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Improving the Communication of CSR in the Clothing Industry

- By evaluating different tools, message designs and senders to use in the communication towards consumers

Abstract

The observed problem proceeds from the clothing companies' current hesitation towards communicating about their CSR initiatives, which implies an insufficient communication towards their target consumers. Meanwhile, it has been concluded that companies can reap many benefits from communicating their CSR engagements towards consumers. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to contribute to the improvement of the communication targeting consumers about clothing companies' CSR efforts. By conducting a qualitative study using a triangulation of findings from focus groups, literature and expert interviews, we focus on the consumers' demands and seek to explore how the different concepts of tools, message design and sender can be used to improve the communication. From our study, we conclude that most consumers know little about companies' CSR engagements and therefore need to be targeted with visible and comprehensible communication in stores. Additional tools outside of the stores should be used to satisfy the more interested consumers' need for information. We also find that it is essential that companies convey honest and transparent messages when communicating about their CSR initiatives and that the corporate communication can be further enhanced by other senders, such as media, as to address the legitimacy issues currently associated with corporate communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROBLEM AREA

"The current problem is the gap between companies and their consumers, where most consumers are confused about CSR as a concept and some demand more information but the companies do not know how to communicate and are reluctant to do so."

(Torlén Simberg 2011)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is traditionally described with the help of Carroll's (1991) CSR Pyramid, which divides the concept into the four dimensions of philanthropic, social, environmental and legal CSR. For the clothing industry with supply chains and factories often located in distant countries far away from the end-consumers, the main issues are to be found within the area of social and environmental CSR (Rosberg 2011). The complexity of the clothing industry is an evident source of legitimacy and transparency issues which has entailed in several scandals during the recent decades (see for example Munck 2007). Hence, stakeholders of the clothing industry have started to demand greater responsibility from the companies and along with the increasing number of companies implementing codes of conduct and sustainability reports, CSR is progressively starting to be regarded as a hygiene factor in the clothing industry (Bogle 2011). Taking on more responsibility by engaging in CSR is thus no longer a great source for competitive advantage in today's clothing industry.

While clothing companies more or less need to engage in CSR as to operate in a legitimate way, it does not automatically imply that the companies will actively communicate their CSR efforts to their various stakeholders. What seems to be a simple and evident thing to do is in reality obstructed by factors which make companies reluctant to communicate (Torlén Simberg 2011). One reason recognized by Ashforth and Gibbs (1990, p.188) is the prevailing legitimacy risk for companies who emphasize their CSR efforts. They, as well as Brown and Dacin (1997), argue that communicating very heavily about CSR might make consumers believe that the company is trying to hide something. Moreover, companies are said to be aware of the need for them to start communicating (Beckmann, Morsing & Reisch 2006, p.12), but are still hesitant about it due to a lack of knowledge about how to do it in a proper way (Torlén Simberg 2011).

Consequently, clothing companies' current CSR communication is mainly restricted to communication through the companies' websites and various sustainability reports (Torlén Simberg 2011). For consumers, this communication not only contributes to the current information overload but does not serve to reach them with CSR information (Rosberg 2011). As a result, the majority of the consumers are not aware that many companies engage in some kind of CSR activity (Beckmann 2006, p.172).

Although the existence of consumers with high levels of awareness is proven by Carrigan and Attalla (2001), lack of awareness is generally considered to be a major inhibitor of consumer responsiveness to CSR (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen 2010; Mohr, Webb & Harris 2001). Communication is thus regarded to be the missing link in companies' CSR engagement, and hardly any companies currently satisfy the demand for information by consumers. For that reason, it is believed that companies are currently not gaining full credit for their CSR activities (Dawkins 2005; Battacharya, Sen, & Korschun 2008). Meanwhile, a growing amount of academic research points at the wide range of benefits a company may gain from being engaged in CSR, such as the positive correlation between CSR and consumers' attitudes towards the company (see for example Brown & Dacin 1997; Lichtenstein, Drumwright & Braig 2004; Murray & Vogel 1997; Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun 2006).

Thus, CSR seems to have a positive effect on consumers' company attitudes while the majority of consumers have low awareness of companies' CSR efforts. The prevailing legitimacy risks associated with communicating CSR and lack of knowledge about how to communicate has resulted in companies' limited CSR communication towards consumers. Here, it is important to remember that communication equals implementation, implying that there is little meaning in engaging in CSR activities if people do not know about them (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen 2010). To date, many have recognized this current gap in communication between clothing companies and their consumers, whereas the question of how companies should communicate their CSR initiatives still remains unanswered (Morsing & Schultz 2006, p.146).

1.2 PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTION

The observed problem proceeds from the clothing companies' current hesitation towards communicating about their CSR initiatives. Thus, with this thesis, we would like to contribute

to the improvement of CSR communication towards consumers and hence reduce the existing gap in communication between clothing companies and their target consumers. As several sources (see for example Du, Bhattacharya & Sen 2010) have stressed the essential role of the sender in CSR communication, we also acknowledge different senders of information in addition to the company itself. With the overall purpose of contributing to the improvement of the communication targeting consumers about clothing companies' CSR efforts, the research questions are stated as following:

- How can clothing companies improve their CSR communication targeting consumers?

- How can different senders potentially improve the communication about companies' CSR efforts?

1.3 DELIMITATIONS

Due to the limitations of the scope of a bachelor thesis, we have chosen to focus on the communication concerning how clothing companies operating on the Swedish market engage in CSR. We have not selected specific companies to focus on nor tried to come to a conclusion that will be applicable for all companies. Instead, the clothing companies referred to in this study includes those on the Swedish market targeting larger segments consisting of mainstream consumers of larger clothing chains, e.g. H&M, Indiska and Lindex. Hence, clothing companies focusing on CSR as their unique selling point by targeting niche segments are not the focus of this study, although the conclusions might be applicable on these companies as well. Noticeable is that this thesis will consider neither the costs nor the companies' possibilities of implementing the suggested improvements of communication since we will focus on the consumers' needs rather than the companies' abilities.

On the demand-side of the industry, this exploratory study evidently focuses on Swedish consumers as the target of the communication, excluding other recipients of communication such as the investors. We recognize that all consumers can be segmented based on their previous knowledge and attitude towards CSR. However, we will not aim at suggesting ways of improving companies' CSR communication with respect to distinguished segments of consumers, since a qualitative study with large samples of consumers would be more

appropriate for that purpose. Rather, we aim at presenting ways for how to improve the communication towards all target consumers, regardless of their interest in CSR.

Further, we assume that the clothing companies are currently engaged in CSR activities to varying extents, which is confirmed by several industry experts. The companies' CSR engagements as such and their underlying reasons will not be a subject for discussion and analysis in this thesis. Hence, we do not take into consideration what kind of CSR efforts that the companies are currently engaged in. Further, as many studies have concluded the positive effects of CSR communication (see for example Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun 2006) we will not conduct a profitability analysis on CSR communication. Rather, this thesis will aim at exploring how the communication can be improved, with the objective of increasing the awareness level of companies' CSR initiatives for the average consumer and better satisfy consumers' differing needs regarding CSR communication. By our definition, the purpose of this thesis also excludes affecting consumers' purchase decision process.

1.4 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

Whilst existing research has been focusing on describing the existing gap in communication and its underlying reasons, there is very little research devoted to resolving the problem by suggesting how the communication can be improved. This thesis will therefore proceed from the stated need for improvements of CSR communication and serves to give suggestions on ways to increase the average consumers' awareness level of companies' CSR efforts and better satisfy consumers' differing needs regarding CSR communication.

Unlike previous research within the area, this study will take on a demand-side focus with the intention of understanding the consumers' current perceptions and preferences as a means to explore possible ways to improve CSR communication. The findings of this thesis will enable companies to be better equipped to understand and meet the demands of consumers when designing the CSR communication. By exploring the differences as well as similarities of consumer attitudes and preferences, companies can learn how to improve their own CSR communication towards all consumers. This study will also take into account how different senders of communication can potentially improve the communication targeting consumers about companies' CSR efforts, as a means to deal with the legitimacy risk associated with companies' own CSR communication. We will use our findings to highlight relevant

managerial implications which can be adopted by clothing companies in order to improve their CSR communication towards consumers. Furthermore, since this thesis cannot possibly eliminate the entire gap in communication, topics for further research will also be proposed.

1.5 DISPOSITION

This thesis has been structured with the reader in mind and it is our aim to provide a pleasant reading experience. The first chapter, the introduction, has served to clarify the problem at hand and the purpose of this thesis. Chapter two describes the research methodology and seeks to explain the research process and why this thesis has been designed in a certain way. Following, the theoretical framework is presented in chapter three, together with its components of tools, message design and sender. The theoretical framework then serves to structure the rest of the thesis, except for the concluding discussion. In chapter four, we proceed with the empirical findings from literature and expert interviews while chapter five presents the findings from the focus group sessions. It is followed by the analysis in chapter six, where the most interesting findings from collected empirical data are combined and analyzed with the help of theories presented in chapter three. Finally, this thesis ends with a concluding discussion, managerial implications of the findings and suggestions for further research in chapter seven.

2. METHOD

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A limited amount of research can currently be found on how to improve the communication of clothing companies' CSR efforts targeting consumers. Experts claim that there is an evident knowledge gap in terms of consumer-oriented studies within this area. For the purpose of filling this gap, we have chosen a qualitative research method with focus on conducting focus groups in order to obtain consumer-oriented answers to our research questions.

According to Malhotra (2004), a qualitative research design is preferable whenever a new problem and its implications are to be discussed. While a quantitative research design with

questionnaires can obtain larger amounts of empirical data, questionnaires will not be able to cover the depth and complexity of our discussion topics. Rather, the qualitative approach through conducting focus groups strives to investigate the views and thoughts of the participants more thoroughly (Bryman & Bell 2007), and thus helps us to understand consumers' current perceptions and attitudes towards CSR communication and also explore ways of improving it.

This thesis is structured according to the abductive approach, which is described by Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994, p.42) as a mixture of the two methods of induction and deduction. When implementing the abductive structure, one starts by recognizing a real-life problem and proceeds with a continuous interaction between empirical findings from research and existing relevant theories. In line with this definition, this study begins in the observed communication gap between clothing companies and their consumers. Conclusions on how to improve the communication are reached through an interchanging process of reviewing theory and collecting empirical data.

Moreover, the findings from the focus group sessions are supplemented by interviews with industry experts and empirical findings from literature which together creates a triangulation. Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 646) describes the method of triangulation as a way to integrate several research methods in one study with the purpose of obtaining different perspectives of a phenomenon. Triangulation and the collection of empirical data from several sources allows us to obtain a varying and dynamic overview of the current situation and possible solutions which is appropriate due to the relatively unexplored research area of CSR communication towards consumers.

2.2 THEORY SELECTION

In addition to the collected empirical data from focus group sessions, expert interviews and literature, additional theories are needed to analyze our findings. Since the focus of this thesis lies upon CSR communication towards consumers, all selected theories are within the area of business-to-consumer communication.

Due to the large scope of the area of business-to-consumer communication, this study is delimited with the help of a theoretical framework. We have proceeded from the marketing communication mix as described by Fill (2009, p.19) in order to determine the areas of

concern regarding companies' own communication. The marketing communication mix consists of the concepts of tools, media and message. Reisch (2006, p. 190) has further investigated the specific area of consumer-oriented CSR communication and addressed the importance of senders when communicating about companies' CSR engagement. Likewise, the experts mentioned different senders rather than media as a way to improve the CSR communication. Hence, Reisch's concept of sender has been incorporated into the marketing communication mix to replace media. Further, the original concept of message has been revised to better fit the purpose of the thesis, and is henceforth referred to as message design. This is motivated by our delimitation of what kind of CSR efforts the companies engage in and consequently the content of the communicated messages.

The final theoretical framework, which will be further presented in chapter three, then consists of the communication concepts of tools, message design and sender, all within the area of consumer-oriented CSR communication. Theories regarding the concept of tools concern the means by which companies themselves can communicate with consumers. Secondly, theories relating to the concept of message design describe how companies should design a given message in order for it to appeal to the target audience. Finally, selected theories on the concept of sender covers how different senders of the message will affect the communication. While the aspects of tools and message design only concern how companies can improve their CSR communication, the concept of sender is the only part of the theoretical framework that acknowledges other sources of information in addition to the companies themselves.

When delimiting our concept of communication with the theoretical framework, naturally many other aspects of communication are left out. Obviously, this thesis will not discuss the content of communicated messages since the concept of message is replaced with message design. Besides, we have not taken into account the possible improvements of companies' internal communication. Due to the consumer-oriented perspective of this thesis, any theories on companies' implementation of communication strategies are excluded. Although we acknowledge the role of different senders of information, theories will not include how other senders in addition to the companies themselves should communicate CSR and neither how clothing companies can better influence other senders' communication. Further, we have opted against discussing consumer theories, such as theories on information search and consumer segmentation regarding CSR since the research question will not be answered with

respect to the different consumer segments. Rather, all selected theories acknowledge the existence of different consumers.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION

A combination of literature review, expert interviews and focus group sessions has been used with the purpose of collecting relevant data for an exploratory research.

2.3.1 Empirical contributions from literature review

Secondary data from sources such as academic publications and news articles have helped us to understand the concept of CSR communication towards consumers. We have examined literature about CSR communication and in some exceptional cases, literature about CSR communication towards consumers in the clothing industry. The empirical findings from literature have provided us with an understanding of the issues at hand and suggestions for improvements.

2.3.2 Empirical contributions from expert interviews

In order to gain more insights into the specific area of CSR communication towards consumers in Sweden, we have conducted interviews with six different industry experts who were chosen based on their knowledge and expertise. All of them work with CSR on a daily basis as consultants or advisers. According to Flick (2009, p. 165), the interviews can be labeled expert interviews since the interviewees were chosen based on their expertise in certain areas.

The industry experts were able to capture both company and consumer perspectives on CSR communication and were thus preferred to clothing company representatives since we wished for a general insight into CSR communication rather than biased and company-specific opinions. Following is a list of all interviewees:

- Nina Torlén Simberg – *CSR consultant*, Fangsi
- Madeleine Rosberg – *Innovator*, CSRguiden
- Karin Schollin – *Project manager,* Prime
- Marianne Bogle – *Project manager and cofounder*, CSR Sweden
- Ulrika Molin – *Manager*, Fair Trade Center

- Joel Lindefors – *Communication specialist with focus on CSR communication in the clothing industry*, Futerra Sustainability Communications

The interviews all lasted for approximately one hour and were conducted in a semi-structured way as we had some predetermined topics for discussion but also allowed the interviewees to elaborate freely on his or hers subject of specialization (Bryman & Bell 2007, p. 480). The expert interviews have provided us with a deeper understanding about how the communication can be improved, often with a striking consensus. The empirical contributions from expert interviews have together with literature findings served as the basis for discussion topics during the focus group sessions.

2.3.3 Focus group sessions

Since the objective of the consumer-oriented perspective was to discuss how the CSR communication could be improved, focus groups were motivated rather than quantitative questionnaires. Focus groups should be used to explore an idea or subject in depth and gain new insights into the participants' opinions (Bryman & Bell 2007, p. 510). One advantage associated with conducting focus groups is that arguments can be voiced and challenged within the group, something that wouldn't have been possible in a questionnaire (Flick 2009). Potential limitations of conducting focus groups are the risk of participants influencing each others' opinions and the prevalence of dominating people in the group (Flick 2009, p.201). As recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 510) and Flick (2009), we participated in the focus groups as moderators but avoided to inflict too much in the discussions. Each focus group session was commenced with a short presentation of the concept of CSR in the clothing industry, in order to assure that all participants were prepared for the discussions. Following, examples of the communication concepts of tools, message design and sender were presented and hence initiated discussions about how to improve the CSR communication. As aforementioned, the discussion topics were chosen based on the literature review and expert interview findings.

A total of four focus group sessions were conducted, with between five to six members in each group. In order to maximize the exploration of a subject from different perspectives, which according to Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007, p. 28) can be obtained through heterogeneous focus groups, we compounded focus groups consisting of a relatively equal distribution of men and women in the age between 19-57 years. All participants also needed

to be interested in buying clothes from the larger clothing chains such as H&M or Lindex. Further, the chosen respondents belong to our circle of acquaintance, but all come from different parts of the country and social backgrounds. Since the purpose of this study is to improve the communication targeting all consumers, we aimed for a sample of consumers that is representative of clothing companies' target consumers. This is motivated by Bryman and Bell (2007), who suggest that focus group members should reflect the group of people with an interest in the subject.

2.4 QUALITY OF RESEARCH

In order to determine the quality of research, we have chosen to discuss our thesis in line with the recommendation of Yin (2009). Hence, the following discussion is structured according to the areas of reliability and validity, where validity is further divided into the areas of construct, internal and external validity.

2.4.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent a study can be carried out repeatedly while obtaining the same results (Yin 2009, p. 45). The objective is evidently to minimize the occurrence of random errors and biases (Malhotra 2004, p.267). Since this study is of a qualitative nature with focus group findings as the main source of primary data, the reliability might be endangered (Bryman 2006). However, we have pursued to attain the highest possible reliability by combining the findings from the focus groups, expert interviews and the literature review, hence using triangulation.

The majority of the reviewed sources for empirical contributions are articles from highly respected journals which have been cited numerous times, indicating a very high reliability. Besides, a large amount of literary sources has been collected which were reviewed simultaneously to minimize the risks of biases and to give us a general view of the situation.

A template of questions was used during the interviews, indicating that the individual opinions of the experts possess higher reliability compared to if the interviews had been completely open-ended. By interviewing six different industry experts, we have been able to correct for some biased opinions by using the different opinions to form a larger perspective on the subject. At large, the experts showed consensus on most questions, implying a high

reliability of the subject. When conducting interviews in a qualitative study, there is also a risk that the mood of the interviewee might affect the reliability as it influences the way he or she responds to the questions. Therefore, we allowed for the interviewees to comment on the transcripts after the interviews in order to make sure they still could stand for the expressed opinions. The experts were also able to give us insights into the consumers' perspective, where their generalizations about consumer opinions are a way to correct for the smaller sample of consumers participating in the focus groups.

As previously mentioned, focus groups are a possible source of lower reliability since the findings reflects the opinions of a small sample of consumers. With this in mind, we have undertaken several measures to ensure that highest possible reliability has been attained. Firstly, all the focus group sessions were structured in the same way to ensure that the same topics were discussed in all groups. Secondly, we also made sure to ask participants to clarify whenever a statement was vague in order to eliminate misconceptions. Finally, in addition to taking notes, we also recorded the focus groups and discussed them afterwards to assure we had interpreted the outcomes in a similar way.

2.4.2 Validity

Construct validity is related to whether or not the operational measurements used in the study are correct for its purpose (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, p. 589) and if it succeeds at measuring what it is intended to (Bryman & Bell 2007, p. 165). As stated by Yin (2009, p.41), a good way to ensure construct validity is to utilize multiple sources for collecting data, which in this study has been done by reviewing literature, interviewing six industry experts and conducting four focus groups. This way, we have been able to obtain many different opinions, which very often have pointed in the same direction, suggesting a high degree of construct validity.

According to Merriam (1994, p.177), *internal validity* concerns whether the results from the study correspond to reality. For a qualitative study, the level of internal validity refers to whether the respondents express their true opinions and if the researcher is able to interpret them in a proper way (Merriam 1994, p.178). As moderators of the focus groups, we made sure to create a comfortable environment whilst ensuring that all participants were able to speak their thoughts and that they were not impeded from expressing their true opinions.

Regarding the expert interviews, all of the interviewees were very keen to express their opinions and there is little doubt that the opinions actually were their own.

External validity refers to if the results of the study can be generalized to all relevant contexts (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, p. 592). Once again, a qualitative study implies a certain risk of lower external validity compared to quantitative studies due to the smaller samples used (Yin 2009, p.43; Bryman 2006). We have corrected for this by using other sources of primary data, where the experts' insights into the needs and demands of the consumers add breadth to our findings. By taking into account the experts' generalized opinions of consumers, the external validity is enhanced and the conclusions are better equipped to be further applicable on consumers outside of our sample.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As acknowledged in chapter two, our theoretical framework is built upon the marketing communication theories presented by Fill (2009) and Reisch (2006), and is constituted by theories on each of the three components of tools, message design and sender which are presented in this following chapter.

3.1 TOOLS

The element of tools relates to the ways companies' messages are presented to consumers. For example, tools can be advertising, in-store signs or information on websites (Fill 2009). When communicating towards consumers, Best (2009) has emphasized the importance of exposing the message to the target audience. If a very low share of the target audience is exposed to the message, the company will face difficulty in receiving any value from the communication. Hence, it is essential to know where and how the target audience can be reached (Best 2009), and use tools for communication accordingly. With exposure being a basic prerequisite, Best (2009) states that the next step in communication is to make the recipients aware of the communicated message. Although many consumers might be exposed to a message, the communication is likely to fail if the consumers' awareness of it is low.

Tools for communication can be described as being either intervention-based or permission-based (Fill 2009). A company using intervention-based tools for communication seeks the

attention of consumers while having limited knowledge about their interest level in the communicated message (Fill 2009). This is the case of traditional advertising where companies often try to reach a mass-market with generic messages without the consumers' consent. In contrast, permission-based tools are appropriate when communicating towards an audience that has already shown an interest in the matter. Company websites are examples of permission-based tools since consumers will actively search for the information they are interested in (Fill 2009). Some consumers will look for information themselves and hence permission-based tools should be used. Other individuals are less interested and therefore require intervention-based tools of communication in order to be reached with the message (Morsing 2006). According to Fill (2009), a combination of the two mentioned communication strategies is to prefer in order to target all consumers.

When choosing the tools for communication, companies also need to consider what kind of messages a certain tool will be able to support. For example, Fill (2009) and Jobber (2007) suggests that complex messages should utilize sales personnel rather than traditional advertising in order to facilitate the target audience's comprehension of the message and also for consumers to engage in discussions. According to Fill (2009), such interactive two-way communication tools allow for companies to target consumers with more customized messages. Contrary to the use of sales personnel and other interactive tools for communication, other tools such as smaller signs will not serve to communicate complex issues to the same extent (Fill 2009).

Fill (2009) also highlights that the credibility of the message will be affected by the choice of tools used for communication. The author states that for example advertising possesses a lower degree of credibility compared to the aforementioned interactive two-way tools for communication.

3.2 MESSAGE DESIGN

Message design refers to the way companies should design their communicated messages, excluding any decisions related to the actual content of the message. According to Fill (2009), companies' message design must take into consideration the issue at hand, the situation and the previous knowledge of the target audience. Moreover, effective communication is more

likely to prevail when the message is adapted to the receiver and hence decoded correctly (Fill 2009; Best 2009).

Fill (2009) claims that the message needs to be designed in a simplified way whenever the target audience has a limited knowledge about the communicated subject. On the other hand, the author states that the message may be designed in a more detailed and complex way if the target audience possesses much knowledge and interest in the subject. A consumer of the latter type will also demand a lot more information from the company (Fill 2009). No message will be able to suit all consumers without being adjusted to the consumers' individual needs and perceived benefits (Best 2009).

When designing CSR messages targeting consumers, companies may choose between engaging in a one-way or two-way communication (Ballantyne 2004). Messages designed for one-way communication seek to inform and persuade its target audience and are commonly designed to fit the mass market (Ballantyne 2004). The opposite is the case for two-way communication messages, which in addition to informing its target audience also serves to involve them to a larger extent by allowing for companies to listen to the target audience and learn from them by engaging in interchanges (Ballantyne 2004). In the case of interacting with consumers through a two-way communication, companies should strive for designing more customized messages, whereas the message may be designed in a more mainstream way if there is no desire to interact with the target audience (Fill 2009). According to Fill (2009), the development of new digital-based technology and the Internet has facilitated two-way communication between companies and their target audiences, as both customized messages and two-way communication can be easily implemented.

3.3 SENDER

The concept of senders refers to different sources of the communicated messages. According to Fill (2009), a message is perceived differently depending on how legitimate and credible the target audience believes the sender to be. In general, messages about companies' CSR efforts originating from the company itself might be questioned by the consumers and considered to be more or less biased (Morsing 2006, p. 239). Meanwhile, it has been found that consumers will react more favorably to a company's CSR activities when the message is being conveyed by a neutral rather than a corporate source (Yoon et al. 2006). An advantage

of media being the sender of information is the ability to reach a greater target audience (Jobber 2007). Worth noticing is the fact that companies with high perceived credibility and legitimacy are able to communicate their messages more effectively, with the messages being translated correctly by the target audience without any support of other information sources (Fill 2009).

Fill (2009) also notices that individuals from the target audience themselves can take on the role as sender of the message by creating user-generated-content (UGC). The most common form of UGC is blogging and social media, which are both distinguished by the way they allow for individuals to post information about particular subjects of interest. Especially consumers who feel a strong affiliation with the brand will use UGC in order to devote themselves to company-specific discussions (Fill 2009).

When discussing senders of information, it is also crucial to consider the companies' extent of control over the communicated messages. The use of non-corporate sources for communication implies very limited control over what is being communicated towards the target audience. Third-party sources of information such as media therefore entail a certain risk of distorting the information during the process of conveying the message to the target audience (Fill 2009; Jobber 2007).

4. EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This chapter presents the empirical contributions from the literature review and expert interviews. The theoretical framework is applied in order to give structure to this chapter which is presented according to the concepts of tools, message design and sender.

4.1 EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM LITERATURE

4.1.1 Tools

As stated by Borglund (2009), consumers demand a different kind of communication compared to other stakeholders. The author asserts that traditional tools for communicating CSR, such as sustainability reports, will therefore not be sufficient in order for companies to reach consumers with CSR messages. Also Reisch (2006) has concluded that private consumers should never be targeted with companies' CSR reports as they will neither read

nor value it. However, it is acknowledged that reporting, compared to for example advertising, contributes with credibility and is therefore needed to enhance the legitimacy of the communication (Bueble 2008). Dawkins (2005) states that few consumers will actively search for information concerning CSR themselves and implies that communication through companies' websites will only appeal to a small number of consumers.

Regarding in-store communication, Bueble (2008) perceives tags attached to garments to be a good tool for communication but addresses the risk of confusing the consumers with multiple types of tags. Hence, the author emphasizes the advantage of tags originating from well-known and respected non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

4.1.2 Message design
Previous research by Carrigan and Attilla (2001) has served to prove that consumers react differently to companies' CSR communication depending on their previous awareness and involvement in CSR. Additionally, Reisch (2006) suggests that some consumers should be targeted with complex messages while other consumers possess less knowledge about CSR and do not demand the same extensive information. Borglund (2009) rather stresses the need for companies to take into account that consumers in general desire to be targeted with easy and comprehensible CSR communication. Also Pohl and Tolhurst (2010) emphasize the need for messages targeting consumers to be designed in a fairly simple and apprehensive way.

In addition to the simplicity of messages, Borglund (2009) also recognizes the need for disclosure and transparency when communicating the companies' CSR engagement. Hence, companies should be honest about both successes and shortages and at the same time expose the companies' ambitions within CSR in order to achieve a better transparency and credibility of the CSR communication (Borglund 2009). When designing messages about CSR, Morsing and Schultz (2006) mean that companies should pursue to involve consumers in the communication by developing a two-way dialogue. In this way, companies may gain inspiration from the opinions of consumers and thus develop the CSR efforts while enhancing the legitimacy simultaneously. Although this is the ideal, they also notice that very few companies have applied this strategy in reality. By communicating messages covering both one-way and two-way communication, Morsing and Schultz (2006) contend that companies will be able to develop a trustworthy and legitimate CSR communication.

4.1.3 Sender

Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) claim that especially cynical consumers are more likely to respond to messages if they are conveyed by other parties such as media or NGOs rather than the companies themselves. Also Morsing (2006, p. 239) states that companies' own communication about their CSR efforts will in general not gain any trust among stakeholders. In line with this, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) suggest that companies should strive for obtaining positive media attention from an unbiased and independent channel, such as varying forms of editorial coverage in the press. The authors recognize the difficulty of attaining cooperation with media, and rather emphasizes that a company's CSR communication would be enhanced in a favorable way if it was reported about voluntarily by media from a positive aspect.

4.2 EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM EXPERT INTERVIEWS

4.2.1 Tools

All experts agree that clothing companies on the Swedish market currently fail at communicating CSR to their consumers. The communication through company websites is a good start, but only reaches consumers who actively search for CSR information according to Bogle (2011). She further recognizes that it is crucial to reach the consumers who do not actively seek information about CSR since most consumers of the clothing industry fall into this category. Hence, she believes that CSR information needs to become more visible in stores through for example pamphlets and signs. Regarding in-store communication, Rosberg (2011) considers tags attached to garments to be the best tool for reaching a larger amount of consumers with information that serves to make them aware of the consequences of their purchases. Moreover, Lindefors (2011) acknowledges the possibility for companies to link the information on tags to more extensive information on for example websites by stating "...Learn more at our website".

Most experts emphasized the importance of educated staff in stores as a way to improve the CSR communication. They claimed that it is a way to increase awareness of companies' CSR initiatives and that many consumers would appreciate the possibility to ask questions about CSR while being in stores. As Molin (2011) expresses it, consumers have more trust in companies with educated and enlightened staff.

Discussions concerning how to improve the current CSR communication all points in the same direction. Overall, the experts claim that the tools used in the communication must facilitate the consumers' purchase decisions by making the information easily accessible for them. Schollin (2011) further expresses a need for companies to find ways to make CSR mainstream in order to ensure that all types of consumers are reached by the communication, for example through advertising. As a role model for CSR communication, Rosberg (2011) mentions the American company Timberland - a company that has initiated an environmental movement online and engaged in discussions on CSR with the consumers. A majority of their items also bear tags to inform about the production. Further, they use social media as a tool to reach and interact with their consumers, something other companies also should learn from (Rosberg 2011).

4.2.2 Message design

All experts recognize the diversity among consumers regarding their knowledge and interest in CSR but also that the majority of consumers know little about companies' CSR engagement. For the majority then, they suggest that the communicated messages need to be basic and very easy to comprehend. Besides, Rosberg (2011) states that the communication should be designed in a more pedagogic way than is currently being done. Then the message would point at the complexity of CSR in a simplified way. According to Lindefors (2011), the challenge for many companies is to find a way to simplify the information that can be found in sustainability reports, structure it in order to make it interesting, and finally divide the information into different levels of complexity to target different consumers.

Some experts also notice the need for improving CSR communication targeting interested and well-informed consumers. Molin (2011) explains that it has to become easier for these consumers to express their opinions and affect the companies. For them, the optimal communication would be to engage in a dialogue with the companies. Rather, Rosberg (2011) believes that involving consumers in the companies' CSR issues instead of pumping out information is the key to success regarding all consumers, and should not be applied only to those who are genuinely interested in CSR.

Despite the general opinion of American companies being ahead of Swedish companies concerning CSR communication, Molin (2011) claims that the more visionary and conspicuous way of communicating in America is not applicable on the Swedish market since

it would fail to appeal to Swedish consumers. She further concludes that the challenge for Swedish companies is to achieve the perfect balance between showing their CSR engagement while not exaggerating the communication by appearing too boastful. A guideline for companies is to be humble in their communication, to point at concrete examples and to not convey false messages. The companies should also find ways to express the challenges they face concerning CSR, since it is better to expose own weaknesses instead of others addressing them (Molin 2011). In line with this, Schollin (2011) claims that it is important to stay true and honest about CSR instead of painting a romantic picture that consumers will not believe in. There is then a risk of consumers perceiving the CSR communication as for promotional purposes.

4.2.3 Sender

A recurring subject during the interviews was the clothing industry's need for support from third parties in order to improve the current CSR communication. A general opinion is that consumers are more receptive for messages that are communicated by others than the companies themselves since they are perceived to be more reliable. Among the mentioned potential supportive communication channels were NGOs and media. Molin (2011) especially emphasized media's role as a supportive communication channel and also for maintaining a constant debate in society about CSR. Debates on CSR serve to educate consumers about the importance of CSR, which is a crucial condition for companies to communicate CSR at all. Molin (2011) continues by pointing out bloggers as a new phenomenon for communicating CSR, and especially for the clothing industry it could be strategic to reach fashion bloggers. Moreover, Rosberg (2011) was concerned that the many aspects of CSR originating from different sources serves to make consumers confused. Hence, she claims that NGOs should take on the responsibility to implement a standardized certification equal to the certifications used for groceries.

5. FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The findings from the focus group sessions are presented in this chapter according to the structure of the theoretical framework presented in chapter three. Moreover, each component of the theoretical framework is further divided into more specific focus group discussion topics.

The conducted focus groups showed a large disparity among the participants concerning their previous knowledge about CSR. Some participants were well informed and possessed quite extensive knowledge about CSR, while others were less informed and also less interested in CSR. Of all focus group members, a majority considered themselves as uninformed regarding clothing companies' CSR engagement and further believed that it was difficult to find information concerning CSR, even for consumers who are genuinely interested. In general, the respondents showed a great deal of skepticism about clothing companies' CSR engagements and believed that many clothing companies in Sweden are engaged in unethical production to varying degrees and that CSR efforts mainly functions as a risk-minimizing strategy. Interesting to note is that previous knowledge and engagement in CSR was not dependent on age or gender.

5.1 TOOLS

5.1.1 In stores

While being in stores, a majority of the focus group participants stated that time is often a scarcity and that they would not spend time on searching for information about CSR. However, CSR information would be appreciated if they came across it by coincidence. As expressed by one focus group member: "I don't want to search for the information myself, I expect the company to provide me with it".

When discussing companies' current tools for communicating CSR in stores, only a handful of the participants believed that they would spend time reading about CSR in pamphlets. Most respondents argued that pamphlets contained extensive and complicated information which would mainly appeal to the most interested consumers. Something that was perceived more favorably as a means to communicate CSR was visible signs in stores, informing about companies' CSR initiatives. Signs were perceived as easy to discover and in general a great

way to communicate simple messages about CSR. For that reason, the participants agreed that clothing stores should locate visible signs in stores to inform about CSR.

A demonstrated example of tags attached to garments informing about certain aspects of CSR was received well by all participants since they believed it to be an easy way for companies to target consumers. Some of the participants claimed that they would spend time on reading information on the tags while others said that they would probably notice the tags but not necessarily read the information on them. One respondent mentioned that he once bought a pair of jeans but did not discover the tag with CSR information until after the purchase. Even so, he had appreciated the CSR information a lot.

When being approached with the subject of in-store staff as a way to communicate CSR, almost all focus group members expressed a skepticism concerning how well-informed the staff was about CSR issues and claimed that they would never bother asking them about CSR. One participant said: "I don't think they have got a clue, mainly because they don't really care about CSR". Another participant believed that she would be more likely to ask the staff about CSR if they wore t-shirts stating for example "ask me about CSR". All participants agreed that educated staff is important for the companies' CSR efforts to be perceived as sincere and legitimate. A few respondents would like the staff to approach them with CSR information without their consent, while a majority of respondents thought it would be too intruding. Few respondents said that they would never ask the staff for CSR information and believed that only the most interested consumers would bother to do such a thing.

5.1.2 Outside of stores

The focus group participants guessed that sustainability reports could be downloaded from the companies' websites. However, none of the respondents showed any interest in reading them since they were perceived to be too complicated to read. All participants considered sustainability reports to mainly target other stakeholders but believed that genuinely interested consumers might look for CSR information in reports.

Compared to sustainability reports, the participants believed the companies' websites to be better adapted to consumers. However, few of the participants expressed themselves as interested in visiting websites to learn more about CSR because they believed the information to be far too extensive for them, but still imagined that committed consumers would appreciate such tools.

Except for companies' websites, especially many of the younger participants liked the idea of receiving CSR information online. Many discussions lead into social media, for example Facebook and Twitter, as a tool for communication because it was perceived to be an easy and interesting forum. The participants were appealed by the thought of seeing what friends were interested in and also to be able to influence their friends. However, most of the participants clarified that they would not actively search for CSR information, even if it was communicated through social media. As an alternative way of communicating, the participants liked the idea of blogs and said that they could imagine reading about CSR on such forums but no one predicted themselves to actually engage in discussions.

Many of the focus group members had previously encountered advertising about clothing companies' CSR engagements, but could only recall ads about special collections related to CSR such as H&M's Garden Collection[1]. About half of the respondents were aware of the collection but considerably fewer were aware of the CSR association. All participants encouraged advertising as long as it was related to the companies' operations and claimed that advertising serves to prove that ethically produced clothes also can look good. However, they warned that advertising only about companies' CSR engagements could make consumers skeptical about the motives behind the CSR engagement and contribute further to consumers' skepticism about companies engaging in CSR only for promotional purposes.

5.2 MESSAGE DESIGN

5.2.1 Message complexity

Many of the respondents claimed themselves to be confused about the concept of CSR whereas all focus group members perceived CSR to be a complicated subject. A general opinion was that the communicated messages about CSR should be made simple and easy to understand. Especially when being in stores and during a purchase decision process, almost all respondents desired to be targeted with easy, interesting and concise messages.

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1. H&M Garden Collection was launched in March 2010, containing garments only using recycled and ecological materials.

Further discussions revealed that the engaged consumers demanded more extensive and detailed information, but that there was a limit for how complex the messages should be in order to still be appealing. The respondents believed that the same kind of information should be made available for all consumers but be adapted to consumers' varying needs. A suggestion which appeared during one of the focus group sessions was to display for example website links on the tags that are attached to the garments. In that way, the consumers who demand more extensive and detailed information are able to further engage in the companies' CSR issues for example online.

5.2.2 Honesty and disclosure

All focus group participants believed the most important factor in companies' CSR communication to be honesty. Several examples of how companies claim to change the world with their CSR efforts were perceived by the respondents as exaggerating rather than admiring. If communicating such visionary messages, the respondents demanded additional and concrete statements about the CSR efforts that are carried out in reality.

When further discussing the extent of disclosure of companies' CSR efforts, most respondents agreed that companies should communicate their imperfections regarding CSR as long as they also communicate their future ambitions for improvement within the area. However, some pointed at the risk of such disclosures being perceived as excuses and only guarding themselves against future scandals, but most focus group participants wished for the transparency which they believed to indicate that the companies are actually committed and caring.

5.2.3 Degree of involvement

During the discussions, most focus group members claimed to care about companies' CSR engagements, although to varying degrees. The respondents appreciated the thought of companies taking into account the demands and opinions of consumers in order to adapt their behavior accordingly. However, the same respondents frequently stressed that they did not have the time or the interest to deeply engage in CSR issues. Some participants stated that they did not care that much about ethical issues and would therefore probably not try to influence the companies' CSR engagement. Only a few participants wished to engage in discussions with the companies while all focus group members believed that deeply committed consumers would probably seek to actively influence the companies' CSR

engagement. Nevertheless, for most respondents, trying to affect companies' CSR efforts was only considered if it was an easy thing to do.

5.3 SENDER

5.3.1 The company
As stated during all focus group sessions, most respondents perceived the CSR communication originating from the clothing companies themselves as unreliable and questionable. While some participants claimed that all companies' CSR communication lacked credibility, others believed that several clothing companies seemed to be more sincere and genuine in their CSR engagement, indicating that also their communication was perceived as more trustworthy.

Most discussions about companies' CSR communication were concluded with the general opinion that companies should communicate their CSR efforts to a larger extent than what is currently being done. However, very few respondents believed companies' own communication to be enough. No matter how transparent and genuine the companies' communication is, the focus group participants believed that consumers will always demand supplementary sources of information that would serve to strengthen and scrutinize companies' statements regularly.

5.3.2 Media
Further discussions revealed that all focus group participants, with no exceptions, claimed to more likely believe a message communicated by media compared to the companies themselves. As expressed by one respondent: "I will always doubt the companies' own statements. However, media has the responsibility to inspect - companies' only responsibility is to make money".

It was a general belief that media's primary task is to inspect and report from an objective and impartial perspective, and is thus more likely to communicate reliable messages. Here, some participants pointed out that there were different types of media with different levels of credibility, and that scandal-driven media would not enhance the credibility of companies' communicated messages.

5.3.3 NGOs

Overall, the respondents had little insight into the role of NGOs, but guessed that communication about companies' CSR initiatives from such organizations would be perceived to be even more legitimate compared to media and companies themselves. Despite the lack of encounters with CSR communication from NGOs, the discussion continued by discussing their alternative role. As mentioned before, a recurring subject during the focus group sessions was the confusion concerning CSR in general and also regarding the difference between companies' CSR engagements. The respondents believed the confusion to originate from the various certifications that are currently implemented by the companies. The difficulty in understanding the meaning of various certifications made the participants suggest that all companies should pursue implementing standardized certifications which are controlled by an independent organization. They argued that not only would it be easier to understand the degree of companies' CSR engagement, but it would also increase the legitimacy of all CSR communication.

5.4 SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus group sessions has allowed us to obtain an insight into consumers' current attitude towards communication about clothing companies' CSR engagement and also their suggestions for improvements. The discussions revealed that consumers in general have a low awareness and limited understanding regarding companies' CSR efforts and mostly desire simple, comprehensible and honest communication whereas the majority do not care for influencing the companies' CSR engagement. It has been proven that most consumers currently would not actively search for CSR information and thus wish to be provided with information about CSR and preferably while being in stores, for example through tags attached to the garments or visible signs. It was emphasized that the corporate communication about CSR needs support from more legitimate sources such as media and NGOs. Concluding, the focus groups have served to show that all consumers are different regarding their interest and knowledge about CSR, implying that the CSR communication must be adapted to the different needs of the consumers. However, the majority of respondents appeared to care about companies' CSR initiatives but suffered from low awareness.

6. ANALYSIS

The aim of this chapter is to conduct an analysis by applying the theoretical framework on the findings from the literature review, expert interviews as well as the outcomes of the focus groups. The analysis will be structured according to the concepts of tools, message design and sender which are further divided into more specific areas in order to highlight the findings.

6.1 TOOLS

6.1.1 In stores

There is consensus among industry experts and the focus group participants that information targeting the average consumers should be made available in stores as a means to increase their awareness level. In line with Dawkin's (2005) belief that most consumers will not search for CSR information on their own, very few of the participants believed that they would actively look for information before visiting a store. Rather, they expect the company to provide them with it and claimed to appreciate CSR messages as long as they didn't have to look for the information themselves. Hence, communicating CSR in stores seems to be appropriate for the average consumers since the tools used for communication in stores are intervention-based, implying that a large amount of consumers can be exposed to and made aware of companies' CSR efforts without them actively searching for the information. However, communicating CSR in stores will only reach those consumers visiting the store whereas the remaining target consumers will neither be exposed nor made aware of the company's CSR initiatives.

Pamphlets

While most focus group members preferred being targeted with CSR information in stores, few of them perceived pamphlets as a good tool to use when communicating companies' CSR engagement. Reading pamphlets was simply regarded as time-consuming and the content as uninteresting. However, many respondents believed pamphlets to be appreciated by interested consumers since they contain extensive amounts of information. Nonetheless, for the majority of consumers, pamphlets serve as a permission-based tool for communication with no appealing effect, implying that other tools are needed when communicating in stores.

Tags

Most industry experts believed that more companies should attach tags to their garments as a way to communicate their CSR engagement. They argued it to be the best way to reach the average consumer with relevant information. The focus group participants perceived tags to be a simple tool for communication that would facilitate information intake and understanding. The main advantage with tags seems to be the simplicity in both format and the message communicated through it, where the message needs to be easy and concise due to the limited space on tags. Moreover, tags attached to items are difficult to miss and thus serve to create both exposure and awareness. Besides, they bear the advantage of potentially creating exposure and increasing awareness after the purchase as well, since the information on tags does not need to be read in stores. By linking the basic information on tags with for example more detailed information on websites, the company may also stimulate interaction with the consumers and hence satisfy the needs of consumers who wish to involve in a dialogue. It is also a way to make it easier for consumers to find more extensive information regarding CSR after visiting a store.

Signs

The focus group members compared in-store signs with tags attached to clothes, and agreed that signs as a way of communicating CSR possessed many similar advantages to those of tags. According to both respondents and industry experts, signs located visible in stores would serve to enlighten consumers about the companies' CSR efforts while also being hard for consumers to bypass. Visible signs are thus a way to expose and increase consumers' awareness of companies' CSR efforts without associating the information to certain garments. Nonetheless, the information on signs need also to be simple and brief in order to appeal to consumers.

Staff

Educated staff was perceived as a fundamental tool for communication by a majority of the industry experts. Yet a large part of the focus group members expressed mistrust in the capabilities and knowledge of staff in general. It became apparent that some respondents would appreciate more well-educated staff in stores and some further wished for staff to approach them with interesting CSR information. As an intervention-based tool for communication, staff might serve to increase the awareness without the consumers asking for

any information. A different way of using staff as an intervention-based tool is for them to publicly display that they have knowledge about the companies' CSR engagements. By wearing clothes stating: "ask me about CSR", staff would function in the same way as signs and tags by exposing consumers to the CSR initiatives and increase awareness as well. Naturally, some respondents dismissed staff as a tool for communicating CSR and thought that only interested consumers would approach staff in stores to obtain information about CSR; then being a kind of permission-based tool for communication. Independent of the consumers' interest level in CSR, all industry experts recognize the importance of educated staff as a means to build trust and legitimacy in the company. Besides, educated personnel is likely to be the optimal tool for communicating complex and extensive CSR messages in stores but also for engaging consumers who desire to express their opinions or influence the company. Another advantage of educated staff in stores is the possibility to target consumers with customized messages containing only what the specific consumer is interested in.

6.1.2 Outside of stores

As previously stated, very few consumers are motivated to search for CSR information themselves, which indicates that communication through companies' websites and alike will fail at reaching the average consumer. Unlike the intervention-based tools for in-store communication, communication tools used outside of stores are mainly permission-based and rather rely on the consumers to actively search for the information. As noticed during both expert interviews and focus group discussions, many of these tools should be intended to target involved and interested consumers who demand large amounts of information. Not only do many permission-based tools facilitate communicating complex and extensive information, they also allow further interacting and engaging consumers in a dialogue. In comparison with in-store communication, these tools have the potential to reach many more target consumers; not limited to only those visiting the stores.

Company websites

Most of the focus group participants claimed that they would not use the websites as sources for information and hardly spend any time on reading extensive information online. Hence, although company websites have the potential to reach many consumers, they rarely serve to expose them to companies' CSR efforts since few of the consumers would take the time to visit them and read the information made available.

Nonetheless, most focus group members perceive company websites to be a good way for companies to target interested consumers who actively search for information since it is possible to convey extensive and complex information regarding CSR. In these cases, websites could be utilized as a complement to more fundamental in-store communication. However, for most consumers, websites will not serve as the primary tool for communication, indicating that companies need to develop and emphasize other tools for communication in addition to the diligently used company websites.

Sustainability reports

The majority of the focus group participants knew about the existence of sustainability reports whereas very few respondents considered obtaining information about CSR from such reports. They confirmed the belief of literature findings and industry experts that sustainability reports are far too complicated to be targeting consumers. Therefore, this permission-based tool for communication does not appeal to the average consumers and thus fails to create exposure and awareness about companies' CSR efforts.

Nevertheless, there are advantages of the extensive and detailed content in sustainability reports. As expressed by some industry experts, such reports are able to cover everything that could be of interest for a consumer and also serve to enhance the legitimacy of the overall communication.

Social media

According to experts, the main advantage with social media is the ability to interact with consumers. They claim that companies need to improve their current ways of communicating through social media as to better satisfy some consumers' need for interaction. Mainly younger focus group participants liked the use of social media as a tool for CSR communication, for example Facebook and Twitter, because of its engaging and interest-arousing effect. The findings indicate that individuals who normally would not consider engaging in CSR issues would potentially do it through social media. The positive aspect that was highlighted was the ability to influence and be influenced by friends, and thus be exposed to and made aware of companies' CSR initiatives through them. As a permission-based tool, social media thus has the potential to reach a lot of consumers in a medium where they are very active. Still, a majority did not believe that they would actively search for CSR information even if it was communicated through social media. Rather, they would appreciate

information about CSR if they came across it, for example through recommendations from friends, which would make social media an intervention-based tool. Consequently, a prerequisite for social media to reach consumers is for some individuals to engage in CSR issues on for example Facebook and thus expose their friends to the communicated messages.

Advertising

Advertising as an intervention-based tool for communication bears the advantage of being able to reach large amounts of consumers and thus increase their awareness about companies' CSR efforts. However, many sources (see for example Fill 2009) have emphasized the risks associated with companies communicating through advertisements since the CSR engagements might appear to be less sincere. While this skepticism was voiced during the focus groups, the general perception was that advertisements about CSR in combination with clothing campaigns are considered to be more sincere and less doubtful compared to advertisements solely about the companies' CSR engagement.

In addition to addressing the legitimacy risks related to advertising, industry experts believe that it has the ability to transform CSR from being a complex and dull subject into something more mainstream and interesting with the potential to target the average consumer. This was agreed upon by all respondents who believed that advertisements communicating CSR engagement in combination with clothes serves to prove that ethically produced clothes does not necessary equal boring and bland garments.

6.2 MESSAGE DESIGN

6.2.1 Message complexity

During the process of collecting empirical data, it became obvious that all consumers are different regarding their attitudes towards CSR and CSR communication. In order for the communication to be effective, the experts therefore believe that companies must adapt the complexity of the messages to the targeted consumers. Here, it was proposed that companies should proceed from the content in the sustainability reports and divide it into different levels of complexity in order to satisfy the needs of the diverse consumers.

The focus group sessions revealed that most consumers have a low awareness of companies' CSR efforts, a fact that was supported by many industry experts. According to Fill (2009),

consumers with limited previous knowledge need to be targeted with simple and comprehensible messages. Although the majority of the respondents considered themselves to have a limited interest and knowledge about CSR, some individuals were distinguished as more involved and concerned about clothing companies' CSR efforts. For these consumers, Fill (2009) argues that the messages may be designed with a higher level of complexity. However, findings from literature and focus groups reveal that also complex messages should be consumer-oriented in order to be appealing.

6.2.2 Honesty and disclosure

Although companies need to adjust the complexity level when designing messages targeting different consumers, a basic prerequisite for all communication about companies' CSR initiatives is for it to be honest. Regarding the area of CSR, industry experts point out that honesty concerns not exaggerating CSR initiatives and not communicating things that are not being fulfilled by the company. The importance of honesty and disclosure is crucial for CSR communication due to the prevailing legitimacy issues.

The experts view CSR as a subject of continuous improvement instead of something with a definite goal. Similarly, most respondents wished for the companies to communicate CSR regardless of how far they have come in the process. Nonetheless, other respondents pointed at the risk of such disclosures being perceived as nothing but excuses and prevarications. They therefore argued that when doing so, it is important to tell about the companies' ambitions and concrete suggestions for improvement. However, when compared to some visionary messages with claims about changing the world, all focus group participants expressed a desire for humble messages with large extents of disclosure also covering the challenges faced by companies in their CSR activities.

6.2.3 Degree of involvement

Proceeding from the basic prerequisite of honest communication with high levels of disclosure, messages should be designed differently with respect to the consumers' willingness to involve in a dialogue with the companies. During the focus group sessions, this resulted in a rather dichotomous discussion, with some expressing the wish to respond to messages that tries to stimulate involvement whereas a majority dismissed the idea completely. When targeting the latter type of consumers, companies should focus on a one-way communication which serves to inform consumers about their CSR efforts. Meanwhile,

consumers who are genuinely interested in CSR often also wish to involve in a dialogue with the companies and should thus be targeted with messages that stimulates a two-way communication. More considerations need to be taken into account when designing messages pursuing a two-way communication since these messages should be more customized, compared to the informing one-way communication messages which can be designed to fit the mass markets.

Morsing (2006) claims that all companies should strive to target consumers with a two-way communication, arguing that an involving two-way communication is essential for companies to gain inspiration and evolve consumers in their CSR engagements. However, the focus group findings reveal that the majority of consumers are currently not even aware about certain companies' CSR initiatives, making it highly unlikely for them to engage in a dialogue with companies. This implies that companies should focus on creating awareness through one-way communication and only try to engage genuinely interested and knowledgeable consumers through two-way communication messages.

6.3 SENDER

6.3.1 Company

In line with theory, the focus group findings unveils a certain suspicion towards companies as the source of CSR information, generally due to a belief that many companies engage in CSR mainly for promotional objectives. In order for the communicated message to be decoded properly, it is proposed by Fill (2009) that the sender should have a high degree of credibility or else the communicated message will not be interpreted in the intended way. Nevertheless, it is also proven that companies with high perceived levels of credibility and legitimacy are able to communicate more effectively.

Companies communicating CSR also have a higher degree of control over the communication and do not face the risk of the message being distorted by a third party. The respondents clarified that they believe that all companies need to communicate independent of the companies' legitimacy, but also wished for the communication to be more genuine and honest regarding their CSR engagement. Hence, companies should bear in mind that the corporate communication must become more sincere and transparent, while also recognizing the credibility issues of communicating CSR themselves. Therefore they should also

acknowledge the potential benefits of other senders communicating about their CSR efforts.

6.3.2 Media

As predicted by industry experts, all focus group members considered media to be a necessary sender of CSR information with the purpose of strengthening the corporate information with impartial and unbiased information. Theory has addressed the higher credibility of all non-corporate sources, but especially media is recognized by experts as a good sender because of its ability to reach a lot of consumers. Media thus has the potential to reach consumers who have limited previous knowledge about CSR, by altering the communication to fit a mass market. In line with the aforementioned credibility issue of corporate communication, media will be especially effective sender of communication for cynical consumers and mistrusted companies. Meanwhile, companies possess less control over media as a sender of information and are faced with the risk of consumers being reached with distorted information. Besides, there is a prevailing legitimacy issue among media as well, where the respondents advised companies to only rely on legitimate media. Despite the disadvantages of media, literature findings encourage companies to endeavor positive media attention since it is a good way to reach large audiences with credible messages.

6.3.3 NGOs

In comparison with media, NGOs as senders also imply less control for companies whereas the focus group participants perceived NGOs to be more credible and professional than most media channels. Although the literature findings and experts recognized the importance of NGOs as a sender, the respondents expressed that consumers are generally not as familiar with NGOs as compared to media and rather believed that they could do more good by taking on the responsibility of auditing and also implementing an independent certification system which would eliminate the current confusion about each companies' own type of certification. This was also elaborated on by experts, who referred to the grocery industry with its standardized labeling system across Sweden as a good example.

6.3.4 Other senders

As depicted in the theories and voiced by experts, companies may gain much positive attention if consumers where to communicate about companies' CSR efforts through for example blogs and social media. This kind of user generated content is most often the product

of very dedicated and interested consumers. While none of the respondents claimed that they were to devote themselves to it, many expressed that they had come across similar messages several times and appreciated it. However, a company will never be able to prevent the consumers from sharing negative opinions and the user generated content thus bear the main disadvantage of low levels of control over the communicated message.

7. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This concluding chapter serves to present the main results of our thesis by answering our research questions and providing managerial implications. We also discuss our findings in a larger perspective and finalize by addressing limitations of our study and provide suggestions for further research.

7.1 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to contribute to the improvement of the communication targeting consumers about clothing companies' CSR efforts. We proceeded from an observed communication gap, where companies' current communication did not generate any value for the companies or their consumers. The research questions, as stated in chapter one, will be answered below.

7.1.1 How can companies improve their CSR communication targeting consumers?
In stores, clothing companies should exploit intervention-based tools such as visible signs and tags attached to the garments to a larger extent than today, since it serves to expose consumers to the CSR communication and also to increase the awareness of companies' CSR initiatives. The advantages of such tools are the formats' simplicity which allows for easy and concise messages that appeal to the consumers. The communicated messages should always be honest and transparent. In-store staff should be utilized to communicate more extensive and complex information and thus satisfy the consumers' additional needs for information. Also, companies should pursue to link the simple messages in stores to more extensive sources of information in order to facilitate for consumers to find more information if they are interested. Outside of stores, companies should utilize websites and sustainability reports to communicate more extensive information, which should serve to disclose the companies'

CSR engagement in a more consumer-oriented way than today. However, since few consumers will actively look for information about CSR, such tools will foremost serve to target engaged consumers. Instead, advertising should be used to target consumers through an intervention-based way outside of stores in order to reach more target consumers than only those visiting the stores. The advertisements should not be focusing solely on the CSR engagement but rather in combination with clothing campaigns in order to avoid legitimacy issues. Communication outside of the stores has larger potential for two-way communication, where social media should be used to target younger consumers who enjoy the easy and fun way of engaging and obtaining information.

7.1.2 How can different senders potentially improve the communication about companies' CSR efforts?

Companies that consumers perceive as legitimate are better able to communicate CSR without the additional support from other senders. However, for most companies, media could potentially improve the communication by reaching a larger target audience with less biased messages. Nevertheless, it bears the disadvantage of the company having less control over the communicated message. NGOs are also able to enhance the communication despite its smaller reach among consumers. Besides, NGOs could serve to implement standardized certifications for all clothing companies in order to reduce the confusion among consumers and facilitate comparing companies' CSR efforts. With the emergence of social media and blogs, consumers themselves can also strengthen the corporate communication as they have the possibilities to express individual opinions. As long as companies' CSR engagements are the subject of positive attention among media, NGOs and consumers, the corporate communication will be strengthened and CSR will be made more available and consumer-friendly.

7.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In line with previous research, this study has served to prove the existence of consumers with varying needs regarding CSR communication. Consequently, we want to emphasize that no communication will be suitable for all consumers, implying that companies need to implement different tools communicating messages with varying complexity in order to reach and appeal to all target consumers. The present communication through mainly websites and

sustainability reports fails at reaching consumers because the majority does not actively search for CSR information. Hence, companies need to improve the communication in stores which will provide the consumers with information without them asking for it. Better in-store communication will serve to expose consumers to the CSR communication and also increase their awareness level regarding companies' CSR efforts. Tools such as signs and tags attached to garments are especially useful for this purpose because they allow for easy and concise communication that appeal to the average consumers. To facilitate for consumers to learn more, the basic information on signs and tags can be linked to other sources, such as company websites, that can provide more extensive information. The major drawback of in-store communication is that it only serves to reach the target consumers visiting the stores. Hence, we suggest that companies should use advertising outside of stores to increase the awareness of a larger group of target consumers.

Although the communication through websites and sustainability reports currently fail to reach the consumers, the tools are important since they enhance the legitimacy of the overall communication and also are useful for communicating extensive information. However, since not even interested respondents believed themselves to currently search for information through these tools, we propose that companies should pursue to make them more consumer-oriented in order to appeal to consumers. We mean that extensive information does not need to be too complicated, which seems to be the main reason why interested consumers currently are deterred from actively searching for information through these tools.

Moreover, both literature findings and experts clearly emphasize the importance of involving consumers in a two-way communication as to learn from their opinions and enhance the legitimacy. While we do not doubt the usefulness of two-way communication, our focus group findings show that they would only consider doing it if companies were to make it really easy and accessible to involve in discussions. For companies wishing to involve their consumers in CSR issues, we want to stress the advantages of social media and educated staff in stores being easy and accessible ways for consumers to engage.

Although companies need to increase their communication, they still have to handle the prevailing legitimacy risk associated with communicating CSR themselves. The basic prerequisite of honesty and disclosure in all communication will eventually imply higher perceived legitimacy for the whole company and its own communication. Nevertheless,

assuming that companies' CSR engagements are genuine, more communication will also imply a larger possibility of gaining positive attention from media, NGOs and consumers, which will serve to strengthen the corporate communication and help companies to become more legitimate regarding CSR and thus eliminate their current reluctance towards communicating.

7.3 DISCUSSION

Along with the increasing popularity of CSR among both corporate managements and stakeholders, taking on societal responsibility seems no longer to be a great source for companies' competitive advantage. Today, almost all clothing companies are engaged in CSR to varying extents but fail at telling the consumers about it. The confusion and low awareness among our focus group participants points at a potentially much larger problem than the one facing the clothing industry.

Rather, for all industries with a currently limited communication about CSR initiatives, the communicated messages do not reach the majority of their consumers, who presently suffer from a low awareness about companies' CSR engagements. It seems like companies do not perceive communicating with these consumers as an evident thing to do, probably due to a belief that most consumers are not interested. Nevertheless, it has been proven that CSR enhances consumers' positive company attitude and our focus group findings show that consumers appreciate communication about CSR. Thus, companies need to understand that consumers do not always need to be loud and demanding in order to be interested.

The companies who are first to comprehend this gap in communication between them and their consumers can expect to capture much value. Communicating the company's CSR engagement towards all target consumers will not only enhance consumers' perceived company value, but also imply a potential first-mover-advantage. By being first, companies can take the lead instead of being a follower in the development towards CSR regaining its role as a competitive advantage instead of being a mere risk-minimizing strategy. Hence, an improved communication towards all consumers will generate value for both companies and consumers, where consumers will be better equipped to make conscious purchase decisions whereas the companies are able to reap the benefits of their CSR efforts.

Still, there is the aforementioned legitimacy risk of companies communicating CSR themselves. The potential value from communicating CSR therefore assumes that companies are genuine in their CSR engagement, where anything else will damage the legitimacy seriously when being revealed. By engaging in CSR sincerely and honestly, all companies will eventually be able to communicate their own CSR efforts in a legitimate way. Nonetheless, the companies need support to get there, where other senders of information need to strengthen companies' communication in order to enhance the legitimacy. Companies, media, NGOs and the consumers thus have a shared responsibility to drive the development of CSR communication and in that way create a better and more sustainable society of tomorrow.

7.4 LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Due to the limitations of a bachelor thesis, naturally some questions worth considering have been left out. Following is a discussion about the limitations of this study and how our thesis can contribute to further research.

The consumer-oriented qualitative approach of this study was motivated by the need to gain insights into a relatively unexplored research area from the consumers' perspective. Although the use of focus groups implies a very limited sample, we have tried to correct for this by using many expert interviews and literary sources as complements. Our qualitative findings can serve as a foundation for a quantitative study to further investigate whether the findings are applicable on a larger sample as well. A quantitative approach is also appropriate if the objective is to segment the consumers with respect to their knowledge and attitudes towards CSR, which can be of large interest for companies trying to reach specific target consumers. Similarly, case studies on specific companies can also be carried through with the purpose of exploring improvements for specific clothing companies.

Although our theoretical framework serves to answer our research questions, it consists of three wide aspects of communication which we did not explore as much as could have been done in a more extensive study. Therefore, in order to obtain a larger insight into the research area, we believe that further research should investigate for example how messages should be designed to affect consumers' purchase decisions and also how companies can attain good stakeholder relations in order to influence other senders' communication about companies'

CSR efforts. We also propose an investigation on how the communication differs with respect to the different aspects of CSR as defined by Carroll (1991) in the introduction.

At last, we have focused on the demands of the consumers and suggested improvements without taking into account the feasibility of companies' implementation. Rather, our thesis serves as the foundation for further research on all issues regarding the implementation process. Especially the major finding that a standardized certification system monitored by NGOs should be implemented to facilitate clothing companies' CSR communication is a highly interesting subject for further research. Likewise, aspects of communication such as the level of intensity, the actual contents of the communicated messages and also the issue of formulating specific CSR communication strategies should be investigated to help companies employ our findings in reality.

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Appendix – Interview Questions

1. How are clothing companies currently communicating their CSR engagement towards consumers?

   - What different messages about companies' CSR engagement are being communicated today?

   - What channels and sources do companies use to communicate CSR today?

   - What are the objectives of companies' current CSR communication?

2. What challenges are faced by companies in the process of improving their CSR communication?

3. Do you believe that companies' own CSR communication can have negative/harmful effects?

4. How can companies improve their CSR communication within the following areas:

   - Tools

   - Message design

   - Sender

5. If you'd picture the ideal CSR communication – what does it look like?

6. How do you believe the future CSR communication will look like?