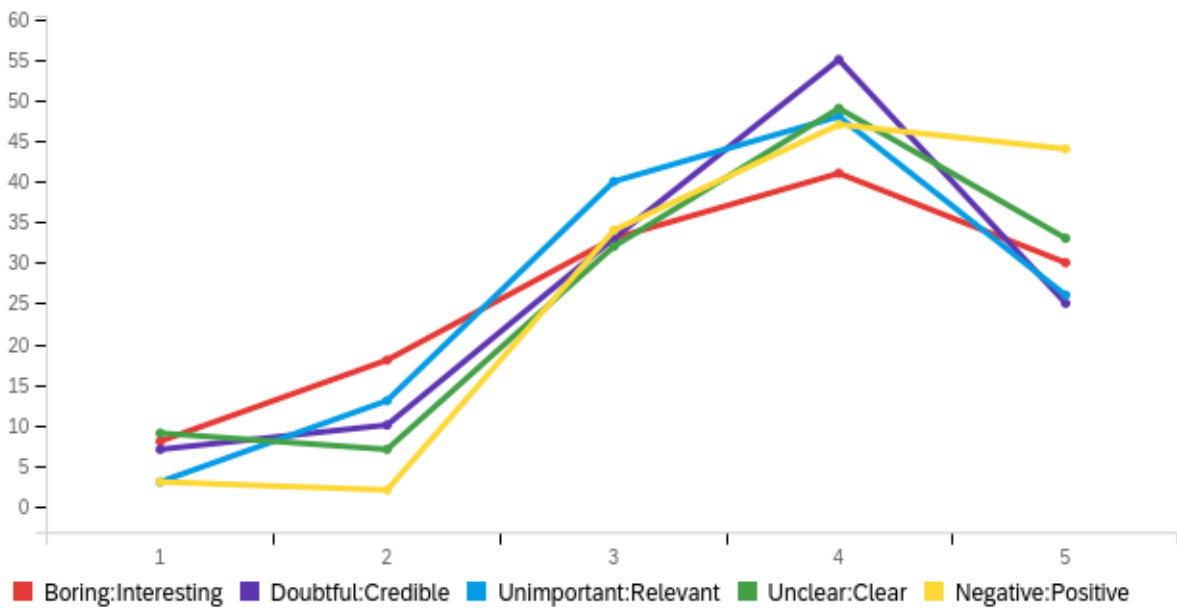
Post 1. Product Information, total responses from 1 to 5 on each statement



Post 2. Lifestyle, total responses from 1 to 5 on each statement



Post 3. Product information, total responses from 1 to 5 on each statement



C.

1. Survey questions:

Dear participant (18+),

Thank you for your involvement in this survey. I, Pleun Kersten, a bachelor student, would really like your help regarding my thesis research. I am pleased to invite you to participate in a study that explores sustainability marketing on Instagram. This survey serves as a valuable opportunity for you to contribute to the growing knowledge surrounding the intersection of sustainability, branding, and digital marketing. So, if you could spare only 15 minutes of your time to complete these questions it would be very appreciated. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and all responses will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, and your answers will remain anonymous and aggregated for analysis purposes only. Your valuable insights will contribute to a deeper understanding of how sustainable practices can be effectively integrated into social media marketing strategies on Instagram, benefitting both brands and environmentally-conscious consumers.

Yours sincerely,
Pleun Kersten

Contact:

+31 6 29207300

p.kersten@tilburguniversity.edu

Titel of research: The value of sustainability in social media marketing

Institution: Tilburg University

Investigator: Pleun Kersten

Purpose of the research: Constructing data for a bachelor thesis.

Type of research: a questionnaire with open, scale and multiple-choice questions.

When giving consent, I confirm that I am at least 18 years old, that I have read the introduction and that I agree with the conditions for participating in the research project of Pleun Kersten at Tilburg University. These conditions are:

- There is no explicit or implicit compulsion for me to participate in this research. I voluntarily accept to participate in this research[read more](#)

Yes, I consent

No, I do not consent

How frequently do you use Instagram?

Multiple times a day

Once a day

Few times a week

Rarely

Do you follow a brand account on instagram? And if so, for what reason? You can select multiple options.

- No, i don't follow brands on instagram
- Yes, to get inspiration
- Yes, to get notified for promotions and discounts
- Yes, to learn about new products
- Yes, to learn about the brand
- Yes, because i enjoy their content
- Other, namely...

What features are most important to you when buying a household product? Please rank from most important to least important

- Brandname
- Design
- Opinion of others
- Price
- Quality
- Sustainability
- Usefulness

What qualities are most important to you in a premium brand (luxury brand) ? Please rank from most important to least important

- Good customer service
- High quality
- Trustworthiness
- Inspirational
- Status

Style

Sustainable efforts

How important is sustainability for you?

Not at all important

Slightly important

Moderately important

Very important

Extremely important

Now three examples will follow of Instagram posts from the premium household company X. Please look at the posts and give your reaction to the statements and questions.

Stimuli 1.

i find this post ...

Boring o o o o o Interesting

Doubtful o o o o o Credible

Unimportant o o o o o Relevant

Unclear o o o o o Clear

Negative o o o o o Positive

It is likely that I would ... this post (you can select multiple options)

Like

Share

Comment on

Click for more information

Ignore

Other namely,

Stimuli 2.

I find this post ...

Boring o o o o o Interesting

Doubtful o o o o o Credible

Unimportant o o o o o Relevant

Unclear o o o o o Clear

Negative o o o o o Positive

It is likely that I would ... this post (you can select multiple options)

Like

Share

Comment on

Click for more information

Ignore

Other namely,

Stimuli 3.

I find this post ...

Boring o o o o o Interesting

Doubtful o o o o o Credible

Unimportant o o o o o Relevant

Unclear o o o o o Clear

Negative o o o o o Positive

It is likely that I would ... this post (you can select multiple options)

Like

Share

Comment on

Click for more information

Ignore

Other namely,

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: After seeing these posts... (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

I believe in the sustainable practices of Brand X

I would consider buying a product from this company

I would like to learn more about sustainability

I would click on their website to find more information about the brand's sustainability efforts

I would like to see more content about sustainability and the environment on Instagram

Would you be willing to pay more for a product from household Brand X (made in a sustainable way) and a similar product from household brand Y (not clear whether or not made sustainably)? If yes, how much more would you be willing to pay?

- No, i would not pay more
- <5%
- 5-10%
- 10-20%
- 20-30%
- 30-40%
- 40-50%
- >50%

Thank you for making it this far! For the last part I only want to ask for some general background information. Remember that information is anonymous and kept confidential.

What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or older

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Highschool
- Primary education
- Secondary education
- MBO
- HBO
- WO
- Masters degree
- Other

What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Thank you very much for completing this survey, your participation is highly appreciated! If you have any thoughts or comments you would like to add, feel free to contact me.

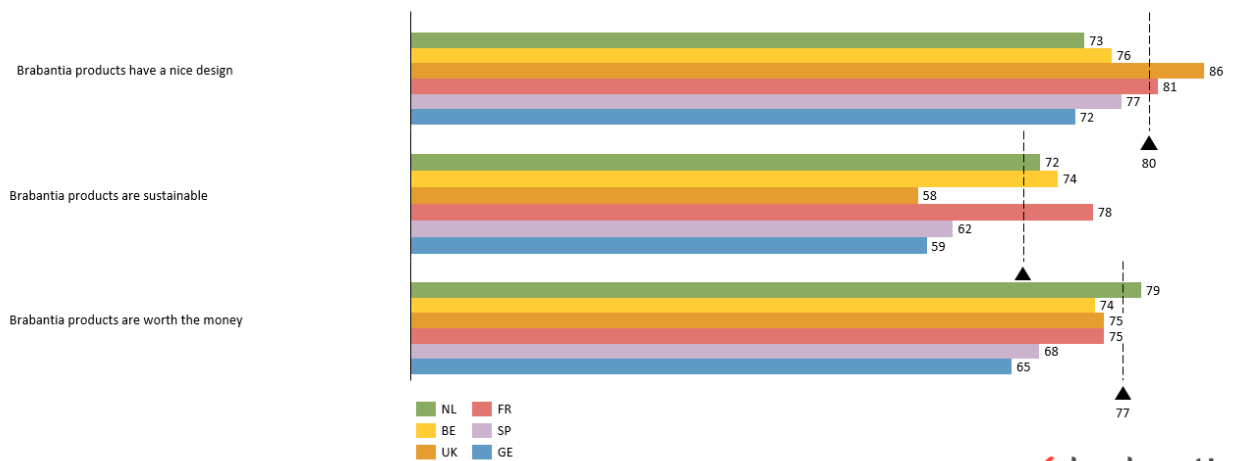
D.

Graph 1. Brabantia’s Brand image score from the Brand Awareness research, Brabantia scores 72% on sustainability in the Netherlands.

BRAND IMAGE.

The higher the overall brand awareness levels, the better the brand image.

- Improve Brand Image on the 3 BPS pillars – focus on ‘Nice Design’, ‘Worth the money’ & ‘Sustainability’.
- In campaigns we focus on ‘nice design’ and ‘worth the money’ by showing the beauty of the products. ‘Sustainability’ is not communicated in the top-of-funnel.



E.

Consent form, BA thesis survey

Title of research: The value of sustainability in social media marketing

Institution: Tilburg University

Investigator: Pleun Kersten

Purpose of the research: Constructing data for a bachelor thesis.

Type of research: a questionnaire with open, scale and multiple-choice questions.

When giving consent, I confirm that I am at least 18 years old, that I have read the introduction and that I agree with the conditions for participating in the research project of Pleun Kersten at Tilburg University. These conditions are:

- There is no explicit or implicit compulsion for me to participate in this research. I voluntarily accept to participate in this research.
- I got sufficient information on the topic and goal of the study and got the opportunity to ask questions that were answered satisfactorily.

- My participation implies the completion of a questionnaire, which takes about 5 to 10 minutes.
- I have the right to leave questions open, withdraw consent or stop the questionnaire at any moment. I do not have to justify my decision nor will there be any consequences if I do so.
- The researcher guarantees that data gathered by this questionnaire will be kept anonymously and my privacy is guaranteed.
- The researcher guarantees that data gathered in this questionnaire will only be used for scientific publications of the researcher.
- No compensation is given for answering this survey.