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MASTER'S THESIS
**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN COMMUNICATING
SUSTAINABILITY**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B – Business to Business

CaS – Communication about sustainability

CoS – Communication of sustainability

CfS – Communication for sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Businesses used to believe that natural resources would exist forever and that the only thing they should be concerned about was profit. However, more than 20 years ago, the interrelation and interconnection of the social, environmental and economic aspects of the system have been analysed and emphasised in a report entitled “Our Common Future” published by United Nations (Sanyé-Mengual, Secchi, Corrado, Beylot & Sala, 2019; Katrandjiev, 2016; WCED, 1987). From that moment on, *sustainability* becomes more and more present in all spheres of our lives. The distinct set of concepts behind sustainability refers to “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

Growing concerns about emerging water and air pollution, deforestation, loss of species and poor wellbeing have prompted society to consider sustainable development (Ottman, 2011). Furthermore, stakeholders have been pressuring companies to re-examine and revise their practices, including marketing (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong, 2005). The previous literature that examines sustainability in marketing propose various definitions and theories. Some of the argued terms include environmental marketing (Coddington, 1993), ecological marketing (Fisk, 1974; Henion & Kinneer, 1976), green marketing (Ottman, 1992; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Vaitone & Skackauskiene, 2019) and sustainable marketing (Fuller, 1999; Peattie, 2001; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Lunde, 2018). Some researchers consider them being synonyms (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017), while others explore the assumption of the evolution of sustainable marketing (Katrandjiev, 2016; Murphy, 2005). This paper analyses the evolvement and definition of sustainable marketing as well as the related understandings and perceptions of marketing specialists of Slovenian companies that are recognised as sustainable.

Furthermore, recent decades have seen a dramatic acceleration of pace in developing and adopting new technologies. This rapid technological change affects the economy, society and culture. It has also changed the way people and organisations communicate (Bennet & Iyengar, 2008). Likewise, 4.62 billion people or 58.4% of the world population, have been using social media in 2021 (Kemp, 2022), which led social technologies to become the most adopted communication channel globally. By that, social media sites, including Facebook and Instagram, have earned a private space in the peoples’ life, affecting, thus, their values and norms and consequently the manner of networking, conversation, purchasing, relationships with companies (Bakardjieva, 2009; Evans & McKee, 2010; Calcagni, 2019; Simeone & Scarpato, 2021). We would even go so far to say that social media provided great power to the public, who can create UGC and affect other peoples’ attitudes and actions as well as organisations’ reputations. Considering these aspects, one may say that the time when companies’ success was measured only by the numbers from

the balance sheet is behind us. Communicating sustainability through social media is an opportunity but also a necessity for businesses of today.

This study aims to contribute to the literature concerning the utilisation of social media for communicating sustainability by answering the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is the sustainable marketing concept defined/seen/perceived among marketing practitioners in the Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable?
- RQ2: What are the experiences and perceptions related to the role of social media for communicating sustainability among marketing practitioners in the Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable?
- RQ3: How do Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable use social media for communicating sustainability?
 - Describe how sustainability is communicated over social media
 - Describe and compare use Facebook and Instagram for communicating sustainability

With the purpose to address the issue adequately, we have decided to narrow down the scope of the research to the two most important social networking sites in Slovenia: Facebook and Instagram. Thereby, by understanding the concept of sustainable marketing and its development from the 1960s to today, we explore the role of social media. With the focus on Slovenian companies that are recognised as sustainable, we conduct in-depth interviews with their employees in the marketing sector to analyse perceptions, expectations and understating of marketing specialists concerning the communication of sustainability through the two social networking sites. Going one step further, we perform conceptual content analysis and examine how these companies perform such activities in practice (how often they communicate sustainability, which sustainability topic they communicate, which content formats they use, etc.). Lastly, the thesis includes the interpretation of the research results and discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of improving sustainability communication effectiveness over social media.

1 SUSTAINABILITY

1.1 Concept of Sustainability

To comprehend the rise of the sustainability concept, we must first travel back to the issues that caused the need to transform the previous way of thinking and acting. The matter is rooted in the 18th century, the period of the First Industrial Revolution when mass production technologies and a division of labour were introduced. Agriculture took the back seat to industry and many people left their lands and villages for work in industrial plants and life in the surrounding areas. That was marked as the period of industrialization, urbanization, and occupational shifts. As Yuval Noah Harari (2011)

reiterated, that was the time when people changed their attitudes towards nature. By learning to convert energy and set assembly-line production, they had started feeling less dependent on and vulnerable to the volatile and uncertain nature. It, therefore, became easier to notice the pluses of economic development than the minuses of excessive extraction and exploitation of natural resources. Some other hallmarks of industrialization include too long working hours, low pay, gender pay gap, child labour, harsh and dangerous working conditions (Fitzgerald, 2020; Sherry, n.d.). In terms of positives, in the 20th century, world gross domestic product per capita quintupled (Montanari, 2019). Acceleration of economic development increased the choice and brought prosperity across the world. Both middle and working-class have started experiencing higher living standards as numerous products and services, better healthcare and education have become available to a larger number of people (Fitzgerald, 2020; Sherry, n.d.). Yet is not clear whether the benefits of industrialization outweigh all the issues it caused to the community and ecosystem. The difficulty of weighing up pros and cons is induced by the strong interlinkage between the economy, politics, environment, and society (SOER, 2020). Historically, green gas house emissions have been coupled with economic growth. In simple words, the richer the country has been, the more emissions have been emitted. However, most countries, including Slovenia, managed to decouple that relationship (Ritchie, 2021). The innovative technology and processes enable generating income with few sources. Anyway, the remaining challenge is to keep consumption volume at the level where it won't overshadow the progress in energy and resource efficiency (IISD, n.d.).

When the collective concerns related to the worsening social and environmental conditions caused by fast economic development have started appearing, the story on sustainability began to unfold. In the 1960s and 1970s, people and organisations had started recognising the problem and urgent need for solutions that would ensure economic growth without jeopardising social and environmental progress (Peattie, 2001; Fleming & Knorr, 2006; Montanari, 2019). In 1972, the term *sustainable* appeared in a report “The Limits to Growth”, referring to a “state of global equilibrium that enables satisfying the basic material needs of each person on the planet and providing each person with the equal opportunity to realize his individual human potential” (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, 1972, p.24). The report was of vast importance for society as it raised awareness about the aforementioned issues warning that economic growth on the planet has limits and that sustainable development is indispensable for enabling all people to develop and improve their abilities and skills. Produced by an international team of 17 researchers, called Club of Rome, the report offered a new insight into the entanglement of economic, political, natural, and social components in the global system and proposed that without taking action to optimize the use of resources and environmental degradation, civilization would collapse before 2070. As such, it succeeded in considerably stimulating public attention over a larger number of counters around the world. A few years later, the “Our Common Future” report (1987), also known as Brundtland Report, suggested the most quoted definition of the sustainability concept we understand today (Asheim, 1994;

Dao, Langella & Carbo, 2011). Defining *sustainable development*, a set of processes and pathways to achieve sustainability (UNESCO, n.d.), it is stated that “sustainable development is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The document was also a joint work of several nations united under the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The initiative was attributed to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and was of enormous importance bringing environmental concerns on the political agenda and emphasising the urgency for sustainable economic growth. Another widely accepted definition of sustainability was the one provided by World Bank Policy Research Department in 1994. The department analysed environmental problems from a welfare economic perspective, referring that referring that “sustainability is a requirement of our generation to manage the resource base such that the average quality of life that we ensure ourselves can potentially be shared by all future generations” (Asheim, 1994, p.4). In that context, the term *quality of life* alluded to everything that affects people’s lives, including material consumption, nature, culture, justice, and health.

To summarise, humankind is a part of nature and cannot function in isolation. Likewise, when people turn their power against other elements in the natural system, they experience tragic consequences as they are a part of the system themselves. On the contrary, the idea of sustainability is to stop the destructive pattern and develop a symbiotic relationship among all the elements in the system. Such structure should retain in the short and long term, satisfying the needs of the people, animals and plants. That is not a modest goal but a challenging battle everyone must go in. This includes people and organisations changing their attitudes and behaviour and that topic will be tackled in the following chapters.

1.2 Youth and Sustainable Behaviour

In the previous subchapter, we went back to the last century and tackled the roots and evolution of the sustainability concept. We could note that the role of the individuals, i.e., consumers, in the transition to a sustainable system is inevitable. To that end, in this subchapter, we focus on today's young people, which are tomorrow's adults and market rulers, their behaviour and, in particular, their attitudes and behaviours related to sustainability.

When examining people and their behaviour, it is common to categorize them by age and life cycle in chords. To that end, generations such as Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z were defined and widely accepted. Each cohort was born in a different time coming through different economic, technological, and social experiences. Generation Y or Millennials, for instance, are born in the period from 1981 to 1996 and they remember the September 11 attacks. They entered the work market during the recession and adopted social media in their early teenage years. Those who come after them, Generation Z, were

born 1997 to 2012 in a digital and globalized world that involves constant internet connection, social media discussions and climate crises as a daily topic (Dimock, 2019). A common for this two-generation is that both consist of currently young people who have been taking over the economy (Hoffower, 2020) with the burden of an unsustainable world system inherited from their ancestors (Ojala & Lakew, 2017). Therefore, their motives, rights and actions on climate issues have been expected and evident for some time.

Figure 1: Young people demand action on climate change



Source: Unsplash (n.d.).

According to the Pan-European Survey performed on 15 to 35 years old individuals in 23 European countries, including Slovenia, almost half (46%) of the youth consider climate being the most serious problem in the world, 44% believes it is environmental preservation, while 30% is the most concerned about the economic situation and unemployment. Besides, more than half (52%) of these young people in Europe believe that the main responsibility for climate change is on business and industry. Interestingly, when asked about their actions and plans regarding the climate change issue, the most commonplace answers included signing a petition (79%), voting for the politicians that address those issues (75%), encouraging others to act (75%) and post or share these issues online (64%) (Dunne & Bijwaard, 2021). As evidence, it has become almost impossible not to notice school and university students worldwide taking a stand for climate by protesting offline and online. Thus, a global climate strike of young people, also called Friday for Future, was scheduled at around 3500 locations around the world in September 2020. As COVID-19 related measures hindered some of the gatherings, thousands of activists raised their voices over social media demanding from politicians to conduct a

concrete action on climate change and from fossil fuels companies to shift toward renewable energy sources (Harvey, 2020). At the forefront of this kind of activity for many years has been Greta Thunberg, a 19-year-old climate activist from Sweden who launch a strike for climate change issues in front of a Swedish parliament in 2018 (Warren, 2019). Her initiative faced tremendous support from the public and media and she has carried on with her movement building her own community.

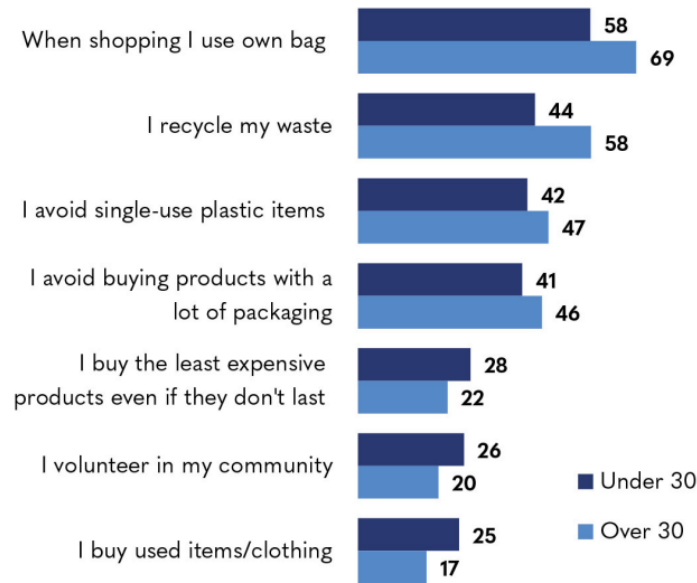
Actions that most of the people associated with sustainable behaviour are buying from responsible brands, seeking information, helping others, avoiding non-environmentally friendly products, buying natural products, eating locally produced and organic products, environmentally conscious travel (GlobeScan, 2021). Almost all of them refer to sustainable consumption. Shift to sustainable consumption has been recognised as one of the requirements for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and coping with climate change already in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (Cohen, 2020). Widely accepted definition for sustainable consumption defines it as “The use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations.” (IISD, n.d.). To put it more simply, sustainable consumption involves improving resource efficiency and product lifetime, satisfying customer needs, avoiding environmental degradation by waste reduction, and improving people’s quality of life. It is eminent that sustainable consumption is gaining momentum in the last year and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated it. The pandemic locked people at homes, interrupted the supply chains, postponed sports events, exhibitions, music festivals, cancelled flights and hotel bookings and consequently reduced consumption drastically (Cohen, 2020). This was a period of social awakening when people felt more affected by climate change than ever before (GlobeScan, 2021). Thus, the quality of the product and price has taken the back seat to brand actions such as *supporting people during COVID* and *being eco-friendly* (GlobalWebIndex, 2020). In comparison to discounts, corporate social responsibility became more important for young customers. Moreover, the recent research reports the increase of young consumers in Europe and North America that want brands to support local suppliers from 31% in the first quarter of 2020 to 37% in the second quarter (GlobalWebIndex, 2020). The young customers require to know how the product is created, how it is being transported, how can it be repaired and disposed of. In regard to communication with the brands, young people want to be treated with respect. They are interested in open dialogue and transparency, so a company that fails in interactive communication with a customer tend to lose market competitiveness. They want companies to commit to environmental protection and care about employees, customers, the public, and the overall economic well-being (McKinsey, 2020). Millennials and Generation Z are bringing and demanding changes in the labour market. Very well famous is the case of 35 years old Hamish Reid, who left a well-paid job in the oil industry and got employed as a consultant for net-zero solutions in Boston Consulting

Group (Kantor, 2019). Cases of young people breaking off their financial comfort and long-term employment contract due to the desire to dedicate their career to jobs and companies which brings benefits to the environment and society are increasingly encountering. The survey results reveal that Millennials and Gen Z prefer employers who make them feel valued, provide diversity at the workplace and engage in sustainability and charitable initiatives (GlobalWebIndex, 2020).

Another significant aspect we should address in terms of sustainable customer behaviour is an aspiration-action gap that persists over the year. Namely, customers are more likely to say they have a desire to change than to make the change. This is especially the case with Generation Z and Millennials, who are also the most critical to themselves in terms of believing they can do more for sustainability (GlobeScan, 2021). Some studies suggest that such a gap is difficult to solve due to the numerous unknown variables in terms of value exchange between humans and the environment. Being said more simply, it is difficult to evaluate or predict the exact need of the future generation of specific resources, the types of resources they will need as well as their need in general (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2020; Lunde, 2018). However, the change of behaviour toward more sustainable is the most likely to occur when people go through a significant life event such as the birth of a child, graduation or getting married (GlobeScan, 2021). Therefore, brands should know their customers and focus on those life-changing moments in order to encourage customers to make the change and start living more sustainably.

Also, it is of crucial importance to understand how and why generations differ regarding their attitudes and behaviour towards sustainability. That can support brands in defining their strategy and conducting their actions to connect with the different customers and gain their attention and support for creating a more sustainable future. The GlobeScan 2021 survey reveals that in comparison the Gen Z and Millennials, older generations are more silent about global challenges. However, people over 30 are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviour daily. Young people are, in contrast, more interested in volunteering and buying second-hand products (Figure 2).

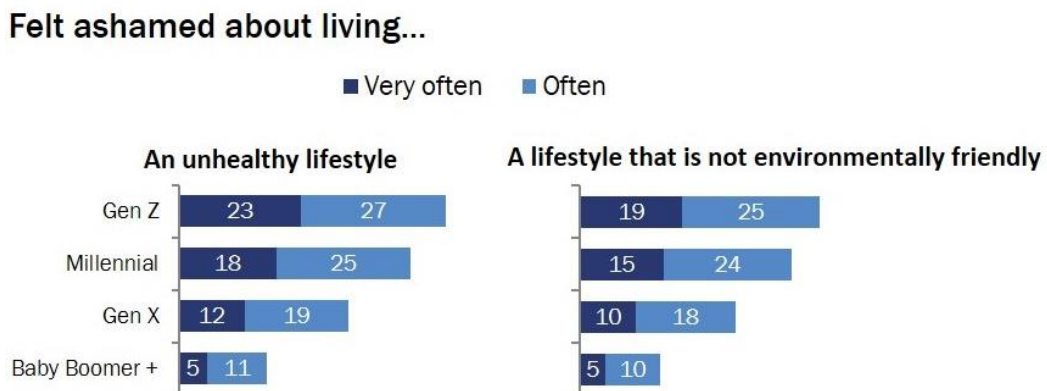
Figure 2: Frequency of sustainable actions by people over 30 and people under 30: 2021 (average of 31 markets)



Source: GlobeScan (2021).

It is argued that the motives for people under 30 to talk and act on climate change lies in their concern for their future. That is expected as they will probably live with the consequences of climate change their whole life (McKinsey, 2020). Besides, their aspiration for change of the behaviour as well as the aspiration-action gap may relate to the social pressure they expertise. As depicted in Figure 3, the 2020 study results show that Gen Z and Millennials felt ashamed by not living a healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyle more often than the older generation.

Figure 3: Social pressures to be healthier and more environmentally friendly by generation: 2020 (average of 27 countries)



Source: GlobeScan (2020).

In view of these facts, it is pretty likely that the young generation is the critical customer, employee and employer of today and tomorrow. Aware of the need for their urgent individual action on climate crises, they expect companies to take their own responsibility and engage on the global issue. It can be considered that to be effective the support from brands must come at the right moment and be honest and transparent. This requires knowing the customers well and connecting with them on the topics and events that matter to them. Such collaboration of customers and brands may reduce the aspiration-action gap and enable the transition to sustainable living.

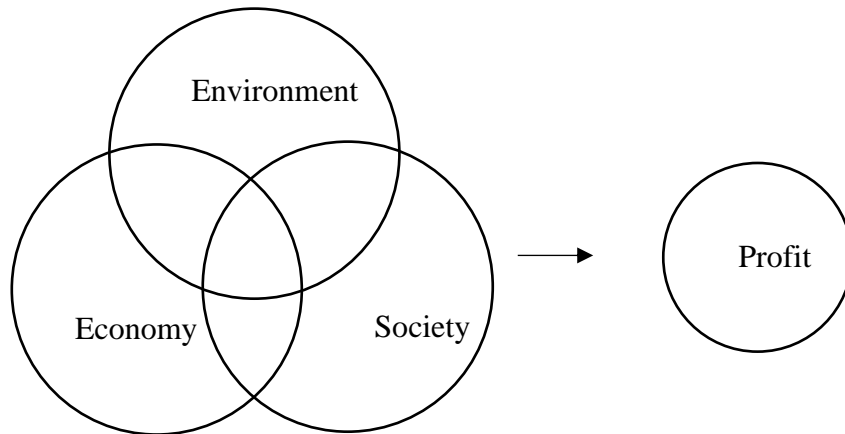
1.3 Corporate Sustainability

In the previous subchapter, it was suggested that businesses are more often assumed responsibility for the global social and environmental issues. One may ask why this is so. The answer lies in the fact that industry emits 21% of global GHG emissions, strongly contributing to climate change (IPCC, 2014). Also, in 2016, 73 million children in the world were employed in work conditions that put in danger their health, safety, and moral development (International Labour Organization, 2017). Another important fact to remember is that chemicals from some of the products we use, stockpile toxins in our organism. The overconsumption, which is closely connected with the waste issues, is fed by an approximately half-trillion-euro yearly advertising budget (Lenox & Chatterji, 2018). Based on all of this, it could be considered that integrating sustainability into the core of the industry and business is inevitable for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Corporate sustainability is based on the sustainable development model, and it refers to companies taking responsibility for all costs related to operating businesses (Lenox & Chatterji, 2018). Considering the practice of companies delivering the products and services to the customers and in return getting the income which they use for creating new products and services, we can derive the argument that companies can have a great impact on all stakeholders, including consumers, governments, other organisations but they also greatly impact the companies. Therefore, businesses must act responsibly and protect the interests of all their stakeholders, including the public, shareholders, employees, other organisations, governments. Corporate sustainability includes companies' contribution to societal progress, environmental protection, and economic growth and this threesome refer to sustainability performance (Figure 4). In social terms, sustainable businesses must care for employees, local communities and has a responsible attitude towards customers. The environmental aspect refers to the careful use of natural resources and habitat conservation. Finally, economic sustainability is about companies' contribution to the development of the economy. Often mixed with the company's financial success, economic sustainability addresses a fruitful coexistence with the local or wider economy through cooperation with small entrepreneurs and local producers or creating new job opportunities. Described sustainability performance should lead to

financial benefits such as profit of sales of sustainable products, decreased costs of energy, decreased costs of employees (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). Importantly, sustainability performance should not be mixed with the triple bottom line (TBL) (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014), an accounting framework that focuses on three sustainability dimensions – people, planet and profit (Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Slaper & Hall, 2013). As a difference to sustainability performance, TBL does include a financial element (profit), and not an economic element (economic growth) (Buhovac, Hren, Fink & Savić, 2019).

Figure 4: Sustainability performance



Source: Epstein & Buhovac (2014).

McKinsey survey (2020) reveals that 22% of brands who implement sustainable business practices generated modest or significant value from corporate sustainability in the last five years. Other 40% expects sustainability practices to create value in the next five years and this is especially envisioned across oil and gas, electric power, automotive and retail industries. The value of embracing sustainability come from reduced costs. By implementing sustainability practices, companies can, for instance, avoid costs for not complying with the regulations, utilize resources more effectively, reduce overhead costs and/or decrease employee turnover rate. Besides, as we discussed in the previous subchapter, the brands that apply sustainability practices are increasingly becoming the choice of young people who are more aware of how their and businesses' actions may influence society and the environment. And not just them, investors today are more attracted to companies with sustainability strategies and plans (Buhovac, Hren, Fink & Savić, 2019; Makridou, 2021). However, embracing sustainability is not a simple and short time project. This requires resources and investments, defined strategy, active involvement of all stakeholders, thoughtful actions, precise monitoring and measurement, continuous improvement (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Makridou, 2021). Consequently, the companies which manage to create the most value from sustainability programmes include sustainability into their strategy, precisely plan their actions, define specific targets, and set key performance indicators related to sustainability. They also promote sustainability as a part of the corporate culture and engage customers, employees, and

suppliers in their sustainability programmes (McKinsey, 2020). This led us to believe that conducting sustainability actions with the purpose to write them down in the annual report will unlikely enable a company to exploit the full potential of sustainable practices. On the contrary, when planted into business strategy, corporate sustainability is rather an opportunity than a threat.

Epstein and Buhovec (2014) decomposed the extensive definition of sustainability in the sense of corporate responsibility into nine principles (Table 1). Such a structure is of great help for understanding the scope of corporate sustainability. Equating these principles with the sustainability communication topics, the theses will accordingly describe, compare, and contrast usage of Instagram and Facebook by the chosen companies.

Table 1: Nine principles of the corporate sustainability

	Principle	Short description
1	Ethics	Establishment, promotion and maintenance of the ethical standards such as human rights and diversity.
2	Governance	Proper allocation of the resources to all stakeholders.
3	Transparency	Defining all stakeholders and informing them about the company's past, present and future activities.
4	Business relationships	Choosing suppliers not only by the price and quality but also social, environmental and ethical performance.
5	Financial return	Providing lenders and investors with a competitive return on investment and aiming to increase company value.
6	Community involvement/economic development	Creating and maintaining beneficial relationship with organisations and communities.
7	Value of the products and services	Providing the customers with the highest value product and services satisfying their needs.
8	Employment practices	Providing fair labour standards, empowering employees and promoting diversity at the workplace.
9	Protection of the environment	Efficient use of resources, reduction of waste and green house gas emissions and protection of the environment.

Source: Epstein & Buhovac (2014).

When it comes to researching corporate sustainability, two different approaches are proposed: Weak sustainability (WS) and Strong sustainability (SS). WS asserts that the

economic aspect of sustainability support environmental and social aspects while economic and environmental sustainability are substitutes. On the other hand, SS recognise three elements of sustainability to be equally important and one can do not replace the other. Besides, WS support growth-based capitalism suggesting that sustainable practices can improve companies' image and increase their profit (Press, 2021). This paper focuses on strong sustainability by acknowledging the importance of all three aspects of sustainability and the challenge in unlimited growth that degrades nature and quality of life.

1.4 Sustainability in Communication

Discussion on corporate sustainability led us to the consideration that sustainability strategy cannot be created and implemented in isolation of any stakeholders but rather in cooperation with them. For a business to be sustainable, it is not only enough to create and sell environmentally friendly products. Instead, it must communicate and promote sustainability to its stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, buyers, government, other organisations (Lunde, 2018). From that, one may conclude that the strategy is born and raised by communication, starting naturally from the inside out. This subchapter discusses communication's role in corporate sustainability, its types and effects on businesses and people.

Sustainability in communication incorporates the exchange of information that carries the vision of sustainability and aims to clarify sustainability and its mission, increase public acceptance of more sustainable behaviours, motivate people to engage in sustainable actions and initiatives, etc. It follows that the subject of sustainability communication may include sustainability values and norms, individual and organisational sustainable actions and effects and causes of sustainability. Communication may take place between individuals, organisations, or organisations and individuals (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). In his recent study, Genç (2017) proposes that communication play a fundamental role for sustainable development by connecting different stakeholders, enabling legitimacy in sustainable practices, and involving society in the global matter. Lunde (2018) indicates a sustainability principle entitled Globalized marketplace of value exchange that outlines the interconnectedness of the market players, i.e., customers, businesses and governments, through value exchange. It calls for all stakeholders to live in symbiosis, whereas each acts to better all of them. In such a system, communication can broad knowledge, wide focal points and propose concrete actions that may untie different individuals and groups and turn them towards a common goal.

A recent study defines three sub-concepts of sustainability in communication. The division is based on the direction of information and the initiator and aim of communication. These three sub-concepts include Communication about Sustainability (CaS), Communication for Sustainability (CfS), and Communication of Sustainability

(CoF). CaS refers to a discussion-based concept that takes place on the horizontal level enabling the exchange of opinions, the generation of arguments and a common understanding of the communication topics (Genç, 2017). CaS is, for instance, the ongoing discussion on whether the environmental benefits could be offset by mobile phone providers selling mobile phones without chargers. As a result, it transfers the information among different stakeholders and areas of operation. On the other hand, CoS is one-way communication with the clear goal to raise awareness, increase knowledge, inform about sustainability actions/initiatives or engage the public in sustainability action (Genç, 2017). CoS is in particular when a company communicates their sustainability efforts to legitimize their behaviour. Yet another sub-concept is CfS which focuses on changing societal behaviour towards more sustainability through raising awareness, sharing information, educating, generating a discussion. In particular, this type of communication exists to turn thoughts, opinions and knowledge into actions (Genç, 2017). CfS is, for instance, conducted by Diesel, who raises awareness about the potential issues of climate change via its marketing campaign Global warming ready (Macleod, 2007). The company takes a stand trying to convince the public to get the climate problem serious and act (purchase more sustainable products) before it is too late.

Perhaps we should also point out that in the last few years, particularly in the period of more interactive and two-way communication among brands and the public, these three sub-concepts have started to overlap, being more difficult to distinguish. To illustrate this point, we analyse a recent Adidas campaign, “It Ain’t Easy Being Green” (with Kermit the Frog) (Figure 5). Indeed, the campaign includes elements of each sustainability communication sub-concepts.

Figure 5: Kermit the Frog and Stan Smit in Adidas campaign



Source: Wilkinson (2021).

To begin with, it can be argued that the campaign encourages word-of-mouth and initiates a discussion about sustainability over social media in particular by bringing a well-known

character from The Muppet Show, Kermit the Frog, and tennis legend Stan Smit and referring to the famous and old song “It’s not easy bein’ green”. Such elements tend to build a common foundation for people familiar with them and therefore encourage and motivate people to share their opinions and discuss. Due to the topic of the campaign, communication can be hardly done without tackling sustainability. Following the Genç (2017) division of sustainability communication, it can be said that such type for communication falls under CaS. Secondly, it is quite likely that the campaign brand promotes shoes made of recycled materials, expressing its commitment to sustainable development and reduction of plastic waste. Initiated with a clear goal to raise awareness and inform the public about its efforts, but also encourage the public to take the action and buy the product promoted, such communication can be defined as CoS. Lastly, since the campaign inspires and invites the public to change their purchasing behaviour toward more sustainability, it directly expects their action which leads to the conclusion that the Adidas campaign may also be characterized as CfS. In conclusion CaS, CoS and CfS are three closely interwoven and interrelated sub-concepts of sustainable communication. Thus, it is possible to say that a communication message can include more than one sustainability communication type. Despite the overlapping of the concepts, they support the study allowing for categorization of communication recorded on the social media channels by sustainability communication type and analysis of which type is the most presented and why.

It has been discussed in subchapter 1.2 that the pandemic of virus COVID-19 increased the public’s awareness of the climate crises and, as a result, their expectations from the companies to support sustainable development. Naturally, this accelerated the trend of companies speaking their sustainability commitment loud and frequently (Uren, 2021). It is also suggested that many companies recognised sustainability as a good value proposition and differentiation strategy during this period, which can replace physical features such as store design, smell or light (GlobalWebIndex, 2020). Such a statement brings the discussion of greenwashing, which is however related to environmental sustainability. One of the widely accepted definitions for greenwashing is the one suggested by the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) which declares the term as “The creation or propagation of an unfounded or misleading environmentalist image.”. In other words, it refers to brands providing misinformation to the stakeholders in order to earn the perception of an environmentally responsible organisation. An example of greenwashing is H&M’s misleading information about its “Conscious Collection” line which had more synthetic fibres than its fast-fashion line (Ho, 2021). Another one is Volkswagen reporting a car line emissions 40 times less than they were. Such communication caused severe brand crises, which decreased the sales in many countries and hurt the brand image (Topal, Nart, Akar & Erkollar, 2019). Besides, such behaviour may increase customers’ scepticism toward brand communication on sustainability. Interestingly, the scepticism tends to grow with the concerns for the climate crises, whereas the more concerned about

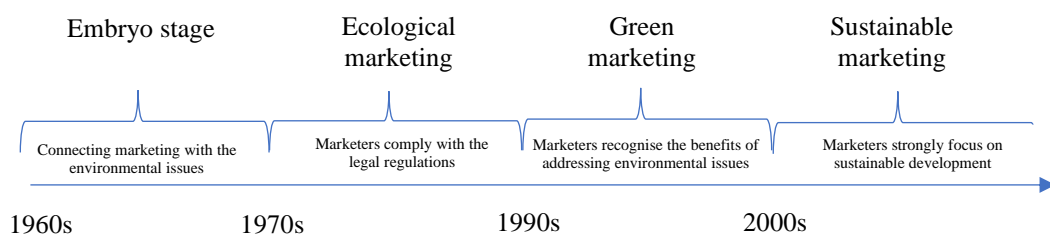
the environment a customer is, the more sceptical they are toward the brands' communication of sustainable efforts (Paco & Reis, 2013, p. 147).

Studies suggest that a brand's efforts in communicating sustainability can contribute to positive customer perception and sentiment toward the brand. This may further grow into high brand value, a more credible brand image, and finally, more loyal customers. In addition, companies that remain silent on sustainability are considered not being progressive enough on the important matters for the customers. Therefore, it can be concluded that sustainable transformation in a company cannot be implemented without effective communication of sustainable efforts to the stakeholders, including but not only to customers. However, one may note that talking the talk but not walking the walk can cause serious harm to the brands. Thus, brands must avoid falling into the trap of greenwashing and should communicate only their true efforts and activities, which ideally spring from the overall business strategy (Sheffi & Blanco, 2018; Topal, Nart, Akar & Erkollar, 2019).

1.5 Sustainable Marketing: Definitions and Evolvement

Defining sustainable marketing is a complicated task since the evolution of sustainability in marketing produced a variety of approaches and definitions which intersect each other and create confusion. Through the theory review, we come across the terms such as *ecological marketing* (Fisk, 1974; Henion & Kinnear, 1976), *environmental marketing* (Coddington, 1993), *green marketing* (Ottman, 1992; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Vaitone & Skackauskiene, 2019) and *sustainable marketing* (Fuller, 1999; Peattie, 2001; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Lunde, 2018). While some authors equate the meaning of ecological, environmental, green, and sustainable marketing (Aguilera, 2013; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017), others consider that these terms stand for the different stages of the evolution of sustainability-related marketing (Peattie, 2001; Katrandjiev, 2016; Vaitone & Skackauskiene, 2019). The evolutionary approach proposes that marketing evolved over time passing through three stages: ecological marketing, environmental/green marketing and sustainable marketing (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Evolution of marketing that incorporates sustainability elements



Adapted from Peattie (2001); Katrandjiev (2016); Dangelico & Vocalelli (2017).

As previously mentioned, the concerns related to environmental issues such as air and water pollution have started unfolding in the 1960s. At that time, books and articles on the businesses' negative impact on the environment and social well-being were published, followed by the first ads on the pollution topic, which opened eyes to the customers on such issues (Katrandjiev, 2016).

Moreover, it is suggested that the era of ecological marketing started in 1974 when Hennion and Kinnear (1975) published a book titled "Marketing and the Ecological Crisis". The authors defined ecological marketing as a set of all marketing activities which help decrease consequences caused by environmental issues (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Katrandjiev, 2016). Ecological marketing was mainly forced by governments whose concerns related to the environmental and social issues caused by industrialization grew, especially with the publishment of "The Limits to Growth" report. Thus, some governments required narrowly chosen companies to address the issues such as oil spills, air pollution, use of pesticides and herbicides, etc. and marketers communicated the conducted actions. However, at that time, companies perceived no benefits in complying with these measures, but solely the additional unnecessary cost (Peattie, 2001, pp. 129-146). Peattie (2001) entitled this period as the first stage of green marketing - ecological marketing, while Katrandjiev (2016) named it ecological marketing (Katrandjiev, 2016).

After the ecological era, marketing entered the stage of *green marketing* (Katradjev, 29016), also called the *second stage of green marketing - environmental marketing* (Peattie, 2001). The recent study suggests that green marketing and environmental marketing are synonyms and both concepts focus on environmental challenges such as waste and air pollution (Kotler & Armstrong, p. 596, 2018). Either way is argued that this marketing stage refers to the period from the 1990s to the 2000s when due to the huge environmental accidents such as Chernobyl Disaster (1986) and the Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989), people started paying more attention to the corporations' negative impact on the ecosystem and human's life. In addition, that was the first time incorporating environmental sustainability in business operations has been recognised as a competitive advantage. In comparison with ecological marketing, which addressed only the industries and products with the most obvious direct impact on the environment, green/environmental marketing had a wider scope, involving many goods and services from cleaning products, white goods, carpets to paperless operations in tourism and banking. In line with the findings of Peattie (2001) and Katrandjiev (2016), the American Marketing Association (AMA) defined green/environmental marketing as the process that focuses on environmental challenges. Namely, AMA (2017) states that "green marketing refers to the development and marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe (i.e., designed to minimize negative effects on the physical environment or to improve its quality). This term may also be used to describe efforts to

produce, promote, package, and reclaim products in a manner that is sensitive or responsive to ecological concerns.”.

Lastly, the period after the 2000s is referred to as *sustainable marketing* (Fuller, 1999; Peattie, 2001; Katrandjevic, 2016). The first definition of sustainable marketing is provided by Fuller (1999), which defined it as “the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the development, pricing, promotion, and distribution of products in a manner that satisfies the following three criteria: (1) customer needs are met, (2) organisational goals are attained, and (3) the process is compatible with eco-systems”. It is important to add that Fuller’s book “Sustainable Marketing: Managerial-Ecological Issues” (Fuller, 1999), addresses environmental pillar of sustainability and explained marketing strategies that aim to achieve *zero waste* and *zero disposal*. In comparison to sustainability, environmental sustainability refers to “developing strategies that both sustain the environment and produce profits for the company” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Another way of defining sustainable marketing is the definition provided by Kotler & Armstrong (2018) which states that sustainable marketing is “meeting the needs of consumers, businesses, and society - now and in the future—through socially and environmentally responsible marketing action.”. It follows that earlier studies concentrated on environmental sustainability when addressing sustainable marketing, while the recent Kotler & Armstrong study offers a more holistic perspective, including social and responsible components. In that view, it can be considered that all Nine principles of sustainable development suggested by Epstein & Buhovac (2014) can be acknowledged in the definition of sustainability in marketing.

After 2010 the number of articles on sustainability in marketing has drastically increased. However, that has not brought clarification in the definition of sustainable marketing. Research has been borrowing different definitions and applying different theories and models. The research conducted by Lunde (2018) reviewed research in the top 25 marketing journals from 1997 to 2016, suggesting that most of the articles before 1997 focused on the environmental pillar of sustainability, whereas the studies after that refer to the macro level of sustainability in marketing including all sustainability pillar. Besides, most of the articles do not offer solutions for the problems related to the climate crisis. Instead, they address the negative impacts of unsustainable practices and the urge to shift to sustainability. The same study proposes a comprehensive definition of sustainable marketing: “Sustainable marketing is the strategic creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that produce value through consumption behaviours, business practices, and the marketplace while lowering harm to the environment and ethically and equitably increasing the quality of life and well-being of consumers and global stakeholders, presently and for future generations” (Lunde, 2018, p.10). The definition incorporates marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association,

2017) and the sustainability principles offered in the GREEN Framework of Sustainable marketing (Globalized marketplace of value exchange, Responsible environmental behaviour for current and future generations, Equitable sustainable business practices, Ethical sustainable consumption, and Necessary quality of life and well-being for both consumers and stakeholders) (Lunde, 2018). As such, it emphasizes marketing functions including sales, product, advertising, distribution channel, competitive relations, packaging, and price. It also points out the exchange of value among stakeholders that is explained as the process of businesses delivering offerings to the customers and customers in return supporting the businesses and deriving the value from the offerings bought. Likewise, the Lunde (2018) definition encounter Brundtland Commission's (1987) definition, the connection between human and environment, interconnectedness of company, customer and governments and sustainable initiatives that improve wellbeing and quality of life.

It is argued that some critical areas that can enable marketers to deliver sustainability lack analysis and testing as well as the engagement of marketing practitioners within them. Namely, literature and practice have been slow to analyze the factors for enabling and disabling the transfer of sustainable behaviour across family members, generations, communities. Interestingly, there is little literature exploring the impact of primary education on sustainable behaviour. Besides, some models of alternative consumption such as renting and swapping or challenges in the supply chain haven't been explored well enough. In addition, there is a gap in research on how companies embrace sustainability systematically compared to how they incorporate sustainable practices into their sustainability strategy and how societal values and norms relate to nature over the focus on economic growth. Namely, the focus has expanded rather on micro than on micromarketing to the detriment of providing insight on the interconnectivity of the social, economic, and environmental aspects (Davies et al, 2020). Such marketing research practices are entitled as SS research (SSR) program in marketing (Press, 2021). They, therefore, focus on SS and not on the WS we mentioned earlier, which is the approach that will be adopted by this paper.

Promotion, also referred to as marketing communication, is one P of the marketing mix and it is defined as "the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers - directly, or indirectly - about the products and brands that they sell." (Kotler & Keller, 1967). It is one of the marketing functions and is vital for increasing sustainable consumption and production and fostering wide adaptation of sustainable consumer behaviour (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Corporate sustainability, which is explained in one of the previous subchapters, involves communication as the function that supports companies' sustainability efforts (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014).

The thesis adopts the sustainable marketing definition proposed by Lunde (2018) since it captures marketing and sustainability in the most comprehensive way, including all three

pillars of sustainability and customer perspective. In terms of the marketing functions, the study focuses on promotion, i.e., marketing communication in particular through social media, which is the subject of analysis in the next chapter.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA

It is mentioned before that youth have been actively using social media to communicate sustainability. The growing interest in such activity caused the increase in the literature which explore such behaviour and its impact on users and society. We discuss the expansion of social media usage more thoughtful in this chapter. We also define social media and explain different types of its platforms.

The most cited definition of social media date from 2010 proposing that “social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0, and that allow creation and exchange of UGC.” (Kaplan & Haenlein, p.60, 2010). Similar definition was provided by Evans (2012), who defined social media as “participatory online media where news, photos, videos, and podcasts are made public through submission (normally accompanied by a voting process to make media items become popular)”. Based on these definitions, we notice that a key feature of social media is online user engagement. The engagement can be active, meaning that users can create the content and/or engage in the voting process (likes, comments, forwarding, saving for later). In contrast, engagement can also be passive, which refers to observing content shared on social media (Verduyn, Résibois, Jonides & Kross, 2017). In that regard, the thesis focuses on the analysis of the active engagement of companies on social media (Facebook and Instagram) when communicating sustainability.

Social media proliferation caused a significant change in the traditional media approaches. Adopted by 4.2 million people around the world (Kemp, 2020), it impacts the way society interacts, communicates, and behaves. It enables creating and sharing user-generated content (UGC), liking content/pages, using abbreviations and emoji, forming online communities, promoting and encouraging donations, and even organizing political activities are some of the social media activities that have become a part of everyday life for millions of people worldwide (Bakardjieva, 2009).

There is plenty of social media platforms that differ in terms of scope and functionality. While some are for mass usage (Facebook), others are more focused on professional networks (LinkedIn), video content (YouTube) or photo sharing (Instagram) (Kietzmann, Hermkesn, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). Social media platforms also differ in terms of the level of user involvement and cognitive energy users are willing to invest. Based on that, Facebook and Instagram are considered to have lower cognitive costs (Bowman, Westerman & Claus, 2012). This implies the thought that the content shared on these two

platforms should be formed in a manner that enables users to easily understand it and decide how to react to it. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify social media by media richness and self-disclosure. The media richness concept is derived from the media richness theory by Daft & Lengel and refers to the amount of information that can be transmitted to decrease ambiguity and uncertainty. That is the ability of social media to handle multiple information cues simultaneously, facilitate feedback, and gain focus and attention. Self-disclosure, as the second classification element, refers to the ability of a media platform to enable a user to manage perceptions other people have about she/he/they, by enabling users to disclose personal information and opinions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This specific classification is presented in the table below.

Table 2: Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness, and self-presentation/self-disclosure

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self presentation/ Self- disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g. YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)

Source: Kaplan & Haenlein (2010).

The thesis focuses on communicating sustainability through Facebook and Instagram. According to the Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classification, Facebook and Instagram have medium media richness. This is so because these two social networking sites enable users to share textual, visual, sound, and video material. As such, they both offer high self-disclosure possibilities. In contrast to the content communicates, which are formed based on the common interests of a large group of people, social networking sites focus on interpersonal relationships (Wu, 2010). Facebook and Instagram enable users to create, develop, and maintain their online profiles, controlling how other people see and perceive them.

2.1 Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is an indispensable concept when it comes to a discussion about social media since the story about social media begins with Web 2.0 and its UGC feature. Web 2.0, also known as the *participative and social web*, presents the shift from a static website and limited space for interaction to dynamic and interactive platforms. The term appeared

in 2004 and has been referring to the participatory and collaborative platforms where content and application are published and modified by internet users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). O'Reilly (2005) summarised Web 2.0 in seven key features:

- The web as a platform: The web is a place where users can use software without installing anything on their computer/mobile devices.
- Harnessing collective intelligence: Internet users' activities provide a valuable insight to organisations and contribute to product/service improvements.
- Data is the next "Intel Inside"¹: Data is critical for remaining competitive. The first who collect the data and turn it into the service/products win.
- End of the software release cycle: Software is maintained daily and adopted based on the real-time monitoring of user behaviour.
- Lightweight programming models: Light and easily adaptable programming allow companies to scale and expand their services quickly.
- Software above the level of a single device: Any online application, such as Facebook is software that allows access from multiple devices.
- Rich user experiences: Services such as collaborative editing, reach formatting, practical interfaces, memorising data, building online networks, etc.

This leads us to consider that Web 2.0 is a technical and ideological concept, which changes the way companies communicate with their customers. Information created in that manner become easily accessible and quickly shared and reshared. Besides, Web 2.0 owns a UGC feature, which refers to the content created and published by users on publicly available sites or social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, as part of their everyday activities. Therefore, UGC does not include the content exchanged in messaging, commercial content, or replicated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Within our thesis, we analyse whether the chosen Slovenian companies utilise the features of Web 2.0 when communicating sustainability through Facebook and Instagram, i.e., whether they interact with users, collect, and utilise the data available at these platforms, build networks, etc.

2.2 Digital Natives

Term digital natives refer to individuals who were raised in the digital age surrounded by ubiquitous technology such as mobile devices, computers, and Internet (Akçayır, Dündarb & Akçayır, 2016). While some consider that digital natives are those born after 1980 (Zaphiris & Ioannou, 2018; Verčič & Verčič, 2013), another refer to people born after 1984 (Kirschner & Bruyckere, 2017), and the rest consider digital natives to be Gen Z, i.e., those born after 2000 (Arfi, Nasr, Khvatova & Zaid, 2021). One different classification perspective has been offered by Akçayır, Dündarb & Akçayır (2016), who

¹ Intel Inside is an ingredient branding campaign that triggered personal computer buying decisions by promoting its integrated component - Intel microchip. Intel was positioned as the premium product by communicating that the world's best personal computers are run by Intel's microchips.

suggest that whether an individual is a digital native should not be determined by its age. According to them, decisive factors are instead county of living, academic experience, and technology experience. Namely, a digital native is a person raised in a developed country who had access to technology and internet, uses digital technology during the academic life and owns digital skills (Akçayır, Dündarb & Akçayır, 2016). In view of that perspective, more than half of the population of the world are digital natives. Namely, over five billion people in the world own a mobile phone (66.6% of the world's total population), while 4.66 million use the internet (59.5% of the world's population) (Kemp, 2020). As an average Internet user spends almost 7 hours per day online (Kemp, 2020), we consider that there is no doubt that most internet users possess digital skills. We cannot ignore the fact that Gen Z is the first generation exposed to the internet, social networking sites, and mobile phones from an early age. This earned them the title of *only true digital natives* (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; GlobalWebIndex, 2020). Considering all this, we believe that the term digital natives may be used for Gen Y and Gen Z i.e., those born before 1981 and 2021.

Digital natives spend half of their time online. Likewise, according to the date of Campaign Monitor (2019), 45% of them are on the internet almost constantly and the other 44% are online multiple times a day. Most of their online activity occurs on some of the social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram (Campaign Monitor, 2019). Such excessive online presence doesn't leave the companies any other way but to increase their interactions with customers over these platforms. To remain unique and distinguish themselves from the competition in the online world, brands need to be very creative in their communication activities (GlobalWebIndex, 2020). In order to establish a successful corporate social media communication, it is crucial for a company to understand the needs and wants of digital natives. They must, for instance, be aware of their expectations for transparency and honest communication but also of their lost trust in paid advertising. It suggested that on Instagram, Generation Y and Z tend to trust brand ambassadors, so-called influencers, who have a smaller number of followers. Therefore, the customers are aware that brands can subsidize the influencer to represent their products and/or companies. Also, as we discussed previously, digital natives expect a company to take a stand for global issues. Youth prefer personalized products and services as well as communication. Open to new experiences and innovative offers, they tend to change lifestyle and habits very often (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Recent research shows that compared to the older generation, digital natives are more open-minded and interested in questions related to diversity, equality and sustainability (McKinsey, 2020). They are open to dialogue and very often directly express their opinion about a brand (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Considering all these needs and characteristics of digital natives, we can come to the conclusion that the use of social networking sites may prove to be an appropriate way of communication for brands. Although some forms of communication through Instagram and Facebook can have issues of trust, the brands still use them to communicate with the public every day, providing transparent and true information. In

addition, media richness and self-disclosure of these two platforms give brands the opportunity to be creative, cooperate with brand ambassadors, provide the audience with space for feedback, ask them questions, etc. In this way, brands can also launch initiatives or just support existing ones, showing which side they stand on, strengthening their brand personality.

Eventually, digital natives, sustainable generation and sustainable behaviour are phenomena that certainly affect a company-customer relationship. To address them and meet the related new needs, companies should keep updating and adopting their practices. Within the study, we examine whether this is a case with the Slovenian leading sustainable companies.

2.3 Social Media Impact

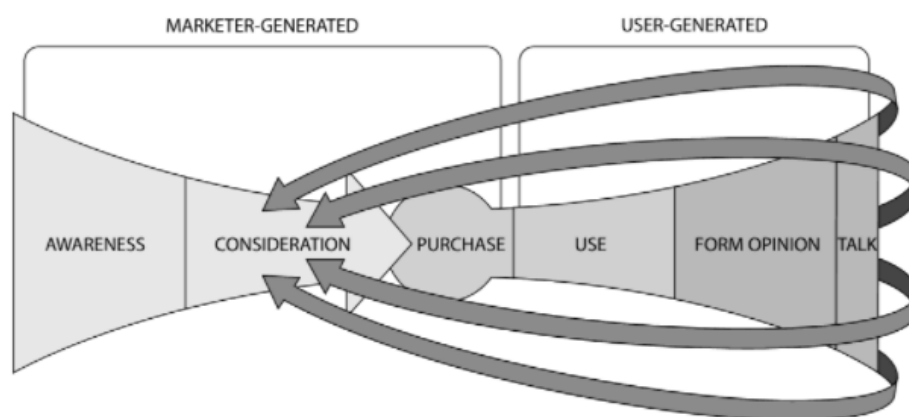
Social media is a space where digital natives (and others) interact and communicate with each other utilizing the mobile and internet technologies to follow, create, share, modify, and discuss UGC (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Evans, 2012). In Slovenia, 7 of 10 residents own a profile on social media, which is 9% higher than in the same period of last year (Kemp, 2021). As a result, participatory online media has started shaping many aspects of humans' lives.

It is well known that social media help to facilitate, develop and maintain relationships among people and between people and organisations (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Verčič & Verčič, 2013). Through social media platforms, people and organisations share their personal information, everyday activities, location, opinions, etc., and, therefore, increase their accessibility and availability in the virtual and real world. Using UGC, they self-promote themselves and build their image. Moreover, the image, i.e., reputation, is usually measured by the number of followers, likes, connections, comments, endorsements, etc. (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). UGC also has the power to accelerate social learning and altruism (Rolls, Hansen, Jackson & Elliott, 2016; Cade, 2020). For instance, the fast spread of information can raise awareness and inform people about plastic in the marine ecosystem. As a result, organisations and individuals worldwide may connect and engage in sustainable initiatives (Cade, 2020).

Many academic studies have been interpreting the relationship between social media and consumption in recent years. Social networking sites have the power to change the way consumers purchase products and/or services. This is due to the overwhelmedness with the information from mass media, which caused single directional and asymmetric communication and consequently difficulty for customers to assess the veracity of the brand message. Therefore, customers have turned to the information shared directly from people who experienced specific products and/or services (often virtual friends and

communities or social media influencers) or the brand itself (Evans & McKee, 2010; Simeone & Scarpato, 2021). Thus, one cannot deny that digitalization empowered customers like nothing before enabling them to develop and adopt new buying patterns. The new purchase funnel (Figure 7) includes the process when those who already bought a product and/or service affect the thoughts of those who are considering buying it through UGC. This means that customers today strongly influence other customers' buying decisions. They spread information about the company and/or product through eWOM (electronic/online word-of-mouth), also known as WOW (word-of-web) (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong, 2005; Evans & McKee, 2010). Even though WOM has existed before social media, it has become faster and now reaches a much larger number of people no matter where they are. That eWOM is at the same time a golden insight for a company, as it comes directly from the customers. As expected, brands usually choose to be present on social media and follow the conversation there in order to react to it as quick as possible and therefore work on creating partners for their customers.

Figure 7: Purchase funnel in digital world



Source: Evans & McKee (2010).

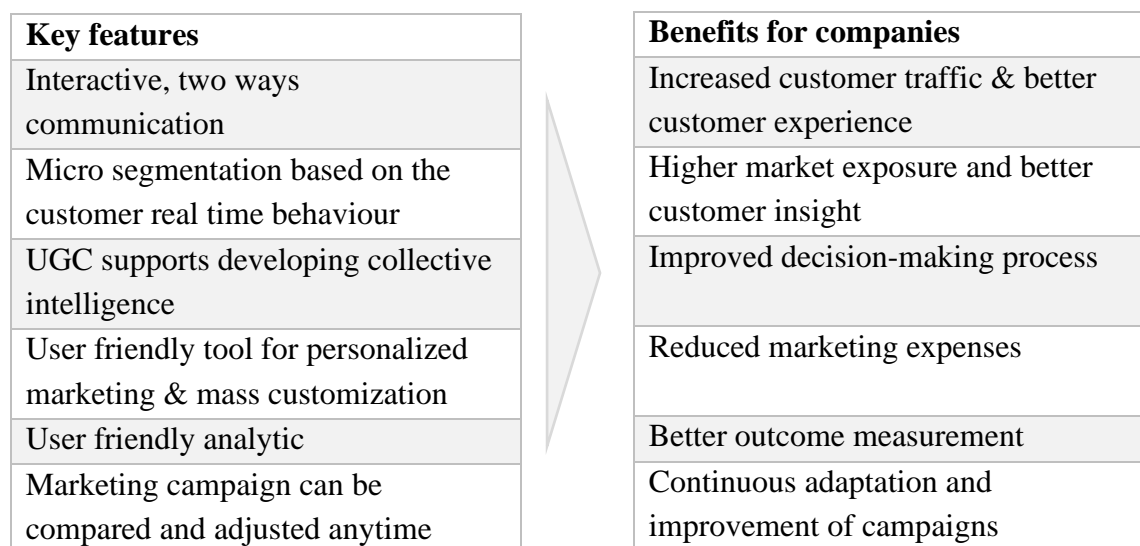
2.4 Social Media Marketing

Globally, 93% of organisations enjoy the benefits of social media marketing is incorporated into their routine marketing practices (Statista, 2019). 57% of them benefit from social media analytics when conducting market research (Statista, 2021). In terms of Slovenia, 945100 people use Facebook while there are 679.400 users on Instagram (Kemp, 2021). Those 25-34 years old are the biggest user group on Facebook (25,5%), followed by 35-44- (21,7%) and 18-24-years old users (19,8%). Interestingly, people aged 13-17 years or Generation Z make up only 4,1% of Facebook users. Instagram users are younger. Thus, people aged 25-34 present 32,4% of Instagram users in Slovenia and those 18-24 years old present 29, 4%. A group of 35-44 years old individuals are 18, 2% of Instagram users and is, therefore, less represented on Instagram than on Facebook. The

same goes for the youngest (13-17 years old people), who present 6.5% of Instagram users (Napoleoncat.com, 2021). In addition, organisations can reach 1 million customers in the country through Facebook ads and 620 thousand over Instagram (Kemp, 2021). In 2019, 82% of advertisers in the country expressed their certainness or likeliness in advertising on social media in the future (iPROM & Valicon, 2019). Below, we take a closer look into digital and social media marketing.

Digital marketing refers to applying digital technologies, the internet, and traditional communication practices to achieve marketing objectives (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2015). Before digital marketing, marketers utilized direct marketing, telemarketing, television, and radio marketing in communication with their target group. The communication was mostly standardized and one-to-many. Information travelled slow, and it was not easy to measure its effect. Later on, Web 2.0 changed a lot. It has allowed micro-segmentation and specific targeting (one-to-one and many-to-many), which has been based on real-time customer digital behaviour and related precise analytics. This process included customers in creating products/services as it has allowed them to actively participate in information sharing (creating UGC). These phenomena present the shift from old school/traditional marketing to new school/digital & social media marketing, especially when it comes to promotion/communication marketing function (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). The key features of the new school marketing and its benefits for the organisations are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 8: Key features of digital and social media marketing and its benefits for companies



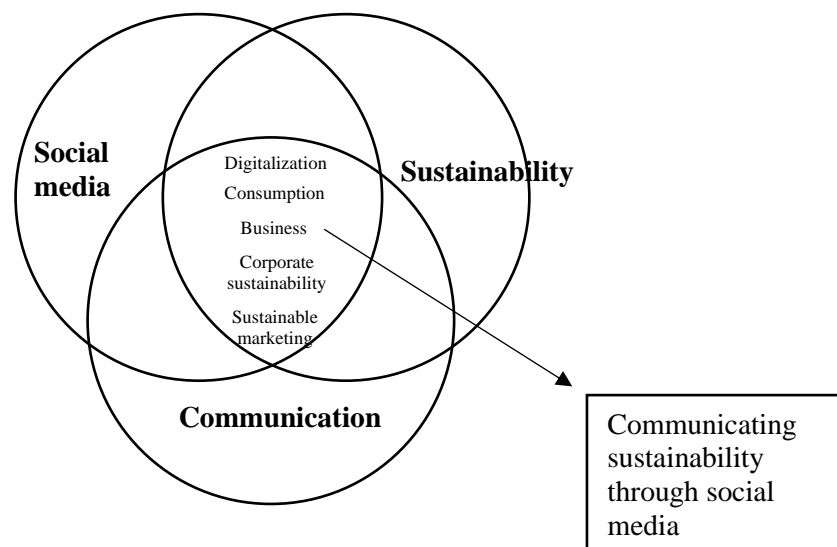
Adapted from Constantinides (2014); Tiago & Veríssimo (2014); Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong (2015).

Social media marketing refers to digital marketing through social media. Social media is based on Web 1.0 (web presence) and it refers to the brand’s engagement on social media platforms. Companies’ engagement can be either passive or active. While passive social media marketing addresses utilising social media for learning about customers and trends in the market, active social media marketing includes communication with customers, direct sales, customer acquisition, and retention (Constantinides, 2014). The study will consider both types of companies’ engagement in social media. Namely, active participation will be analysed by observing companies’ activities on Facebook and Instagram, while passive engagement will be examined from the data gained from the interviews with companies’ representatives.

3 SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY

A significant amount of academic work is dedicated to the three topics addressed in the study – social media, sustainability, and marketing communication. The research area to which the thesis should contribute is shown in the intersection of the concepts (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Intersection of Social media, Sustainability and Marketing communication



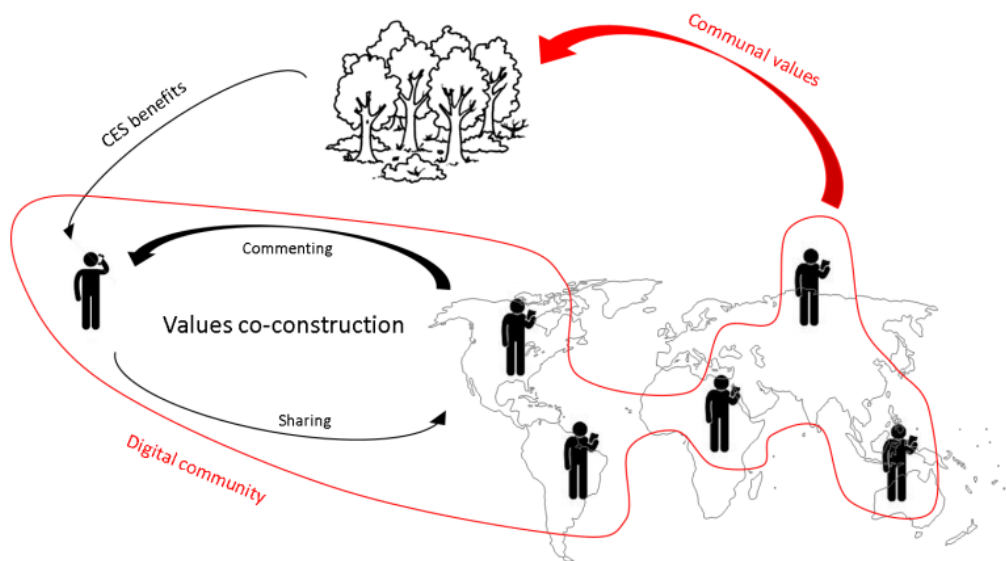
Source: own work.

Communicating sustainability to external and internal stakeholders is one of the steps in the process of a company’s sustainability transformation. The process starts and flows with communication transferring sustainability values to different stakeholders through various channels (Buhovac, Hren, Fink & Savić, 2019). Focusing on sustainable marketing communication, we explore the utilisation of social media platforms and that brings us to the intersection in the figure above.

3.1 Co-creation of Relational Values

Since this paper focuses on SSR marketing (Press, 2021), it is important to tackle the role of social media for developing relational values as the values people attain from the relationship with the environment, including wellbeing or cultural and community identities, etc. Calcagni (2019) analyses such a process by screening the 129 publications. The findings propose that social media may be considered as the new area for negotiation and definition of relational values. This process starts with an individual who experiences the benefits of culture cultural ecosystem services (CES benefits), including all non-material benefits he/she gain from nature and share the experience on social media by posting content about it. The Web 2.0 feature allows other users to see and react, spreading the eWOM. Moreover, the negotiation and engagement eventually develop the form communal values of the group, which tend to change their behaviour to nature (Calcagni, 2019) (Figure 10). It follows that by passive social media usage, the brands have the opportunity to reveal relational values but also to join the process of creating the values and therefore supports the sustainability.

Figure 10: Relational values co-construction through interaction on social media



Source: Calcagni (2019).

Similarly, research suggests that social media support inclusivity, providing individuals with a sense of belonging, which consequently affects their perceptions and behaviours. It is argued that the reasons behind this involve social pressure and conformity, which encourage individuals to pay attention to other peoples' behaviour, talk about that and share a moment from their own lives (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The studies correspond well with the Calcagni (2019) findings as suggesting that peoples' interactions in mass create their shared beliefs and perceptions. One can, thus, consider that social media can have a critical role for brands in image creation.

3.2 Effective Communication of Sustainability through Social Media

Reilly and Hynan (2014) found out that companies that conduct sustainability-related activities more frequent tend to use social media more actively compared to the companies with less sustainable actions and initiatives. As an explanation of their research results, they suggest that companies who shift from traditional media to social media tend to be more open to innovation and change as well as to sew their communication activities according to the social trends and their consumers' preferences. Moreover, such values are also shared by companies that adopt sustainable practices. The same paper provides the following recommendations that can increase their effectiveness in such efforts.

- Competitor analysis should be performed in order to understand which elements of sustainability are a priority in a certain industry and eventually answer them. That enable customers to compare different brands' efforts in terms of sustainability.
- Concrete and detailed information rather than buzzwords must be communicated in order to explain brands' efforts more clearly.
- Greenwashing should be avoided as customer fraud may bring serious harm to the brand, society and the environment. With the development of Web 2.0, the information of a brand being engaged in greenwashing reveals and spreads faster than ever before.
- Brands must follow the activities on social media, i.e., engage also in passive social media usage, especially those related to their brands. In addition, the procedures for solving the issues the brand may face on social media should be included in the social media strategy.
- Brands should answer promptly on public's comments and messages on social media, share updated content, adapt content to each social media platform and remain consistent with their sustainability strategy through all their channels and messages.

As discussed in the proviso subchapter, communal values and social norms predict sustainable behaviour. These values and norms are created by people who have common interests and attitudes. In the social media world, such groups are called *social media communities*. For brands the communities are of crucial importance as through UGC they promote engagement, positively impact the consideration process of the potential customers, spur brand trust and loyalty and increase brand visibility. Digital Marketing Institute (n.d.) suggest that the following actions on social media can help brands in building communities:

- Inviting the audience who likes a brand in general and its customers to follow the brand's social media activities and engage in them.
- Using hashtags (#) in order to help the audience interested in the posts # to find the brand and connect with it.

- Using events and special dates related to the brand can help a company to reach the audience interested in such topics and connect with them.
- Collaboration with influencers can support the brand to raise brand awareness and build community.

Examining the impact of social media usage, social norms, self-efficacy, attitude as well as of NGOs and governments on recycling behaviour, Sujata, Khor, Ramayah & Teoh (2019) confirm that all the elements are significant predictors to the recycling intention among the general public. According to the study, social media is an appropriate tool for raising awareness and educating the public about environmental issues. However, in order to influence people's behaviour, social media content must be chosen strategically. Suggestions include engaging and interacting content such as videos or DIY content. Moreover, Tanford, Kim & Kim (2020) suggest that social media can support the promotion of sustainable hotel offers and impact the customers' attitudes. Their essential finding was that brands could not directly influence customers' attitudes. Instead, they should do it indirectly, meaning that educating or raising awareness about climate issues or sharing other peoples' engagement in climate actions rather than promoting brand's products and services tend to create buzz and therefore have a bigger impact on the customers' behaviour. If we go back to the findings of Genç's study (2017) and relate it with the results of Tanford, Kim & Kim, it can be considered that CfS and CaS rather than CoS tend to be more successful in supporting sustainability. Another important perspective to emphasize is that customers' motives to engage with the brand on social media may define their preferences of type of communication. Namely, previous research suggests that customers tend to engage more in story-telling and self-oriented content on social media for convenience brands. In contrast, shopping brands (reusable water bottles, clothes) and services prefer task-oriented or interactive content (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015). The thesis will examine which type of communication is used by chosen brands when communicating sustainability.

Moreover, successful sustainability communication on social media requires developing a strategy based on the needs and behaviour of the target group strategy. The strategy defines what will be communicated, to who, and how often (Dawkins, 2005; Herbert & Schantz, 2007). The critical elements of the strategy include the selection of the social media channel, the topics of the content shared, the content and the way of interaction with customers (Dawkins, 2005). The paper will examine whether the chosen Slovenian companies engage in developing a social media strategy and whether they have a separate strategy for communicating sustainability on social media. We will also tackle responders' motives behind these decisions.

3.2.1 Web atmospheric cues

The literature links social media and sustainable marketing with atmospheric cues. It was before the Web when marketers were focused on the store atmospherics which refer to “the conscious designing of space to create a positive buying environment to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance purchasing probability” (Kotler, 1973, p.174). Kotler (1973) suggests that the smell, voice, view and feeling of a customer in a store can be more influential on purchasing decisions than the product itself. In the online environment, there are web atmospherics, defined as the elements of online environment that develop positive effects on users (e.g., positive cognitions, positive psychological contracts, WOM, etc.) and accelerate the positive consumers’ responses (e.g., revisiting online platforms, browsing, commenting, etc.). Web atmospheric cues such as attractive images, sounds, updated information, comprehensive privacy policy tend to impact the consideration stage of the purchase funnel developed by Evans & McKee (2010). Likewise, based on the cues consumers develop either approach or avoidance response. The approach refers to proceeding in the purchase funnel, while avoidance leads to the existing online place (Dailey, 2004). In the light of that, Khan, Wang, Ehsan, Nurunnabi and Hashmi (2019) analyse whether and how web atmospheric cues in sustainability-related marketing on social media impact consumer behaviour. Key findings are summarised in the table below.

Table 3: Web atmospheric cues in sustainability related marketing and their impact on consumer behaviour

Web Atmospheric Cues	Explanation
Visual cues	Visual cues are highly associated with sustainable marketing strategies. The most satisfying factors for consumers include engaging colours, attractive images, interactive design, layouts. These cues help brands to attract consumer attention and positively influence consumer decision making.
Information Cues	Information cues in sustainable marketing on social media may not be helpful in affecting consumer behaviour. The audience is not quite interested in acknowledging the information provided on social media and have little trust in such information. However, the impact depends on the quality and nature of the information.
Ethic cues	Ethical cues in sustainability communication on social media are not likely to affect customer behaviour significantly because they don’t get enough attention from the audience.
Social cues	Social cues in sustainability communication on social media can positively affect customer behaviour. Interacting with the audience on topics that are valuable to them, launching giveaways or quizzes effectively promotes the product and can develop a positive consumer perception.

Security cues	Security cues in sustainable marketing strategies on social media help build a strong relationship between the brand and customers. Namely, sharing security and privacy policy creates a reliable business image which plays an important role in sustainable marketing strategies.
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Source: Khan, Wang, Ehsan, Nurunnabi & Hashmi (2019).

The web atmospheric cues support our study as an analytical tool for describing, comparing, and contrasting the use of social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram), as well as defining the existing trends related to their communication of sustainability through these online sites.

3.2.2 Content formats

Content on social media platforms may have different formats. On Instagram and Facebook, the post can be published in text, image, or video format. Besides, they can include both image and text or video and text. According to Sabate, Mirabent, Canabate & Lebherz (2014), different formats trigger a different reaction of the audience. Hence, they suggest that images cause higher public engagement, expressed in the form of likes and comments. The engagement thus positively contributes to the post's popularity. Such finding is in accordance with the study of Khan, Wang, Ehsan, Nurunnabi & Hashmi (2019), which proposes that rich images and text are associated with sustainable marketing strategy and positively influence customers purchasing decisions. Unlike images, video format does not contribute to the post popularity (Sabate, Mirabent, Canabate & Lebherz, 2014) as the audience tend to not comment but only like posts that include video materials. The reason may be in the heaviness of such a format, meaning that watching a video takes more time and effort for a user (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015). Moreover, it is proposed that including links in the post may negatively affect its popularity as links lead users to another online place (Sabate, Mirabent, Canabate & Lebherz, 2014). Regarding the text, previous research shows that the text-only format attracts less customer attention than the image format (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015). Besides, according to some, the text length included in social media posts can have an important role in the engagement rate. Namely, the audience tends to engage more in the posts with less text (Sabate, Mirabent, Canabate & Lebherz, 2014).

Both Instagram and Facebook are high self-presence and media richness media while allowing for plenty of diverse content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Despite these two platforms having different interfaces, they both seem to be more effective for communicating images than videos and text (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015). However, a previous study proposes that customers on Instagram are more active, i.e., they engage more frequently with the content shared by the brands (Eriksson, Sjöberg, Rosenbröijer

& Fagerstrøm, 2019). Our study will explore which content formats are used by chosen companies and how this is related to the different social media platforms.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research arose from an aspiration to provide a better understanding of how Slovenian companies communicate sustainability communication through social media. Hence, the study is exploratory, and it is meant to identify practices in the business world (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015). To specify the research's objective, the three research questions have been developed:

- RQ1: How is the sustainable marketing concept defined/seen/perceived among marketing practitioners in the Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable?
- RQ2: What are the experiences and perceptions related to the role of social media for communicating sustainability among marketing practitioners in the Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable?
- RQ3: How do Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable use social media for communicating sustainability?
 - Describe how sustainability is communicated over social media
 - Describe and compare use Facebook and Instagram for communicating sustainability

All the questions were answered by applying the qualitative research method since it is the most relevant for the exploratory study, which, by its nature, analyses narrative data (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page, p.156, 2015). The research focuses on the visual and textual content (images, text, links, videos). Based on the research questions, we defined the data collection type. The first step was a literature review conducted to develop a better understanding of the matters addressed by the thesis. The first and second questions were answered based on the interviews with sustainability practitioners from the chosen companies. The first-hand information provided deeper and more practical insight into the research matter. The third question was answered through observation i.e., conceptual content analysis with the aim to examine the companies' sustainability communication through Facebook and Instagram. By means of the descriptive statistics, the data has been organised, summarised, and presented in an informative way.

4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

An interview can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Bryman, 2004). For our research, we decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with a predefined structure and the possibility to include unanticipated questions (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015). Such a method of collecting primary data together with the open

questions enabled reaching insightful information. Besides, the responders were able to explain their opinions, thoughts, and perceptions more freely.

4.1.1 Sampling method

The research sample for the interview included representatives of the companies selected for the research. We choose companies by purposive sampling technique setting the following criteria:

- established and operates in Slovenia,
- applies sustainable business practices,
- use social media and
- practice B2C model.

The criteria were chosen carefully and with the aim to allow us to answer the research questions in the right way. Thus, as the thesis aims to discover how Slovenian companies communicate sustainability through social media, we focus only on the businesses that are established and operate in Slovenia. Besides, the second factor was that companies already apply sustainable business practices. In that regard, we wanted the focus of the research to be solely on communication while their sustainability performance goes without saying. Therefore, following the Finance's list of Slovenian companies that aim to become carbon neutral until 2030 (2021) and the Spirit Slovenia's list "Green. Creative. Smart. Ambassadors.", we chose four leaders in the sustainability that fulfil all of the above-mentioned criteria (Hočevar, 2021; SPIRIT Slovenija, javna agencija, n.d.). Moreover, since the study focuses on two social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook, the criteria was that chosen business must be using both channels. Finally, as the focus of the research is communicated to customers, choosing B2C companies was a natural decision.

It is important to add that interviewees were chosen based on their expertise and experience in social media and sustainability communication. Some of them were reached via LinkedIn, while others were proposed by their companies' contact person. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to each responder. The limited timeframe allowed us to conduct four interviews. Despite a statistically not large enough sample, it provided specific and valuable information and insight, enabling us to answer the research questions.

4.1.2 Structure of the in-depth interviews

Interviews had the predefined structure of 15 questions created to provide an understanding of responders' perceptions, attitudes, experiences and plans regarding the use of Facebook and Instagram for communicating sustainability. A few questions were slightly modified during the interviews, while some questions were removed or added

based on the responders' answers. Each interview was conducted online with an average duration of 40 minutes.

The interviews started with the introduction, and the study was briefly explained. In this way, responders get more information about the topic and objectives of the thesis as well as about research methodology, anonymity and discretion.

The second part of the interview included introductory questions. The responders have been asked questions regarding the industry the company operates in, the market they focus on, the number of employees, their core product and their own role in the team as well as years of experience. These questions were followed by sustainability communication-related open questions. The first three questions were asked to discover responders' perceptions and opinions about sustainable marketing as a concept. Next, we asked them to define sustainable marketing to examine how they understand and perceive the concept. Afterwards, we mentioned a few sustainability marketing practices and asked them whether such activities are done by the companies they work for. In this way, it was easier to understand whether the responders connect sustainable marketing as a term with sustainable marketing practices. The third question was regarding other terms related to sustainability in marketing, and responders were asked whether they are familiar with them and how they understood them. Moreover, the questions related to the communication of sustainability through social media, particularly Facebook and Instagram, were asked, which helped us get familiarized with companies' motives, perceptions, and experiences related to such activities. Question on how the younger generation, expansion on the global market, and competitors affect companies' approaches and decisions related to sustainability, communication and social media followed. Furthermore, responders were asked whether and how social media support their customer insight and help them to note and understand customer behaviour. Finally, we asked responders to evaluate the importance of CaS, CoS or Cfs for their company's communication goals and their plans in that regard.

4.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis is the most often used approach for analysing communication of corporate sustainability since this approach is suitable for forming the conclusion and verifying the presence of the concepts by observing the data presented (Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). The study uses content analysis to examine whether the selected companies use social media for communicating sustainability and if yes, how do they do so. For this reason, one of the criteria for selecting the research cases was their presence on Instagram and Facebook. The analysis complements the semi-structured interviews, and they together should provide the insight of what is present on the specific communication channels vs. what is/was aimed/perceived/planned to be communicated.

The corporate content of four interviewed brands on their official Instagram and Facebook accounts for the period from the 1st September 2021 to the 30th November 2021 were analysed. The period was randomly chosen, and it is not connected with any event. The data collection and coding method were adopted from the research by Valentini, Elving and Zoonen (2014). Coding units were social media posts, and the data were categorized nominally (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The analysis included identifying the frequency of the specific elements.

Following the adopted data collection and coding method, data were collected, categorized and coded in the Excel spreadsheets. Data for each research case, i.e., the interviewed company, were collected manually by observing companies' posts on their corporate Facebook and Instagram accounts. Only posts published from the 1st of September until the 30th of November were analysed. Each post was carefully examined and organised in the previously determined categories. Data were coded according to the coding rules defined in the Coding book (see Appendix X), ensuring coding consistency.

The coding units were social media posts. Each coding unit was entered in the Excel file and assigned with an ID. To analyse posts, compare different variables and understand interconnectedness and trends, categories of analysis were determined and they included:

- Channel,
- Communication Type,
- Web Atmospheric Cues,
- Content formats, and
- Sustainability Communication Topic.

As the focus of the study was on Facebook and Instagram, the Channel of the post could only be either one or another platform. To inspect which communication types are mostly used when communicating sustainability, the theory of Genç (2017) were followed and the posts were categorized in CaS, CoS, CfS, CaS + Cos, CaS + CfS, CoS + CfS or CaS + CoS + CfS. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, five web atmospheric cues were identified in the study of Khan, Wang, Ehsan, Nurunnabi and Hashmi (2019), but as some posts seemed to use more than one web atmospheric cue, each cue individually and their combination were selected and used for coding. The format of the social media posts was also among the chosen categories, and we defined eight different formats based on the study by Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015). Finally, each coding unit was categorized by sustainability communication topics, which are identified following the corporate sustainability principles by Epstein and Buhovec (2014). Please, refer to the coding book in Appendix 3 for more details about collecting data. To answer the second and third research questions and meet the purpose of the study, the data have been summarised and analysed using descriptive statistics.

5 RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1 In-depth Interviews

In order to answer the second research question, we have conducted in-depth interviews. Chosen companies have different sizes and operate in various industries. Each of the companies has B2C as their business model, sustainability integrated into its company strategy and offers sustainable products to customers. Apart from this, two of the four selected companies pledge to reach carbon neutrality until 2030. Furthermore, all the chosen companies target the global or international market, implying that exposure to the international competitive market requires the business to invest in more sustainable practices. Refer to Table 4.

Table 4: Research cases

Company	Industry	Core product	Target market	No. of employees	Job title
#1	E-commerce	Women clothes	Local and global	4	Marketing Manager
#2	E-commerce and retail	Reusable water bottle	Local and global	35	Chief Marketing Officer
#3	Retail	Kitchen composter	Local and global	300	Business Developer Manager
#4	Energy	Fuel	Local and international	4.000	Content Manager

Source: own work.

As presented in the table above, Company #1 has four employees, which according to the Companies Act (Zakonodaja.com, n.d.), positions it in a category of micro-companies. The core product of Company #1 is sustainable clothing present at both local and global markets. With its 35 employees, Company #2 is a small company (Zakonodaja.com, n.d.). It focuses on online and offline retail of shopping goods, particularly reusable water bottles. Company #3 and Company #4 are big companies counting more than 250 employees (Zakonodaja.com, n.d.). While Company #3 is engaged in retailing consumer shopping goods, particularly kitchen composters, Company #4 is an energy and retail company.

Responders in the interviews were employees and representatives of the four chosen companies. We targeted employees actively engaged in their companies' sustainability communication through social media. Moreover, a great understanding of the practices their companies perform in the areas of the research topic, the results of such practices and the insight into the target market were also our screening criteria. Each of the interviewees has been employed in chosen companies for at least 2 years and at the positions which provide an overview of the business's big picture, i.e., the overall

strategic orientation of the company. It can be seen in the table above that responders have different job titles which depend on their companies' internal policy and practices.

Responders from micro and small companies provided similar answers regarding the meaning of sustainable marketing, pointing to the lack of clarity of the term itself. In their opinion, sustainable marketing can be either sharing companies' sustainability practices or marketing anything in a sustainable way with fewer resources, waste, and energy. One of the answers is cited below.

“It can be marketing of sustainable products and services or promoting any other sustainable practices of the company. Or it can be marketing anything in sustainable way such as using less paper for marketing materials, less plastic and energy for promotion etc.”. (Interviewee #2, 2021).

The representatives of the big companies described the term quite specifically, emphasizing different matters. One of the responders accentuated the integration of sustainable marketing with the business strategy, seeing marketing as a tool for executing the company's long-term strategy. Another important suggestion was that sustainable marketing for Slovenian customers could probably not be the only reason why people buy the product. Still, the absence of such communication may be why not buy it.

“Sustainable marketing is about how you market sustainability. I don't see it as something extra, but as an integral part of a company's activities. As sustainability is part of our company's long-term strategy, it is naturally involved in our marketing activities... I also believe that sustainable marketing is not a reason why people buy the product, but its absence may be a reason why they don't buy it.” (Interviewee #4, 2021).

One of the interviews stressed the importance of recognizing other elements, not only promotion and distribution, in the concept of sustainable marketing. In light of that, the responder mentioned pricing and product as the area captured by the concept.

“It (sustainable marketing) is addressing sustainability related topics, marketing products which are sustainable. The concept involves also producing the products that last more and encouraging people to buy less products for higher prices instead of buying large quantities at low price.” (Interviewee #3, 2021).

No responders stated that they see a clear line between ecological marketing, environmental marketing, and green marketing. Despite the fact that they all heard about the terms, they do not use them, neither could they provide specific definitions or characteristics of the terms. Two responders addressed the terms as *buzz words*, commenting that they are hard to differentiate, and they usually change over time. The responders said the following:

“Yes, I have heard but I don’t quite use them (terms). They sound as buzz words to me. In the business, you just focus on the work and practice and usually do not engage in the definitions very much, unless that is important for your brand.” (Interviewee #1, 2021).

“Yes, I have heard about those terms, but I cannot say much about them. We have been facing many buzz words in marketing sector which have been changing over time together with the trends. That has never been my area of focus nor interest.” (Interviewee #4, 2021).

The other two responders said that the terms probably include some elements of sustainability, but they weren’t quite sure which. Only one responder perceived ecological marketing, environmental marketing, and green marketing as synonyms.

Each of the chosen companies communicates their sustainability practices and they do it through different media channels, including websites and social media. One of them also does it through events. According to our responders’ views, the source of such the initiative lies in companies’ business strategies, principles, and products they offer. Responders explained that communicating sustainability reflects efforts these companies make related to sustainable development, i.e., corporate sustainability. In other words, since sustainability is incorporated into their business strategy, products and/or principles, it came naturally to include it into communication and marketing activities.

Three responders suggested that younger people expect them to act sustainably while at the same time being conscious about climate crises by themselves. One responder, however, said that they were expecting more interest from the public in terms of sustainability communication. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that solely communicating that a product is sustainable is not enough when competitors offer equally sustainable products. Such conditions require differentiation in other aspects, such as the product’s look. To address such matter, they use to find creative ways to communicate their sustainability efforts either through building *cooler* (trendy) and more fashionable brand image, product’s visual characteristics, communication type, or talking about potential positive impacts of the purchase. The answer was as follows:

Sustainability aspect has always been present in our communication but has never got the attention that fashion and health aspect have. We started very strongly with the sustainability as brand’s key message. However, we noticed that what people love about us is the look of our product – they think our bottles are beautiful. As the effect of fashion and health appeals are higher in our case, we decided to create a fashionable brand whose side effect would be positive on the environment. In short, we are trying to make sustainability more fashionable and cooler.” (Interviewee #2, 2021).

Each of the interviewed companies has been using Instagram and Facebook for communication with customers for many years. As stated by their representatives, the reasons they created the accounts on these platforms and kept them active include a possibility for a great audience reach, building the connection and close relationship with the audience, having two-way and interactive communication with customers, media richness and low costs. Interviewees explained that they use social media to reach people they want (specific targeting), connect with them daily, provide them high-quality content, gain their attention, create long-lasting communities and get their feedback.

One of the companies highlighted the importance of social media for maximizing WoM. It was pointed out to the buzz and movement they created on Facebook in the early stage of their company. As the responder stated, that buzz significantly contributed to today's brand's success. Anyway, today is more difficult to be visible on Instagram and Facebook platforms, as more users share considerably more content. At the same time, most of them compete for likes, comments, and shares, as explained in one of our interviews.

All the companies we interviewed collaborate with social media influencers and perceive it as a valuable way of advertising. A more detailed answer in that regard is below.

“Work with influencers is proved as success. In that way social media helps us to build a community and start a movement or trend. Once people see influencers to do something, they follow the initiative. What we do through such collaboration is providing as much content to our public and encouraging them to join the move.” (Interviewee #4, 2021).

Regarding the social media platforms, the representatives of the two companies revealed that they currently focus rather on Instagram and relatively new platform Tik Tok than on Facebook. As an argument for that, they stated the high presence and engagement of the younger generation at those two channels. One company revealed that they have almost stopped using Facebook, as it is not very popular anymore, at least not in Slovenia. The other responder suggested that over Instagram, they usually manage to reach younger people. At the same time, their Facebook activities are followed mainly by the older population, although they communicate very similar content via both platforms.

None of the interviewed companies has a specific strategy for communicating sustainability through social media. However, they do have such a strategy incorporated into their strategy for social media and their overall communication strategy. For example, one of the companies creates weekly plans for communication on social media, including posts related to sustainability. They endeavour to mark and celebrate those dates which denote sustainable living and development, such as Earth Day and Water Day. One of the big companies owns an exact communication strategy that includes and defines their customer persona, visual components, communication topics, frequency of the communication, language, emoji etc.

As revealed through the interviews, the companies naturally derive decisions on the sustainability communication topics from their business strategies and core products. As stated by one of the responders, they tackle the area where they can make the most impact. Thus, the company that offers reusable water bottles encourages people to reuse the products, while the firm that provides kitchen composter talks about reducing organic waste and composting. The brand that offers sustainable clothing is most active in local and ethic production. One of the interviewees mentioned that the decision on the communication topic is not made in the marketing department but at the top level of the company. The marketing team supports the company's strategy and connects the company with its customers. The same responders highlighted the value of communicating sustainability for employer branding.

To understand better how the interviewed specialists perceive sustainability communication through social media, we asked them to describe one of their social media posts that communicate sustainability. They mentioned the posts which contain information about their sustainable products, those that encourage more environmentally friendly behaviour, tips on how to live more sustainably, promotion of their employees, quizzes on sustainability-related topics etc. An answer which captured the most of it was the following.

“For instance, when we built a wind farm, we share this information through Instagram explaining that its energy suffices a specific number of households on the yearly level. We also talk about energy-efficient refurbishment in general and our environmentally friendly products, such as water bottles or products made from biodegradable materials. From time to time, we communicate our sustainability strategy and vision, present our employees and talk about our employment practices.” (Interviewee #4, 2021).

When asked about the elements which make one sustainability related social media post successful, one interviewee stated that the visual element (picture) is very important. It is suggested that pictures must reveal the message as best as they can and represent real-life situations. According to our responders, the description of the post should reflect the brand strategy, use the defined brand voice, be clear and transparent.

One of the respondents stressed that the atmosphere on social media is very relaxed. She explained their efforts to communicate sustainability through Facebook and Instagram in a fun, informal and not too conventional manner. Namely, they understand social media as a space where one can share behind the scenes moments, different tips and tricks, real pictures, and videos with a large mass at any time. Besides, one company accentuated the media richness of social media platforms. The answer is as follows:

“The decision (to open Instagram and Facebook account) arose from the belief that social media is a great channel for sharing the content and reaching people out. It is not a tool for sale but for providing rich content, such as educational materials on sustainable living. In this way, we provide our audience with interesting and high-quality materials. The audience can choose what to read, and they can provide their feedback quickly helping us to create our future content.” (Interviewee #3, 2021).

In addition, one of the big companies perceives their experience with communicating sustainability through social media as highly positive, revealing that social media helps them attract and target customers and connect and maintain relationships with people who care about the planet and people. They consider that such customers help them develop and become more successful and sustainable companies.

5.2 Social Media Content Analysis

Once coding is completed, collected data were analysed and presented in the Pivot tables and charts. The categories have been examined with the aim to understand how Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable use social media for communicating sustainability. To answer the third research question, we looked at the categories to find and understand patterns and draw conclusions on the social media activities related to sustainability. Content analysis was performed on the four chosen companies’ sustainability communication through Instagram and Facebook.

The companies are presented in Table 4. Observing the content communicated within three months, we have collected a data sample of a total of 392 Instagram and Facebook posts (Table 5). It is important to note that Company #2 renovated its Instagram profile and by that, they deleted/hid all the posts shared before November 1st. By that means, their communication on Instagram wasn’t recorded for September.

Table 5: Social media posts by company, posting frequency, channel and topic: Sep-Nov

	Company #1	Company #2	Company #3	Company #4	Total	Average
Total posts (number of posts)	43	82 ²	94	173	392	98
Facebook posts (number of posts)	22	33	68	122	245	61
Instagram posts (number of posts)	21	49	26	51	147	37

² Data does not include company’s communication on Instagram during September, as the data were not available at the moment when content analysis was performed.

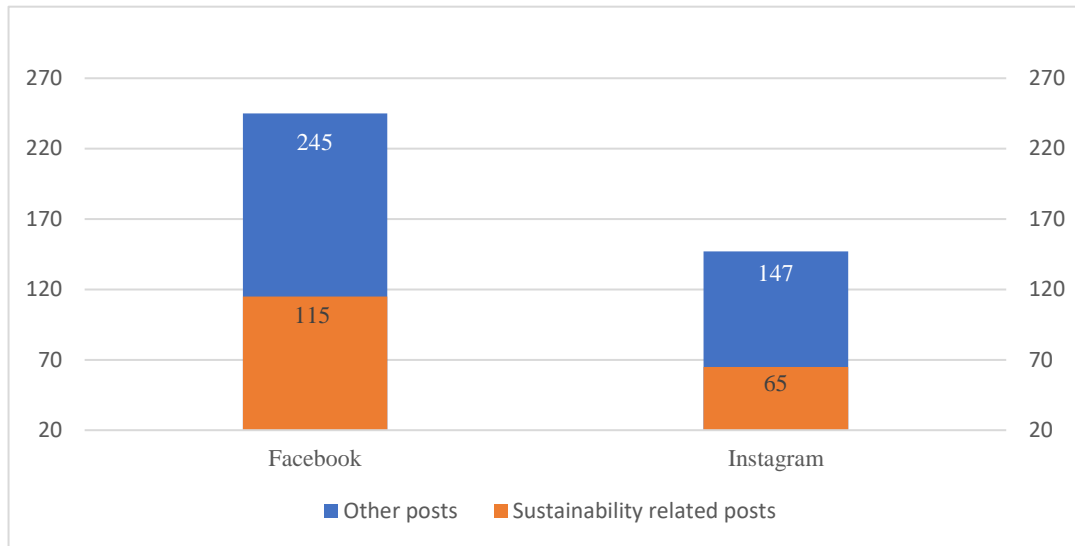
Posting frequency (post per day)	0.5	0.9	1.0	1.9	/	1
Posts related to sustainability (number of posts)	16	25	73	66	180	45
Posts related to sustainability (% of total posts)	37%	30%	77%	38%	/	45%

Source: own work.

As can be seen from the table above, the bigger the company is, the more often it communicates through Facebook and Instagram. While Company #1 shares a post almost once per two-day, Company #4 does that almost four times as much, i.e., nearly twice a day. Company #2 posts a little less often than once a day and Company #3 once per day either on Instagram or Facebook. There is a similar pattern to the posts related to sustainability, while the micro company included some of the sustainability topics in their posts 16 times in the three months, a small company did it 26 times and the big companies did it 73 and 63 times respectively.

Data also revealed that Facebook is more popular among the chosen companies. The exception is Company #2. The company whose core product is reusable water bottles is more often present on Instagram. In addition, it would be expected that the difference would be even more pronounced in favour of Instagram for Company #2 if the data on communication on that platform for September were available. Anyway, the result for all companies shows that collectively all brands communicate more often using Facebook. In addition, 114 of 245 Facebook posts (47 %) and 65 of 145 (44 %) Instagram posts communicate sustainability. Refer to Figure 11.

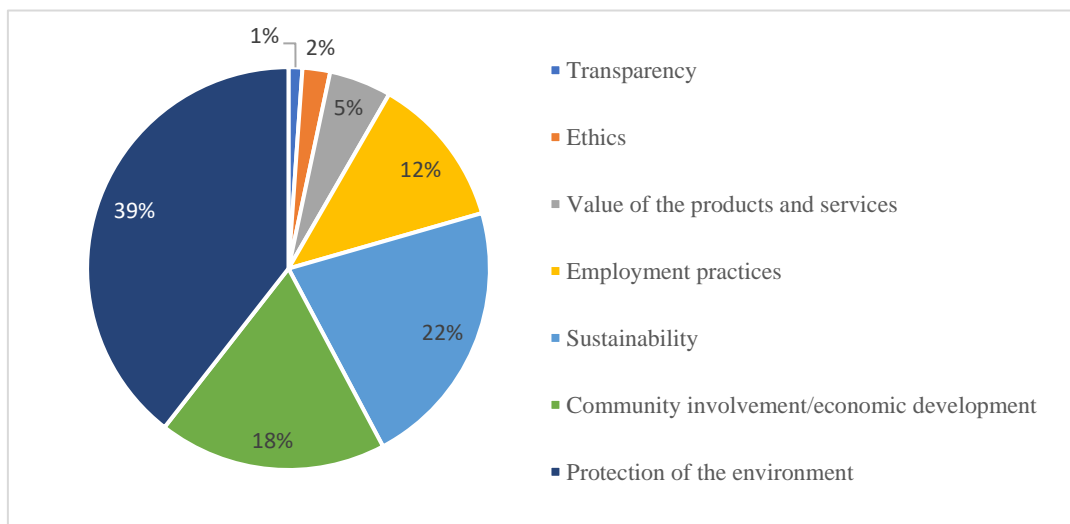
Figure 11: Social media posts by channel and topic: Sep-Nov (number of posts)



Source: Own work.

Based on our findings, the most communicated sustainability topic is the Protection of the environment, followed by Sustainability. Slightly less frequent communicated were Community involvement/economic development and Employment practices. Value of product was mentioned in a few posts, while Ethic and Transparency were the least present topics among chosen companies' social media posts. Refer to figure below.

Figure 12: Social media posts by Sustainability topic: Sep-Nov (percentage of total sustainability related posts)

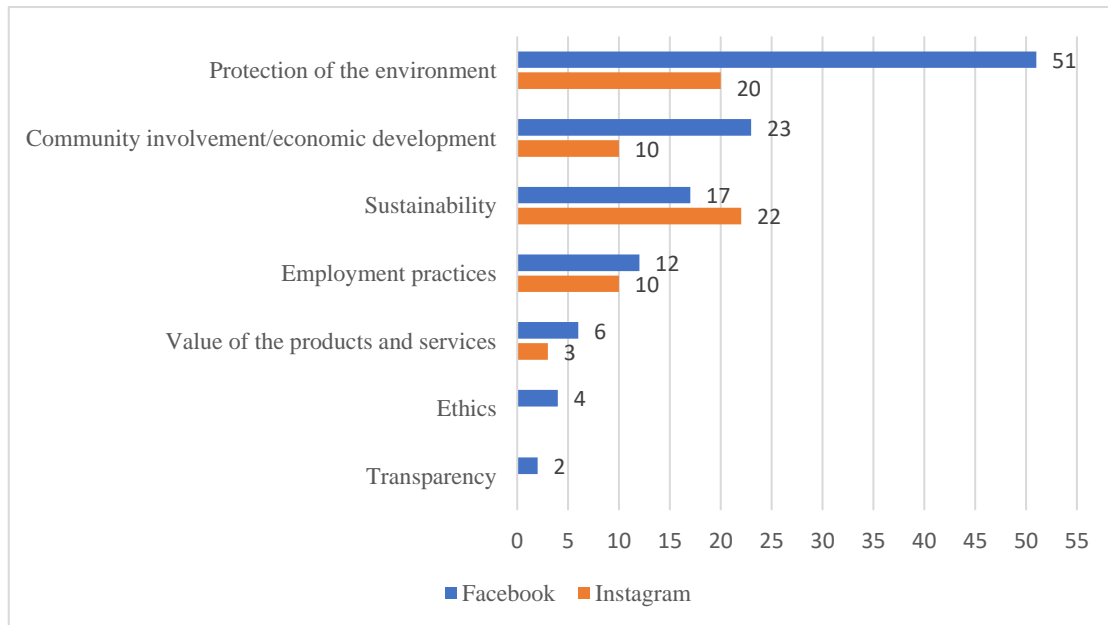


Source: own work.

We went one step further and examined which channels were utilized for each of the sustainability topics. As the figure below presents, Sustainability (sustainability in

general) was the only topic communicated more often through Instagram than Facebook. On the other hand, protection of the environment, the most popular sustainability topic among chosen companies' social media communication, with all other topics, was more often communicated via Facebook.

Figure 13: Posts by channel and sustainability topic: Sep - Nov (number of posts)

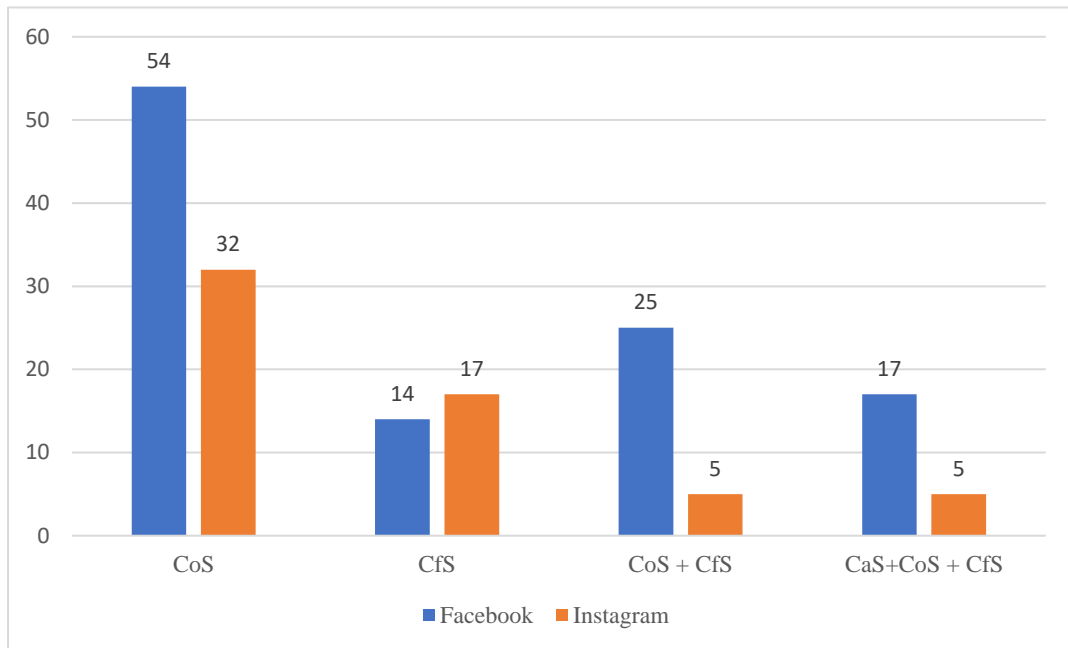


Source: own work.

The results in the figure below demonstrate that CoS is the most communicated type of sustainability communication. As discussed in subchapter 1.4, such communication refers to one-way communication where companies inform and/or educate the public about sustainability-related actions and initiatives. For instance, through CoS the brands informed and educated their audience about their sustainable products, showing positive employment practices and other sustainable efforts performed by them. CfS concentrate not only on informing and educating but transforming the behaviour of the public toward more sustainability. Such content involved creative elements from sustainable living, motivational quotes and practices, requirements for sustainability pledges and actions, etc. Almost equally present were posts which included both CoS and CfS, in particular content which informs and educated about but also required the clear action for sustainability. All three types of sustainability were identified in the 22 posts through which companies usually communicated their sustainability actions, involving the public in discussion and inviting them to take an active role in sustainability transformation.

Besides this, the figure presents the communication types by social media platforms. It can be noticed that three of four communication types are more often communicated via Facebook. Social media posts which include CfS are however more popular on Instagram.

Figure 14: Social media posts by channel and communication type: Sep-Nov (number of posts)

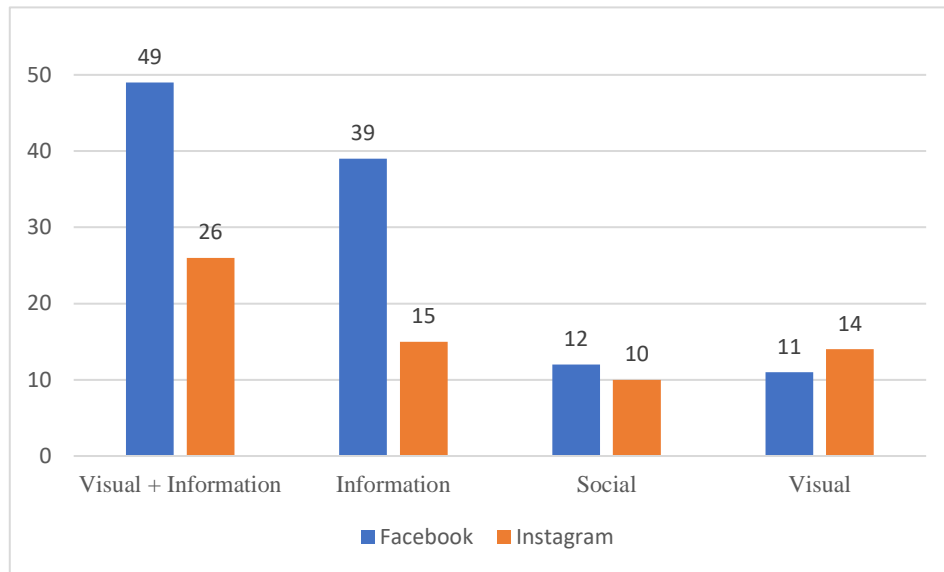


Source: own work.

Results of the content analyst reveal which web atmospheric cues are most often used by the chosen companies and we analyse them by channel. A combination of Visual and Informational cues was identified in the posts with both customs made, attractive and/or engaging coloured images or videos and content which involve companies' news, presented results, interesting facts, quotes, etc. The combination was the most commonly used Web atmospheric cues both on Instagram and Facebook. As expected, visual cues, were more often used on Instagram than on Facebook, while Information cues were more often presented in the posts published on Facebook. Social web atmospheric cues, which included social media quizzes and giveaways, were used slightly more on Facebook than Instagram. Refer to Figure 15.

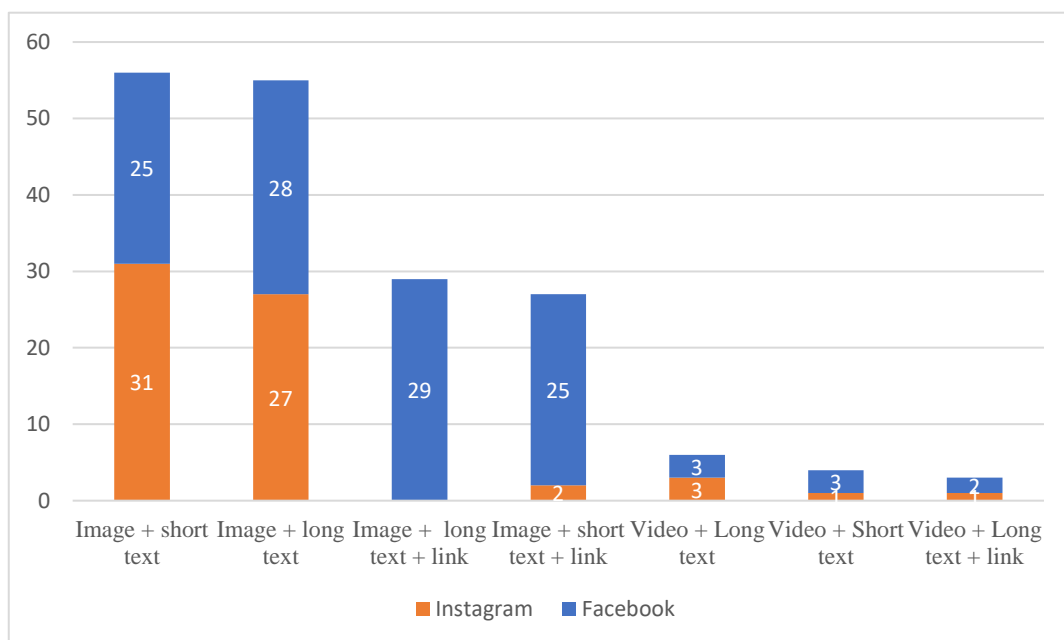
Figure 15: Posts by channel and web atmospheric cues topic: Sep - Nov (number of posts)

Source: own work.



Inspecting the content format type, we again took into consideration the differences between Instagram and Facebook. The findings showed that posts in form of images and short textual descriptions are the most shared by the chosen companies. As expected, short texts are more often used for posting on Instagram. Moreover, since Instagram does not allow the use of links in feed posts' caption, but only in profile bio, in total, only three posts with links were shared on Instagram. The number of video posts was relatively low, with more of them being shared on Facebook. Interestingly, no solely textual posts were recorded at any of the company's feeds. See figure below.

Figure 16: Posts by channel and content format type: Sep - Nov (number of posts)



Source: own work.

6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we discuss findings and highlight the theoretical and managerial contributions. Likewise, the results are linked and compared to the prior studies on sustainability communication.

6.1 Theoretical Implication

Firstly, the study corresponds well with the previous findings (Katrandjiev, 2016; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Lunde, 2018), which empathize that complexity and disagreements in defining sustainable marketing. Likewise, our results show that there is a lack of clearance of the sustainable marketing concept due to the presence of many different definitions and perspectives in the previous literature. However, it is vital to comment that all responders recognised sustainability elements in the concept, despite the minor differences in how they experience it. Namely, while representatives of micro and small companies focused on the wording, the responders from bigger companies emphasized the connectedness of sustainable marketing with the business strategy and its comprehensiveness (inclusion of all marketing functions such as production, promotion and pricing).

Our content analysis reveals that all chosen companies communicate sustainability over social media. What's more, they undertake it in at least 30% of its Facebook and Instagram, which means that at least one of three posts includes a message on sustainability. Companies' representatives consider social media as an important channel for communication with customers since it enables connection with customers on a daily basis, two-way communication, eWoM, low communication costs, high reach etc. With the average social media post frequency being one post per day, we can consider chosen companies to be active social media users. The finding supports the study of Reilly and Hynan (2014), which suggests that brands that perform sustainable actions tend to be more active on social media.

Next, how marketing specialists perceive sustainable marketing communication was captured well when they described one of their social media posts. Based on their explanations as well as the results of content analysis, it can be considered that the responders are aware of the interconnectedness of the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability. Their actions do not address environmental sustainability solely, nor do their ultimate goals include the growth of their business. Previous studies argue such extension of the focus from micro to macromarketing and propose the concept SS and SSR program in marketing (Press, 2021; Davies, Oates, Tynan, Carrigan, Casey, Heath, Wells & others, 2020).

Pursuing this further, our findings reveal that Protection of the environment is the most communicated topic on chosen companies' social media. Thus, 39% of sustainability-related posts talked about environmental sustainability. However, other topics, including Community involvement, Employment practices, Transparency, Value of the product and services and Ethic have also been communicated and perceived as important by the marketing specialist. Therefore, drawing a parallel with the nine principles of corporate sustainability suggested by Epstein and Buhovac (2014), we can say that only the topics that include Financial return, Business relationships and Governance have not been communicated by chosen companies. It is worth stating at this point that interview data reveals that sustainability topics were chosen based on the business strategy and the company's potential to contribute to sustainability. That confirms the suggestions of the McKinsey study (2020), which propose that brands that create the highest value with sustainability programmes tend to include sustainability into their business strategy.

Another aspect that is important to mention is all companies communicate sustainability over social media with the ultimate goal to encourage and affect the public to change their behaviour toward more sustainable. Therefore, they did not cite profit as the main motive for communicating sustainability. Moreover, through the interviews, we found out that each of the companies targets the young generation and the global/international market and has competitors who communicate sustainability. We can, hence, assume that these factors may encourage companies to engage in sustainability communication through Facebook and Instagram. The brands are aware of the youth's interest in sustainable transformation, despite one of them suggesting that communicating only that the product is environmentally friendly may not be enough for gaining customer attention and support. That, however, may be related to the size of market completion, which requires brands to differentiate themselves based on their unique value proposition. Each of the researched companies has eco-friendly products in their offer, and they count on Generation Y and Z to be their first adopters and promoters.

Furthermore, we have found out that some of the marketing specialists consider Facebook being rarely used in Slovenia, especially by the younger generation. It was pointed out that youth is nowadays more active on Instagram and Tik Tok. This is, however, partially substantiated by the data, which show that 32.7% more Slovenian use Facebook in comparison to Instagram. Besides, the companies can reach 46.9% more people over Facebook than over Instagram ads (Kemp, 2021). Notably, previous literature suggests that Instagram has younger users in comparison to Facebook (Napoleoncat, 2021), and such users tend to engage with the content shared by companies more frequently (Eriksson, Sjöberg, Rosenbröijer & Fagerström, 2019). Our findings are aligned with suggestions. Perhaps we should also mention that the content analysis discovered that three of four chosen companies communicate more often over Facebook in comparison to Instagram. Therefore, despite the specialist are aware that Facebook is less effective in engaging Millennials and Gen Z in comparison to Instagram, they communicate more on

Facebook. This leads us to believe that Facebook may be perceived as an expected and implied communication channel since the platform is older than Instagram and has more users, or those chosen companies at the same time target a significant portion of the older population.

In addition to the sustainability topic, we have explored other aspects of how chosen companies communicate sustainability through Facebook and Instagram. According to our data, they undertake such communication mainly through CoS, i.e., by promoting their sustainable products and efforts. The previous literature suggests, however, that indirectly educating and raising awareness of sustainability through CfS and CaS may be more effective to create buzz and have an impact on people's behaviour (Genç, 2017; Tanford, Kim & Kim, 2020). Namely, customers are more interested in two-ways communication that extends beyond the promotion of the offer and activities of the brand itself.

Regarding the web atmospheric cues, our research results are in accordance with the research of Khan, Wang, Ehsan, Nurunnabi and Hashmi (2019). Responders believe that visual cues have a critical role in attracting the audience's attention and are the most compelling element of the post. Moreover, the content analysis shows that visual cues in combination with informational cues are the most used cues by chosen companies. Despite the previous research suggests that information may not influence consumer behaviour, it also emphasises that this may not be the case with high-quality information. Our research shows that sharing interesting and helpful content appeals to the audience. Furthermore, the previous research suggests that social cues can positively affect customer behaviour and our responders share that understanding. However, social cues are used less often in comparison with visual + information cues.

This paper shows that content format is an important variable for effective communication over social media, no matter of the topic communicated. Aligned with the previous studies (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015; Sabate, Mirabent, Canabate & Lebherz, 2014) our results show that image is the most appropriate format for communication over Facebook and Instagram. Posts that include only text are not suggested as successful (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015) and our results show that chosen companies shared no such content in the observed time. Regarding the length of the text, we have found that slightly more frequently are used short captions and that longer ones can be more often seen on Facebook than on Instagram. The results correlate well with the findings of the previous study (Sabate, Mirabent, Canabate & Lebherz, 2014). We could also notice that links are more popular on Facebook than on Instagram, which has been discussed by Eriksson, Sjöberg, Rosenbröijer & Fagerstrøm (2019).

The content analysis does not include data on customer engagement with social media posts. Thus, while we didn't analyse which kind of posts influence customer response and in which way, we examined the attitudes and experiences of marketing specialists. Based

on that, it can be said that each of chosen companies has a positive experience with communicating sustainability over social media. Importantly, they all have intentions to continue with that activity in the future.

6.2 Managerial Implication

The first aspect to point out is that communicating sustainability has been recognised as an important aspect of corporate sustainability as such activation requires inclusion and engagement of all stakeholders, from employees to suppliers and customers (Lunde, 2018; Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Buhovac, Hren, Fink & Savić, 2019; Makridou, 2021; McKinsey, 2020). Through this paper, we could see that Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable are aware of that and invest their efforts in communicating their sustainability efforts to their customers. Marketing specialists emphasised that their decision to communicate sustainability to customers stems from their business strategy and actions in that field. Likewise, these brands practice corporate sustainability and nurture it as a core principle of their business. Consequently, they consider that sharing related activities and results, as well as their opinions and values, with the public comes as a natural decision.

Secondly, it is discussed in previous literature that social media is a powerful tool for influencing customer purchase (Evans & McKee, 2010) or learning about their behaviour, needs and wants (Constantinides, 2014). Social media can also accelerate social learning and altruism (Rolls, Hansen, Jackson, & Elliott, 2016; Cade, 2020) and create relational values (Calcagni, 2019). In addition to that, previous research shows that companies who undertake sustainability-related efforts tend to use social media more than “traditional” companies (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). In support of that, each of the Slovenian sustainable companies which we analysed is present and quite active on both Instagram and Facebook. They see many benefits of such communication, including high reach (especially of Millennials and Gen Z), convenience, low cost, eWOM, unformal atmosphere, two-way communication and high speed and customer engagement.

The aforementioned suggestions bring us to the communication of sustainability through social media, which undeniable gains plenty of attention nowadays. This paper suggests that Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable practice such communication talking about sustainability in on average 30% of their Facebook and Instagram posts. The results didn't surprise us due to the trends, which include youth's (Gen Y and Gen Z) growing concerns about climate crises, environmental preservation, unemployment and economic situation as well as their expectations for business and industry to support sustainable transformation (Dunne & Bijwaard, 2021). Moreover, today we face young people with high aspirations to support and contribute to sustainable development whose actions, nevertheless, very often remain untaken. However, they admit they feel ashamed for not taking the actions (GlobeScan, 2020). Also, these generations are at the same time digital

natives, who spend half of their time online while most of their online activities are performed on Facebook and Instagram (Campaign Monitor, 2019). They are characterised as open-minded, open to new experiences, transparent and honest relationships and interested in innovations and social issues (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). From these needs and characteristics, one might conclude that utilisation of social networking sites can be appropriate for sustainable communication, which furthermore can encourage sustainable behaviour. As part of the technical and ideological concept of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), Instagram and Facebook allow companies to connect with their targeted segments on a daily basis, engage with them in two-ways conversations as well as observe their behaviour and trends. The level of media richness and self-disclosure of these two platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) is high enough to enable companies to disclose rich and creative content, cooperate with brand ambassadors, create communities and manage perceptions of other people. It has been discussed that specified activities can increase the effectiveness of sustainability communication through social media (Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Digital Marketing Institute, n.d.). In addition, younger generations are most open to change (toward more sustainable living) when facing life-changing moments such as marriage and graduation (GlobeScan, 2021). That is a great opportunity for companies to reduce the aspiration-action gap by informing and educating social media audiences on how to live more sustainably as well as offering them the solutions from their offer. Companies should therefore observe customer behaviour and pay attention to such moments. The practice of researched companies corresponds well with this suggestion since they perform plenty of research on customers' behaviour using, among others, passively and actively social media and social media analytics.

It is important to add the study's implications on how to communicate sustainability through social media. To begin with, when practising sustainable marketing, it is important to focus on macromarketing and strong sustainability (SS) and understand the interconnectedness of economic, social and environmental aspects as well as their equality (Press, 2021; Davies, Oates, Tynan, Carrigan, Casey, Heath, Wells & others, 2020). Besides, brands are strongly advised to avoid greenwashing and talk transparently about their effort related to sustainability. Providing misinformation to the stakeholders may cause harm to the brand, society and the environment (Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Paco & Reis, 2013, p. 147). The study shows that chosen companies are aware of the suggestions and we could note that their communication message includes more than one corporate sustainability principle. In addition, following the example of researched companies, brands should invest their efforts in developing social media strategies or at least plans which can enable them to plan their activities, including those related to sustainability in accordance with their brand strategy and values, trends and important dates and events such as the Earth Day.

Furthermore, when communicating sustainability through social media, companies should not only focus on one-way communication by promoting their products and

services. Instead, they should engage the public in the discussion about sustainability and encourage concrete actions for sustainability (Genç, 2017; Tanford, Kim & Kim, 2020). The companies are also advised to generate content that includes rich visuals and high-quality information in order to attract audience attention, as well as quizzes and giveaways to engage them by developing social cues. In terms of content formats, both previous research and our study suggest using images on Facebook and Instagram as well as short captions. Links are more suitable for usage on the Facebook interface, while their aim to send the user to another online platform may be evaluated as unfavourable for the aspect of engagement on Facebook. Only text included posts are not advised, while video content is debatable since it may be considered as heavy for social media users but at the same time is an effective visual web atmospheric cue.

The most satisfactory conclusion that we can come to is that communication of sustainability through social media proved to be a benefit for companies. Thus, we strongly advise brands to communicate their sustainability-related efforts incorporating previous literature and our research suggestions. Nevertheless, one should accept that each research contains limitations that must be encountered when analysing the content and interpreting results. We discuss them in the following chapter.

7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

This chapter includes a critical analysis of this paper. Being of the basic research steps, critical analysis is significant for a scientific approach (Mayring, 2014). It seems that the main limitation of the study is the issue with objectivity. As a classical quality criterion, objectivity refers to the disconnectedness of the researcher's bias from research results and it tends to be the main issue within qualitative research methods (Mayring, 2014). Due to the fact that research includes in-depth interviews and content analysis, it is difficult to say that researcher's attitudes, feelings and knowledge could be in total separate from the data. However, in order to increase objectivity during the interview, semi-structured interviews have been conducted, meaning that most of the questions have been predefined. Besides, the questions were asked using the same wording to all respondents and interpretation of questions was avoided. To increase objectivity within the content analysis, the study adopted coding rules developed in the previous study and coding was made a few times until the consistency of results was established. Anyway, it is recommended for future research to establish intercoder reliability to ensure consistency and validity. In addition, we have been aware of the potential researcher bias from the begging of the study. Therefore, we have tried to disconnect from them during all steps of the research, including sampling, data collection, questions formulations, data analysis and results in interpretation.

Another significant limitation to consider is the small sample size, which is again of the characteristics of the qualitative research. The small sample, which is appropriate for

conducting the in-depth interviews and content analysis, may be problematic for generalising the results to the broader population and context (Rahman, 2016). Similarly, due to the extent and complexity of the work, the content analysis was performed for three months. We consider that further research may take a more extended period in order to observe and compare changes in communication over time and disconnect from possible events that may influence the research results.

Besides this, one may note that the study includes many concepts and topics and emphasises their interceptions and interconnectedness. However, each of the concepts may present a research topic by itself. Therefore, future researchers may consider the more detailed analysis of single concepts and thus, reach more specific results.

Finally, our research analyses how the sustainable marketing concept is understood among Slovenian sustainable companies, how they experience and perceive sustainability communication over social media and how they undertake it. The engagement of social media users is not analysed within this paper and that may be included in further research.

8 SUMMARY

Interrelation and interconnection of the social, environmental and economic aspects of the system call for sustainable development as the only path toward meeting the needs of current and future generations. From citizens, profit and non-profit organisations to public institutions, everyone is affected by climate and social crises. Everyone is also held responsible for undertaking actions that will enable the transformation to more sustainable practices and behaviours. Thus, companies need to rethink their practices and work on replacing their traditional growth and profit-maximisation model with corporate sustainability. This includes replacing traditional marketing with sustainable marketing, which is described as “the strategic creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that produce value through consumption behaviours, business practices, and the marketplace while lowering harm to the environment and ethically and equitably increasing the quality of life and well-being of consumers and global stakeholders, presently and for future generations” (Lunde, 2018, p.10). Such transition is complex as no stakeholder exists and operates in an isolated mechanism. Among others, it requires adaptation to micro and macro trends, including digitalization and the rise of social media. Social media sites, including Facebook and Instagram, gained extensive attention from citizens worldwide and their impact on various aspects of their life is scientifically proven.

With the focus on the utilisation of social media for communicating sustainability by answering the following research questions: *How is the sustainable marketing concept defined/seen/perceived among marketing practitioners in the Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable?* further, *What are the experiences and perceptions related to*

the role of social media for communicating sustainability among marketing practitioners in the Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable? and How do Slovenian companies recognised as sustainable use social media for communicating sustainability?

Master thesis analysed the concept of sustainable marketing and its development from the 1960s to today. It further focused on Slovenian companies that are recognised as sustainable by discussing the perceptions, expectations and understating of their marketing specialists concerning the communication of sustainability through Facebook and Instagram, as well as their undertaken activities on these two platforms during the period of three months. Our results advocate that communicating sustainability through social media presents an opportunity and necessity for today's businesses. Besides, we provide additional suggestions that may improve the effectiveness of such communication. The study answered all three research questions, providing the theoretical and managerial implications of improving sustainability communication effectiveness over social media.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary in Slovenian

Medsebojna povezava družbenih, okoljskih in gospodarskih vidikov narekuje trajnostni razvoj kot edino možnost zadovoljevanja potreb sedanjih in prihodnjih generacij. Podnebne in družbene krize prizadenejo vse, od državljanov, pridobitnih in nepridobitnih organizacij pa vse do javnih ustanov. Vsi so odgovorni tudi za izvajanje ukrepov, ki vodijo v bolj trajnostno prakso in vedenje. Podjetja morajo premisliti svoje modele in si prizadevati za prilagoditev svojih tradicionalnih modelov rasti in maksimiranja dobička v smeri korporativne vzdržnosti. To zajema razvoj tradicionalnega trženja v trajnostno trženje, ki je opredeljeno kot “strateško ustvarjanje, komunikacija, dostava in izmenjava ponudb, ki ustvarjajo vrednost s potrošniškim vedenjem, poslovnimi praksami in trgom, hkrati pa zmanjšujejo škodo za okolje ter etično in pravično povečujejo kakovost življenja in dobro počutje potrošnikov in globalnih deležnikov, zdaj in za prihodnje generacije” (Lunde, 2018, str.10). Takšen prehod je težaven, saj deležniki ne morejo živeti v slonokoščinem stolpu, hkrati pa zahteva prilagajanje mikro in makro trendom ob digitalizaciji in rasti uporabe družbenih omrežij. Spletna mesta družbenih omrežij, vključno s Facebookom in Instagramom, so pridobila veliko pozornost državljanov po vsem svetu in njihov vpliv na različne vidike njihovega življenja je znanstveno dokazan.

S poudarkom na uporabi družbenih omrežja za komuniciranje trajnosti, študija odgovori na naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja: *Kako je koncept trajnostnega trženja opredeljen / viden / zaznan med trženjskimi strokovnjaki v slovenskih podjetjih, prepoznan kot trajnosten?* nadalje, *Kakšne so izkušnje in dojemanja v zvezi z vlogo družbenih medijev pri komuniciranju trajnosti med trženjem/trajnostnimi praktiki v slovenskih podjetjih, ki so priznana kot trajnostna?* in *Kako slovenska podjetja, ki so priznana kot trajnostna, uporabljajo družbena omrežja za komuniciranje trajnosti?*

V študiji smo najprej analizirali koncept trajnostnega trženja in njegov razvoj od šestdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja do danes. Nato smo se z razpravo osredotočili na slovenska podjetja, ki so prepoznana kot trajnostna, ter obravnavali pričakovanja njihovih tržnih strokovnjakov za komuniciranje trajnosti prek Facebooka in Instagrama, vključno z njihovimi aktivnostmi na teh dveh platformah v obdobju treh mesecev. Naši rezultati govorijo, da komuniciranje trajnosti prek družbenih omrežij predstavlja priložnost in nujnost za današnja podjetja. Poleg tega podamo dodatne predloge, ki lahko izboljšajo učinkovitost tovrstne komunikacije. Študija vključuje odgovore na vsa tri raziskovalna vprašanja in razpravo o vplivu raziskave na teorijo in prakso.

Appendix 2: In-depth interview questions

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to support our study. The interview will take 30 to 45 minutes.

Now, I would like to briefly explain to you the study. It is a master thesis that arose from an aspiration to provide a better understanding of sustainability communication through social media. We focus on Slovenian companies recognised as leaders in sustainability and explore their attitudes toward and ways of utilisation of Facebook and Instagram for communicating their sustainability efforts.

Within this research, we are aiming to interview at least four communication and/or sustainability experts from five different companies. Additional data will be collected through observation and analysis of the content published on your companies' social media platforms.

Everything written that will directly refer to you/your company will be sent to you for review and confirmation. Unconfirmed content won't be published. If you would prefer to stay anonymous, please, let me know now.

Before we jump to the specific questions, please tell me a bit more about you and the company you work for.

- What is your role and your responsibilities at the company and for how many years you have been doing so?
- Please, tell me a bit about your educational background.
- How many employees your company counts?
- In what industry does your company operate?
- What is the core product/service of your company?
- Do you currently target local/national or international/global market or both?

Interview Questions

1. What is, in your opinion, sustainable marketing?
2. Does your company communicate to the public messages related to sustainable development such as practices and tips related to nature conservation, more sustainable living, responsible consumption, pollution and waste reduction, energy efficiency etc.? Why/Why not?
3. How did you decide on the area of your sustainability communication?
4. Have you heard about terms such as ecological marketing, environmental marketing and green marketing and how do you understand them?

5. Why at first did you decided to open Instagram and Facebook account for your company and why do you remain active there?
6. Does your company communicate sustainability through social media? Why/Why not? How? Please describe a post that communicates sustainability.
7. Can you explain your experience with communicating sustainability through social media?
8. Does your company have a strategy for communicating sustainability through Instagram and Facebook or any other strategy for Instagram or Facebook? If yes, please, explain it briefly.
9. Which kind of post work the best in your opinion?
10. Is youth your current or/and future target group and how does it affect your company's approach toward sustainability, communication, and in particular communication of sustainability efforts?
11. Does and how going global/international affected your sustainability communication through social media?
12. Do your competitors have Facebook and Instagram accounts and how would you evaluate your social media performance in comparison with them?
13. It is considered by some that Facebook and Instagram can provide producers and sellers much insight into the consumers attitudes and behaviour related to sustainability. Have you ever benefitted from social media in that way?
14. Do you consider that social media influences customer behaviour? If you do consider so, do you think of it as good or bad for your company? Why?
15. Which aspect is the most import for you when communicating sustainability communication through social media?
 - a. engage public in a discussion about sustainability related matter
 - b. communicate your sustainability efforts
 - c. influence public to change behaviour toward more sustainable
16. Do you plan to utilize social media for communicating sustainability in the future?
17. Communicating sustainability efforts of your company through Facebook and Instagram is, in your opinion,
 - a) necessity
 - b) opportunity
 - c) other

Why do you think so?

Conclusion

- Is there something that I haven't ask and you believe it is important to mention?

Thank you very much for your participation and your input. You can expect the pre-published materials in a month or two in your email. And please do not hesitate to contact me whether you think of something additional that you believe we should include in our study, or you have any questions.

Appendix 3: Coding units and variables

Coding units for this study are the companies' social media posts. Each unit needs to be analysed and coded using separate rows of the table and in accordance with different variables related to seven columns explained below.

ID	Date	Channel	Communication Type	Web atmospheric cues	Content formats	Sustainability Communication Topic

Variable/column	Description
ID	Identifier of each coding units. Includes name of the brand, channel and date of the publishment, and a number to differentiate among the posts published at the same day. For example, Nike_FB_12.05.2021_1.
Date	A day, month and year of the post publishment. For example, 12.05.2021
Channel	The channel where the post is published. It can be either FB for Facebook, IN for Instagram or WS for website.
Communication Type	The type of sustainability communication (CaS, CoS, CfS). As we discussed, the post can include more than one communication type. The column should be filled with the absolute numbers that correspond to the specific type of communication (See Table 1).
Web atmospheric cues	Web atmospheric cues may be visual cues, information cues, ethic cues, social cues, security cues or others. Coding unit may include more than one type of web atmospheric cues. The column should be filled with the absolute numbers that correspond to the specific type of web atmospheric cues (See Table 2).
Content format	Can be photo, video or text with the addition of the text or link. The column should be filled with the absolute numbers that correspond to the specific content formats (See Table 3).
Sustainability Communication Topic	Can be ethics, transparency, business relationships, financial return, community involvement/economic development, value of the products and services, employment practices, protection of the environment, or other. The column should be filled with the absolute numbers that correspond to the specific type of sustainability communication topic (See Table 4).

Table 1: Communication type

Communication Type	Coding
CaS	1
CoS	2
CfS	3
CaS + CoS	4
CaS + CfS	5
CoS + CfS	6
CaS + CoS + CfS	7
Not related to sustainability	0

Table 2: Web atmospheric cues

Web atmospheric cues	Coding
Visual cues	1
Information cues	2
Ethic cues	3
Social cues	4
Security cues	5
Visual cues + Information cues	6
Visual cues + Social Cues	7
Visual cues + Information cues + Ethic cues	9
Visual cues + Social cues + Ethic cues	9
Visual cues + Social cues + Informational cues	10
Not related to sustainability	0

Table 3: Content format

Photo + short text (up to two sentences)	1
Photo + short text (up to two sentences) + link	2
Photo + long text (more than two sentences)	3
Photo + long text (more than two sentences) + link	4
Video + Short text	5
Video + Short text + link	6
Video + Long text	7
Video + Long text + link	8
Text	9
Not applicable	0

Table 4: Sustainability Communication Topic

Sustainability Communication Topic	Coding
Ethics	1
Transparency	2
Business relationships	3
Financial return	4
Community involvement / economic development	5
Value of the products and services	6
Employment practices	7
Protection of the environment	8
Sustainability / more than one topic	9
Not related to sustainability	0