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Behind the Green Claims: A Critical Discourse Theory Approach

A study of the critical discourses derived from fashion brands green social media marketing

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In today's society, social media is an inflated part of marketing within the fashion industry and has become a part of green marketing for many brands, enabling consumers to communicate directly with them. Here, discourses within media texts are created as a result of such marketing practices and consumer interactions adherently possibly change the meaning of the green statements and consequently, the social image of such brands. Thus, our purpose is to explore and illustrate the critical discursive practices performed by consumers on social media posts of fashion brands in connection to green marketing. From the platform Instagram, we analyse the discursive practices in their social media context as well as their connection to a wider societal perspective of governing and responsibilisation. In order to contribute to the discussion of consumer discourses on Instagram, we include four different fashion brands (Arket, Filippa K, Fjällräven and Kappahl) and inspect their green marketing posts uploaded between January 2017 and February 2020. Further, we use a hermeneutic interpretation method by Palmer (1969) in order to analyse the material. Through the perspective of critical consumer discourses, we argue for the presence of four main critical discourses within green social media marketing and their influence on fashion brands, namely *(1) Requesting*, (2) *Greenwash accusing*, (3) *Seeking economic justification* and *(4) Impugning*. We conclude that these four consumer discursive practices can have an impact on a broader societal context of consumer governing and influence on brands, as well as affecting marketing practices.

Within the fashion industry, together with consumers' continuous increasing awareness of sustainability-related issues (Ritch, 2015), it has become an "emerging mega-trend" for companies to incorporate sustainability-related issues (Lubin & Etsy, 2010), including social and environmental aspects, in their marketing

activities. This is known as green marketing (Polonsky, 2011). Along with this trend, social media platforms, such as Instagram, are gaining popularity as marketing tools due to social media's extensive reach and interactive nature (Minton et al., 2012; Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012). Despite the slowly rising acknowledgement of social-, and environmental-related issues surrounding fashion companies, also portrayed in their marketing, the industry has continued to adopt a business strategy called 'Fast-fashion', fostering faster trend cycles, lower prices and encouraging impulsive- and over-consumptive behaviour (Ritch, 2015). In turn, this exploits the resources of the planet and thus contradicts a greener consumption (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The business development of being a fast-fashion industry combined with green marketing, also expressed in their social media marketing, creates contradictory messages which may be conflicting with consumer intentions (Strategic Direction, 2016).

The combinational context of the popularity of social media, the societal discussion of sustainability and the continuously rising fast fashion trends, makes it utmost interesting to analyse possible critical discourses, where discourse defines as an *"important form of social practice that both produces and reproduces and changes knowledge, identities and social relations"*

(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 67). Hence, we find it relevant to explore how consumers critically interact with fashion brands' green marketing activities on social media, that is to say, create critical discourses through, in our case, consumers' comments on Instagram posts.

Van Brussel (2018) discusses discourses as communication with socio-contextual meaning reflecting reality. In that sense, consumers, through their comments on social media posts form discourses of media texts by generating social structures, give it meaning and create social contexts of reality. As the nature of the fashion industry along with the societal sustainability concern brings forth conflicting circumstances for critical discourses to occur, it becomes most relevant to examine, especially on the continuously growing social media platforms of fashion brands. Despite the seeming significance of this phenomenon, prior to this research, little research has been conducted, thus creating a gap in research to fill. Through our analysis, we delve into some of the underlying structures of interactions of green social media marketing connected to fashion brands, and extend our findings to a broader societal level, hence, adding to the research of consumers' discursive powers in general.

In addition, today's market favourises consumer-centric value creation, where consumers interact with companies, leading to co-creation of value (Prahalad &

Ramaswamy, 2004). According to Nysveen and Pedersen (2014), this value acts as a critical mechanism for competitive advantage. Consequently, if not taken care of, it might have an opposite effect than intended. Thus, it is essential to understand what is presented and interacted through marketing in social media, where interactions are plenty, might have an impact on factors leading up to the competitive advantage of a company. Tapping into this area creates an insight into the critical discourses that can appear connected to green social media marketing that can affect the co-creation value.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore and illustrate the critical discursive practices performed by consumers on green social media posts of fashion brands. To fulfil this objective, this study looks into how consumers create critical discourses related to fashion brands green marketing on Instagram.

To answer this, the outline of this paper is the following; First, we discuss the theoretical perspective used throughout the paper that is based on discourse theory, green social media marketing, as well as, governance and responsibilisation. The following section, we address the method used to conduct this study. Thereafter, we present the analytical segment where we conceptualise and define the four different discursive practices we found most dominant within consumer communication. Finally, we discuss how the critical discursive practices,

in response to green social media marketing, might play a more significant part in affecting society and marketing practices. Also, how it might relate or not to previous research as well as further suggested research.

Discourse Theory and Media Text

Discourse refers to written or spoken communication which carries meaning in the socio-material world (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), that is, carries meaning of the reality. Discourse theory further explains that the meaning and shaping of discourses are not constructed of separate things but together include linguistic, affective, material and behavioural aspects (Torfing, 1999). Thus describe, on a broader spectrum, how discourses are created and how they reflect the reality in different aspects. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) add to those aspects by describing discourses as social practices that produce and reproduce social relations, identities and foster change of knowledge. Due to the dynamic nature of discourses, it is a constant struggle of their meaning, and it is first when a discourse reaches a dominant position over other discourses it becomes acknowledged (Van Brussel, 2018). Torfing (2005, p. 15) explains the occurrence of discourse as "*a credible principle upon which to read past, present, and future events, and capture people's hearts and minds*". To paraphrase, a specific discourse, when

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becoming the most commonly accepted by people, to some extent represents the reality in that moment of time. However, a discourse can always be undermined as another can obtain dominance (Van Brussel, 2018).

Taking a step back, viewing what activates discourses, Van Brussel (2018, p. 384) explains "*discourses provide individuals with subject positions with which to identify*", thus lifts the conceptualisation of discourses as originating from a subject, as individuals communicatively invest in that subject, resultantly embody and enact in a discourse. Indeed, discourses can be activated from basically any subject. However, previous research concerning discourse theory has primarily been applied to analyse political groups (Howarth, Norval & Stavrakasis, 2000; Howarth & Torfing, 2005), while this study lifts green marketing as a subject which originating discourses. Further on, previous research has also not given any reception towards the importance of discourses in media texts, which also is an activator of discourses (Van Brussel, 2018). The internet is an example of such media (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020), and thus provider of media text. As discussed by Van Brussel (2018), the discourses shaped by the encounter between individuals and media text on the internet add to the creation, discussion, debate and rivalry of a social imaginary. In this study, this takes form of the consumers encountering fashion brands' green marketing on social media.

However, the negotiation of meaning and struggle of which discourse is dominant over others is also repeatedly at play in media texts (Van Brussel, 2018).

Notwithstanding, the construction of meaning from circulating discourses is derived from various societal sites, where media acts merely as one of many distributors of discourses (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). As media enables the production of representational mechanisms such as being able to conflict over the consensual understanding, discuss and choose different personal angles of entry (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014; Jewkes, 2015; Liebes, 1994), these mechanisms act as grounds where specific discourses can be activated (Van Brussel, 2018). Thus, some representational mechanisms give way for some discourses rather than others (ibid.). In our case, how fashion brands portray themselves within their green marketing stimulate some discourses over others.

Media texts present many opportunities for discussion, stemming from the process of interpreting the texts, that can activate discourses (Van Brussel, 2018). Here, the audience gives meaning to the texts, assuming that the text has many meanings (Fiske, 1989). However, Hall (1973) points out that the audience often shares a view of the preferred meaning of the media message, even though they evaluate the message in different ways. By combining discourse

theory with interpreting media texts, it is possible to break it down into the logic of recognition and identification (Van Brussel, 2018). Here, logic of recognition refers to *"where audiences will often implicitly and unconsciously recognise the hegemonic message inscribed in the media text."* (Van Brussel, 2018, p. 385), and logic of identification refers to *"the way audiences invest in discourses and subject positions activated in media texts."* (Van Brussel, 2018, p. 385).

Media text and Green Social Media Marketing

Social media platforms, distributed through the internet, is such a source of media text through which, as aforementioned, discourses can become activated. Due to the platforms' extensive reach, interactivity and generally low costs, as well as consumer self-grouping tendencies (Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012), their importance as marketing tools are continuously increasing. In addition, platforms changing effect on consumer behaviour (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013), interpersonal interaction (Hung, Li & Tse, 2011) and level of consumer engagement for a mutual understanding of one another (Minton et al., 2012) amplifies them as indispensable marketing tools.

Additionally, as a consequence of the increasing awareness of sustainability-related issues, companies, including fast fashion brands, are continuously incorporating action of sustainability into their businesses and market themselves accordingly, that is Green marketing[1] (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Such green marketing activities have, as of late, become more incorporated within the social media marketing in order to gain advantage from both marketing types. Thus, match the consumer groups who are both active on social media and sustainability aware and possibly sustainability-driven in their consumption (ibid.).

However, if green marketing does not match the level of environmental or social performance, it transforms into greenwashing, thus misleading consumers about the environmental or social benefits of a product or service (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Such misleading activity has shown to have an apparent adverse effect on both shareholder and stakeholder relations in the form of investment and consumer confidence as well as the market for greener products (ibid.). That is, creating hazardous predicaments which brands would want to evade. Thus, to avoid hazardous predicaments and instead increase competitive advantage and change the firm's

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[1] Green marketing refers to marketing activities which *"incorporate transformative change that creates value*

for individuals and society, as well as for the natural environment (i.e., environmental restoration and improvement)" (Polonsky, 2011, p. 1311).

image positively, companies should not ignore pressure from consumers but instead respond with processing information and increasing transparency (Hooghiemstra, 2000). As Wognum et al. (2011) explain it, transparency is vital when creating value by improved sustainability as consumers have to be shown and convinced why the often increased prices are justified.

Nevertheless, brands need to be vigilant not to fall into greenwashing; also as if their claims become questioned by consumers, the adverse effect may become amplified (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). According to Hoffman, Novak and Stein (2012), it is consumers with independent self-view and high psychological wellbeing that are more likely to use social media to interact with content. In other words, more likely presumptive to interact with sustainability advertising, where questioning content may be one way to interact. Such questioning could be whether or not the proclaimed environmental or social responsibility taken by the firm reflects the reality or is a case of greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Thereby, social media serves as an empowering tool for consumers (Gensler et al., 2013). In addressing the purpose of this study, this leaves room for possible consumer creation of critical discourses addressing the green social media marketing attempts pursued by the fashion brands. Resultantly, it becomes interesting to delve into neoliberal governance and responsibilisation to broaden the spectra of consumers empowering effect through the interactivity on social media.

Neoliberal Governance and Responsibilisation

Responsibility is both a concept and a practice that is visible through governance (Trnka & Trundle, 2014). Governance indicates, in general, *"moving away from legalistic, bureaucratic, centralised, top-down configuration of authority to a reflexive, self-regulatory and horizontal market-like configuration"* (Shamir, 2008, p. 4). Responsibility, in contemporary usage, often refers to the individual or collective accountability where judgements are made through rational capacities, a sense of moral blame and evaluation of legal liabilities (Trnka & Trundle, 2014). Additionally, research by Miller and Rose (2008) shows that responsibility is a part of rising neoliberal forms of governance as it gives individuals independence and empowerment. Here, neoliberalism refers to an assortment of ideals and practices involving personal choice and freedom playing an increasing part of governing social life, deregulation and privatisation, and lower involvement of state mandate (Trnka & Trundle, 2014).

Further, the neoliberal angle of governance focuses on promoting forms of authority that are private (Shamir, 2008),

meaning, not by the state. Thus, regulatory roles novel forms of legality that are adopted by private actors such as corporations, and consecutively, laws, rules and regulations become replaced by guidelines, principles, standards and codes of conducts, which are not necessarily backed by the state (Santos, 2005; Shamir, 2008). With this shift of authority, the production and meaning of these guidelines are not rigid as they are produced, distributed, exchanged, negotiated and consumed by different market actors such as corporations, non-profit organisations, the host of state and inter-state agencies (Shamir, 2008). However, governance relies on actors to take responsibility for their actions for it to work, otherwise known as responsibilisation (ibid.).

Responsibilisation is key in self-governance and subjectivity (Shamir 2008; Zigon, 2010), emphasising on that there is a call for action, where a moral agency is assumed, which catalyses social action (Shamir, 2008). In essence, responsibilisation bridges the gap between governance and actual ground practices. Apart from being morally driven, neoliberal responsibilisation is also encompassed by economic-rational actors, assessing the costs and benefits of the different action to call upon (Lemke, 2001). However, as with governance, for responsibilisation to be effective, it has to operate on an individual level - such as employees, citizens, managers and consumers - to on an active level perform self-governing tasks (Shamir, 2008). For instance, consumer groups, human rights organisations and non-governmental organisations have put pressure on companies to take on more responsibility in their market performance, which in turn, has resulted in many corporations now claiming that they are socially and environmental responsible (Hulme & Edwards, 1997; Taylor, 1999).

In essence, ideas about being a moral corporation are growing extensively (Zadek, 2001). Indeed, economic rationality still plays a part which has led to corporations using moral aspects as a managerial tool for 'social branding' and 'cause-related marketing' (Parker, 2002). As explained by Lobel (2004), leaving a large amount of control in the hands of the ones closest to the problems can lead to such rationally market-driven governance facilitating solutions that are flexible, efficient and creative. Hence, some companies claim that self-developing responsible policies from within the organisation is crucial if becoming successful at this time (Shamir, 2008).

Methodology

In order to fulfil the purpose of this research, a qualitative netnographic study was conducted, where publicly available information online in the form of media text, in this case, consumer comments on

Instagram, is gathered and analysed to identify and understand the need, desired and behaviour of consumers (Kozinets, 2002). We found qualitative research to be suited as it reflects over a real-life scenario (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011), thus revealing the symbolic world that underlies desire and meaning (Kozinets, 2002), and hence, can enable one to understand the complexity of the phenomenon of discourses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). However, a netnographic research is limited to the individual who interacts in online communities (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011), thus making it more difficult to generalise any possible outcomes to groups outside of online communities (Kozinets, 2002). Nonetheless, as the purpose of this study was to analyse discourses on social media, a netnographic study was the alternative to take. Despite the mentioned limitation, netnographic studies bring a unique combination of being naturalistic and unobtrusive (Kozinets, 2002), which we found favouring the fulfilment of our objective.

To analyse the consumer discussion of brands' marketing attempts of sustainability activities, relevant Instagram posts and its related comments were gathered, observed and investigated. When collecting the data, we first looked at which Scandinavian fashion brands that we knew of had or currently did some sustainability-related activities in which they communicated through social media, in this case, Instagram. Secondly, we looked at whether the brands had a sizable number of followers and engaging comments on those related posts that could be used to analyse. Hereafter, we decided on six brands to study. However, due to the richness of the content, where several comments seemingly implied the same discourses, we chose to narrow it down and include the following brands, as seen in Table 1. These four brands were selected due to their illustrative related comments, applicability to the discursive practices and its, as we consider, comparability to the fashion industry, and thus, relevance to the study. Thirdly, as a result, all posts connected to green marketing between January 1st, 2017 and February 11th, 2020 were chosen to be analysed (Table 1).

Brand	Brand description	Instagram profile	Followers (as of 2020-02-11)	Number of reviewed posts
Arket	Founded 2017, Arket is the newest fashion brand within the H&M portfolio. They aim to produce long-lasting products for the many, as well as, claim to incorporate sustainability in all processes, such as suppliers and materials, along with	@arketofficial	394 k	937

	informing customers of garment care to prolong the clothes lifespan. (ARKET, 2020)			
Filippa K	Founded 1993 in Stockholm, Sweden. Filippa K state themselves to be a sustainable fashion brand. With their core values *Style*, *Simplicity* and *Quality* they aim to offer a more responsible solution for modern fashion and mindful consumption. (Filippa K, 2020)	@filippa_k	203 k	119
Fjällräven	Founded 1960 in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden (Fjällräven, 2020b). Fjällräven is a outdoor brand which, as they state, continuously look for more innovation and sustainable solutions and together with their values of *Simplicity* and *Practicality* strive to provide the best outdoor equipment in harmony with the environment. (Fjällräven, 2020a)	@fjallravenofficial	494 k	679
Kappahl	Founded in the beginning of 1950s in Gothenburg, Sweden (Kappahl, 2020a). With the fashion brand's mission "value-for-money" (Kappahl, 2018, p. 2) they strive towards having an extensive consumer reach, and integrate sustainability, in terms of respect for people and environment, in everything they do (KappAhl, 2020b).	@kappahl	174 k	331
		Total:		*2 066*

Table 1: Brand Overview and Instagram Review

The analysis of the data collection was conducted regarding the following: (1) the relevance of the data in consideration of the research purpose, and, (2) its connections to previous studies and literature. The data, in terms of consumer comments, was analysed using the hermeneutic interpretation method by Palmer (1969). The author describes this method as connecting the whole and parts: both mutually dependent, co-composed as well as related to the whole context of the text. In our case, it meant going back and forth between comments, the parts, to interpret the text and pictures connected to the posts, the whole. By doing so, we divided the comments related to the posts into different documents as we studied and chose which comments were relevant to the context of our paper.

Further on, the categorisation process of the chosen data, followed as; Firstly, we decided only to include those with a critical standpoint. This, as we found the critical comments more interesting than comments with a non-critical standpoint as the adherent outcome from critical comments may address the contradictory nature of green marketing within the fashion industry and consumers rising sustainability concern. Secondly, after going back and forth, scrutinising and evaluating possible similarities between different comments, we distinguished four

main aspects which consumers had in their critical communication on the fashion brands posts, interpreted as discourses - *Requesting, Greenwash accusing, Seeking economic justification, and, Impugning*. Furthermore, when more profoundly analysing the different discourses, further themes within the discourses were found, and thus categorised in different subgroups within the discourses.

Moreover, when conducting research such as this, it is crucial to acknowledge both ethical problems and possible issues of trustworthiness. Concerning ethical difficulties, Kozinets (2002) highlights the importance of informing participants to get consents; however, as it is publicly posted comments and not on private accounts, makes its observatory. Nonetheless, keeping the anonymity of the participants is still valid for ethical reasons despite its level of publicness.

Furthermore, it is important to take into notion and consideration that this study is (1) based on a limited selection of consumers - consumers also engaging in online communities - and (2) despite efforts of being unbiased and objective, the data has been interpreted and analysed by the conductors of this study, which has impacted the drawn conclusions, both factors aligned as issues by Bryman and Bell (2017). Nevertheless, with efforts of transparency regarding possible biases, interpretation influences and modus of analysis combined with the richness of the data, we aimed to increase the level of credibility and confirmability. By illustrating the context of fieldwork, we strived towards transferability, and through thoroughly describing the processes of the study improve dependability. By such means, increase the trustworthiness, as argued by Shenton (2004), of this study along with its level of significance. Lastly, essential to acknowledge is that during this research, the pandemic outbreak of Covid-19 was ongoing. However, as the empirical data was collected ahead of February 11th, before the escalation and declaring of the pandemic, we considered it not to have had an implicit impact. However, if it were to be conducted again, comments later than February 11th might be altered by the current developing pandemic.

Findings and Analysis

Through our analysis of the observed comments and posts of the different brands, we have found four different discursive practices divided into distinct categories, known as *Requesting, Greenwash accusing, Seeking economic justification* and *Impugning* (Table 2).

Discourse	Description	Subgroups
Requesting	Critically requests further information regarding sustainable claims as they do not meet their desire, or they suspect it to not reflect the reality.	Requesting further information for (1) expressing desire, (2) gain reassuring enlightenment, and, (3) questioning definition and practicality of a green statement.
Greenwash accusing	More severe criticism of sustainable claims accusing brands of falsely using green marketing, ergo, greenwashing.	Calling out fashion brands for (1) having a double standard, (2) directly lying about their intentions, and, (3) having incorrect claims.
Seeking economic justification	Moral obligation is not always enough, and instead, also needs to be economically justified. This also to exclude plausible ulterior motives in the brands' pricing models.	Seeks economic justification in terms of (1) increased prices, (2) level of sustainability, and, (3) economic incentives to act in accordance with solicited behaviour.
Impugning	Criticism of sustainable claim as a way of denigrating brands as of their current sustainability actions while assisting them towards better options.	Impugn the brands regarding (1) the insufficient taken action, presenting an alternative solution, and, (2) the direction of sustainable development.

Table 2: The four distinguished discourses with associated subgroups

With reflections based on the presented theory, we consider these discourses to be significant in understanding how consumers, from a critical perspective, discuss fashion brands' green marketing efforts through the social media platform Instagram. As several previous research has highlighted, social media marketing has shown to have a significant social impact (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013; Hung, Li & Tse, 2011; Minton et al., 2012) and combined with green marketing and its potential risk, a possible severe impact on company relations, consumer confidence as well as the market for greener products (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Hence, hereinafter, we present and discuss a more in-depth insight into the different discursive practices that are disclosed by the consumers and consequently, how these can alter brands' sustainability efforts.

Requesting

The first discursive practice we found was 'Requesting', which is where consumers critically request to obtain further information regarding green marketing messages stated on the fashion brands' Instagram posts. Connecting this discursive practice with responsibilisation theory, there is an underlying sensible moral evaluation and judgement of a statement or practice (Trnka & Trundle, 2014) which consequently lead to a neoliberal form of governance (Miller & Rose, 2008). That is, the critical request of information subsequently continues to unravel the different aspects of who should take on responsibilisation, in a possible governing manner. Furthermore, within this discursive practice, we found three distinctive subgroups, where the underlying intention

with the requesting seemingly differs. These were defined as discursive practices through which *consumers seek further information to (1) express desire, (2) gain reassuring enlightenment, and, (3) questioning the definition and practicality of a green statement*. The first subgroup implies that despite sustainability efforts made it is merely enough, hence, requesting further sustainability incorporation in the different brands' product lines. The second subgroup suggests that there is a remaining doubt whether the whole truth of sustainability practice is reflected in the messages as consumers request further informative details. The third subgroup insinuates a suspiciousness towards the definition and practical meaning of what a brand may consider or claim to be sustainability and thus if an ulterior motive may encrypt such a message.

Various posts signal a more sustainable consumption through which the marketed clothes to some extent is made from either recycled materials, organic fibres or toxic-free processes, etcetera, that is, green marketing. Thus, purchasing such products would be more morally acceptable for those who are more sustainability-driven in their consumption, also explained by Delmas and Burbano (2011). However, revealed by the first subgroup, this does merely match the current sustainability demand as consumers continuously stress the importance of further

incorporation of environmental friendlier materials, as requesting comments on those posts. To exemplify, displayed in various comments seen on Arket's and Fjällräven's feed, such as:

> *"was just about to purchase, but noticed that the wool sweaters are made with 30 % polyamide. Isn't this a synthetic component and why is that necessary???"* (@arketofficial)
> *"Do you plan to make one without real leather?"* (@fjallravenofficial)
> *"I would not mind to spend my money in this but only if it was cruelty free"* (@fjallravenofficial).
> *"do you already produce denim out of recycled fibre? there are already small companies out there doing so.."* (@arketofficial)

These posts with such captions as '*was about to purchase*' or '*would not mind to spend my money if*' portray an uncertainty to consume due to an insufficient level of sustainability while demonstrating an existing demand for further development. By requesting more information in terms of material choices, such as '*Isn't this a synthetic component and why is that necessary???*', '*without real leather*' and '*cruelty-free*', specific demands are displayed as a challenge and hope of receptions from the brands in question. Additionally, by stating '*there are already small companies out there doing so..*' disarms any possible previously accepted excuse from brands of neglecting such development as it, according to the consumer,

proves its feasibility. In essence, there is a sense of putting more responsibility on the brands to develop their ways of working with sustainability. However, despite neoliberal governing efforts from the consumers, and previous research indicating such governing forces to be effective in steering companies in the direction of sustainability (Hulme & Edwards, 1997), this view of governance is not unified amongst all consumers, as seen in the following comment:

"We need more scientists in politics. Climate change needs legislative action." (@kappahl).

Here, it indicates that the belief of neoliberal governance being enough to foster sustainable incorporation is not cohesive amongst the consumers, instead '*legislative action*' is requested and pointed out as a lingering need. That is, with the emphasis on the importance of legislation as well as more scientific influence indicate disbelief that individuals and corporations' moral alone is enough to steer towards the necessary sustainable development. Thereby, on some levels, opposes what Shamir (2008) and others argue regarding responsibilisation as a facilitator of sustainable development. On the contrary, as the discourse displays, consumers' mentality, in which they request more sustainable options, allude their take of responsibility in their consumption choices as well. Hence, together with the brands'

claimed sustainability efforts, responsibilisation and self-governing tasks are present on both the side of the consumers as well as brands which is crucial, resonating with Shamir (2008), for responsibilisation to be effective. Consequently, here consumers seem to become an influential part of what Shamir (2008) describes as a shift of authority in connection to neoliberal governance. However, in disparity to the author, who solely focus on corporations, non-profit organisations and agencies, our results indicate that individual consumers might have a major impact as well. Our result is thus more in line with both Hulme and Edwards (1997) and Taylor (1999), where the authors include consumers as a group that puts pressure on corporations to take more responsibility in their market performance, hence take on a role of neoliberal governance.

The second subgroup implies that there is a solicitation for whether the whole truth is reflected in brands' statements on their social media posts. Seemingly, there is a doubt regarding the given information, and that behind the facade of a statement lies an outcome that might not be truly reflected in the message and potentially not in line with the consumers' desire, thus, requesting more information. To illustrate, on several posts from Arket and Kappahl regarding a stated urging for individuals to recycle old clothes, consumers have enacted in the following comments:

"Good to see this concept working in reality (or at least it seems it will)" (@arketofficial)

"@arketofficial what happens exactly with the clothes when it comes to the circular fashion loop? do you have any new processes? any details to share?" (@arketofficial)

"(...) with that little information it feels more right to donate the clothes (...)" (@kappahl).

Seemingly there is expressively a fulfilling level of sustainability portrayed in the caption '*Good to see this concept working in reality*', however, with the additional comment '*(or at least it seems it will)*' demonstrates an inevitable doubt regarding the reality behind the messages. Further, such solicitation as '*what happens exactly*' and '*any details to share*' implies a lack of transparency, and thus, disbelief in the match between message and reality. Additionally, '*feels more right to donate the clothes*' indicates that the insufficient level of transparency leads to an outspoken hesitation of taking action from the consumers' side. Such reflexive hesitation and disbelief reveal a probable underlying reaction to historical events of brands camouflaging themselves in sustainability claims while economic growth likely hide underneath as the foremost driving factor. As Delmas and Burbano (2011) mentioned, misleading and false green statements could have a profound negative impact on consumer confidence on brands' future statements. Hence, the requesting of

further details in order to determine the true, transparent meaning of the message, which if responded by the brands, could increase consumer confidence. As explained by Wognum et al. (2011), when companies commit to a higher level of transparency, it can restore trustworthiness to that extent that consumers become willing and convinced to consume again.

The third aspect of this discursive practice is the seeking for clarification of what brands may consider or claim to be sustainable to avoid falling into the pit of wrongly desired consumption due to ambiguous messages. That is, how brands define labels may not represent the consumer expectation it generates; thus, the need for requesting more information regarding what embodies the messages and what is not. This is displayed in several posts where the brands claim and promise to offer sustainable materials, and where consumers question the content by requesting in-depth explanations of what they mean. Foremost, this was visible on Arket's, Fjällräven's and Filippa K's feed. To exemplify:

"(...) Good but what does it mean? "more sustainable"? (...)" (@kappahl).

"is it sustainable also for you workers? you know, it's almost #fashionrevolutionweek" (@arketofficial).

"how have you calculated that people can wear your clothes 75 times?" (@filippa_k).

"Is it so expensive because it's processing is a chore or because it's durable or is it the company just pricing out of reach of most consumers" (@arketofficial).

These comments impart an undertone of suspiciousness regarding what a brand defines their statement as. For instance, captions such as '*more sustainable*' or, '*is it also sustainable for your workers?*' brings forth requests upon clarification of the statements, seemingly, to determine if it is a case of ostensible messages. Allegedly, brands may have lost or yet not attained consumer trust in their sustainability claims, and self-defined concepts do not go by undetected. Further commented '*you know, it's almost #fashionrevolutionweek*' indicates an attempt of enlightenment towards brands to take on responsibility. Consumers call brands to take action and take on the responsibility that comes with the usages of the sustainability concept. Furthermore, self-made definitions and calculations of sustainability levels are requested for an explanation, exemplified by the comment '*how have you calculated that*'. Thereby, promising words and vague claims of sustainability without any elucidations are caught by the critical eyes of consumers who shed light beneath the camouflage of sustainability claims. Thus, questioning what driving factors hides underneath, as one commented '*is it so expensive because it's processing is a chore or because it's durable or is it the company pricing out of reach*'. This indicates a search for a potential ulterior motive, which could be, once again, linked to the case of the transparency issue. That is, an attempt to reveal whether the actual level of sustainability is reflected in the price or if the concept and moral aspect utilities as a managerial tool, as Parker (2002) explains it could be, to validate a higher price range to, as the ulterior motive, strengthen the economic growth.

Delmas and Burbano (2011) have described how misleading statements lead to damaged consumer confidence. In our findings, damaged consumer confidence towards the brands appears to be present as consumers have expressed a distrust in what lies behind a claimed action, how concepts are defined or how sustainability levels are measured. As Fiske (1989) explains, consumers do not only give meaning to texts in media but also question it, which this discursive practice have illustrated. By doing so, consumers have here given a new meaning to what is written by the brands, creating a critical discourse that seemingly debates the brands' social image, also implied priorly by Van Brussel (2018). Seen in the discourse of Requesting, new meanings to the text are brought forward as there is an unmet consumer demand of sustainability incorporation and their understanding of its feasibility. Further, there is a lack of

transparency which generates conflicting consumer confidence, and lastly, a belief in an existing obscuration of potential ulterior motives.

Greenwash Accusing

The second disclosed discursive practice was 'Greenwash accusing', referring to consumers' more severe criticism of fashion brands statements and accuse them of falsely using green marketing. Linking this to the battle of responsibilisation, in this case, consumers call out fashion brands failed attempts of taking responsibility for industry sustainability or uphold the standards of their claims. As highlighted by various authors, novel forms of legality have led to self-developed initiatives (Santos, 2005; Shamir, 2008) and with social pressure from consumers, many corporations now claim to take responsibility (Hulme & Edwards, 1997; Taylor 1999). However, as displayed within this discursive practice, this relies on actual responsibility to be taken, and consumers to demand accordingly in an ethical governing manner (Shamir, 2008; Hulme & Edwards, 1997). Despite so, as Parker (2002) highlights, sustainability claims sometime become nothing more than a tool for brands' social branding. However, as Fiske (1989) mentioned, consumers can give new meaning to texts, which is something that is seen in this discourse. As brands failure of upholding

their marketed sustainability standards becomes disclosed by the consumers, the meaning of the text changes from green marketing to greenwashing, and followingly, the social image changes as well. Thus, we define this discursive practice through which *consumers call out fashion brands for (1) having a double standard, (2) directly lying about their intentions, and, (3) having incorrect claims.* The first subgroup refers to consumer detecting brands arguing in favour for a particular taken action as well as arguing for the opposite taken action, and thus, creating a misleading double standard. The second subgroup is where we found consumers disclosing double messaging in terms of one message referring to the denial of the action of what the other advocates. The third subgroup implies consumers are calling out fashion brands for stating incorrect information, which is in favour of the green messaging, hence, false green marketing.

The first aspect of this discourse illustrates, through various posts, how consumers criticise brands' claims and marketing measures for their contradicting messaging. The consumers claim there is a double standard between promoted action and the taken action in reality. This subgroup was primarily visible in Fjällräven's, Arket's and Kappahl's feed. Some examples include:

> *"A bit far away to be sustainable! Maybe better to find closer farms?"* (@arketofficial).

"Funny! When you on the other hand promote hunting. Support the outdoors by not killing those who live there" (@fjallravenofficial).

"Pay your workers fair wages so they can take care of their children" (@kappahl).

Comments like such show a consumer mindset of calling out brands, indicating that what is stated on the posts does not match other actions and ideas related to the brand. For instance, *"A bit far away to be sustainable!"*, referring to the post's statement of being responsible when it comes to the use of wool, and *"Funny! When you on the other hand promote hunting"*, where the post claims to protect nature. These captions indicate a sense of consumers interpreting it as greenwashing by pointing out the existence of other less sustainable standards of the brands, hence, accusing the brands of having double moralised claims. Likewise, when Kappahl promotes social welfare - also part of green marketing as mentioned earlier - one comment denotes a different reality *"Pay your workers fair wages so they can take care of their children"* implying the brand has a double standard. As the comment indicates that the brand might promote inadequate information regarding their social aspects, where workers' wages is included, it creates a misleading trait, and hence, would be what Delmas and Burbano (2011) refer to as greenwashing. Seemingly, here the brands are using such sustainability claims to strengthen

their social image, as also highlighted by Parker (2002), while the consumers detect another reality and elucidate a contradicting aspect. Thus the meaning of the text changes as well as the social image.

The second subgroup demonstrates consumers detection of brands untruthful statements and claims. Here the critiques clearly point out the flaw in what is claimed, showing others that the brand is not being transparent or honest in their posts. This was mostly visible on Fjällräven's posts with examples as follows:

"Yet your US and Canadian sites have black friday discounts!!! You just want to milk your european customers for all you can." (@fjallravenofficial).

"Your email blast today says otherwise: "BLACK FRIDAY IS HERE!! SHOP DEALS NOW!" (@fjallravenofficial).

"But almost everything you have is made in China...don't buy the bs about being a swedish branch." (@fjallravenofficial).

In the posts, the brand has promoted a non-sale action, distance itself from *Black Friday* as the over-consumption it fosters; however, the consumers detected a different reality. Comments such as '*Yet your US and Canadian sites have black friday discounts!!!*' and '*Your email blast today says otherwise*' reveals that what the brand denies in one statement they promote in another, ergo, a case of dishonesty and abortive social

branding. Further commented, '*You just want to milk your european customers for all you can*' implies a divulgence of economic rationality as thought to be the driving factor. As mentioned by Lemke (2001), consumers being economic rationale is not something entirely foreign in neoliberal responsibilisation, and as Parker (2002) points out, economic rationality plays a part in brands usage of moral aspects as a managerial tool within their marketing. Presumably, consumers are here aware of brands utilisation of moral in their economic rationality, and criticises in accordance. Furthermore, captions such as '*don't buy the bs about being a swedish branch.*' brings forth an accusation that the claim made by the brand of its origin is faulty. Again, this shows that false or ambiguous statements here have led to consumer indignation, resulting in a negative discrepancy between intended- and actual social image.

As some consumers have pointed out, there is an existence of incorrect claims connected to the green social media posts. Within this subgroup, consumers present their concern for the claims, hence lowering the confidence in the brands. According to Delmas and Burbano (2011), such abated confidence can result in a worsening company and consumer relationship. Examples of such comments include the following from posts on Arket's feed where the brand promotes its collection as sustainable:

"*#greenwashing - In the collection there are fleece pieces: fleece is one of the worst materials (...). And it is not even a 100% recycled fleece: 20% virgin polyester content. The lining in the running jacket is 100% virgin polyester. This is not a sustainable collection, this is greenwashing.*" (@arketofficial).

"*Hey guys, why do you claim on your website that the Hario Enamel Coffee Kettle was made in Japan when even Hario themselves display on their website that it was made in Thailand? Kinda weird and not trustworthy considering that you claim to be transparent, sustainable and so on…*" (@arketofficial).

Comments as such exhibit a sense of neoliberal governance, as the consumers correct the brands' claims, and thus, as a form of authority, consumers lay the ground for other standards to be set and fulfilled. For instance, captions such as '*fleece is one of the worst materials*' followed by '*This is not a sustainable collection, this is greenwashing.*' criticise the material use of the brand as well as accuse them of portraying their material choice in a better light than it really is. Moreover, the comment emphasises the '*20% virgin polyester content*' of the fabric as something faulty, likely indicating a need for change, thus pressuring the brand to take more responsibility. Moreover, inquiries of concern can also be found regarding the incorrect statements made by the brands where consumers have found alternative facts stating something different as the caption

'why do you claim' corrected by *'it was made in Thailand'* illustrates. As the incorrect information is given in the posts, it can result in a lack of confidence towards the brands as illustrated in the caption *'Kinda weird and not trustworthy considering that you claim to be transparent'*.

Seen in this discourse, throughout the different subgroups, the consumer-brand relationship seemingly changes in a condemning manner as consumers accuse the brands of greenwashing, and so, also change the brands' social image presenting them in a bad light. This goes in line with Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), who state that discourses are social practices that can change social relations. Moreover, within this discourse responsibilisation is seemingly pushed to the side of the brands as there is pressure from consumers for them to be more responsible, transparent and increase their sustainable performance. As a result, the consumers within this discursive practice are not just important actors in the self-governing of themselves, as Shamir (2008) stated, but also of the brands, which Hulme and Edwards (1997) lifts.

Seeking Economic Justification

The third discursive practice reveals a 'seeking economic justification' amongst consumers when fashion brands pursue green marketing of products or services. That is, the

moral obligation of acting sustainable is merely enough for some consumers. Instead, incentives to act accordingly presents itself as needed; in this case, economic justification. Here, brands outwardly grasp responsibilisation even though their self-developed sustainability standards might just be a managerial tool for social branding (Parker, 2002). While on the consumer side, despite these developments probably being a post-reaction of previous consumer pressure (Shamir, 2008), consumers hint that further economic justifications are required. As Lemke (2001) mentions, some actors tend to be more economic-rational rather than moral-based in their choices. Further, as explained by Wognum et al. (2011), some consumers may need to be convinced to justify increased costs and act accordingly, illustrating the importance of transparency. If not justified, this could lead to a belief of not withholding the sustainability standard required for the consumers to accept potential extra costs that come with it. Thus, we define this discursive practice through which *consumers seek economic justification in terms of (1) increased prices, (2) level of sustainability, and, (3) economic incentives to act in accordance with solicited behaviour*. The first subgroup, we found those who question the pricing models as a lack of justification of why more sustainable materials, such as recycled ones, are not equal or lower priced than virgin materials. The second subgroup

refers to the need for assurance of sustainability standards to justify its economic worth. The third subgroup highlights a consumer segment who request economic incentives to act upon promotional offered green services.

On numerous posts, some consumers have given notice to the pricing models on, for instance, clothes partly made out of recycled materials. Seemingly, according to some consumers, the notion of recycled materials is seen as cheaper, and thus, higher prices are not automatically justified, but rather the opposite. This is mostly displayed on Fjällräven's posts and exemplified by the following comments:

"I love your products but if something is made from recycled material shouldn't it be cheaper. Maybe if could be affordable to people who you know work outdoors but get paid less. That way your products are available to the many not the few" (@fjallravenofficial).

"(...) but I don't understand your pricing model, which at time seems extortionate compared to the rest of the market. Such a shame as I'd love one but couldn't justify the needless extra cost.." (@fjallravenofficial).

These comments shed light on a seemingly unrecognised possible relation between more sustainable incorporated fashion and higher prices. Instead, many consumers believe such a relation to result in the opposite. Captions such as '*shouldn't it be*

cheaper', referring to recycled material, illustrate an unjustified pricing model. As Wognum et al. (2011) explained, for increased costs to be accepted by some consumers, the underlying reasons for such increases need to be communicated and justified. In our findings, this has not been the case, as illustrated in the comment '*couldn't justify the needless extra cost..*'. Repeatedly, the issue and lack of transparency become apparent as informative arguments of why sustainable fashion should be more costly than 'ordinary' fast fashion, are not present. Additionally, also brought forth is the criticism of it not being '*affordable*' for most, and if changed more sustainable fashion could become '*available to the many not the few*'. However, this further lifts the question if sustainable fashion could be available for the many and remain sustainable, without fostering over-consumption, however, this is not further addressed as it is not the focus of this research. Moreover, other consumers lift the question of whether the pricing model is even dependent on the level of sustainability or, in fact, something else.

Revealed in the second subgroup is the non-persuasive consumer speculation whether the pricing model is correlated with the level of sustainability or driven by something else. This is visible on Fjällräven's and Arket's feed, highlighted in the following comments:

"Is it so expensive because it's processing is a chore or because it's durable or is the company just pricing out of reach of most consumers? (...)" (@arketofficial).

"I would not mind to spend my money in this but only if it is cruelty free (...)" (@fjallravenofficial).

These comments point out a critical question of whether higher prices depend on sustainability or an underlying search for additional profits. To exemplify, captions such as '*Is it so expensive because*' followed by '*company just pricing out of reach*' where the post claims to use recycled materials, illustrates this critical belief of hidden ulterior motive in the pricing model. The following comment, where the post also speaks about using lasting materials, indicates that only if it was proven to uphold certain standards, explained as 'shown' by Wognum et al. (2011), a higher price model would be accepted. Thus, strengthens the argument for the need for increased transparency as consumers inherently do not trust that the whole truth is reflected in the statements nor the prices, thus searching for clarification. This can also be connected to the discursive practice of requesting, as it seeks explanations and further information to justify, which also indicates that some discursive practices can be interwoven in one another. That is, some media text can foster different discourses.

In contrary to previous subgroups where consumers seek economic justification in terms of increased prices and level of sustainability, consumers in the third subgroup seek to utilise opportunities of economic incentives from fashion brands to carry out an act of sustainability, e.g. when sustainability services are marketed by the fashion brands, such as recycling of clothes, to no costs. This is illustrated in the following comment, visible on Kappahl's post:

"Do you receive any discount coupons like you do at hm?" (@kappahl).

Comments as such, reveal that moral alone might not be the driving factor, but instead accompanied by economic incentives. As Shamir (2008) mentioned, companies nowadays need to develop responsible actions to succeed in business, which Parker (2002) argues also is connected to economic rationality where moral aspects have become a tool for social branding, and in this case, seemingly embraced by the consumers. At first, it seems as both brands and consumers take on responsibilisation in terms of recycling old clothes, contributing to a circular fashion loop. However, as requested and offered, such correlated discounts tend to lead to further consumption, ultimately contributing to the issue of over-consumption, which is one of the most significant sustainability problems within the fashion industry (Ritch, 2015; World

Commission on Environment and Development, 1987)

Throughout the different subgroups within the discursive practice, it is illustrated that sustainable action is not just moral-based but also influenced by economic justification and incentives. The somewhat unrecognised possible relation between more sustainable incorporated fashion and higher prices, as well as the critical belief that fashion brands use sustainability as a cover for their ulterior motive of milking consumers for additional profits, all indicate a possible consumer demand for increased transparency. Further, sustainability-related actions may be fostered by economic driving factors, both by the brands and the consumers, ultimately leading to increased consumption at the expense of sustainability. That is, revealing a possible loophole in the take on of responsibilisation, where one act of sustainability camouflages a coherent sustainability issue.

Impugning

The last discursive practice that was found relates to the 'impugning', which involves consumers criticising sustainable claims made by the brands and pointing out that better options are available but not embraced by the brands. Here, what the brands present is seemingly either not enough or not the right path to take, hence, sternly criticised by the consumers. Further, as consumers often share a view (Hall, 1973) or foster a change of knowledge (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002), such criticising can give way for increasing a negative social image of the brands, which can lead to damaged reputation or what Delmas and Burbano (2011) state, lowered consumer confidence. Thus, responsibilisation can be linked to the notion of the consumers urging, through pressure and judgement, brands to take more responsibility or change their way of action as of current. Thereupon, consumers act as a neoliberal form of governing force, as Miller and Rose (2008) and Trnka and Trundle (2014) explain it. Consequently, we define this discursive practice through which *consumers impugn the brands regarding (1) the insufficient taken action, presenting an alternative option, and, (2) the direction of sustainable development.* The first subgroup emphasises on the more sustainable options that can be taken; thus, indicating that what is being done is not enough. The second subgroup, solely impugns the claimed sustainability choices of the brands, as of not being comprehensive enough or rightly prioritised.

The first subgroup tends to discuss the sustainable claims of the brands in a negative light by giving suggestions of what is, according to the consumers, considered to be better options. Here, there is seemingly a focus on the presentation of the consumers own ideas of what is the correct way to

approach such actions. Consequently, what is claimed by the brands is then portrayed as an incorrect way of handling things. As follows, this is demonstrated both on Fjällräven's and Arket's feed, where posts mention the development of long-lasting materials and material choices:

"thank u for the info! But please, consider the idea of not using real down. I know that it is a challenge for your company but the future is vegan! Companies like the north face has launched outdoor jackets 100% cruelty free" (@fjallravenofficial).

"I'm vegan myself, but plastic is also no good for the planet (...) So @arketofficial, please non-plastic natural materials" (@arketofficial).

"would love to see more shoes like these, but vegan" (@arketofficial)

"That's a cool blog but why have your manufacturing in China = massive carbon footprint, why not keep manufacturing local or European based surely??" (@fjallravenofficial).

As illustrated by comments such as *'consider the idea of not using real down'* and *'plastic is also no good for the planet'* there is a sense of accusing the brand of doing things incorrectly. This might be a way for consumers to diligent a change in consideration of what is sustainable and enlightening better options, which is shown by the following comment *'Companies like the north face has launched'*. Thereby, display that other brands already take such actions, and hence, show that a better option is possible. Further on, the offered material

range is something that is critically being brought up to discussion with comments such as *'love to see more shoes (...) but vegan'*. This criticism also stretches to the location of manufacturing as shown by the comment *'manufacturing in China = massive carbon footprint'*. By suggesting local or European based manufacturing, as a more sustainable manufacturing location, evince a sense of assisting in the brands' quest of increased sustainability. Ergo, illustrate that consumers take on responsibilisation and that brands should act alike. Evidently, this shows a level of engagement and interpersonal interaction through the social media platform (Hung, Li & Tse, 2011). Consequently, this might anticipate a sense of responsibility and self-governing action on the consumer side as they provide incentives of wanting to consume sustainable options. However, with this not being provided to the desired extent on the market, companies as well have to take responsibility for it to be effective (Shamir, 2008). Moreover, these suggestions within the comments protrude a sense of superior knowledge; however, simultaneously, there seems to be a dispute of what is most sustainable.

Also presented within this first subgroup of the discourse, in line with Van Brussel (2018), is the appearance of discussion and debate of the meaning of what sustainable should be. In other words, there is a conflicting belief amongst the consumers

themselves concerning what the most sustainable is, and thus responsible action to take. This is illustrated on two of Fjällräven's posts, where one portraying protection and preservation of nature and the other a jacket with fur:

> *"so when it's vegan it's better? it's also about lifespan of products in my opinion"* (@fjallravenofficial).
> *"fibers of fur breaking down over time is surely better than synthetics?"* (@fjallravenofficial).

While many consumers proclaim vegan products to be more sustainable, as the non-vegan product is not in line with animal welfare and thus not seen as sustainable, other consumers see it differently. These comments are emphasising on '*lifespan*' and '*breaking down over time*', questioning the durability of other materials and presenting non-vegan products as a possible more sustainable option. This shows that discourses not only intertwine - as previously discussed - but also sometimes conflict with one another. As Van Brussel (2018) mentioned, there is a constant struggle of the meaning of a discourse and its potential dominance over other discourses is repeatedly at play, which this case illustrates.

Questioning if the actions of the brand are the correct ones is something that appears within the second subgroup of this discursive practice. Here, consumers take a critical stand towards what is claimed in the posts made by the brands, questioning if the action has the right impact. Some examples from Arket and KappAhl, where two posts explain how they recycle clothes and another offer alternative bags, include:

> *"I wonder though how much difference in co2 emissions it is to recycle plastic bottles compared to making new polyester."* (@arketofficial).
> *"Who wants to have plastics and microfibers on them?"* (@kappahl).
> *"Does the world really need more fabric bags? I'm sure most people already have a good few fabric bags."* (@arketofficial).
> *"I rather have too many of these bags than plastic bags some stores are still making people buy. I wish they get rid of the plastic ones trying hard to stop them in the uk ."* (@arketofficial).

As seen within these examples, the brands are being criticised over their sustainability action in a reputation-damaging manner. Meaning, despite their efforts of sustainability, their direction of sustainable development is either not comprehensive enough or not rightly prioritised. Resultantly, the brands' sustainability abilities and quality are criticised by the consumers in a possibly besmirch manner. As illustrated, brands recycling efforts, in terms of recycling plastic, is questioned by some consumers '*how much difference in co2 emissions is it to recycle ... compared to making new*' and '*who wants to have plastics and microfibers on them?*'. While many consumers urge brands to

increase their corporation of recycled materials, here their choice of recycling appears not to be the right one. Indeed, additional efforts of sustainability incorporation of the brands are requested by consumers - as seen in the previous discourse of requesting - however, seemingly some are not to be as prioritised as other. '*Does the world really need more fabric bags?*' exemplifies the questioning prioritisation of a sustainability action taken by the brand, deeming it as unnecessary and perhaps even implying a case of over-consuming fabric bags. In contrast, yet again illustrating the struggle of discourse meaning, consumers question each other's point of view as seen in the comment '*I rather have too many of these bags than plastic bags*'. This demonstrates an intrigue amongst consumers concerning what brands should offer within the concept of sustainability.

In similarity with previous discourses, this discursive practice discloses that consumers tend to take responsibility by wanting to be able to make more sustainable choices by indicating a need for further sustainability incorporation. However, as these suggestions are declared as brand actions by the consumers, it is in the brands' hands responsibility should be actualised. Strongly connected to this discourse, the consumers consequently seem to act and put themselves as a governing force trying to steer the brands into their path of

sustainability. However, what is seen as sustainable is also debated by the consumers making the lines of sustainability blurry.

Ultimately, all these presented discourses have brought enlightenment into consumers discussion of fashion brands' green social media marketing, illustrating how predicamental situations for the brands can occur in the socially interactive nature of social media. Considering the findings of our analysis, much can be learnt also when entailing implications related to society, marketers and research.

Discussion

Resulting from our analysis, we find that critical discourses including *Requesting*, *Greenwash accusing*, *Seeking economic justification* and *Impugning* all are a prevalent part of green marketing on social media channels, such as Instagram. Consequently, we attest to that these discourses all have an impact both in the shaping of green marketing on Instagram and as governing forces in society. As these discursive practices are a big part of consumers' interaction with brands, we, in the following section, discuss their implications for society at large, marketing, research and future research.

Implications for Society

As mentioned by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), discursive practices foster a

change of knowledge. Correspondingly, we present the accuracy of this with the discursive practices challenging what brands present as sustainable and consumers associations with sustainability. Here, as exemplified by Van Brussel (2018), it is clear that the way companies choose to present their representational mechanisms, in this case, their green marketing on social media, give way for some discourses, rather than others. By criticising brands' green claims and choices, consumers tend to step into the position of neoliberal forms of governing the brands. In society as a whole, this shows that consumers, though the use of social media, can possibly play an essential role in governing and influencing wider issues in society, like sustainability. According to Lobel (2004), leaving the ones closest to the problems with control in their hands, it can lead to market-driven solutions that are flexible, efficient and creative. Illustrated in this study, the control also applies to the hands of consumers, and not only the companies, as mentioned by Lobel (2004), where it is presenting itself as governing comments that may foster positive change and thus, create sustainable suggestions and solutions. As a result, this study illustrates that consumers are a possible strong force within neoliberal governance and that they, through social media, can voice their matters.

Implications for Marketers

Through these discursive practices, marketers can get an idea of what consumers demand and request within the realms of social media marketing. As Torfing (2005) explains, a discourse is a credible principle where past, present and future events can be read, and have a positive impact on people's hearts and minds. Consequently, by acknowledging the importance of consumer discourses within social media, marketers can use this to alter and adapt marketing methods in line with the discursive practices for future benefits. Exemplified by Delmas and Burbano (2011), lack of transparency harms relations in the form of investments, consumer confidence and the market for greener products. In our case, it is illustrated that this is prevalent within green social media marketing as well, if not more. Discussed by Hooghiemstra (2000), companies should respond to pressure from consumers to obtain a positive image of the brand and thereby possibly increase the companies a competitive advantage. As displayed by the different discursive practices in this study, consumers put pressure based on various statements on the brands through social media. Therefore, it is suggested that marketers use transparency within such marketing practices and are clear about what they communicate. Correspondingly, and most prevalent in the discursive practice

Greenwash Accusing, we find that green claims are recommended to be justified within marketing posts to avoid amplification of adverse effects from greenwash criticism, also pointed out by Delmas and Burbano (2011). As social media is a tool that empowers consumers (Gensler et al., 2013), we regard that there is a caution that needs to be taken on the side of the marketers where what they present should be accurate, clear and true. Meaning, transparency can act as a gateway to exit the predicament scenario the brands seemingly get caught in somewhat regardless of their intention. Otherwise, we consider that, through the discourses from this study, consumers can take on a role that can have a significant impact on the brand's image. As a marketer, such empowering consumer interactivity culminates into a loss of control entailed within the social media platforms. Thus, addressing consumer pressure becomes essential when tackling the loss of control that comes with the shown arbitrary nature of marketing through social media.

Implications for Research and Future Research

As discourses provide us with subject positions connected to identification (Van Brussel, 2018), discourses as a subject itself can be important to research (Glynos, 2012; 2014a; 2014b). Indeed, our research provides

relevance for analysing discourses within social media, as many different discourses are identified within the social media posts. Findings show that consumers can use social media as an attempt to steer brands in different directions. By analysing these discourses, in our case, from green marketing posts on Instagram, we can create an understanding of how different discourses can be created through social media and what triggers some of these discourses. Mainly, what kind of discourses green marketing creates. Additionally, the research provides findings that discourses are not separate from each other, but overlap, change and are not always straight to the point as shown by the discourses *Requesting* of further information to uncover plausible hidden truths and *Seeking economic justification* in terms of unveiling the driving factors in the pricing model. This intertwinement also illustrates that a media text can source different discourses, and consequently demonstrate what Van Brussel (2018) refers to as a constant struggle of the meaning of discourses.

To end our discussion, it is clearly seen throughout this research that social media provides a platform for discourses of media texts to occur, and this of high significance as we have argued. As this, in general, has been given little recognition, and especially within the conundrum of sustainable fashion development, we

encourage further research of discourses of media text within this field. Additionally, expanding it to more brands from other countries as well as different social media channels to also explore if there is a difference in responses depending on, for instance, culture or social media platform. Our research also touches upon the importance of social media-related discursive practices on a broader societal level. Hence, we argue for the importance to discuss how discursive practices within social media are performed outside the borders of the fashion industry as social media seems to be used by consumers as a governing tool. Stemming from this, a research program could be conducted to look into discourses on social media as a source of societal and sustainable change, if indeed consumers through social media are changing the ways of brands, and possible change in consumers conception of issues on a more extensive societal level.

Conclusion

To summarise, this paper demonstrates the value that discourses of media texts brings forth concerning green marketing attempts pursued by fashion brands through their social media channel Instagram. Through our findings, we argue for our contribution to the discussion of; (1) the two-sided responsibilisation dilemma, (2) the counterintuitive outcome of green marketing,

and, (3) the neoliberal governing power of consumers.

From our purpose, to explore and illustrate the discursive practices performed by consumers on fashion brands' green social media posts, our analysis is specified to the critical view of consumers, excluding possible thoughts, as well as to fashion brands with Scandinavian heritage. Within this industry is a growing consumer sustainability concern, increasing usage of green marketing to allure such concern while faster trend cycles are presented, fostering over-consumption, and severe level of sustainability-related issues. Ultimately creating a paradox of sustainability for consumers to criticise under the social constructivism social media provides. Derived from this, our methodological approach and analysis, we found and distinguished four discursive practices: *Requesting, Greenwash accusing, Seeking economic justification,* and, *Impugning* that add to the illustration of consumers critical view on fashion brands green social media marketing. In resonating with Fiske (1989) it is shown that consumers can give new meaning to the statements of the fashion brands, and in that sense, debate their social image as pointed out by Van Brussel (2018).

Drawing upon the discursive practice of Requesting, it is seen that as consumers become more knowledgeable of sustainability-related issues and the

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feasibility of more sustainable options, ambiguous and ostensible messages and vague claims without elucidation do not go by undetected as consumers request further information. Thereby, as a result of a lack of brand transparency and consumers' suspiciousness of ulterior motives, consumers express a hesitation to consume. Looking towards Greenwash accusing, it is shown that when consumers scrutinies the fashion brands' green marketing statements and find double standards, direct lies, incorrect claims and conflicting messages, deem the fashion brands visualising in captions such as: '*not trustworthy considering that you claim to be transparent*'. Resultantly such deemiance have an adversified impact on the brands' social image. Turning to Seeking economic justification, it is revealed that consumers need justification for higher prices if not to suspect ulterior motives behind the pricing model. Further, it is also shown that one act of sustainability can camouflage an economic driven, coherent sustainability issue revealing a loophole in the take on of responsibilisation. Lastly, through impugning, consumers shed light on fashion brands' poor sustainability standards, pointing out a better option is not yet embraced by the brands, thus, taking on the role of assessing consultants. However, as further disclosed in this discourse, what is believed to be most sustainable is conflicting amongst the consumers themselves.

These discursive practices elucidate what can be described as a negative circle of consumer pressure, wrong claims of responsibility and consumer detection of such, lowering consumer confidence and damage of brand image leading back to consumer pressure. Indeed, it is revealed that consumers, in the construe of fashion brands green social media marketing, attempt to foster change in the form of neoliberal governing, and exceedingly do so, in the quandary of responsibilisation. However, as observed, if brands do not withhold a sufficient level of sustainability standards, being ambiguous or having ostensible statements, result in consumer hesitation and criticism which in turn damages the brands' social image and lowers the consumer confidence. Correspondingly, consumers further suspect hidden truths, continuously dispute brands' green marketing, leading to further damaging of brands' trustworthiness and increased consumer pressure, closing the circle. This negative circle essentially seems to be a result of false usage of green marketing and a severe lack of transparency in their statements for them to be interpreted as truthful.

Nevertheless, it is shown that change of knowledge and governing consumer comments can lead to the creation of sustainable suggestions and solutions, influencing society at large. As Hooghiemstra (2000) points out, it is also within the

companies' interest to follow up on consumer pressure as it favours an adherent positive social image and ensuingly can enhance competitive advantage. That is, upholding their claims and transparently communicating this to the consumers could break the negative circle. However, the risk stands, that if green marketing, both including environmental and social aspects, is not pursued in a righteous and adequately transparent way, it might result in counterintuitive effects, and coherently, prevailing a hesitative consumer behaviour and companies being denigrated, which in turn, can lead to a degradative market for greener products, which also Delmas and Burbano (2011) warn off.

Limitations of Paper

Our research has brought light onto critical discursive practices, created and portrayed in social media texts, regarding fashion brands' green marketing, thus demonstrating social media texts possible function as a consumer governing tool. However, we do acknowledge that the found and presented discourses in this article were only taken from the social media platform Instagram; thus, the findings are based on this platform alone, while other platforms may foster different discourses. Further acknowledged is that the found and presented discourses in this article related to the examined post were found and perceived by us, as well as our conscious choice of excluding other discourses (e.g. non-critical discourses) which might have been significantly dominant. Notably, other discourses can thus be found or later gain dominance, as well as the surfacing of new ones. Additionally, given the perceived gap in the literature, which this paper alone cannot fill, we encourage further research to widen the aspects of discourses related to green social media marketing as well as onto other brands aspiring to sustainable development and market pursuantly.

Further on, through our research, we have also raised the concern regarding the importance of broadening the perspective of the critical discursive practices, e.g. in terms of other social media channels, industries, consumer cultures and societal levels. In consequence, deepening the perception of how discursive practices acts as a tool for derivation of societal and sustainable change. This, as a way of addressing the difficulties of generalisability from this research alone.

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