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"Green" Marketing in the Apparel Industry: The Spectrum of Veracity

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Abstract

Apparel companies' propensity for manipulation in their marketing of environmental initiatives contributes to immense environmental pollution from petrochemical textile material production. Public scrutiny pressures these businesses to adopt "green" initiatives to avoid losing devoted consumers. In some cases, these initiatives disguise the real operations of a company or claim benignity for the company when this is not the reality. Previous business ethics research analyzed the emergence of "greenwashing" in corporations and thus concluded that corporations market themselves as eco-friendly to portray commodification as sustainable. In the form of case studies, this paper scrutinizes four companies: Zara, Patagonia, Lululemon, and Pact. Through discourse and visual analyses on the social media platform, Instagram, from 2016 until 2021, and annual reports from 2016, 2018, and 2020, the paper analyzes how each company narrates its environmental consciousness. My findings indicate that Zara and Lululemon elicit consumer support through strategies of ambiguous discourse and nature visuals while Pact and Patagonia emphasize their third-party certifications and data substantiated results. In sum, this research brings awareness to marketing narratives of apparel companies in hopes of informing consumers that company claims may mask the true environmental effects of a company's production processes.

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Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>

Habitually, consumers trust the claims of successful companies. While apparel company claims regarding style and popularity are relatively benign, distorted environmental sustainability claims are not. With fashion as the second largest polluting industry, major apparel companies spark the question: what marketing strategies frame a brand as environmentally conscious? This paper addresses these concerns and bridges critical analyses of corporate greenwashing through visual and discourse investigations on the companies: Zara, Patagonia, Lululemon, and Pact. How is each company conveying sustainability when the industry revolves around conspicuous consumption? Moreover, how does each company craft its narrative to the public and convince consumers to continue purchasing? Through my analyzes on the narratives constructed on a social media platform and in corporate annual reports, my research offers a critical lens on these conveyances.

Past marketing research discovered the nuances of greenwashing in businesses along with the marketing strategies implemented by companies to persuade the consumer (Arnold, 2009; Berghoff, 2017; Ottoman, 2011). While these researchers understood manipulation in marketing, the research lacked a comparative analysis on digital media marketing between companies. Digital marketing on Instagram grew exponentially in the past decade given its success in shaping consumer habits. Through an investigation of Instagram marketing strategies from 2016 until 2021 and an analysis of 2016, 2018 and 2020 annual reports for each case study, this paper uncovers how brands craft environmental consciousness narratives to the public and convey credibility.

The ambiguity of the term "sustainability" along with other terms such as "sustainable" and "social responsibility" allows brands to capitalize on consumer confusion (Christofi, 2012;

Meuer, 2020; Mohammad, 2019; Montiel, 2008; Siew, 2015). These terms require a strong background in environmental science or extensive research, both of which many consumers do not have. Companies, aware of this fact, exploit the consumer by orchestrating their self-representation with certain discourse and visuals. Given the lack of standards for sustainability in the industry, many companies can avoid repercussions if they distort their environmental story. Fortunately, some brands strive for credibility and demonstrate it by providing transparent and specific data on their operations. In assessing sustainability narratives in the four case studies, the variance in marketing images and language demonstrates this phenomenon.

With fossil fuel generation, the production process, and pollution through shipment methods, making the apparel industry "green" is an arduous task. My research brings awareness to the nuances of the industry in hopes of informing consumers that the environment continues to suffer at the expense of greenwashing claims. Consumers must recognize the reality of marketing claims as just that: strategy. Corporate narrative claims must be realized to make progress with environmental initiatives.

After synthesizing past visual research on corporate reports and discourse strategies adopted by "sustainably driven" companies in those reports, I develop a framework centered on ambiguous terminology, nature tropes, and credibility to assess my case studies. Next, I describe the Instagram case studies of Zara, Patagonia, Lululemon and Pact. After the Instagram analyses, I scrutinize the annual reports of each company, breaking the sections into separate visual and discourse analyses. Finally, I conclude with an analytical discussion on where each brand falls on the spectrum of veracity. My spectrum of veracity refers to each company's degree of transparency on practices and profits. Obscured practices and manipulated greenwashing claims constitute the lowest rating. Projected practices and data based initiatives constitute the highest.

This is followed by suggestions for future research on alternative objects of analysis including employees, stakeholders, and marketing communications.

Situating the Research within Science, Technology, and Society Studies

While marketing strategies are not explicitly "science," I study digital media as a technology that enhances marketing. Many of the questions Science, Technology, and Society (STS) scholars ask about technology can be applied to digital marketing (Jasanoff, 2017; Benjamin, 2016). My research directly questions how digital media accelerates and permits the spread of false information. The phenomenon of greenwashing grew exponentially with the digital age given the societal acceptance of brevity and ambiguity in Instagram posts. When brands manipulate environmental initiatives, they detrimentally affect the planet because citizens assume companies implement environmental preservation measures. In reality, these initiatives may not be fully realized by the companies, or they may impact the environment less than each company claims. Through my research, I am questioning how digital media reinforces social power and authority. In "Field of Its Own," Jasanoff establishes that STS scholars traditionally consider science and technology as "distinctive cultural formations" (2017, p. 4). They question how scientific authority translates into social power and how social power enables scientific authority. The use of greenwashing by big businesses is an exemplar of this power dynamic. When customers lack the resources to learn about sustainability, they turn to social powers, in this case apparel corporations, for scientific authority. Unfortunately, powerful companies often implement greenwashing as this "authority." In "Catching Our Breath," Benjamin questions, "who and what are fixed in place—classified, corralled, and/or coerced, to enable innovation?" (2016, p. 150). With these case studies, companies coerce the consumer, earn profit, and continue apparel production. Similar to Jasanoff's argument, this persuasion and manipulation of

information upholds the hegemony of greenwashing. True environmentalists will often challenge companies on their green initiatives, but Benjamin's argument forces us to consider who has the strongest voice in digital media. Platforms such as Instagram allow the public to contest company narratives and advance criticism, but the voices with social prestige (corporations) are heard the loudest. Lastly, although Browne discusses new surveillance strategies in "Dark Matters," the core questions of the chapter are important for my own research. Browne argues how, with new surveillance, "data collection is often done without the consent of the target" (2015, p. 15). As companies privately collect digital data on successful marketing tactics, they manipulate their language and visuals to capitalize on consumers (Lammi, 2019). Thus, this exploration matters not only for ensuring environment concerns are properly addressed, but also for understanding how detrimental digital media can be when in the wrong hands. In sum, my analysis offers a model for how to analyze digital media's perpetuation of social power imbalances and how it further advances those imbalances.

Overall, my research contributes to the discussion of who has a voice in science and technology. In an era of mass disinformation and powerful algorithms, we must contend with false corporate environmental narratives. As corporations continue production unabated, the devastation from climate disaster increases. Questioning the narratives presented by those with authority remains crucial if society hopes to improve its environmental footprint.

Research Methods

Research on corporate greenwashing typically implements discourse analysis as a primary method. For this paper, I contribute to the existing body of literature by conducting a discourse and visual analysis on digital media from four apparel companies. Two companies sell activewear products (Patagonia and Lululemon) while the other two (Pact and Zara) cater to

lifestyle apparel. Zara, Lululemon, Patagonia, and Pact all tout environmental initiatives and social responsibility to their consumers. Patagonia designs outdoor apparel and gear. Lululemon is a high-end athletic retailer. Pact is an organic fabric apparel retailer. Lastly, Zara is a mass fast fashion brand owned by the Spain based retailer, Inditex. The juxtaposition adds variety to the objects of analysis. With activewear brands, companies tend to promote outdoor visuals demonstrating their apparel in use. Lifestyle apparel companies often do not position their models in nature for everyday photoshoots. Thus, using both types of companies allow me to analyze the visuals using a nature trope framework. Within my framework, I noticed instances of what I refer to as "untouched" nature along with "groomed" nature. "Untouched" indicates visuals of the environment in its purest, daily condition. "Groomed" indicates nature manipulated by humans such as landscaped areas and potted plants. Additionally, lifestyle and activewear brands use different discourse for marketing. Activewear brands often promote health and wellness while lifestyle brands promote comfort. I scrutinize how sustainability factors into the discourse and whether the brands converge or diverge in their marketing language. In each activewear and lifestyle category, one of the brands has been praised by popular media articles while the other has been criticized by those publications. Zara and Lululemon represent companies that third-party organizations highlighted as major greenwashing participants (Butler, 2022; Changing Markets Foundation, 2021; Rauturier, 2022). Patagonia and Pact, on the other hand, were continually referenced by articles on sustainable apparel (Good Trade, 2022; Nadine, 2022; Raczka, 2021; Sustainably Chic, 2022). This paper analyzes where each brand falls on the spectrum of veracity and how each marketing team generates credibility for the brand's environmental claims.

Previous Visual and Discourse Research

Past critical business ethics research on corporate reports demonstrates the necessity of implementing both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. Stakeholder theory and corporate accountability researchers Greenwood et al. provide a methodology for analyzing visual rhetoric in corporate reports. The authors break the analysis into three phases (Greenwood, 2019). The first phase is categorical analysis. This includes tracking the quantities of each visual element, compositional features, and size. While this can be beneficial, a second order analysis attributes meaning to the visual data. The article refers to this phase as content analysis and creates a denotative and connotative description for each visual (Greenwood, 2019). Denotative describes what the visual is while connotative describes what it signifies and how it makes one feel. The authors note that the way an image makes one feel is subjective but is strongly bound by cultural experience (Greenwood, 2019). Lastly, the third phase is rhetorical analysis which interprets the design elements in relation to each other but also in the contexts of organizational setting, the research question, and the researcher (Greenwood, 2019). My study follows a similar pattern in grounding the analysis with a strong contextual background to adequately interpret the data through a qualitative lens. Additionally, this paper considers how the report appears to stakeholders as well as consumers. While many consumers do not read company reports, they are publicly accessible. As a final point, Greenwood referenced researcher Craig Deegan's argument that visuals emphasize or divert attention from certain aspects of text or data (Greenwood, 2019). Some of the case studies in this paper may utilize this diversion tactic to manipulate the sentiments generated from the corporate reports.

Sustainability reporting researcher Sue Hrasky conducted similar research to that of Deegan (2012). In her study, she analyzed the increasing amount of sustainability information available in formal corporate reports (Hrasky, 2012). Through an analysis of 41 firms' annual

reports, Hrasky argues that companies use visuals such as graphs and photographs to communicate their legitimacy (2012). Her data substantiates other research that businesses typically use less graphs when their environmental initiatives are symbolic and implement greenwashing strategies (Hrasky, 2012). These companies use photographs with non-specific natural imagery that are suggestive of environmental concern (Hrasky, 2012). Thus, businesses attempting to feign sustainability utilize photographs to distract or influence how readers remember the information provided (Greenwood 2019, Hrasky 2012). Overall, Hrasky's study categorizes the graphs and photographs and conducts a differential analysis to reach conclusions on the variety between companies.

Objects of Analysis

For the discourse and visual analysis, this paper scrutinizes Instagram posts from 2016 until 2021. I began my analysis in 2016 because the profitability of sustainable products began exponentially growing in the 2010s. Between 2006 and 2010, the top 100 sustainable global companies experienced higher mean sales growth and cash flows from operations compared to control companies (Ameer, 2012; Whelan, 2016). Additionally, a study found that revenues from sustainable products and services grew at six times the rate of overall company revenues between 2010 and 2013 (Singer, 2015). By 2016, more companies learned of the profitability of sustainability and capitalized on it. Beginning with 2016 provides a manageable data scope for my research, and it situates the research timely. Instagram is the chosen media outlet given its popularity "with roughly one billion monthly active users" (Statista, 2021). Additionally, Instagram launched "Instagram Checkout" in March 2019 where users can purchase commerce directly through the app and avoid third-party sites (Khaimova, 2019; Warren, 2020). With this feature, more business articles encouraged companies to join the app to boost profits (Divakaran, 2021; Kellogg, 2020; Kuligowski, 2020). This study also scrutinizes Instagram because of the

attributes of the posts. When posting on the app, a user has the capacity to post a photo or video along with a short caption. In evaluating the Instagram accounts of each case, my discourse analysis includes attention to the company bio, text on the videos or photos, and captions accompanying each post.

Instagram posts cater to the public eye directly. The consumers often possess less of a knowledge base than environmental scholars on environmental consciousness; therefore, these consumers require less information than what companies must provide to investors. Stakeholders invest in the company, and they necessitate more specifics about each tactic implemented by the company along with the risks. Alongside Instagram posts, this paper analyzes annual reports from 2016, 2018, and 2020. An Investopedia article broke down the purpose of corporate reports:

> The intent of the required annual report is to provide public disclosure of a company's operating and financial activities over the past year. The report is typically issued to shareholders and other stakeholders who use it to evaluate the firm's financial performance and to make investment decisions. (Hayes, 2020)

Annual reports provide another window into the marketing strategy of each brand and how that brand entices investors and consumers to become loyal clients. In corporate reports, a company cannot make overt false claims as it could affect the stock of the company. For the corporate reports, my study draws inspiration from past corporate research and conducts a multi-phase approach for dissecting each report (Greenwood, 2019). My multi-phase approach implements both visual and discourse analysis. Primarily, I categorize and quantify the visuals included on each page. Next, I analyze the visuals for context and pair my research on each case with the data presented in the report. Finally, I crosscheck the data on the page with the visual narrative

presented to each reader as Hrasky's research demonstrated the proclivity of brands to alter the

narrative through image use. After scrutinizing the visuals of each report, I move to a closer

discourse investigation. My analysis on discourse is both quantitative in considering the

frequency of words and qualitative in studying the framing of the words. The quantitative tables

for each company's top 25 most frequent words are in the appendices. I use the programs from

Databasic.io (2022) and Key Content (2022) to conduct my frequency analysis. In both the

discourse and visual analyses, I undertake the broadest representations of environmental

consciousness and nature as I assess the variety of materials. I synthesize the data found from the

Instagram and annual reports and discuss my conclusions.

Background
Corporate Sustainability

As more companies market themselves as "sustainable," the question arises: what does

the phrase "corporate sustainability" mean? Unfortunately, the definition of corporate

sustainability is a point of contention for many scholars. A consensus on a universal definition

has yet to be reached. After reviewing the literature surrounding the question of corporate

sustainability, many scholars point to the 1987 Brundtland Report as the first conceptualization

of "sustainable development" (Christofi, 2012; Meuer, 2020; Mohammad, 2019; Montiel, 2014;

Siew, 2015). The report defined corporate sustainability as "the ability to meet the needs of our

present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own

needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987). In the years following this report, the definition of corporate

sustainability has continued to change. Montiel, Mohammad, and Meuer provide long lists of

slightly varied corporate sustainability definitions from top academic management journals,

practitioner journals, scholars, and institutions. Generally, while the wording differs, many of the

definitions state that a firm must balance the three pillars of economic, social, and environmental

goals. Sustainability scholars will consider the interdependence of these three pillars, but some businesses will treat each pillar as a separate entity, and therefore avoid acknowledging the interconnectivity of the issues. In this research paper, however, I am not evaluating how sustainable a brand is nor am I attempting to define corporate sustainability. This research, instead, understands how companies achieve credibility in the public eye when marketing their sustainability. Some companies implement sustainability reporting tools while other companies, guilty of greenwashing, will actively avoid these tools. For the purpose of this research, I will define corporate sustainability as supporting current economic, social, and environmental development while staying cognizant of how those developments affect the needs of the future. Researchers Meuer et al. published a 2020 study that generates a framework to create a common understanding for corporate sustainability. The framework identifies essential attributes in the various definitions of corporate sustainability. These attributes include level of ambition, level of integration, and specificity of sustainable development (Meuer, 2020). As this paper analyzes the corporate sustainability reporting of companies, I will consider Meuer et al.'s study to evaluate where the case studies land on the scale of each attribute. Lastly, aside from the plethora of definitions, scholars note the various tools attempting to regulate sustainability. In 1997, CERES and the Tellus Institute worked with the UN Environment Program to create the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The GRI is an international independent standards organization working to ensure companies maintain accountability as they adhere to environmental conduct principles such as corporate sustainability (GRI, 2022). By 1999, the Sustainable Asset Management Group of Zurich and S&P Dow Jones jointly created the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI) as the first global sustainability benchmark (DJSI, 2022). The indices "select the most sustainable companies from across 61 industries" (DJSI, 2022). While both the GRI and

DJSI appear helpful for sustainability, they are only two of many corporate sustainability reporting tools (SRTs). Siew's study categorized SRTs into the categories of frameworks (principles and guidelines), standards (formal requirements), and ratings (third-party evaluation) (2015). Siew references the SIGMA project, the Global Compact, Carbon Disclosure Project, ISO140001, EMAS, KLD, SAM, and many others as reporting tools (2015). Thus, the oversaturation of reporting institutions allows businesses to slip through the cracks and avoid public scrutiny on corporate sustainability. All in all, this study sheds light on the issues created by the ambiguity of corporate sustainability.

Greenwashing
In 1986, Jay Westerveld coined the term "greenwashing" to describe how a hotel promoted its reuse of towels as a sustainable initiative when, in reality, the company reused towels as a cost saving effort (Ottman, 2011). Essentially, greenwashing describes a business' inflation of claims to give the impression that products or actions benefit the environment. With the emergence of the "green consumer," greenwashing became a crucial element in a company's business model (Ottoman, 2011).

Jacquelyn Ottman upholds this theory in *The New Rules of Green Marketing* (2011). In "Chapter 6: Communicating Sustainability with Impact," she describes how consumers now avoid brands that do not directly address their sustainability or social responsibility. She argues that consumers and stakeholders believe companies are not "ecologically sound" if the marketers "don't tout the sustainability achievements of their brands" (Ottman, 2011, Chapter 6). Next in *Green capitalism?: Business and the Environment in the Twentieth Century,* authors Berghoff and Rome state, "dramatically revised regulatory regimes and consumer attitudes gradually turned green capitalism into a commercial growth strategy" (2017, p. 31). Conversely, in *Ethical Marketing and the New Consumer*, author Chris Arnold informs marketers on how to avoid

greenwashing (2009). He analyzes the new "eco-ethical" consumer, and his work advises

businesses on how to format their personalized marketing strategy. In one section of his book, he

writes about the "rational to emotional line" (Arnold, 2009, p. 87). On the rational side,

consumers make informed decisions on their purchase. On the emotional side, consumers have a

propensity to make impulse decisions. Sustainability is highly emotive, but the brand must help

the consumer rationalize the purchase after initial engagement (Arnold, 2009, p.89). He

substantiates that "the failure of many eco-ethical products is their inability to tune into the real

world of marketing, which is why big brands that begin offering ethical versions are a major

threat to the small guys" (Arnold, 2009, p. 90). In this paper, I analyze the marketing strategies

of the "big guys" and the "small guys" to consider the effects of green capitalism.

Fast Fashion
Greenwashing prevails in the apparel industry because environmental consciousness

directly conflicts with fashion. In brief, "there is probably no other industry in such an ethical

conflict as the fashion industry" (Arnold, 2009, p.216). In the late 1980s, globalization

transformed the fashion industry and the idea of "fast fashion" emerged. Fast fashion is "the

production of trendy, inexpensive garments in vast amounts at lightning speed in subcontracted

factories, to be hawked in thousands of chain stores" (Thomas, 2019, p. 4). In this model,

businesses offshore their factories to cut production costs and produce a copious supply of

inventory. Dana Thomas' book, *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of

Clothes*, examines the fast fashion industry. Thomas states that the industry "devours one-fourth

of chemicals produced world-wide" (2019, p. 7). Devastatingly, the clothing produced does not

stay in closets for long. The average person throws away about 80 pounds of clothing per person

per year (Thomas, 2019, p. 7). Luz Claudio's research on this subject revealed that, even if this

clothing is donated, "there are not nearly enough people in America to absorb the mountains of

castoffs" (Claudio, 2007, p. 452). Claudio also researched the capabilities of alternative methods

such as organically grown cotton, but in 2007, only 0.03% of worldwide cotton was grown

organically (Claudio, 2007, p. 453). In this industry, "design and aesthetics comes first and ethics

second" (Arnold, 2009, p. 221). Thus, companies are less willing to choose the more sustainable

option because it does not fit the aesthetic appeal of the industry. These findings illustrate the

necessity to question each apparel company's credibility in its claims of "durability" and

"environmental consciousness" in such a polluting industry. Publicly, Zara is notoriously known

as a fast fashion brand. Society does not give Lululemon, Pact, and Patagonia the same

classification, but these three companies still contribute to the copious supply of clothing

produced daily. Thus, all four require critical analyses.

Corporate Social Responsibility
When analyzing sustainability in businesses, the phenomenon of "corporate social

responsibility" (CSR) often accompanies the research. Much like the term "corporate

sustainability" (CS), scholars often note the ambiguity of CSR's definition. Consequently,

confusion arises from the company's workers along with its stakeholders and customers. Aside

from its ambiguity, CSR embodies goals very similar to those of corporate sustainability. Thus,

clarifying the slight variations between the two concepts fosters a deeper understanding when

conducting my case studies. As demonstrated later, some companies place more time and effort

into their CSR initiatives rather than their CS efforts.

Most scholars researching CSR reference Carroll's (1979) definition for CSR where "the

social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary

expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (p. 500). Essentially, most

scholars define CSR as a business' set of practices and procedures that honor economic, social,

and environmental improvement. This definition, however, resembles the definition for CS with

its three pillars of economic, social, and environmental consideration. Fortunately, Montiel (2008) conducted a study on the various CS and CSR definitions present in general management journals. Montiel discovered that CS literature recognizes the three issues as interconnected, whereas CSR literature views social and economic performance as independent components (2008). Additionally, Montiel substantiates how there is a subtle difference in the way each definition frames issues. CS visions align with "intrinsic value" which considers an entity for its own sake independent of humans while CSR visions align with "use value" which considers how an entity provides for humans (Montiel, 2008). Thus, CS initiatives view issues through an eco-centric paradigm while CSR initiatives view the issues through an anthropocentric paradigm (Montiel, 2008). In Dickson's (2006) study on social responsibility defined by apparel and textile scholars, the surveys referenced CSR categories including working conditions, child labor, consumerism, environmental degradation, wages, and trade policy. Dickson argued that apparel and textile industries tend to describe issues falling under the environmental pillar in broad, general terms while they describe the social pillar in more depth (2008). In the case studies, this proclivity toward social pillar related issues might overshadow or replace the business' concern for the environmental pillar. The business may spotlight its CSR in hopes of distracting the stakeholders and customers from questioning its CS practices. Before brands can effectively distract from CS practices, however, brands must combat what Wong (2016) refers to as the CSR-luxury paradox. According to Wong, luxury brands must navigate how to combine luxury which is "regarded as a symbol of social distinction" with CSR when "this concept of social distinction contradicts the notion of equality, a core value of CSR" (Wong, 2016, p. 94). Brands combatted this paradox by using a "coexistence" or a "convergence" strategy in their discourse (Wong, 2016). For the coexistence strategy, the brand balanced discussions of internal growth

and achievement with discussions on care and respect for society and the environment (Wong, 2016). With the convergence strategy, companies mitigated the "conflict of excess and moderation by highlighting their care and preservation of Earth, from which rare and precious resources are often violently extracted" (Wong, 2016, p. 106). While Patagonia, Pact, Lululemon and Zara are not "luxury brands," Wong's research demonstrates marketing strategies regarding CSR. In this paper's case studies, I consider these strategies when analyzing company discourse. While some businesses are critiqued for their CSR and CS efforts, others dedicate equal attention to both initiatives and work to improve their economic, social, and environmental impact. In my four case studies, I investigate instances of CS along with CSR. CS and CSR only vary slightly, but when a brand truly achieves both, the distinction is clear.

Fair Trade USA

A prime example of corporate social responsibility is the non-profit organization, Fair Trade USA. This organization certifies products with the "Fair Trade Certified" seal that guarantees safe working conditions, environmental protection, sustainable livelihoods, and community development funds (Fair Trade USA, 2022). Launched in 1998, the organization prides itself in "leading the charge toward sustainable development and corporate social responsibility by forming fair and honest partnerships across the globe" (Fair Trade USA, 2022, About Us). The organization also consistently promotes six of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) including no poverty, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production, and life below water (Fair Trade USA, 2022). While Fair Trade USA exemplifies only one of many non-profit organizations promoting equity and responsibility, it is a noteworthy organization because both Patagonia and Pact received the Fair Trade Certification. Lululemon and Zara did not earn the certification. Even though those two brands were not awarded the designation, this

paper's case studies search for other CS or CSR organizations referenced by Zara and Lululemon given the plethora of non-profit organizations promoting CS and CSR standards.

Credibility and Claims

Customers often purchase from a company when they believe in the legitimacy of the product, it is affordable, or the product is convenient. As marketing teams craft their brand strategy, credibility remains crucial. Legitimating claims of durability in clothing pieces may be fairly simple for the marketing team but demonstrating credibility in environmental efforts is more challenging. Some marketing teams lean on third-party certifications for credibility while other teams capitalize on the lack of consumer knowledge. Even if consumers have a general knowledge base for sustainability, customers often suffer from "green fatigue" where they feel overwhelmed by "green marketing buzzwords" (Ottman, 2011, Chapter 7). With more businesses touting environmental commitment, some marketing teams leverage third-party certifications while others manipulate the ambiguity surrounding credibility.

In 2014, researchers Olsen et al. conducted a study to determine how brand attitude (overall evaluation of a brand) changes with the introduction of sustainable products to a company. The researchers disagreed with previous research that argued "green" products were believed to be of lesser quality and therefore contributed to negative brand attitude (Olsen, 2014). The researchers also falsified the notion that consumers stayed away from sustainable products because of their fear of greenwashing. This study, instead, concluded that environmentally conscious products can improve brand attitude if the marketing team implements a good strategy. The research revealed that fewer broad green claims enhanced the relationship between innovation and credibility (Olsen, 2014). Olsen et al. argued that fewer general claims are less taxing for the consumer and less likely to generate skepticism.

Surprisingly, the study also found that consumer attitudes about a brand were not affected by a company's investment to create environmental legitimacy (Olsen, 2014). Customers wanted to see direct action from the brand not investments. The study concluded that the introduction of "greener" products improves brand attitude, and therefore credibility, for younger brands. It recommended that older brands, however, consider introducing a sub-brand for green products. Separating the new venture from the known brand helps create a stronger brand identity for the subdivision and build more credibility in the end. The case studies in this paper scrutinize the success of subdivisions.

Often, the term credibility accompanies the idea of validity. A study from 2021 measured the concept of authenticity and what it meant to consumers (Nunes). The study noted that people agree on the importance of authenticity, but there is no commonly accepted definition for the word. The researchers concluded that there are six component judgments for authenticity: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency (Nunes, 2021). Consumers judged the authenticity of the entertainment industry with "originality" while "legitimacy" (adherence to standards) was more important for areas pertaining to one's health. This study, therefore, raises the question: which judgement should be used for environmentally conscious companies and what strategies are the teams implementing? Environmentally conscious brands should fall under "legitimacy" to standardize the industry, but unfortunately, the fashion industry lacks a universal sustainability standard for businesses. Ottman states, "more than 400 different eco-labels or green certification systems have been found in over 207 countries" (2011, Chapter 7). With the saturation of logos and trademarks, it is clear how "green fatigue" emerges. On top of that, Ottman argues that only a handful of eco-labels have gained purchase influence with public (2011, Chapter 7). Ottman suggests that companies choose a

relevant label and educate their consumer on the qualifications for the label (2011, Chapter 7). She believes this will help brands navigate the inundated market. Third-party certifications are important for building credibility, but these certifications will not reach full efficacy until the process is standardized and impartial.

Overall, the portrayal of validity promotes a brand and its sales in consequence. The case studies in this paper shed light on the methodology implemented by each brand to portray credibility. Rather than question if a brand is authentic, the paper evaluates *how* that validity is crafted. Companies that provide more evidentiary support appear to succeed in portraying credibility compared to companies that inundate consumers with vague claims and irrelevant visuals.

Case Studies: Instagram
Zara Instagram Analysis
Zara released its first sustainable collection in autumn/winter 2016. With this collection, Zara alluded to its corporate sustainability. The first post for the collection announced a "woman who looks into a more sustainable future." As the posts progress from 2016 until 2021, a shift in the marketing strategy emerged. The discourse and visual analysis reveal how the marketing team adapted their portrayal of Zara's environmental initiatives.

In 2016 and 2017, most of the posts had relatively bare backgrounds with a single model posing. In 2017, the marketing team posed the models for the children's line with bunnies (See Figure 1). This could suggest a connection to nature or draw on the benignity of nature to boost sales. This year also featured images of models posing with the sky as the backdrop. For both years, the captions consisted of vague claims such as "reduce environmental impact" and "best sustainable processes". The posts mentioned two fibers created from recycled cotton and wood, but the descriptions were brief. In 2018, the marketing team approached their sustainability

initiatives differently. At this point, the need to be "green" was steadily increasing for companies, and it appeared that Zara did not want to be left behind (Berghoff, 2017). Visually, the posts from 2018 provided a sense that the model is one with nature. Posts included images of a model in the woods, a dragonfly resting on a model's shirt, and a video of a model walking through fields and with animals on a farm (See Figure 2). The discourse from this year emphasized recycling. Phrases such as "collection made out of recycled materials" appeared in many of the captions. Additionally, some of the posts provided a short description of Zara's "Clothes Collection Program" that encouraged clothing recycling and reuse. Unfortunately, this campaign was not received well. Comments under the video critiqued the excessive connection to nature and mentioned frustrations with the lack of transparency. Much public discourse questioning Zara's credibility surfaced. Following these critiques, the marketing team appeared to approach 2019 with a simplistic design. Most of the posts from this year, along with 2020, contained monochrome wall backgrounds or simple skies. The captions provided longer descriptions of the raw materials. Phrases from these years included "produced using better processes" and "looking for new processes and raw materials to help us produce more responsibly". The subtle change from "best processes" used in 2016 to "better processes" in 2020 alluded to the marketing team's attention to public critique. The team understood that people were judging the sustainability of the company, and portraying Zara as faultless would not be favorable. The captions, however, still lacked specificity, "better" than what and by what standard? Lastly in 2021, the team positioned the models in manicured outdoor spaces or with monochrome walls (See Figure 3). I use manicured to describe what looks like a well-kept green lawn with a modern house in the background. This year, the captions for the posts provided concrete figures and goals. For example, one post mentioned, "Our goal is that by 2022 10% of

the energy in all our headquarters logistics centers and stores will come from renewable

sources." On top of providing more accountability for the company, the posts also provided

longer descriptions of the processes and materials implemented by the company. Overall, Zara's

team shifted their marketing strategy from 2016-2021. The nature trope transitioned from

"untouched" to "groomed" nature after the company received criticism in 2018. Zara might have

created its sustainable subdivision to build more credibility and brand identity for its new line,

but it appears consumers were not convinced of the company's environmental commitment

(Olsen, 2014). The transition to "groomed" nature matched Zara's design aesthetic for its regular

clothing line, but it also conveyed a disconnect from nature. Zara's implementation of

"untouched" nature visuals may have been more successful if it convinced the consumer of its

appreciation for nature. Zara, instead, appears to rely on manicured nature because this form

matches the overall feed aesthetic.

Figure 1:

Zara: October 26, 2017

Figure 2:
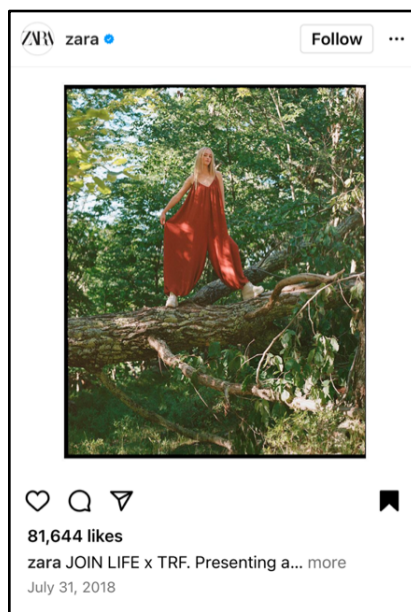
Zara: July 31, 2018

Figure 3:

Zara: April 23, 2021

Patagonia Instagram Analysis

Yvon Chouinard founded Patagonia on the principles of wasting less and reusing more. Year after year, the company advocated for a circular economy where companies recycle materials to tackle the corporate tendency of overconsumption of a finite supply of resources. Even though Patagonia's environmental efforts predate 2016, this paper evaluates data from 2016 until 2021. Through visual and discourse analyses of Patagonia's Instagram, the company seems to promote environmental education and informs users on how to create a better planet.

At first glance, Patagonia's page appeared as an ode to "untouched" nature. Most posts directly featured visuals of the environment while others positioned nature in the background. The bio for the account stated, "We're in business to save our home planet." After analyzing the visual strategy for each year, I identified themes in the marketing strategy of each respective year. These themes serve as general classifications, and many of them overlapped between years. In 2016, the posts brought attention to the international organization, One Percent for the Planet. This organization was cofounded by Chouinard, and its members contribute at least one percent of annual sales to environmental causes. This year's theme was social change. The marketing team presented a video series encouraging users to vote on issues surrounding environmental concerns. Some of these included California's vote for the plastic bag ban, Washington's vote against Big Oil infrastructure, and Michigan's vote to shut down the Line 5 pipeline. These videos began by directly calling out the states with "HEY (insert state)". The team appeared to take a more assertive stance on their environmental message promotion in the videos by stressing urgency through action verbs. In future years, the marketing team still advocated for the environment, but they used less force. A study analyzed the consumer perception of assertive environmental messages in generating urgency for an issue (Kronrod, 2012). The research concluded that when consumers are overwhelmed with the sense of importance on an issue, they

will avoid taking action. The study suggested reducing assertive phrasing in marketing which Patagonia accomplishes in the years following 2016. In 2017, the team created a video series promoting national public land protection. The language asked users to "speak up for…" This year was also characterized by the marketing narrative that the land is "our land" and a treasure to be protected. Lastly, the posts noted Patagonia's Fair Trade USA certification to demonstrate legitimacy. In 2018, the same appreciation for nature was prevalent, but there was also a theme of hearing stories directly from customers. Posts followed individuals as they journey through nature and share their stories. 2018 also featured posts advocating for the environment, similar to 2017 (See Figure 4). In 2019, the narrative theme shifted to human interaction with nature. These posts included many photos of the environment dwarfing humans (See Figure 5). The angle and framing of photos positioned nature as monumental, and it was hard to locate the human in each photo. The images evoked the legacy of nature as the "sublime" from America's Romantic period. This nature appreciation extended into 2020 with a new theme on education. During 2020, the team created an initiative promoting Patagonia's blog "The Cleanest Line" which discussed Patagonia's products, the sports customers play, and environmental issues. The Instagram campaign featured quotes from environmental activists with a caption encouraging users to read more on the blog. These quotes were compelling, and the blog posts further encouraged uses to engage with dialogue surrounding environmental issues. Lastly, in 2021, the company utilized the marketing strategy of featuring Patagonia customers. The theme this year centered on videos and photos of people's experiences in nature. The posts also called for environmental reform (See Figure 6). As with many of the other posts from previous years, Patagonia's posts conveyed an appreciation for "untouched" nature. Within my nature trope framework, these posts demonstrated pure nature rather than nature touched by man. All in all,

the page appears to solidly educate its users on respective environmental issues and how to be

proactive with initiatives. It also inspires a connection with the natural environment.

Figure 4:   **Figure 5:**   **Figure 6:**

Patagonia: March 9, 2018   *Patagonia: Feed ca. 2019*   *Patagonia: April 29, 2021*
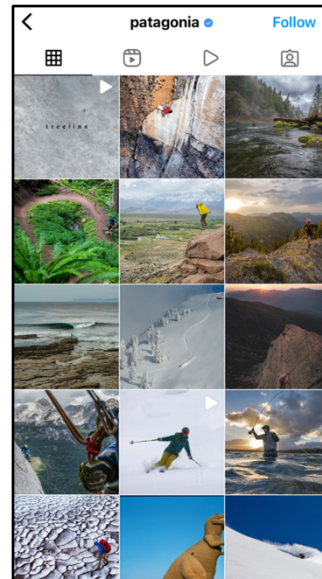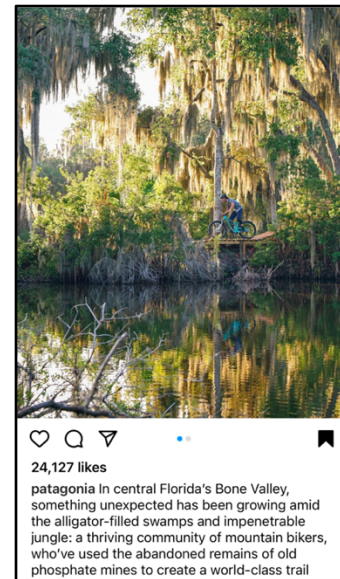
Lululemon Instagram Analysis

Unlike the other case studies, Lululemon does not have a robust sustainability collection.

The company did not explicitly address sustainability on its Instagram until 2021. As of 2022,

the company had a designated section on the web page labelled "Our Impact." Under this

category, the company disclosed goals for product and material innovation. Even though the

Instagram data on sustainability was limited, the analysis from 2016 until 2021 demonstrates the

changes in marketing strategies from Lululemon's team.

Beginning with 2016, the Lululemon Instagram emphasized meditation. Various posts

preached using running as meditation, the environment's contribution to meditation, and the

connection to one's body through yoga. These photos illustrated various models and athletic

enthusiasts partaking in running, yoga, and other physical activities. There were many posts

demonstrating the appreciation for "untouched" nature where the images showed an outdoor setting with a human moving through the space. The Instagram highlighted positive thinking and an emphasis on one's health. Many of the posts involved physical activities occurring outside and a strong attention to nature. Some of the captions even mentioned lines such as "nature is a simple way to bring you into the moment" (See Figure 7). The company felt connected to nature, but it did not appear motivated to protect the environment. In 2017, the Instagram shifted to emphasize workout classes. Various posts demonstrated members of the Lululemon community partaking in yoga classes and group runs or training days (See Figure 8). As with 2016, yoga poses proliferated the Instagram feed and preached connection to the body. This year, the actual gear was featured more on the Instagram. Posts showed models using the athletic apparel for their workouts. Surprisingly, this year was characterized by more indoor workout photos. There were many instances of groups posing on yoga matts indoors. Albeit the switch to indoor training, the feed still featured outdoor running photos, but the 2016 connection to nature appears subdued. In 2018, the Instagram shifted back to the 2016 trends, the feed featured more photos of yoga classes, running outdoors, and yoga in nature. The page promoted "getting after adventure" and "staying down to Earth". Running images were accompanied by messages of finding one's escape route (See Figure 9). Additionally, this year emphasized the company's social responsibility. In a post from June 18, 2018, the page discussed International Day of Yoga. Every purchase made that day supported the company's social impact program that "creates access to yoga and meditation across social, physical and economic barriers". As demonstrated earlier, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a separate entity from sustainability even though the two are typically grouped together. Lululemon chose to promote its CSR, but it did not add sustainability efforts. In 2019, Lululemon's Instagram featured personal stories from avid

Lululemon clients on why they run. These narratives are similar to the narratives posted on Patagonia's Instagram in 2018. This year was also marked by more product promotion for the athletic gear. Fitness professionals and real clients populated the Instagram as they completed their workouts. In 2019, the marketing team appeared to shift away from the meditation focus and toward more of an emphasis on running. They posted numerous videos and photos concerning their Global Run Ambassador initiative. Next in 2020, the focal point shifted back to nature and the environment. Through a variety of outdoor photos, the posts are accompanied by messages of unplugging, tuning into one's breath work, and nature as a source of interconnectivity. Given the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, many of the posts emphasized how the brand created a community with a shared purpose. The posts mentioned the global digital community available at one's fingertips, and the marketing team posted many indoor workouts for the pandemic. Additionally, there were more instances of CSR this year as well. Posts included solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement along with a post for LGBTQ Pride.

Finally, in 2021, the Instagram mentioned sustainability. On Earth Day (April 22, 2021), Lululemon posted about its "Like New" program. This program aimed to extend the life of Lululemon's products by allowing customers to trade-in their gently used pieces. According to the post, Lululemon would "revive them and put them back into action through our resale shop." The post mentioned how the program will come to California and Texas with other states on the horizon. In May of 2021, the company also posted about the repurposing of plant waste for clothing dye. The post mentions how the "Earth Dye Collection" will use the waste of oranges, beets, and saw palmetto trees to dye the materials. While it seems Lululemon had good intentions, the collection appears to embody what researchers often reference as "older" green marketing. Simply changing the fabric dye does not compare to some of the current

sustainability efforts by other apparel companies. Lululemon, thus, appeared very far behind the times. Interestingly, many comments on the post praised the collection, but there were a few users who critiqued Lululemon and suggested the company begin using recycled fabrics. Judging from this analysis, one may hypothesize that Lululemon shareholders and consumers did not push environmental initiatives, and therefore, the brand did not represent any specific sustainability commitments on its Instagram. The brand preaches a connection with nature, but it does not appear pressured to help the environment. Lululemon's consumers may be uninformed about sustainability, or they may love the product enough to continue purchasing regardless of consequences. While this study does not analyze the consumer, the Lululemon marketing team appears to have capitalized on the lack of backlash given the scarcity of the company's sustainable initiatives.

Figure 7:   **Figure 8:**   **Figure 9:**

Lululemon: September 19, 2016   *Lululemon: May 28, 2017*   *Lululemon: March 20, 2018*
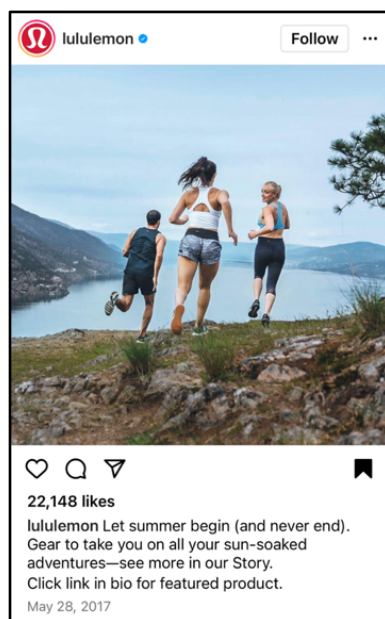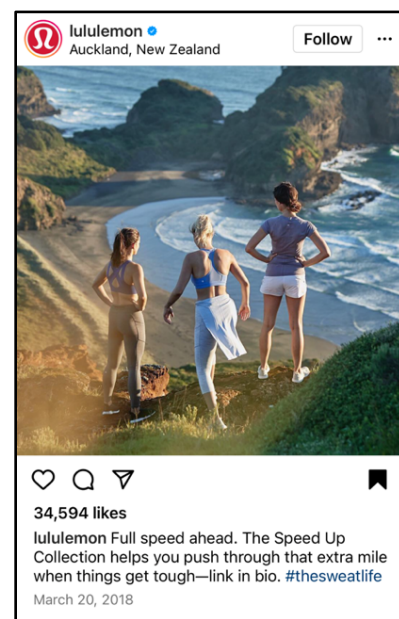
Pact Instagram Analysis

Originally launched as an organic cotton underwear line for men and women in 2009, Pact now sells clothing for women, men, and children along with bed and bath pieces (SGB Media, 2018). The company's website touts the sustainability of the brand and its belief in Fair Trade USA practices. After analyzing the Instagram from 2016 until 2021, the sustainability narrative of the brand did not change too much, but the general themes of the feed varied between the years.

In 2016, all the posts featured Pact's underwear or sock products. At this point, the brand did not have other clothing pieces for feed promotion. Most of the posts featured individuals posing in their socks and underwear in "untouched" nature. Given the company's home base in Boulder, Colorado, many of the posts featured scenic backgrounds of Colorado's mountains and fields. Additionally, individuals appeared to be trekking through nature in their various Pact pieces (See Figure 10). In January 2016, the marketing team uploaded an informative post on organic cotton. By Earth Day 2016, the feed featured another post on the non-GMO cotton along with the nontoxic dyes used by the company. Additionally, Pact's posts during this year featured many hashtags such as "wearpact," "organic," "nongmo," and "fairtradecertified." In the following years, the tendency for hashtag use seems to have dwindled, but the placement of the hashtags on each post from 2016 demonstrates the marketing team's commitment to informing Pact consumers of these company initiatives. In 2017, the feed highlighted newer products from the company as it expanded its collection. Most of the posts that featured the new gear were photographed outdoors. The people in the photos appear to be regular Pact consumers. Some of the captions mentioned phrases such as "people in their #wearpact" and "explore in Pact" (Pact Instagram, 2017). The quality of the photos also varied which suggests that clients shared their

own personal photos with the company. The photos were not typical professional photos with a plain backdrop and a posed model; instead, the feed was full of aesthetic poses gazing into nature and exploration poses. By having customers modeling the clothing, the lifestyle appeared more accessible to the consumer as Pact worked to "change the apparel industry for good." Lastly, 2016 and 2017 featured many posts on social responsibility, specifically, Fair Trade USA. As previously mentioned, the organization Fair Trade USA represents CSR not sustainability, but companies committed to sustainability often undertake CSR initiatives as well. By 2018, the photo backgrounds transitioned to include more indoor scenes. Photographed individuals sat on couches or on their beds and modeled the clothing. Although more photos showed the indoors, the feed still featured many outdoor adventure photos. Additionally, some of the photos appeared to be staged, professional photo shoots unlike what appeared to be self-created client photos in the past. These photos featured the same individuals, had the same camera quality, and showed neutral backdrops with good lighting. To add variety to the feed, the marketing team also uploaded photos with similar color schemes to enhance the aesthetic. These photos showed quotes, breakfasts and coffee, and potted plant arrangements. The plants exemplified my "groomed" nature framework. As with 2016 and 2017, the marketing team posted photos for Earth Day and emphasized the beauty of appreciating nature. This year also featured a campaign where the photo showed a sketch of clothing on a model with the clothing cut out of the paper. The drawing was then held up to plants or the sky with the caption "dressed by nature," to further connect Pact's clothing with nature. By 2019, many of the photos showed individuals completing daily activities indoors or outdoors while wearing the clothing. Additionally, the posts did not actively push the product at the consumer; instead, the posts seemed to invite consumers to the lifestyle and discuss organic cotton without overly promoting the product (See

Figure 11). Occasionally, posts highlighted a piece of Pact's collection, but it was limited. In 2019, the feed showed a mix of customers and hired professionals modeling the clothing. Once again, this conclusion was drawn given the variance in lighting, camera quality, backdrop, and repetition of the same person. By 2020, Pact transitioned to more informative posts. These included a post for World Water Day along with an entire campaign for "Earth Month." During Earth month, the company posted similar messages to prior years on their organic cotton and non-toxic chemicals. These are the cornerstones of the brand, but it is interesting that the brand does not promote new initiatives after four years. The 2020 feed showed similar aesthetic photos to 2019 where clothing was juxtaposed with food photos, signs, and potted plants, but it also spent more time showing the actual clothing sold by Pact. Again, it appears that mostly professional models are the individuals being photographed rather than customer models. Finally, in 2021, the feed shifted slightly. It looked like a culmination of all the prior years. In the beginning months of the year, picturesque photos where people pose outside and in homes proliferated the feed (See Figure 12). By the middle of the year, more posts featured professional models in the clothing with direct links to the product on the company site. Interestingly, as the months of 2021 progressed, the photos of the clothing were juxtaposed with empty nature scenes that matched the colors on the clothing of the posts before and after the nature photo. This created a cohesive look for the Instagram, but it also brought the individuals out of nature and made the brand look more commercialized. All in all, Pact's Instagram suggests that the brand gained popularity given its ability to expand beyond underwear and socks, its introduction of models, and its transition to a more commercial feed. Interestingly, as the company commercialized, it transitioned from "untouched" nature visuals to more visuals with "groomed" nature. Pact and Zara possibly drew on "groomed" nature because it appeared more editorial

when photographing the clothing, but it took "natural" out of nature. The sustainability efforts from these companies should be genuine, but the fixation on aesthetic suggests otherwise. Even though Pact's visuals are questionable, the posts convey strong consumer education efforts pertaining to organic cotton and non-toxic chemicals as the years progress. This raw material education is important, but the company only cites Fair Trade USA as a third-party organization for sustainability and does not appear to promote additional developments in its sustainability efforts.

Figure 10:   **Figure 11:**   **Figure 12:**

Pact: January 8, 2016   *Pact: November 23, 2019*   *Pact: March 31, 2021*

Case Studies: Annual Reports

Before moving into the analysis, it is important to note the public and private distinction between each of the companies. Both Inditex (subsidiary, Zara) and Lululemon are public companies. As public companies, Zara and Lululemon are legally required to generate an annual corporate report for their stakeholders. Additionally, the companies are legally accountable for what they write in the report because false information can alter stock price. Patagonia and Pact,

on the other hand, are private companies. Private companies are not required to post annual reports because they do not have public stakeholders. That being said, Patagonia is a Benefit Corporation, and therefore, posts an annual Benefit report. A Benefit Corporation is a legal structure for businesses (Benefit Corporation, 2022). A company becomes a benefit corporation by incorporating as one (Benefit Corporation, 2022). Patagonia holds Benefit Corporation status under California law. As a benefit corporation, the company is committed to a higher standard of purpose, accountability, and transparency. The accountability and transparency entail self-reporting from the company. While it is not a typical corporate annual report seen from public companies, Patagonia's benefit report offers insights on the marketing strategy of the company. Aside from being a Benefit Corporation, Patagonia is also a certified B Corp which means the "company's overall environmental and social performance is measured and independently verified by a third-party, B Lab (B Lab, 2022). B Lab evaluates its companies through the B Impact Assessment where businesses receive scores on their environmental and social performance of a 200-point scale (B Lab, 2022). Given Patagonia's position as a Benefit Corporation and a B Corp, annual reports are available for analysis. Unfortunately, I was unable to attain the Benefit report from 2020, the analysis, therefore, only includes 2016 and 2018. Pact is also a private company, but it is not a Benefit Corporation like Patagonia. Thus, I was unable to attain annual reports from the company. In lieu of annual reports, I analyzed the environmental information provided on Pact's website. The information on the website does not compare to an annual report, but it still reveals fascinating insights on how Pact crafts its company narrative.

In comparing private and public companies, each version entails its own nuances. For private companies, the brand is ultimately choosing what it shares. It has more leeway to

manipulate the discourse as the language is not legally monitored for stock integrity. On the other hand, the private company's high transparency could indicate moral intentions. By not relying on appeasing stakeholders, the brand can complete the environmental initiatives it chooses. With public companies, the scrutiny by stakeholders leads the public to assume the business claims are verified. Unfortunately, some companies will use empty claims that sound appealing to the stakeholder but will not get the company in legal trouble. Taking it one step farther, the utilization of the Benefit Corporation legal structure adds another layer of potential legitimacy and verified information. This structure, however, could foster similar results to that of a public company where the company chooses words to appease the stakeholders or, in this case, the legal requirements. Each of these factors served as background for the annual report analyses, and they offered deeper comprehension on the marketing strategies of my case studies.

Inditex (Zara) Annual Reports

As mentioned earlier, Zara is a mass fast fashion brand owned by the Spain based retailer, Inditex. Inditex consolidates the corporate reports for all its smaller brands into one report. For my analysis, I primarily focus on the sections explicitly describing Zara while I also analyze the general text from Inditex.

Inditex Report Visual Analysis

In Inditex's 2016 report, images featured the company's stores, workers, and various infographics. The 2016 report did not feature many images of nature; instead, it centered its visual narrative on the company's processes and progress. I noticed six instances of "groomed" nature visuals: two photos of landscaping outside of company offices, two photos of plants at the storefront, and two images taken outside discussing some of their international partnership initiatives. Many of the photos featured short, one sentence captions. Additionally, most of these images were not referenced in the actual body text. They supported the narrative of the text, but

they did not offer additional information for the stakeholders reading the report. Surprisingly, Inditex utilized infographics for most of its visuals. These were color coordinated graphics that outlined certain goals for the company, milestones reached, and plans of action for the future. The use of infographics is noteworthy because infographics are characterized by consolidated, digestible information. Infographics are often vague and should include little to no text. The emphasis remains on the graphic narrative and the quick relay of information to the onlooker. Thus, Inditex's use of infographics allows for vague descriptions on initiatives as well as performance. Additional visuals from the report included a stock market performance graph and data tables. These tables, however, did not appear until the end of the corporate report. The marketing team may assume that stakeholders will pay more attention at the beginning and slowly transition to skim reading as the report progresses. Within the data tables, the stakeholder could recognize some growth and improvement, but the long lists of data figures within the table also allowed the company to hide some of its shortcomings. For this analysis, I did not specifically quantify each image as the reports are over 300 pages long with many images proliferating the text. Instead, I generalized the categories of the images appearing as I discussed my findings.

The 2018 report resembled the report from 2016. Once again, the images featured Inditex's various company offices along with its stores. Other images demonstrated workers creating the clothing and speaking together as a team. Infographics were prominent in this report as well, but some of the graphics offered more data than in 2016. For example, one infographic broke down Inditex's improvement from 2014 until 2018 on their traceability audits. On the whole, the report generally followed the structure of the report from two years prior. I did, however, note more instances of "groomed" nature. In the 2018 report, 18 images featured an

outdoor scene, a plant, or a tree in the wild. Similar to the images seen on the company's

Instagram, the photos taken of models in the clothing featured outdoor scenes or featured plants

behind the models. Other sections of the report showed images of trees and plants inside the

offices and stores. These often did not have a specific caption, but they seemed to contribute to

the aesthetics of the corporate report.

In 2020, the report appeared to have undergone a major transformation. Notably, Inditex

dove into its data figures on page 18 of the report compared to page 207 in the 2016 report and

page 274 in the 2018 report. This could indicate that the company had more factual evidence it

was proud to disclose, or the company realized that stakeholders desire strong factual data over

infographics. Within the report, I found 28 instances of "groomed" nature featuring either a plant

in the store, an image of a tree with leaves, or an image of an outdoor lawn location. Some of

these images related to the initiatives discussed in the report. Examples included Inditex's

agreement with the Forestry Association of Galicia for the environmental restoration of forest

areas or the Water.org collaboration which improves access to drinking water and sanitation for

vulnerable families in Bangladesh. Additionally, one section of the report broke down the

training of the employees in an infographic. This graphic had a section for "sustainability" with

an image of a tree and the sky in the background before it listed the short description. Overall, all

three reports seemed to highlight visuals of the actual stores and offices owned by Inditex. The

reports did not appear fixated on showing numerous images of nature, but they did show

"groomed" nature throughout. The lack of "untouched" nature visuals in the 2018 report

compared to what was seen on Zara's Instagram could be attributed to the fact that the Instagram

is more public facing. The company may put on a show for the public, and it may not need that

same level of enticement for the stakeholders.

Inditex Report Discourse Analysis

Beginning with 2016, the most frequent word was "inditex" and it appeared 1254 times. Other frequent words included "directors," "management," "zara," "audit," and "compliance." The word "sustainable" appeared 234 times, "sustainability" appeared 224 times, and "responsible" appeared 166 times. In comparison, the 2018 report also featured "inditex" as the most frequent word along with other frequent words such as "financial," "compliance," and "social." The word "sustainability" appeared 308 times, "sustainable" appeared 190 times, and "impact" appeared 185 times. In 2016, the report used "sustainability" and "sustainable" frequently, but the 2018 report used "sustainable" much less. By 2020, "Inditex" was still the most frequent word. In this report, "sustainability" appeared 449 times, "impact" appeared 393 times, and "protect" appeared 376 times. This is notable because the higher frequency of the words "protect" and "impact" could connote a stronger attention to the effects of the company's environmental initiatives or CSR initiatives. See Appendix 1 for the larger frequency table.

"Sustainability" may have appeared more in the 2020 report because the company implemented a new "sustainability policy" this year. In analyzing the context of the words in the report, the transgression toward more transparency is apparent between 2016 and 2020. The 2020 report featured more data tables, and the company appeared to have more factual data on which to report. The new pillars in the 2020 report mentioned "ongoing improvement" and "innovative solutions." This wording implied that the company was in the process of improvement, but in the past reports, the phrasing mentioned "environmental excellence," "best practices" and "most sustainable raw materials." This wording was present in the 2020 report as well, but the report featured more verbs working toward improvement rather than set descriptions of achievements.

Finally, in the 2016 and 2018 report, there was a section at the very end of each report titled "GRI content index." It provided principles of the GRI Standard for defining the reports, and one of these principles stated:

> Sustainability context: Inditex contributes, or pretends to do so in the future, to the improvement of the economic, environmental, and social trends, advances, and conditions, at a local, regional, or global level, all of them interconnected. (Inditex, 2018, p. 415)

I assume the definition of "pretends" in this case is "lays claim to." Even so, this statement is alarming as it does not hold Inditex accountable to a set timeline. The company, instead, clarified that it *intends to* take sustainability measures, but this intent lacks direct action. Additionally, each report also included large lists of their global stakeholder collaborations. As previous research showed, outside organizations can attribute credibility to a company. The report provided a brief description of each stakeholder along with a description of Inditex's partnership with the organization. Unfortunately, these were brief sentences that often mentioned "collaboration" and "active participation," but did not provide specific evidence on the initiatives arising from the collaboration. In sum, the reports may be saving space by not mentioning the details, or these words are serving as ambiguous ideas for the company and are not supported by real evidence.

Patagonia Annual Reports
Patagonia Report Visual Analysis
In the 2016 report, there were seven images embedded in the text. These included images of Patagonia community members camping, hiking, farming, or spending time with children. The report also featured an image of animals in nature and two scenic nature images. Aside from

these 7 photographs, the report featured stick figure drawings in various sections. The stick figures were planting trees, blacksmithing, hanging laundry, and working in a factory with others. The letter "B" also appeared in these drawings as a reference to the company's position as a Benefit Corporation and a B Corp. The drawings often took up their own page and helped break up the text, the images, however, accompanied the text on the page while not diverting attention away from the actual text.

While the stick figures served as filler images, the photographs allowed for more analysis. Two of the scenic nature images along with two of the community images accompanied a section of the report describing the achievements of environmental activists. The images included descriptive captions. They were not outwardly referenced in the body text, but readers can infer the connection. The other three images also accompanied sections of the body text with content relating to the photo. The report did not directly use any of the images to advance a new argument or teach something new; instead, the images served as aesthetic additions to the report. While not directly visuals, the report also contained data tables demonstrating quantified results of their initiatives. These tables often compared the 2016 results with those of prior years to demonstrate company improvement. Throughout the report, these tables contained bolded numbers and percentages with small descriptions on what each numeric value represents.

In 2018, the report did not feature any images aside from six stick figure drawings. These drawings resembled the drawings seen in 2016 with sketches of trees, people walking through or holding the letter B, and a man fishing. As with the 2016 report, there were many instances of bolded numerical figures demonstrating company growth and improvement. Interestingly, the visual stylistic choice in 2016 changed by 2018. As seen in Figure 5.1, tables in the 2016 report were drawn by hand, while the tables in 2018 are computer generated. Even though the tables do

not feature the same sketch aesthetic, Patagonia kept the sketched images for page breaks in the 2018 report. The 2018 report may have no images because they were purely supplemental in the 2016 report. The images did not serve much purpose beyond stylistic embellishment, and it appears the marketing team chose to focus their efforts on filling the report with meaningful information on the company.

<u>Figure 13:</u>

Fiscal Year 2016	2015	2016
Virgin petroleum-based products (polyester/nylon)	58%	54%
Recycled materials	24%	26%
Cotton and other plant-based materials	15%	18%
Wool and other animal products	3%	2%

Patagonia Corporate Report 2016

Patagonia Material and Worn Wear Numbers for FY18

MATERIAL SOURCES	2016	2017	2018
Virgin petroleum-based products (POLYESTER/NYLON)	54%	51%	49%
Recycled materials	26%	29%	35%
Cotton and other plant-based materials	18%	19%	15%
Wool and other animal products	2%	1%	1%

Patagonia Corporate Report 2018

As previously mentioned, researchers Greenwood (2019) and Hrasky (2012) analyzed the motivations behind a company's visuals. Hrasky substantiated that companies more likely to be guilty of greenwashing typically include less graphs in their corporate reports, and instead rely on visual images (2012). In the case of Patagonia, the minimal use of images in 2016 coupled with the use of no photographs (solely stick figures) in 2018 suggests Patagonia's intention to avoid the strategies of greenwashing companies. While this does not confirm or deny if Patagonia partakes in greenwashing, it demonstrates that the company does have substantial, quantifiable data on environmental initiatives in which it is partaking. In 2016, the "untouched" nature visuals served as evidentiary support for the information relayed in the body text, but its supplemental nature left it fairly obsolete for the report as a whole. Other companies make heavy use of visuals, but it seems that Patagonia's team wanted to get straight to the data.

Patagonia Report Discourse Analysis

Beginning with an analysis of word frequencies, some of the most frequent words in 2016 included: "patagonia," "environmental," "benefit," "product," "percent," "work," "employees," "supply," "quality," "best," "fiscal," "performance," "social," and "care." In 2018, the most frequent words included: "patagonia," "environmental," "benefit," "products," "organic," "waste," "national," "support," "employees," "regenerative," "planet," "practices," and "harm." See Appendix 2 for the larger frequency table. From 2016 to 2018, the dialogue moved from typical corporate jargon to more discourse relating to the environment and environmental initiatives. While these individual words are insightful, an analysis of trigrams provided more context to the words chosen. In 2016, some noteworthy trigrams appearing seven or more times included: "no unnecessary harm," "for the planet," and "build the best." In 2018, noteworthy trigrams appearing five or more times included: "no unnecessary harm," "build the best," "national average of," and "the best product." In both lists, the frequent trigrams did not vary very much. Overall, each report had a similar structure with very similar body text about the company initiatives and goals. Even though the company preached transparency and accountability, it still implemented standard marketing techniques to support the business long-term. In the challenges section, the 2018 report framed the "challenges" or weaknesses of the company in a positive light. Instead of providing real weaknesses, some of the challenges included how the company feels it can and should do more for the environment. Another weakness was that the company was involved in activism which can be polarizing. Some other sections of the 2018 report highlighted actual challenges pertaining to the company's struggle with generating renewable energy and achieving accurate supply chain data. At the end of the day, profit is still part of the corporate "Triple Bottom Line" (people, profit, and the planet). Patagonia's transparency is not something every company is willing to admit to, and this is

admirable. The company does, however, still make use of some marketing strategies to boost the company narrative to the public.

Lululemon Annual Reports
Lululemon Report Visual Analysis

Lululemon's 2016 report only featured two visual images. These included a woman running on the front cover and a portrait of a man in a raincoat on the back cover. Aside from these two images, the report included many data tables and a stock performance line graph. On the whole, it was very bare and data centric. Additionally, the report did not reference the images in its body text. These images appeared to be used to showcase the products and add visual appeal to the report but nothing else. When analyzing the context of the photos, the decision to use a woman as the cover photo fit with the target customer outlined in the report. Lululemon noted that its primary target customer is a "sophisticated and educated woman who understands the importance of an active, healthy lifestyle (Lululemon, 2016, p. 1). The report also noted that although the company was founded to address the needs of women, it has been designing products for men and children as well. In terms of the background of each photo, both the woman and the man were seen outdoors. Similar to trends I observed in the photos posted on the company Instagram, the models pictured in this report are also captured out in "untouched" nature. The brand appears to equate the outdoor environment with a healthy lifestyle.

In 2018, the annual report featured five photographs. On the cover page, there was an image of a woman in the preparation position for running along with an image of a man running through a grassland. After the letter from the CEO, the report featured a group of men and women running in an urban environment and a photo of a man exercising in what appears to be a public city park. The final image was a photo of two women doing yoga indoors on the back cover of the report. All the images featured models wearing the brand's clothing and engaging in

some form of physical activity. It is important to note that the marketing team chose to use the outdoor photos as the first photos seen by the stakeholders and any other readers of the report. Once again, the brand appeared to be pushing a connection between health, longevity, and the outdoor environment. This year, the report did not jump directly into a story about the perfect woman consumer, instead it referred to "guests" who seek performance and style in their athletic apparel. It stated that women were still the largest target audience, but it had the men's and children's line as well. The images in this report compared to two years prior demonstrate the company's commitment to growing the men's line. Lastly, and similar to the 2016 report, the 2018 report featured a stock performance graph along with financial data tables.

Finally, the 2020 report contained a few notable differences compared to the 2016 and 2018 reports. Once again, the report featured five photographs. The front cover showed a man and woman running in a green valley along with an image of a woman completing a yoga pose indoors. The back cover featured three photos: a woman using exercise equipment, a close-up image of an exercise weight, and a man using the Lululemon fitness mirror. Unlike the black and white reports from 2016 and 2018, however, this report featured the brand's red color throughout the report, specifically on the data tables. The 2020 report also included three pie charts that did not appear in the previous years. Two of the charts demonstrated the difference in net revenue between 2019 and 2020. The third chart spoke to the company's social responsibility and illustrated the regional demographics for each employee. In the past years, the annual report was visually bare and data centric. This report enhanced its visual appeal by changing the presentation of the financial charts and adding the company's signature red color. As with past years, the report does not reference the images in the body text. Lastly, the same "untouched" nature trope appeared once again in one photo while the others featured indoor physical activity.

These indoor photos could be attributed to the brand's emphasis on maintaining a healthy

lifestyle from the comfort of one's own home. Another explanation for many indoor photos

could be a change in marketing strategy from the company.

Lululemon Report Discourse Analysis

In 2016, the most frequent words included: "fiscal," "million," "net," "income,"

"January," "financial," "revenue," "stock," "sales," "increased," "products," "company," and

"cash." These words are all typical corporate terms, but none of them related to the company's

environmental or social responsibility. The term "sustainability" was only mentioned twice in the

entire 80-page report. It was mentioned twice in the same paragraph about sourcing and

manufacturing. The paragraph stated:

> We have developed long-standing relationships with a number of our vendors and take
> great care to ensure that they share our commitment to quality and ethics. We do not,
> however, have any long-term term contracts with the majority of our suppliers or
> manufacturing sources for the production and supply of our fabrics and garments, and we
> compete with other companies for fabrics, raw materials, and production. We require that
> all of our manufacturers adhere to a vendor code of ethics regarding social and
> environmental sustainability practices. Our product quality and sustainability teams
> partner with leading inspection and verification firms to closely monitor each supplier's
> compliance with applicable laws and our vendor code of ethics (Lululemon, 2016, p. 4)

The trigrams for 2016 were also very corporate and did not reference the environment. Some

examples included: "million in fiscal," "direct to consumer," "consolidated financial statements,"

"income from operations," and "results of operations." In 2018, many of the frequent words and

trigrams were the same. Additionally, "sustainability" was mentioned twice, and the 2018 report

used the same paragraph as the 2016 report. By 2020, the frequent words and trigrams were

similar once again, but "sustainability" was mentioned eight times in the 2020 report. See

Appendix 3 for the larger frequency table. As previously mentioned, the Lululemon Instagram

did not post about sustainability until 2021, but the report demonstrates that the company began

its initiatives in 2020.

At the beginning of the 2020 report, the letter from the CEO described the "Power of

Impact" initiative from the brand. The company classified the Power of Impact as a movement to

create positive change for people and the planet. Some goals under this movement included

"making 100% of our products with sustainable materials and end of use solutions by 2030,

using 100% renewable electricity to power our operations by 2021, and achieving a 60%

intensity reduction in carbon emissions across our global supply chain by 2030 as well"

(Lululemon, 2020, p. 2). The report also noted the company's commitment to social

responsibility in its approach toward more diversity and equity. While these statements were

encouraging, the specifics of the report revealed a lack of accountability for these initiatives. All

three of the reports included a section highlighting the potential areas that could affect the

company stock. By 2020, discussions on sustainability were included with the risk factors. The

section mentioned how increased scrutiny regarding the company's environmental social

governance (ESG) and sustainability practices could result in additional risks to stakeholders.

The paragraph notes that if Lululemon does not meet expectations "which continue to evolve"

then the brand, reputation, and employee retention may be impacted (Lululemon, 2020, p.15).

The company states how any report it publishes may not be satisfactory to some stakeholders or

it may require additional resources. It also notes that the "failure, or perceived failure, to meet

the standards included in any sustainability disclosure could negatively impact our reputation,

employee retention, and the willingness of our customers and suppliers to do business with us"

(Lululemon, 2020, p.16). The language used in this section indicates that Lululemon did not

have an intention to immediately change its sustainability practices. The letter from the CEO gave some aspirations, but the fine print in the body of the report suggests that the company fears taking a step in the direction of sustainability and fears accusations of greenwashing. The company does, however, note that no action at all could increase scrutiny and serve as a potential risk. This may be why the company chose to begin a soft launch of embracing environmental consciousness in 2021. The details in this report, however, bring the credibility and efficacy of the initiatives into question if the company fears additional costs incurred by sustainability.

Pact Website Information

As previously noted, Pact is a private company and does not need to provide corporate annual report data to its stakeholders. I analyzed the information provided in the "About" section on the company website because this reveals the narrative the company chose to portray to the consumer (Pact, 2022). Pact selectively crafted this narrative, and the marketing team could use the freedom of being a private company to its advantage. The home page for the "About" section stated, "Our mission is to build Earth's Favorite Clothing Company," and it played a video on the creation of a piece beginning with "untouched" nature scenes of organic cotton growing in a field. The page then featured a link to a deeper description of the company's organic farming. On this page, a large image of an individual picking cotton appeared. Following the image, six sentences discussed the company's use of organic cotton. The description was bare and stated that organic cotton uses no toxic chemicals and 81% less water than non-organic cotton. The page also mentioned the company's compliance with the Global Organic Textile Standard. Another webpage linked on the "About" page discussed the company factories. The page had a large image of two Pact workers, and it moved into a discussion on the third-party, Fair Trade Certified. This is the same certification that Patagonia uses with its products. After the image, the

page featured five sentences explaining the Fair Trade Certified seal and how provides standards for social, environmental, and economic initiatives. The page also featured an infographic on Fair Trade Standards. The final section of the home page was titled "More Doing the Right Thing." It highlighted the company's carbon offset shipping, clothing donation program, and recycled packaging. The descriptions for these three areas were also brief like the other pages. The lack of information on each subject was surprising when the company markets itself as very committed to the environment. If Pact has this environmental background, it should provide more in-depth education for the consumer. The marketing team appeared to have followed other companies in using third-party certifications to demonstrate credibility, but the lack of information on the site is fascinating. Without robust information, the viewer has more difficulty assessing the company's sustainability initiatives, and it allows the company to protect itself from accusations of false claims. The company suggests advocacy for the environment, but the lack of in-depth descriptions on sustainability positions the company in the middle of the veracity spectrum. The discourse and images lack substance which suggests that the company could be less sustainably motivated than it conveys to the consumer.

<u>Discussion</u>

This study questioned the marketing strategies of four companies and analyzed where those companies fell on the spectrum of veracity. On Zara's Instagram, the posts pertaining to the sustainability subdivision of Zara featured "untouched" then "groomed" nature tropes. The "groomed" images featured outdoor backgrounds or plants, but these appeared very manicured and ordered. The company seemed to take the "natural" out of nature. These posts scatter the Instagram in between posts of the company's regular clothing. Olsen noted that using a subdivision within a brand can help the established brand earn more credibility because

consumers have a hard time separating the company's established operations from its new

initiatives (2014). Zara's "Join Life" collection implemented this marketing strategy, but

consumers were not convinced of Zara's connection with "untouched" nature. Thus, the

company transitioned to "groomed" nature visuals as a potential technique to convey

environmental connection. Patagonia's Instagram contrasts sharply with Zara's. Patagonia used

its own customers to market the company which supports the narrative of the company's

transparent and personal commitment to its customers. The Instagram featured an "untouched"

nature trope focused on the appreciation of nature. The company used pure images of the

environment rather than manicured plants, and the posts highlighted how the Patagonia

community loves exploring nature. Moving to Lululemon, the Instagram emphasized humans

rather than the environment. Many of the posts described how individuals can use the tranquility

of nature to reach a deeper meditation for themselves. The posts promoted the company's

clothing and showed the athletic apparel in use outdoors. The feed featured images of the

environment and the "untouched" nature trope seen in the other companies, but it was

anthropocentric rather than eco-centric. The discourse paired with the images mentioned how

customers could use nature to reach a higher meditation with themselves, thus emphasizing

human involvement with nature rather than nature itself. Lastly, Pact's Instagram implemented

marketing strategies similar to that of Patagonia. In its early years, the company used its own

customers to model the clothing. The Instagram featured images of "untouched" nature and

individuals exploring nature in the company's apparel. There appeared to be an invitation to the

"#wearpact" lifestyle where individuals could embrace and find beauty in nature. In later years,

the nature trope transitioned to "groomed" nature. The company marketed itself as connecting

with nature, but it is not the same reverence toward "untouched" nature that was seen in

Patagonia's Instagram. Patagonia appears to appreciate the beauty of nature given its discourse and numerous visuals of natural landscapes on the feed, but Pact lacked this admiration.

In the annual reports, Inditex (Zara), Patagonia, and Lululemon implemented various strategies to convey their environmental efforts to the consumers and stakeholders. Inditex's report contained many infographics on the operations and initiatives in place to aid the environment. These infographics, however, often lacked explicit details on the operations as infographics are meant to convey a message quickly and do not require too much depth. Additionally, the report featured many images of the company's workers, stores, and offices. By 2020, more images of "groomed" nature appeared in the report and these images resembled those seen on the Instagram. Some of the images matched the content in the body text while others served primarily as filler images to further promote the nature trope. Additionally, the company highlighted its third-party partnerships to gain more credibility with consumers. Inditex's discourse implemented many ambiguous terms such as "sustainable" and "sustainability." By 2020, the report used words such as "impact" and "protect" with more frequency. While these words have standard definitions unlike "sustainability" and "social responsibility," they still constitute environmental buzzwords and lack specificity. Finally, the end of the report noted that the company "contributes or pretends to do so in the future" to the improvement of environmental conditions. This reveals that the company gave itself leeway with what it could market to the consumer and for what it was held accountable.

In Patagonia's benefit reports, the 2016 report featured some images of customers outside, images of animals, and landscapes of nature. The 2016 and 2018 report also contained stick figure drawings to break up the text in the report. The report did not use any other images or infographics, only data tables. These tables featured company sustainability achievements

along with future goals. Patagonia's marketing team might have decided to leave out nature images in 2018 because the images did not contribute enough to the report. The extra space could, instead, be used for more transparent discussion on the company. In Patagonia's discourse, words such as "waste," "regenerative," "planet," "practices," and "care" appeared frequently in the report. These words offered more description and specificity than the ambiguous terms implemented by Inditex. Lastly, Patagonia reported some of its shortcomings with sustainability, but it did explain these weaknesses in a favorable manner.

For Lululemon, the annual reports did not contain many images, but the models were positioned with "untouched" nature outdoors in many of the photos. This use of the outdoors suggested that health and longevity are connected to the outdoor environment. The reports did not feature any infographics either, solely a few front and back cover images and data tables. In terms of discourse, Lululemon did not have a lot of conversation on sustainability. Frequent words related to business operations. Some examples included: "revenue," "stock sales," "products," "company." The report discussed how the company requires manufacturers to adhere to a code of ethics on social and environmental practices, but the report did not discuss environmental efforts further. Lastly, in the 2020 report, the CEO's opening letter described the "Power of Impact" initiative that will create positive change for the people and the planet. The report, however, does not delve into the specifics of this initiative. The 2020 report mentioned more on sustainability that previous reports, but it placed the discussion in a section on risks. It mentioned that changing the sustainability practices of the company could result in public backlash if Lululemon falls short on its claims, but it also noted the risks of not changing those practices. The connotation of the discourse suggested that the company was not particularly motivated to take a step in the direction of sustainable efforts.

While Pact does not publish annual reports, the analysis of the environmental information provided on the company website revealed information on Pact's marketing strategies. The pages featured images of Pact's workers and "untouched" nature. The images of nature appeared to emphasize that the natural environment indicates clean and environmentally conscious operations from the company. The pages also contained images of organic cotton, one of Pact's raw materials. In terms of discourse, the pages used short descriptions on the initiatives. The company also discussed the third-party certification that it follows, but overall, the information provided by the company was lacking. The marketing team touts the company's environmental commitment, but the absence of long descriptions indicates that this may not be the case.

Overall, Patagonia appeared to be using the most transparent marketing techniques. The other three companies either did not comment much on sustainability, or they solely portrayed themselves as a credible and moral company working toward change. Patagonia and Pact used "untouched" nature images to show their appreciation of nature and craft the idea of a "one with nature" lifestyle. Lululemon executed this to an extent, but it was more an emphasis on how humans can use the outdoor space to their advantage to connect deeper with themselves. Zara seemed to implement "groomed" images of the environment to convey the idea that the company was connecting to nature. The team positioned images of nature with models to allude to the "rawness" of the company and its work toward environmental improvement while still maintaining manicured, editorial content. Zara, Pact, and Lululemon used vague language and ambiguous terms to give themselves more room to fall short on the goals they set. While Patagonia seemed to use more specific language to outline its procedures, it is not the epitome of environmental consciousness. Patagonia still utilized regular corporate marketing strategies that framed the company favorably even as it discussed its weaknesses. In sum, the analyses reveal

that companies will use ambiguous terms and images of nature to demonstrate a commitment to the environment. Additionally, companies will cite third-party certifications to provide more validity to their operations. Each of these companies may or may not be successful with environmental initiatives, but the implementation of the empty claims, buzz words, and nature tropes allows companies to convince the consumer of the former.

<u>Conclusion</u>

All in all, this paper evaluated the various digital marketing strategies implemented by four companies: Zara, Lululemon, Patagonia, and Pact. Through a visual and discourse analysis on each company's Instagram from 2016 until 2021 and annual reports from 2016, 2018, and 2020, each company clearly attempts to portray credibility and environmental consciousness through its sustainability narratives.

Unfortunately, the term "sustainability" along with many other related terms in the field such as "social responsibility," "renewable," and "best practice" are ambiguous and require much outside research on the various definitions to create a complete understanding. Companies recognize that many customers lack the knowledge base for these terms, and they realize that many consumers will not dedicate their time to researching these terms. Thus, the company positions itself to manipulate the consumer and project authority through selective language and images. Even though companies use digital media to gain social power, social media alters the dynamic because consumers can contest the narrative directly on the post. This contestation inspires criticism, and many companies fear this backlash. As seen in the case studies, companies continued to alter their media strategies to avoid criticism, and more importantly, a loss of power. In this paper, the ambiguity of sustainability and social responsibility was explored to provide stronger background for readers and to situate my own research on the subject. This

customer manipulation is known as greenwashing where a company masks its actual processes by using unsubstantiated discourse. The company may also classify certain initiatives as environmentally conscious efforts when they are motivated by profit.

Interestingly, the research in this paper discovered that each company relied on nature tropes to convey sustainability. While sustainability directly affects the natural environment on the planet, company production and distribution processes are indirectly related to the images of flowing waterfalls, lush trees, and huge mountains seen in many visuals from these companies. Photos of a company's raw material crops are more applicable for images of nature. A big question throughout the research, therefore, was why do these "untouched" and "groomed" natural images continue to appear? Through my analysis, it seems that some companies use these natural images because they believe it suggests a connection to nature and thus boosts their portrayal of environmental consciousness. Other companies seem to use nature images to demonstrate the pride they have in their consumers. The consumers have a passion for the natural environment, and they are most often seen wearing the company products while spending time outdoors. Zara appeared to use the nature trope to portray environmental consciousness as did Lululemon, but Lululemon also used the nature trope to highlight its consumers. Pact and Patagonia included images relating to nature to show pride in their consumers. While the nature tropes were different, clearly images and discussions on the natural environment proliferate marketing on sustainability. It is fitting that companies working to improve the environment highlight nature, but with marketing, the companies could have chosen to solely focus on their own raw materials and production processes instead.

The findings in this paper substantiate much of the previous research in the field. Past critical business researchers presented conclusions on marketing tactics and possible areas for

greenwashing to come to fruition, specifically in a company's visuals and discourse. Additionally, researchers noted how the lack of standards for sustainability allows many companies to slip through the cracks and craft their own marketing narrative unabated.

Through this paper's case studies, visual marketing distraction strategies along with vague discourse strategies are seen in the case of Lululemon, Zara, and Pact. Patagonia, on the other hand, utilized more evidentiary graphs and figures to prove its attempts at environmental consciousness. Additionally, it implemented more specific discourse explaining its exact goals and challenges as a company. In sum, Zara and Lululemon have less transparency and specificity than the other two companies suggesting they are falling lower on the spectrum of veracity. Pact uses similar ambiguous terms and visuals of the natural environment to that of Zara and Lululemon, but the company highlights its raw materials to provide evidence of some environmental consciousness. Thus, Pact falls in the middle ground of my veracity spectrum. Patagonia lands highest on the spectrum given its fervor to supply factual data, but it is not infallible. At the end of the day, Patagonia is still a business, and it falls victim to strategic marketing ploys. All in all, this paper did not attempt to select one company as a sustainability exemplar. My findings from this paper, instead, force consumers to consider how marketing narratives are crafted and how the phenomenon of sustainability affected marketing strategies.

In closing, sustainability is an arduous task for businesses. They need to make a conscious effort to improve their operations and distribution, and they need to fully consider how their actions will affect the planet long-term. Some companies gladly accept this challenge because they care about the Triple Bottom Line of profit, people, and planet. Other companies simply adopt marketing strategies to give the illusion of their environmental consciousness when they are conducting these strategies to gain more consumer support which translates into profit.

In order to truly aid the environment, the best step would be to designate set standards for businesses and to force companies to adopt more transparency. Until then, consumers will have to navigate the world of commerce with a watchful eye for ambiguity and distraction in environmental initiatives.

Limitations

This research reveals environmental marketing strategies of brands, but it is not comprehensive. I limited my investigation to four companies, and I kept this in mind as I reached conclusions. Additionally, my research covered selected years rather than assessing the entire timeline of each brand. Through my visual and discourse analyses, it was important that I acknowledged my subjectivity in the research. I was approaching this research with my own unique viewpoints, but I could not let that restrict my findings. After considering my own background, I hypothesized the subjectivity of stakeholders and consumers viewing the Instagram posts and corporate reports. Overall, the research was limited given the resource restrictions of my data collection, but the findings in this paper make meaningful contributions for the fields of sustainable marketing and greenwashing.

Future Research

While this study analyzed Instagram and corporate reports to determine how a company markets its sustainability, future research could investigate how companies discuss sustainability with their employees. Through interview and survey data, researchers could uncover the conversations surrounding environmental initiatives at the company or the lack of these conversations. Other research could further investigate email, postal communications, and print advertising from companies as this is often a major area of marketing for companies. Lastly, this paper focused on the marketing team and the company itself, but future research could analyze the actions of stakeholders. Researchers could scrutinize how stakeholders react to published

data on the company and how their investment changed over the years as the company advocated

for more environmental initiatives. Each of these areas of research would provide fascinating

insights on the dynamics of the apparel industry and sustainability's role in market adaptation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Zara Frequent Words

2016

Word	Frequency
inditex	1254
annual	722
report	719
group	713
directors	568
board	496
management	493
committee	440
zara	434
full	393
sales	377
consol	374
company	364
suppliers	359
retail	331
audit	329
control	312
social	287
compliance	281
31-Jan	227
corporate	255
nancial	255
year	252
risks	251
internal	251

2018

Word	Frequency
inditex	1001
group	791
management	594
financial	543
directors	496
zara	455
annual	441
board	432
suppliers	431
report	422
full	407
sales	403
committee	403
company	386
consol	378
chain	340
retail	339
supply	332
year	325
business	323
control	318
sustainability	308
compliance	307
risk	294
total	288

2020

Word	Frequency
inditex	1952
annual	1227
report	1181
group	847
management	700
financial	579
social	485
action	472
suppliers	457
workers	456
chain	456
sustainability	449
accounts	442
risk	426
develop	406
sales	404
compliance	400
business	400
health	399
drive	395
impact	393
supply	393
full	388
protect	376
company	372

Appendix 2: Patagonia Frequent Words

2016

Word	Frequency
patagonia	97
environmental	66
benefit	57
product	57
products	57
year	56
percent	49
2016	45
1	44
work	40
employees	38
supply	31
fy16	30
fiscal	29
performance	29
0	29
business	28
use	27
chain	27
quality	27
corporation	26
best	26
number	26
made	25
social	25

2018

Word	Frequency
patagonia	70
year	32
environmental	30
1	25
work	25
2018	24
benefit	23
products	22
2	20
organic	20
waste	18
national	17
support	16
employees	16
regenerative	16
annual	15
planet	15
best	15
practices	15
use	15
business	14
corporation	13
fiscal	13
product	13
report	12

Appendix 3: Lululemon Frequent Words

2016	2018	2020

Word	Frequency
fiscal	303
1	295
million	262
net	238
january	215
income	213
2016	211
2015	194
tax	185
financial	177
2017	165
2	161
revenue	156
stock	152
sales	150
10	150
29	148
may	145
increased	127
products	123
0	122
stores	120
company	115
cash	112
increase	111

Word	Frequency
fiscal	388
million	327
net	320
tax	310
1	307
3	302
income	287
2018	255
2017	217
financial	206
revenue	196
costs	184
2	177
2019	172
company	161
stock	156
may	153
operations	153
january	148
10	144
sales	140
february	139
increased	139
0	135
increase	135

Word	Frequency
2020	239
1	235
net	222
financial	203
2	184
company	182
tax	177
million	176
may	169
income	160
could	159
stock	148
assets	147
products	144
10	142
2021	137
cash	135
including	129
3	127
4	126
value	126
business	124
revenue	122
operations	121
stores	116