



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

International Sustainable Marketing Strategy

- *A multiple case study of Swedish multinational companies within the apparel industry*

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Abstract

The growing awareness from both consumers and companies of unsustainable operations in many industries has led marketers to incorporate sustainability into their marketing practices. Unsustainable operations can especially be seen in the apparel industry, which is ranked as the second most unsustainable industry in the world. There is a lack of previous research in terms of how companies within this industry use sustainable marketing, as well as how they do this internationally. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to bridge the gap between international marketing strategies and sustainable marketing strategies in the context of the apparel industry, by conducting a multiple case study of seven Swedish multinational companies within the industry. To find respondents of each chosen company a snowball method was used and the empirical data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, as well as secondary sources such as reports from the companies. By the use of our own developed conceptual framework, which is based on linking existing frameworks and theories within the two fields sustainable marketing and international marketing, the gathered data was analyzed. The study concludes that sustainable marketing can be integrated in the international marketing strategy of apparel companies in various ways. It can be done either by standardizing or adapting the sustainable marketing mix of a company. Which type of strategy is most suitable can depend on different external factors such as regulations and demand from customers, as well as internal factors such as the companies' commitment and integration of sustainability in their organisation.

Keywords: sustainable marketing, international marketing, international business, international sustainable marketing strategy, apparel industry.

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1. Introduction

This introductory chapter will present relevant background information of the subject that is being studied, followed by a problem discussion related to this. Thereafter, the purpose of this study will be presented, as well as the research question. Lastly, the delimitations of the study will be presented.

1.1 Background

The globalization of the world economy during the last thirty years of the twentieth century has had a major impact on the operations of multinational corporations. On the international market today, companies have intricate networks on a global scale with not only complex geographical production circuits but also complex distribution and consumption chains. This global development has led to products being manufactured in one country, assembled in another, and distributed to the end-customers in a market on the other side of the world (Dicken, 2015).

The clothing industry was one of the first industries to develop these complex global production networks (Dicken, 2015). This was mainly due to the increased globalization that occurred as a result of the low entry-barriers and the growing number of free trade agreements after the Second World War (Cheek & Moore, 2003). Moreover, the increased outsourcing of production to subcontractors in mainly developing countries continues to drive the geographical shift of production in the clothing industry. Outsourcing production to subcontractors can be highly beneficial for a company because of lower production costs. However, according to the United Nations (2001) the countries which production is shifted to often have weak regulatory institutions, where monitoring of standards regarding labour and the environment are less developed. As a result of the lack of monitoring, it is not uncommon for the clothes to be made by the use of hazardous chemicals, and under sweatshop premises, meaning that the employees often work in precarious working environments with long working hours and extremely low wages (Naturskyddsforeningen, n.d.; Dicken, 2015). Furthermore, the industry is responsible for about 10 % of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions which is more than maritime shipping and international flights emit combined (European Parliament, 2021). Approximately 79 billion cubic meters of water is used yearly

and only 1% of used or old clothes are recycled into new clothes. Overall the apparel industry accounts for between 2% and 10% of the environmental impact of EU consumption, having the most impact in third countries where the most production takes place (European Parliament, 2019).

Diverse ways to solve these issues have been developed and presented within the apparel industry (European Parliament, 2019). Implementing circular product-designs and business models, which would make recycling and reuse easier are ideas which have been introduced and put in place. These circular business models have become dominant in the EU with the aim to 'design out' waste by producing goods that can be disassembled and reused instead of disposal (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013; Hartmann et al, 2020). Another solution includes educating consumers about slow fashion, this involves convincing the consumers to focus on quality instead of quantity and driving consumer behavior to become more sustainable (European Parliament, 2019). In order to successfully integrate circular business models and to educate customers to become more aware of sustainable consumption, companies and marketers have to consider including sustainability into their business strategies. Many institutional goals and agreements have been formed to encourage companies to do so, such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations. These goals were created in order to reach the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goals and focuses on creating an economically, socially and environmentally responsible economic development. The twelfth goal, which focuses on sustainable consumption and production can be seen as directly related to marketing, as it encourages companies to promote sustainable lifestyles (UN, n.d.).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Despite the increased awareness of the issues related to the operations of companies within the apparel industry, it is still ranked as the second most unsustainable industry and cases related to the unsustainable practices are often presented in the media (Dicken, 2015; Hartmann, 2020). According to Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) the internationally increased awareness of these issues and the increasing interest from consumers of more sustainable products have led to companies in many industries to integrate these concerns into their businesses. Dicken (2015) means that in the apparel industry this can be seen especially in the

supply chain, where companies in the industry monitor suppliers and subcontractors to increase control and remove practices that are not in line with the companies policies and values. Although it is very important to develop more sustainable supply chains, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) mean that marketing plays the most essential role in a company's work towards more sustainable operations. This is because, through marketing companies can use communication to foster more sustainable production and consumption by raising awareness and informing consumers about sustainable products, and thus contribute to the creation of green markets. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to not only focus on creating sustainable supply chains when working towards more sustainable operations, but to also focus on integrating sustainable marketing practices. Although research points to the fact that marketing is an important part of making businesses more sustainable, its importance is not as widely discussed as for example the importance of making the supply chains more sustainable. Therefore, it is important to bring more awareness and for research to be conducted in this less discussed subject.

Research conducted by Polonsky, Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1997) shows that the communication of corporate environmental improvements together with a more responsible consumption from the consumer is the essence of sustainable marketing. Companies working to create more sustainable operations should communicate this work and changes to their consumers. This can be challenging for companies on the international market because of the various degrees of environmental marketing regulation in different countries, where the regulations in some countries can be vague and therefore more open for interpretation, and thus result in the tendency of marketers reducing their environmental marketing claims (Polonsky et al., 1997). Leonidou, Leonidou, Palihawadana and Hultman (2011) also point out that as an international company it is important to carefully monitor trends in the different markets and design different advertisement campaigns for different groups of consumers. This is because there are still variations among consumers in terms of how much they value green products and therefore in order to attract this group, the company might have to use advertising messages that combine the green attributes of a product with other product attributes such as quality.

Earlier research therefore suggests that sustainable marketing is an important element within international firms. However little research has been conducted on how sustainable marketing actually is integrated into the overall international marketing strategy, nor has a conceptual

framework or theory been developed specifically for international firms to use when seeking to incorporate sustainable marketing practices. Also, the research available in the field mainly focuses on the importance of sustainable advertising claims and not as much on other marketing activities such as planning, product and packaging design, pricing, distribution, retailing, promotion, customer segmentation and overall marketing strategy that are all activities that marketers can incorporate the environment into (Polonsky et al., 1997). Moreover, the integration of sustainable marketing in the international marketing strategy is especially important in companies within the apparel industry because of the changes that the industry has gone through during the past decades and the increased awareness of the issues related to this. Therefore, we need to develop an understanding of how sustainable marketing can be integrated in the marketing strategy of multinational corporations within the apparel industry with operations worldwide. By presenting a comparable case study of seven Swedish international companies within the apparel industry that are of various sizes and degrees in terms of how much they position themselves as green, we hope to contribute to a useful conceptual framework for other companies in the apparel industry seeking to develop a international sustainable marketing strategy, but also in other industries were similar issues are apparent.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to bridge the gap between international marketing strategies and sustainable marketing strategies. There is a lot of previous research conducted within both fields. However, we want this study to be a contribution of knowledge on how to combine the two by developing a new conceptual framework from existing frameworks and theories within both fields.

1.4 Research Question

How can sustainable marketing be integrated in the international marketing strategy of a multinational company within the apparel industry?

1.5 Delimitations

The scope of this study was narrowed down to a multiple case study that focuses on seven multinational companies of various sizes, that were founded in Sweden and operate within the apparel industry. The reason for exclusively studying Swedish companies in this research, is because Swedish companies in general tend to work a lot with incorporating sustainability in their business practices and have a focus on creating transparency throughout their value chains. This will contribute to a better understanding of how sustainable marketing can be integrated into the international marketing strategy of a firm.

The chosen companies are Axel Arigato, Björn Borg, KappAhl, Nudie Jeans, H&M, COS and & Other Stories. The three latter mentioned are all a part of the H&M group, which means that they have the same owners. Even though they are all part of the Group and have central guidelines and policies that they need to follow, the matrix structure of the Group allows each brand to have its own organization with separate responsible managers and local sales organisations (H&M Group, 2020) and can therefore be studied as independent from each other in this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will begin by presenting relevant theories and frameworks within international marketing and sustainable marketing, which will be linked together at the end of this chapter to develop a new framework for international sustainable marketing. This developed framework will be used to analyse the empirical data in order to answer the research question.

2.1 International Marketing Strategy

In a research conducted by Vrontis, Tharassou and Lamprianou (2009), the attitudes towards adaptation and standardization of multinational companies were studied through a comprehensive literature review within the subject, as well as an in-depth statistical analysis of primary data. This was done to provide marketers with the main factors that can affect marketing tactical behaviour in international markets. Vrontis et al (2009) put emphasis on

the importance of deciding whether to standardize or adapt their Marketing mix, which is a conceptual framework by McCarthy in 1964 and is made up of the four elements product, price, place and promotion, also known as the four Ps (Goi, 2009). The four Ps were developed with the purpose to translate theoretical marketing planning into practice (Bennet, 1997). Vrontis et al (2009) mean, that for international companies it refers to whether or not the four Ps in the marketing mix need to be modified and adjusted to suit the local conditions of each country in which the company operates, or if the company should standardize and use one single marketing strategy in all countries. This includes aspects such as to what extent the marketing communications needs to be adapted to the local market, if the products fit the local demand, if the same pricing can be applied to the products of the local market and also how the products can be offered and available for the local consumers to access (Vrontis,Thrassou and Vignali, 2006).

Zou and Cavusgil (2002) who also have studied this subject mean that on one hand companies should have an adaptive strategy only if necessary, as implementing a standardized strategy can contribute to improved operational efficiencies. On the other hand, Vrontis et al (2009) mean that using an adaptive strategy allows companies to better meet the local consumers' needs. In some cases, even if marketers would like to use a standardized approach because of its benefits, there are regulations or cultural differences which make it hard for companies to implement it. For example, Baines, Fill and Rosengren (2017) argue that when it comes to the fashion industry, there can be huge changes in the preferred styles around the world. They also point out that communication can be one of the biggest obstacles for an effective international marketing strategy, especially in geographical areas that differ greatly from the home market. Finally, Vrontis et al (2009) find in their study that companies do not have to either standardize or adapt their strategies and therefore recommend companies to standardize their strategies where possible and adapt them only when necessary, meaning that in practice it is a matter of which degree companies choose to combine these two strategies instead of choosing only one.

2.2 Sustainable Marketing

Through comprehensive research on the development of green marketing, Peattie (2001) highlights three main “ages” of sustainability that have occurred during the recent decades.

These include ecological marketing, environmental marketing and finally the current age, sustainable marketing. Peattie means that all these ages have contributed to corporations combining green activities to their traditional marketing practices in order to reduce the negative external effects of existing production systems and products. Another author, Hunt (2011), who has conducted further research on this subject means that the recent age, sustainable marketing, has the goal to combine all the parts of sustainable development to a company's business strategies. Sustainable development is a concept that was presented by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (UNWECD) in the late eighties, which includes the three aspects of social, environmental and economic sustainability (UNWCED, 1987). Therefore, Hunt among other researchers conclude that sustainable marketing is defined as an approach that has an equal focus on social, economic, and environmental concerns and has the goal to encourage companies to integrate the three forms of sustainability in companies' business activities all the way from design, manufacturing and R&D to disposal of the products (Hunt, 2011; Bridges & Wilhelm, 2008; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Furthermore, Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) mean that sustainable marketing is a holistic approach that should be incorporated in companies' values. Therefore companies should try to meet consumers' needs, while at the same time minimize the long term harm that their production has on the environment. Various models, frameworks and theories have been developed with the purpose to enable companies to do this, such as the Sustainable marketing mix explained by Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) and the Green marketing matrix developed by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), which will be discussed further below.

2.3 The Sustainable Marketing Mix

The traditional marketing mix and the four Ps have been further developed by several authors in the context of green marketing, with the aim to help companies incorporate sustainable aspects in their practices (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) explain that the modified four green Ps, also referred to as the sustainable marketing mix, should be implemented in companies' marketing strategies when they want to have an overall successful sustainable approach. Furthermore, Stall-Meadows and Davey (2013) explain that having a sustainable marketing strategy can be very important especially for companies within the apparel industry, as taking part in socially responsible activities and selling green

products can be appealing for the consumers that are aware of the negative external effects that the industry causes.

The green *product* has been defined by several authors throughout the years. One definition provided by Peattie (1995) is that a product can be considered green “*when its environmental and societal performance, in production, use and disposal, is significantly improved and improving in comparison to conventional or competitive products offerings.*” (Peattie, 1995, p.181; in Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017:1271). Polonsky & Rosenberger (2001) suggest that the environmental attributes need to be integrated in the initial processes and development of new products. However, developing products that are less harmful with the same quality and performance as traditional products is a complex process that requires innovative designs. Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) also point out that even though there is a need for companies to find new innovative ideas in order to provide more sustainable products, it is equally important that consumers change their ways of thinking in regards to what they perceive as a necessary attribute in a product in order to satisfy their needs.

Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) explain that the *price* of a green product is often higher than the traditional product in terms of higher out-of-pocket price. The difference in out-of-pocket price that consumers must pay for the green product instead of the traditional products is called premium. Furthermore, Grove, Fisk, Pickett and Kangun (1996) mean that green Price refers to companies setting prices in relation to the consumers’ willingness to pay for sustainable products. Consumers expect the green products to be of the same quality and perform equally to the traditional products, however, they generally are unwilling to pay a higher premium for them. In their paper, Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) further explain that this is problematic and challenging for marketers, because it requires them to find ways to make the consumers redefine what they consider to be the norm of acceptable products. However, the results of Stall-Meadows and Davey (2013) study suggest that consumers who have bought green apparel once, are more likely to pay a higher premium for it again in the future.

In their study of green marketing, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) conclude that the green *place* includes activities related to distribution, from production to consumption. Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) further mean that sustainable distribution strategies are one of the primary and first concerns when minimizing the environmental costs and reducing packaging

and using integrated transportation systems can help lower these costs. Moreover, the development of new technologies, such as the Internet, enables today's companies to more effectively target green consumer segments on a global scale without the need of complex distribution networks (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001).

Finally, Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) explain that *green promotion* includes the communication of environmental information that is connected to the activities of a company. Green promotion is important in order to successfully integrate a green marketing strategy in a company and includes establishing good communication to inform and educate consumers and can be done by for example advertisement or labels that inform about sustainable attributes (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Furthermore, Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) mean that it is important for marketers to not overclaim these activities when informing the consumer about them, because it can be seen as *greenwashing*, and thus could possibly be harmful for the brand. Chen and Chang (2012) explain in their empirical study of greenwash and green trust, that greenwashing is a concept where companies either consciously or unconsciously make false environmental claims about their products and services which gives a more positive picture of the company's sustainable work than what the reality is. In order to avoid this, marketers have to have an open communication and dialogue with the company's stakeholders and put equal emphasis on providing both positive and negative information and news.

2.4 The Green Marketing Strategy Matrix

In order to help companies understand how they should approach sustainable marketing strategies, Gingsberg and Bloom (2004) have developed a framework called the Green Marketing Strategy Matrix, which consists of four different green strategies. Gingsberg and Bloom (2004) mean that companies adapting a green marketing strategy need to understand that there is no universal green strategy that fits all companies. Instead, the most suitable strategy for a company can depend on factors such as the condition of the market and competitors. Furthermore, the Green marketing strategy matrix is based on two main questions that a manager must take into consideration regarding a green-marketing strategy: *How substantial is the green consumer segment for the company and can the brand or company be differentiated on the green dimension?* These questions are extremely relevant in

the apparel industry as the industry can be characterized as highly competitive and the development of green products is a very current topic within the industry (Guo, Choi & Chen, 2019). Based on the answers of the two main questions, one of the four following strategies should be considered for a company to adapt (See Figure 1).

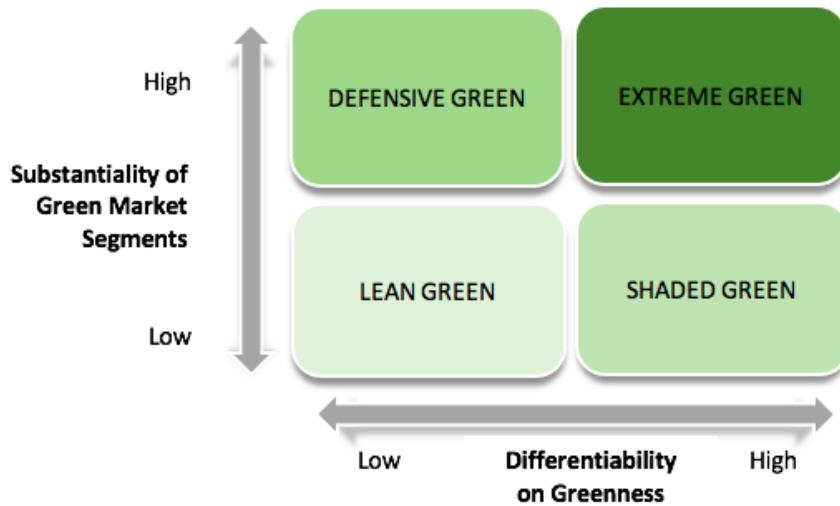


Figure 1. The Green Marketing Strategy Matrix (Ginsberg & Bloom, p. 81).

2.4.1 The Different Green Strategies

Lean Greens are mainly focused on reducing costs and improving efficiencies through activities that are pro-environmental to create a lower-cost competitive advantage. They do not see the possibility of making money from green market segments and tend to not focus on marketing green initiatives, activities or products because of the fear of being held to a higher standard and not living up to it (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004).

Defensive Greens seek to enhance brand image and alleviate damage and use green marketing as a precaution and as a way to respond to a crisis or a competitor's actions. They see green market segments as important and profitable constituencies that need to be recognized. However, because of their lack of ability to differentiate themselves from competitors on greenness, their promotion of sustainable initiatives is often temporary and sporadic and launching of green campaigns will only take place if they can obtain a competitive advantage in the green dimension (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004).

Shaded Greens promote environmental benefits as a second factor and focus primarily on promoting direct and tangible benefits to the customers and use mainstream channels to sell their products. They often make substantial investments in long-term environmentally friendly processes and develop innovative products and technologies that generate competitive advantages. Even though they have the ability to differentiate themselves in terms of greenness, they do not focus on this because of the possibility to make profit from other attributes that their products offer (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004).

Extreme Greens are shaped by holistic philosophies and values and are often companies that are from the beginning developed and driven by greenness. Social responsibility is embedded in the identity and core values of these companies. They fully integrate environmental issues into both their business and product life-cycle process and their "*Practices involve life-cycle pricing approaches, total-quality environmental management and manufacturing for the environment.*" (Ginsberg & Bloom 2004, p.83). Their products and services are mainly offered on niche markets and often sold through specialty channels or boutique stores (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004).

2.4.2 Green Market Segments and Differentiability on Greenness

Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) mean that in order for marketers to know whether or not it is appropriate to incorporate sustainable attributes into their marketing mix and what marketing strategy is the most suitable they need to understand the targeted consumers. In order to illustrate this, Gingsberg and Bloom (2004) used a Roper survey¹ as an example to show how consumers can be divided into five main groups, depending on how much they value green attributes of products. The first group is called True Blue Greens (9%), who value the environment highly and strive to make a positive change themselves. The second group, Greenback Greens (6%), are not politically active as the True Blue Greens but are willing to purchase sustainable products to a larger extent than the average consumer. The third group is called Sprouts (31%), who rarely pay a premium for green products, but do believe in environmental causes and can end up buying green products when appealed effectively. The fourth group Grouzers (19%) tend to be uneducated about sustainability issues and believe

¹ Roper Survey refers to a survey that is created and conducted by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research based in the US. The Roper Center collects, preserves and publicizes public opinion data within social sciences (Roper Center, 2021).

that green products are too expensive and are of less quality than traditional products. Lastly, the fifth group is called Basic Browns (33), who do not care about sustainability issues and are instead focused on day-to-day concerns. In conclusion, the main findings in the Roper survey showed that around 15% are fully receptive to green appeal, 31% somewhat receptive and the 52% are not receptive at all (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004).

In addition to studying the company's green market segment, Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) suggest that it is of importance to understand how a company can differentiate itself on the green dimension. This can be done by studying how consumers perceive the company's competitors on greenness compared to their own company, as well as studying the company's own internal sustainable processes and its commitment to greenness from upper management.

2.4.3 Marketing Mix Tools in Green Strategy

In addition to the substantiality of the green market segment and the differentiability of greenness of a company, Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) suggest that the utilization of the four Ps can provide an understanding of which of the four green strategies is the most suitable for a company. By examining how the four Ps of the traditional marketing mix are utilized in the four different strategies of green marketing, Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) mean that the differences among them can be examined (See Figure 2). The lean green strategy focuses on greenness in product development, design and manufacturing. The defensive green strategy focuses on both the product and promotion aspects of the marketing mix by quietly promoting greenness through public relations and quietly including greenness in their product development, design and manufacturing. The shaded green strategy includes greenness in product, price and promotion. However, greenness is not the primary focus when promoting products and mostly integrated in product development, design and manufacturing and pricing when it can contribute to cost efficiencies. Lastly, the extreme green strategy involves all 4Ps of the marketing mix.

	PRODUCT	PRICE	PLACE	PROMOTION
LEAN	X			
DEFENSIVE	X			X
SHADED	X	X		X
EXTREME	X	X	X	X

Figure 2. Marketing-mix Tools in Green Strategy (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004, p. 82).

2.5 International Sustainable Marketing Strategy

By linking the existing concept of standardization and adaptation from the article by Vrontis et al (2009) with the four green Ps provided by Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001), as well as the framework of green marketing strategy developed by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), we can understand how a multinational company can integrate sustainable marketing in their international marketing strategy, creating an international sustainable marketing strategy (See Figure 3).

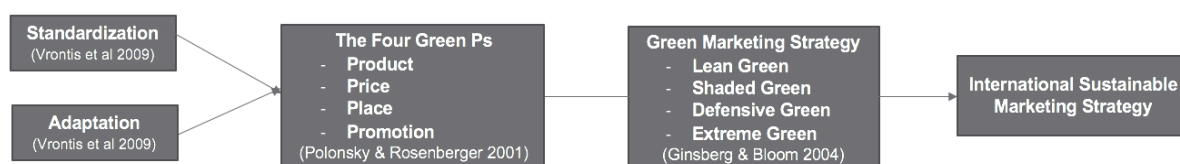


Figure 3. The developed conceptual framework of International sustainable marketing strategy

The conceptual framework suggests that companies that want to market their sustainable products abroad first need to decide whether to standardize or adapt their four Green Ps. If a company decides to have an adaptive marketing approach to the sustainable marketing mix, the attributes of the four green Ps product, place, price and promotion can be adopted to suit the conditions of the local markets in which the company operates in. When choosing a standardized marketing strategy, the four Greens Ps in the sustainable marketing mix will instead be the same in every market. Depending on how the company utilizes the four Green Ps, how substantial the green market segment is and how the company can differentiate itself on the green dimension, they will adapt one or more of the four green marketing strategies developed by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). This will lead to a green marketing strategy on an international level that is either the same in all countries or tweaked in terms of adapting one or more of the Green Ps in the sustainable marketing mix.

This framework of international sustainable marketing strategy has its focal point in the concepts of standardization and adaptation, it is therefore possible that when using this framework, studied companies might end up being categorized within one or more of the strategies provided by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). This is because when companies want to

market their sustainable products internationally, the way in which they utilize the four green Ps might vary depending on the market, as well as their green market segment. Therefore, this framework aims to explain different international sustainable marketing strategies by examining and balancing all factors of which the concept is based on.

3. Methodology

In this chapter the methodological choices for this study will be presented. First the research approach will be discussed, followed by the chosen research design. Thereafter, the methods for collecting data will be presented and includes the method for interview selection, as well as the method of gathering secondary data. Furthermore, the methods for analysis will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the quality of the research. Lastly, ethical aspects of the research will be discussed.

3.1 Research Approach

The chosen research approach of this study is the abductive approach, which according to Patel & Davidsson (2011) is a way to relate theory with the empirical data that is a combination of a deductive and inductive approach. The deductive approach is based on existing theory, which determines what information should be gathered, how it should be interpreted, as well as how the findings should be related to the existing theory. The inductive approach, unlike the deductive approach, is not based on an existing theory and instead focuses on developing theory from gathered information and empirical data (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). Therefore, by combining these two approaches, the researcher can study a problem by using both empirical data and literature in order to create a totally new theory or add new dimensions to an already existing one (Bell et al, 2019; Patel & Davidson, 2011). However, when using an abductive approach the researcher needs to be careful to not let previous experiences and presumptions affect the creation of the theory as it may lead to the theory excluding certain response options (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). In this research, the empirical data from the conducted interviews were gathered by asking the respondents questions that were based on existing theories. However, because of the lack of previous research within the selected research field, a conceptual framework was developed by linking

the chosen existing theories together and thus, the study is based on an abductive research approach.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how Swedish multinational firms in the apparel industry integrate sustainable marketing in their international marketing strategy. Therefore a qualitative research approach is the most preferable for this study. According to Patel & Davidsson (2011), the formulation of the research question is what mainly determines whether the research should be conducted through a qualitative or quantitative research approach. A research question that is formulated to explore and understand underlying patterns of the problem should be analyzed through qualitative research, which can be seen as the essence of the research question of this study. Furthermore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the chosen research topic by collecting "soft data", which includes gathering data from interviews, observations and written texts. This further indicates that qualitative is the most suitable approach for this research as it agrees with the description of a qualitative study according to Patel and Davidsson (2011).

3.2 Research Design

The research design of this study is a multiple case study, since it focuses on several Swedish companies within the apparel industry. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), a multiple case study is a comparative research design, which allows several cases and their individual contexts to be studied by using identical methods. Furthermore, by conducting a multiple case study, each of the chosen companies could be studied separately and thereafter compared to one another to provide the most accurate answer to the research question (Patel & Davidsson 2011). The selection of companies in this study was based on the following criteria: all companies had to be founded in Sweden and suit the criteria of a multinational company, which in this study is defined as a company that has operations in one or more countries other than the country from which it originates. However, the selection of companies was not limited to a specific size, nor were brands with the same owner eliminated, if the organizational structure of the group allowed them to be studied as independent entities.

3.3 Data Collection

The data in this study have been collected through mainly primary data, which is data that is both collected and analyzed by the researchers for the purpose of a specific study (Bell et al, 2019). In addition, secondary data was also gathered in order to verify the collected primary data and to bridge possible gaps of information. The primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, which is a method that is based on an interview guide (See Appendices) made by the researcher and allows for the respondent to answer the questions freely (Bell et al., 2019). However, the researcher does not have to strictly follow the interview guide as the semi-structured interview method allows for supplementary questions to be asked throughout the interview, which according to Bell et al (2019) enables the researcher to get more in-depth answers when necessary and makes the results more unique and flexible. This also provided the possibility to prioritize the most important questions if the respondent had a tight schedule and could not speak with us for more than a limited time.

3.3.1 Interview Selection

The interview selection process began by contacting possible respondents from the chosen companies that were considered relevant for the purpose of this study. This was done through personal connections, email as well as LinkedIn. In order to find additional possible respondents, a snowball method was also used. This is a sampling method where the first respondent within the relevant field is asked to recommend other individuals for the study (Flick, 2018).

After contacting seventeen Swedish multinational apparel companies and sending a total of 123 interview requests through email and LinkedIn, ten people agreed to participate in an interview for this study, of which two were turned down due to the restricted time limit of this research. In addition to the ten agreeing responses, 21 interview requests were rejected and 92 were not responded. In order to reduce non-responses, the companies or employees were contacted up to three times. When receiving rejective answers, an alternative to answer questions in writing by email was given to the respondents. By doing this data could have been collected through email correspondence, however the interview requests remained rejected. Despite the challenging circumstances and the small response rate, as many companies and employees as possible were contacted within the given time frame of this study, in order to collect enough primary data to ensure the quality of the study. In total, eight interviews were conducted with employees from seven different companies (See Table 1).

The eight chosen interviewees were highly engaged with sustainable aspects within their company. Three of the respondents work with sustainability in sustainability departments, three have positions within international marketing in the apparel companies and two of the respondents work with product development. Even though the two latter mentioned do not directly work in the sustainability or in the marketing department, one of them had experience of working in the sustainability department earlier and both of them confirmed that they work with different sustainable aspects regularly. Despite the varying positions of the respondents all the respondents provided interesting and applicable information for this research. Furthermore, all the respondents are presented as anonymous in order to follow the ethical best practice (Bell et al, 2019).

All the interviews were conducted in April and May in 2021. Six of the interviews were held through the digital platform Zoom, one through Microsoft Teams and one by telephone (See Table 1). According to Bell et al (2019), online and telephone interviews can worsen the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee as there might be some delays in the connection. It also makes it more difficult to understand gestures and the body language of the respondent, which could lead to wrong interpretations (Bell et al, 2019). However, it also saved time of transportation and made it possible to interview people not living in the same city or country. Two of the interviews were conducted in English and six in Swedish. The ones held in Swedish we translated to English.

Respondent	Name of the Company	Interview Platform	Language of the Interview	Length of the interview
1	H&M	Zoom	Swedish	45 min
2	H&M	Zoom	Swedish	65 min
3	COS	Zoom	English	50 min
4	&Other Stories	Microsoft Teams	Swedish	44 min
5	Axel Arigato	Zoom	English	25 min
6	Nudie Jeans	Zoom	Swedish	40 min
7	KappAhl	Telephone	Swedish	25 min
8	Björn Borg	Zoom	Swedish	37 min

Table 1. Table over the conducted interviews.

3.3.2 Secondary Data

By using secondary data, a comprehensive research of the extensive data that is available can be conducted and enables the researcher to choose articles and data that are the most relevant for the research. However, it is also possible that the user of the secondary data misunderstands the content of it and it is not always possible to inspect the quality of secondary data (Bell et al., 2019). Therefore, secondary data was gathered in this research mainly to compare and add information to the gathered primary data, since the sample size ended up being smaller than anticipated due to the small response rate. The secondary data was conducted by extensive research online to find reports and articles related to the subject within the studied companies, using keywords such as ‘sustainability’, ‘marketing’, ‘vision’, ‘circularity’ and ‘organisation’ connected to the names of the seven studied apparel companies. This was done by using search engines such as Google, Google Scholar and Supersök and the database Mediearkivet. In addition, databases such as Business Source Premier and Emerald were used to gather scientific articles and information of existing research within the subject of international business and sustainable marketing. The data that was found through this method consisted of scientific articles, press releases, annual reports and sustainability reports related to the companies, of which the most relevant data was found from the businesses' annual reports and sustainability reports. In addition to this, secondary data was also gathered from all the companies official websites. In total, 28 articles and reports related to the companies and the research subject were reviewed and are cited in this study in addition to the different websites that were searched through. Overall, a lot of interesting and comprehensive data was gathered through the conducted interviews and therefore, the additional gathered secondary data was mainly to ensure that there was enough information for each company and to verify the information provided by the respondents in order to conduct a thorough and as accurate analysis as possible.

3.4 Method of Analysis

When conducting the interviews for this study, every respondent was asked for their permission to record the sound, which enabled transcribing of the interviews shortly afterwards. Bell et al (2019) mean that it is important to transcribe interviews as it allows a thorough examination of what the respondent has said and it helps to correct the limitations of the researcher’s memory. Initial thoughts were noted and documented throughout the

process of gathering primary and secondary data and later used for the final analysis. According to Patel & Davidsson (2011), an ongoing analysis is often common in qualitative research and it enables the researcher to get ideas during the process on how to continue the research while the memory of the interview is still good. Furthermore, the process of coding was used to turn the written material from the gathered interviews and secondary data into fragments. According to Bell et al (2019), this is an important part of the analysis process and helps to reduce the amount of data, which enables the researcher to process the gathered material. This was done by identifying and highlighting the data that match the different parts of the developed theoretical framework. The analysis was then conducted by an interplay of the developed conceptual framework, the gathered empirical data and own interpretation, in order to analyse how the seven chosen studied companies integrate sustainable marketing in their international marketing strategy.

3.5 Quality of the Study

To ensure the quality of this study the two concepts of validity and reliability have been used. The validity of a qualitative research refers to ensuring the quality of the study throughout the entire research process (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). When collecting data for qualitative research, the term triangulation is often used to ensure the validity of the research. Triangulation can be used in different ways, by using different methods to gather data (Patel & Davidsson). In this research different methods, data, theoretical perspectives and researchers have been combined to study the same research topic. By the use of additional gathered secondary data to ensure and confirm the information sampled by our primary sources, a more accurate and objective depiction of the phenomenon can be presented and analysed, than if only one method for collecting data was used (Svensson & Ahrne, 2011). Furthermore, in qualitative research the terms validity and reliability are in many ways intertwined (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). In this research the specific situation of each interview will be taken into consideration, and thereby the reliability is ensured.

Other researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Bell et al, 2019:363) and Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bell et al, 2019:363) suggested the use of the alternative term trustworthiness to evaluate the quality of a qualitative research. The trustworthiness of a study is often described by the terminologies credibility, transferability, dependability,

confirmability and authenticity (Bell et al. 2019; Patel & Davidsson, 2011). In order to ensure credibility in this research, the earlier mentioned method of triangulation has been used. Transferability in a qualitative study can be ensured by producing "thick description", meaning that enough details of the studied phenomenon have been accounted for in order for the findings to be transferred into similar or completely different contexts (Bell et al, 2019). Similar findings from the gathered empirical data in this research would most likely be presented if another researcher conducted this study, as the chosen respondents were representatives from the studied companies. To ensure dependability the research should be audited by peers, preferably both during and after the research process (Ben et al., 2019). This is something that has been done in this study, through regular meetings with a supervisor, as well as additional auditing by peers. In order to ensure the confirmability of a study Ben et al (2019) means that it is important for the researchers to ensure that the findings are derived from the gathered empirical data. To ensure this the reason behind the chosen theories, methodology and analysis have been clearly stated.

3.6 Ethical Aspects

When conducting research it is of high importance to take ethical aspects into consideration (Patel & Davidsson, 2011). According to Vetenskapsrådet (2002) it is important that the individuals that participate in the research are not subjected to humiliation, abuse nor physical or psychological harm. This is called the *Criterion of protection of the individual* and has been concretized by Vetenskapsrådet (2002) into the following four main ethical rules: the requirement of preventing deception, the requirement of consent, the requirement of confidentiality and the requirement of utilization. The requirement of preventing deception means that the participants of the study are informed by the authors of its purpose. The requirement of consent means that the participants of the study have the right to fully decide about their participation in the study, which means that they have the right to end their participation without any negative consequences. The requirement of confidentiality means that information about the participants is as confidential as possible and their personal information should be kept in ways that ensure that it is not available to others outside the study. Lastly, the requirement of utilization means that the gathered information from the participants is only allowed to be used for the purpose of the study (Vetenskapsrådet 2002; Patel & Davidsson, 2011). When conducting this study all these four main ethical rules have

been taken into account. Before conducting the interviews for this study, all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the participation was voluntary and all respondents are anonymous to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Lastly, the recorded sound and transcripts were only used for the purpose of this study and will be deleted after the final research is published.

4. Empirical Data

This chapter will present the primary data obtained by the conducted interviews, as well as secondary data that have been gathered from relevant annual reports and websites of the chosen companies. The collected data for each company will be presented separately and provide an introduction of the different companies, their view on sustainability, their international marketing strategy and how they use the sustainable marketing mix. At the end of this chapter a short summary will be provided of the presented empirical data.

4.1 H&M

H&M is a Swedish clothing company founded in 1947 by Erling Person and is built on the concept of “Fashion and quality at the best price.” (H&M, n.d, p.2). H&M offers all types of garments to men, women and children and is one of the largest clothing companies in the world (Respondent 2). Moreover, the company is present on 74 store markets with around 4372 stores all over the world and available on 54 online markets (H&M Group, 2020).

4.1.1 What is sustainability for the company

Respondent 1 means that *”when a company as large as H&M, which is one of the world's largest companies, introduces certain initiatives and shows customers that this is possible, we contribute to a better world because there are so many people following because when such a large company as H&M does one thing, it has a "spill-over effect" on competitors.”* (Respondent 1). The focus on sustainability is something that has increased over the years and therefore sustainability has become an important part throughout the organization. Even

though there is still a focus on profitability, the focus has shifted towards also keeping the customer, rather than only to make profit (Respondent 2).

4.1.2 International marketing strategy

The planning of the international marketing strategy takes place in H&M's headquarter in Stockholm. However, because H&M is a large company with stores and operations worldwide they have local marketing departments in each country or region that they are in. These departments focus on adapting the marketing strategy and how they communicate with customers according to what their competitors do and also how the customer behaves in the specific location. In terms of sustainability and sustainable products, the interest and awareness of sustainability varies among countries and therefore it is important to find the right level on how much they should market sustainability in different countries and how much they should market other attributes (Respondent 2).

4.1.3 Sustainable marketing mix

4.1.3.1 Product

When it comes to the products, there is almost always a conscious choice for the customers to make, no matter what type of product it is. H&M uses organic cotton and recycled polyester in many of their products. H&M also has a collection that specifically focuses on sustainability, earlier called conscious exclusive which is now rebranded to Innovation collection. In this collection the brand has a strong focus on innovative ways to develop new materials and to lead the change for the entire brand. This is done by developing new materials in this collection on a smaller scale, and when it is possible these materials are then later integrated into other departments on a larger scale (Respondent 2). The brand also offers recycling options in store for the customers and does a lot of work with educating their suppliers and to increase the competence, in order for them to be able to change towards more sustainable practices and processes and still maintain the same quality of the products. This is done through the production offices that the brand has in the countries where the suppliers operate (Respondent 1).

4.1.3.2 Price

Sustainable materials are generally more expensive than non-sustainable materials and when a product is made out of recycled materials it can lead to the price of the product to become higher and this is something that needs to be taken into account (Respondent 1). The customers of H&M are willing to pay more for "conscious" products but not much more than the original price. Therefore, to be able to keep the prices for the sustainable products at the same level as the non-sustainable version of the product they have to compensate in other places. The increased cost for the sustainable product does not mean that the price for the customer gets higher. However, the prices of products from the conscious exclusive collection are higher than the average price (Respondent 1; Respondent 2).

4.1.3.3 Place

When developing new products, the process of sample rounds is used, which is a process of sending sketches of a product to production, having it produced and sent back for evaluation. Sending samples back and forth requires a lot of resources and has a huge impact on sustainability. Therefore, H&M works actively on shortening the sample rounds. This is done by developing and working with new technology such as 3D-programmes. The 3D-programmes enables the development of new products to be made digitally and the goal is to have this initiative up and running fully within two years. Not only does it eliminate the transportation of samples back and forth, but it is also beneficial since it makes the process of developing new products less time-consuming (Respondent 1; Respondent 2).

The use of boat or ship as a transportation method has increased during recent years from production to sales countries. Since the use of flight as a transportation method is very unsustainable their goal is to reduce it to 1%. They also work with reducing the amounts of plastic used in the supply chain, since products often come with hangers or plastic in order to make sure that the products are safe during transportation (Respondent 1).

4.1.3.4 Promotion

H&M communicates sustainability through for example their website and Instagram where they develop fun and innovative ways to talk to the customers about sustainability (Respondent 2). On the H&M website there is a focus on educating the customer about both

what the company does in regard to sustainability but also what the customers can do by for example taking care of their clothes in the right way to make them last longer. Products that have sustainable attributes are labeled with "conscious" on the website, and also in physical stores (Respondent 1). Furthermore, in the conscious exclusive collection both Respondent 1 and 2 point out that the company is much better at communicating with the consumers about sustainability and promoting more in detail what they actually do. Respondent 1 means that the communication of what the company actually does in terms of sustainability in general could be better and pointed out that *"We do a lot and then it is not communicated to the customers."* (Respondent 1). However, even though it could be communicated more, marketing has a larger focus on sustainability today than it had before (Respondent 2). Moreover, because the brand is present in many countries the communication and advertising needs to be adapted since there are variations in terms of the interest in sustainable products and their receptivity of information related to sustainability (Respondent 2).

4.2 COS

COS is a fashion selling brand owned by the Swedish H&M Group and established its first store in London in the year 2007 (Respondent 3; H&M Group, 2020). The brand is independent in terms of having their own managing director and organisation located in the UK (H&M Group, 2020). The brand offers timeless designs of garments and accessories for women, men and children and are currently available in 280 stores around the world including Europe, North America, Australia, the Middle East and Asia (H&M Group, n.d.).

4.2.1 What is sustainability for the company

Sustainability can be seen as a part of COS's brand identity as their collections focus on merging timeless design with sustainable high quality materials made to last (Respondent 3). This and the importance of circularity were two important parts of sustainability for the brand according to Respondent 3, who responded the following:

"What is sustainability for COS? I think that is a good question actually to ask a fashion brand because of course we are making things to sell. I have always been really proud of the statement which is 'buy better, keep forever'. It is a lot about how we can manage to sell

things that people will keep forever and how we can support our customers to be able to repair things or take care of things without having to come back and buy more things essentially. That has always been really important to us. It is not about making a small number of people buy more but growing our customer base and educating people with the knowledge of care.” (Respondent 3).

The respondent also pointed out that the demand for sustainable products is big for the brand, however it is not what drives the brand to work sustainably since it has always been an inherent part of their identity as a brand.

4.2.2 International marketing strategy

As a part of the H&M Group, COS has to follow some fundamental guidelines given by the corporation when it comes to the marketing activities but with the freedom to adapt into the local environment (H&M Group, 2020). Although COS does cooperate with H&M group when it comes to the sustainability goals, the vision of the different brands within H&M group differentiate from each other and therefore Respondent 3 means that their way of reaching the set goals is different to other brands of the group. The brand does not tailor their international marketing strategy to different regions and when it comes to sustainable marketing the company also keeps the same centralised approach, as their circular approach does not change per region. This is done even though it can be more difficult in some countries to implement certain types of materials or processes due to availability and knowledge in different markets (Respondent 3).

4.2.3 Sustainable marketing mix

4.2.3.1 Product

The brand has a big focus on selling sustainable products, but they also offer other values to their customers. The identity of the brand is *“timeless, considered design, very simple, very minimal and things that are made to last.”* (Respondent 3). Furthermore, according to the COS sustainability page, 86% of the materials in their collection has been sustainably sourced so far in 2021 (COS, 2021; Respondent 3). For COS responsibly sourced materials cover the three areas animal welfare, the environment and social responsibility. As the brand focuses on

selling sustainable products with a long lifespan, they use conventional fabrics while constantly searching for other better alternatives by exploring new technologies and production methods that will have less impact on the planet (COS, 2021).

4.2.3.2 Place

Respondent 3 means that since sustainability is an inherent part of COS there is no focus on designing any specific sustainable collections and instead sustainable attributes can be found in most products regardless of the collection. As a part of becoming a responsible and a fully transparent brand, COS have since their establishment been building relationships with their colleagues and suppliers throughout their production chains in order to drive a positive change throughout products' life cycles. Some initiatives include exchanging plastic bags into reusable fabric bags in the supply chains (COS, 2021). As a part of the H&M group, COS also strives to use environmentally friendly transportations in the form of ship and train transports (H&M Group, n.d.).

4.2.3.3 Price

Respondent 3 means that sustainable materials are more expensive than non-sustainably made materials. However, the respondent explains that when designing a product which can later on be repaired and reused, it gets a longer lifespan and can last from four to five times longer compared to a less expensive non-sustainable product. Thus, designing sustainable products might mean a higher initial investment but because it will last longer it can be seen as a return on investment in a different way than what many businesses with linear models are used to having. The respondent also believes that customers don't mind paying a little bit more if they know that they are going to get a better quality and if they are aware of what they are being sold.

4.2.3.4 Promotion

COS has created a lot of visibility for their sustainability work on their website. In order to educate consumers on sustainable consumption, they have their own page to sell product care items and a Product Care Guide linked to every sold item where they share information on how to take care of the products in the right way (COS, 2021). They also have established a

webpage named COS resell, where consumers can resell their old COS products (Respondent 3). This aims to encourage the consumers to support circularity. Furthermore, COS has an online magazine on their webshop where they publish interesting articles related to sustainability, culture and fashion as well as a comprehensive sustainability site informing of all the sustainability work that is being done. However, when entering the webshop, the word sustainability is not visual right away (COS, 2021). The physical labels that COS have on their products highlighting sustainability are hangtags for certain types of materials such as organic cotton (Respondent 3). The social media platforms that the brand uses to communicate with customers is the same for all regions in which they operate in.

4.3 & Other Stories

& Other Stories is a brand in the H&M group that was launched in 2013 and offers clothes, shoes, bags, accessories and beauty products for women. The brand is present in 22 markets with 74 stores and 33 online markets (H&M Group, 2020).

4.3.1 What is sustainability for the company

Being a part of the H&M group the brand needs to work toward the sustainable vision of the group, which is based on the three pillars of circular and climate positive, fair and equal, and leading the change. Even though the brand needs to work towards goals that are set by the group, they can do it in their own way by making their own prioritizations and choosing materials that are most suitable for their brand and customers (Respondent 4). When it comes to what sustainability means for the brand, respondent 4 describes that: *"I think that it is the responsibility we as a fashion company must take. I see it as a hygiene factor, it is the only way we can do business. It is deeply integrated in our values and it is the type of company we want and should be."*

4.3.2 International marketing strategy

When it comes to the international marketing strategy of the brand it varies depending on the countries that they are in. This is mainly because of the varying regulations in different countries. When it comes to sustainability, regulations might result in the company having to adapt or even refrain from selling a certain product, if the regulations go against the

sustainability agenda of the company. For example, if a certain market requires animal testing on the cosmetic products, the company will choose not to sell products in that market because it goes against their agenda. Furthermore, some regulations might not accept certain labels on the products, and thus the company needs to adapt to different markets by using a different label or describe the original label in different words that are accepted for that specific market (Respondent 4).

4.3.3 Sustainable marketing mix

4.3.3.1 Product

In general the brand offers products made by premium materials, in other words more expensive and finer qualities such as cashmere, wool and alpaca (Respondent 4). The respondent means that by offering garments made out of premium materials, when taken care of properly they can last longer, and thus can be seen as more sustainable from the start. Furthermore, the brand aims to only use certified versions of these materials. The brand wants to move towards doing this faster than what the H&M group in general will. The brand also tries to increase the amount of reused materials and to work with materials that have the lowest possible effect on the environment (Respondent 4). This is done for example by using materials such as recycled or organic cotton, recycled polyester and recycled polyamide/nylon (& Other Stories, n.d.). Furthermore, the suppliers of COS have seen the increasing demand of sustainable products and the company discusses with them for instance about how to optimize the use of their materials (Respondent 4).

4.3.3.2 Place

When it comes to working more sustainably in terms of distribution Respondent 4 means that the brand only uses flight when necessary and pointed out that *"It is also more expensive to fly than to transport by boat, this is a good example of when it makes business sense to do something too. Because it is not good for the environment and it is not good for the costs either."* (Respondent 4).

4.3.3.3 Price

Integrating sustainable activities can have an effect on the prices short term. The increase in price can mostly be seen during the innovation stage when certain materials are not yet

established on a large scale. However, in the long run when the supply of these materials are of a larger quantity it does not have to affect the prices negatively. Even though working sustainably might increase the costs, the brand tries not to put these costs on the price that customers pay, but rather absorb it in the margins. For example, moving from polyester to the use of recycled polyester does not have to affect the price towards the customers. However, the use of more premium materials in some products such as cashmere, wool or alpaca does make the price towards the customer higher than products made by acrylic for example (Respondent 4).

4.3.3.4 Promotion

When it comes to the communication of sustainability, Respondent 4 puts emphasis on that it is important to be very exact, clear and use an understandable language and to not talk about things that can not be proven. Respondent 4 also means that because of the increased interest in sustainability from customers the brand has become better at communicating about their sustainability work over time even though they have been working with it internally for many years.

One way that & Other Stories communicate sustainability and overall goals with their customers is through their website (Respondent 4). But in order to get to the sustainability page on the website, customers have to actively search for it, as it is not visual at first sight to find the (& Other Stories, 2021). Another way sustainability is communicated is through social media channels such as Instagram, which Respondent 4 means is a great platform to reach the customer in a more inspiring way, by for example educational tutorials about how to take care of their garments. The brand also communicates sustainability on their products by showing what materials they are made of, if they have a certain certification or have been made through sustainable processes. This type of product related communication is something that can help their customer in making a buying decision, since they know that their customers care about and are interested in sustainability (Respondent 4). Furthermore, the physical stores are also an important part when it comes to communicating sustainability to the customers. The brand focuses on educating the employees about the sustainability work that they do in order for them to be able to educate and inform the customers coming into the stores. The store also works as a place where customers can be educated on how to properly handle their garments, and thus making them last longer (Respondent 4).

4.4 Axel Arigato

Axel Arigato is a Swedish clothing brand that was founded in 2014 and is present in Sweden, Denmark, England, Germany and the United Arab Emirates. Initially the company began selling sneakers but have expanded their offering to ready-to-wear for women, men and kids and also lifestyle accessories. The company wants to be a people-powered lifestyle brand and the main inspiration for the brand is the Swedish/Japanese philosophy on minimalism (Axel Arigato, n.d.).

4.4.1 What is sustainability for the company

When it comes to the company's overall view on sustainability, according to the respondent their view is that *"I think that this is the way we want to try to maintain our sustainability kind of positioning, that it is not going to be the first thing you find out about us as a brand, it is going to be maybe the second, third or fourth and more like one of those nice cherry on top moments where you like the trainor and you are happy to buy it and then you suddenly find out that there is this appealing sustainability agenda that underpins it."* (Respondent 5). The respondent explains that the reason for this view is because they would rather be transparent on what they are working towards, than rushing and hurrying processes that they do not have full clarity on.

4.4.2 International marketing strategy

All Axel Arigato's major communication channels are global, and there are no region specific channels. The company does not have a wide spread global team because of its smaller size and relative young age, and uses social media and online channels to reach their customers in all markets. The way in which sustainability is expressed globally is mostly through social media and online, and those are teams that all have office functions in Gothenburg (Respondent 5).

4.4.3 Sustainable Marketing Mix

4.4.3.1 Product

The respondent representing Axel Arigato means that the company being relatively young is an advantage for them when it comes to sustainability, because they attract and hire young people who have a genuine interest in sustainability. That in turn increases the company's internal drive to work sustainably, especially when it comes to the production chains.

The company has created something called drop of the week. This was implemented because they wanted to eliminate the overproduction of products from their business model, because of the waste of materials, water, resources, energy and the pollution that it causes. They also mean that it is a way to create control over the quantities produced and reduce the stock of products (Axel Arigato, n.d.). Furthermore, the development of new products or development of existing products always has the customer feedback in mind and thus, reduces the chances of the company ending up with unsold stock.

When it comes to the materials that the company uses there is a focus on having leather that is ethically sourced. The company predominantly uses leather from Leather Working Group certified factories, which is an organisation that ensures and certifies that the manufacturer of leather works in a sustainable way. It is also important for the company to use cotton that has been developed in a sustainable way (Axel Arigato, n.d.; Leather Working Group, 2021). The company has released a few campaigns during this past year that have had sustainable attributes. The focus for these products has been on having sustainable materials such as organic cotton (Respondent 5).

4.4.3.2 Place

The majority of their products are made in Europe, mainly in Porto, Portugal (Respondent 5). When it is possible, the company works with materials that are locally sourced or in close proximity to the production company, this is to reduce the use of transportation, lead time and air pollution (Axel Arigato, n.d.). In the year 2020 the company made changes in their packaging to more sustainable solutions. The construction of their shoe boxes were changed in order to reduce the quantity of materials used and some of the materials used are recycled. The clothing packaging was also changed and the company now uses light density

polyethylene, which they mean is a material that can be recycled and reused back in the loop of the production process. In addition to this the company uses hang tags that are recyclable and made out of FSC certified paper (Axel Arigato, n.d.), which stands for Forest Stewardship Council and is an international organisation that stands for the responsible use of the forests in the world in ways that are environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable (Forest Stewardship Council, n.d.).

4.4.2.3 Price

The price point in general is more on the luxury side for the products that the company offers and this is partly due to the company having the majority of their products made in Europe (Respondent 5). Respondent 5 also means that the price point depends on the materiality that the company works with. For example, if they would work with a vegan leather, or a mushroom leather or something that requires a little bit more treatment and innovation, then that could end up driving some costs up. However, that is not always the case because of some of the sustainable products that the company offers, customers actually do not have to pay as much for, compared to others that do not have sustainable attributes. Respondent 5 therefore means that there is no clear theory behind the specific pricing of the products that are more sustainable.

4.4.3.4 Promotion

When communicating what the company does from a sustainability standpoint the global marketing team works closely with the sustainability team and educates and formulates the company's sustainability learning and initiatives to their audiences (Respondent 5). The company works with sustainability initiatives that are connected to product launches. This means that for products with key sustainable attributes, they go more in depth about those materials and talk about them in a more scientific way. This is done for example through the company's e-commerce website, where products with sustainable attributes are marked with an icon. It is also communicated through hangtags in the physical stores, where they write if something is made out of for example organic cotton (Respondent 5).

4.5 Nudie Jeans

Nudie Jeans is a Swedish denim brand that was founded in 2001 in Gothenburg. It is one of fourteen legal entities that are a part of the Swedish Jeans Holding AB group and is available in more than 50 markets all over the world through distribution channels such as wholesale, e-commerce and retail (Nudie Jeans, 2020). The brand was founded with the goal to do something different to what was available in the industry (Respondent 5), and to build a brand on a foundation that moves away from the concept of fast fashion (Nudie Jeans, 2020).

4.5.1 What is sustainability for the company

Nudie Jeans' vision is to become the *"World's most sustainable Denim Company."* (Nudie Jeans, 2020). Being sustainable for the company means to take responsibility in all parts of the value chain. This means that the company wants to take responsibility all the way from the cotton seeds, throughout the value chain, production, during the user phase, and also after. In other words the company wants to move towards a more circular business model and because it was created to do something different in the industry in terms of wanting to be completely sustainable, this is a possibility since it is of interest to the highest management level and the owners (Respondent 5).

4.5.2 International marketing strategy

The marketing strategy is standardized and it is important that the customers that visit a Nudie store get the same experience no matter the location in the world. This also applies for the stores that are franchised or through distributors. The company educates the employees that work in the physical stores all over the world and there is a clear culture related to the customer service that they offer in their stores all over the world (Respondent 5).

4.5.3 Sustainable marketing mix

4.5.3.1 Product

When it comes to the product the company has a strong focus on using sustainable materials and they keep track of the exact weight of the different materials that are being used. They

often have 98% cotton and 2% elastane in their jeans, sometimes up to 100% cotton depending on the type of jeans that they are making (Respondent 5). The respondent means that the product itself is of a high worth, because it is made of the best materials possible, by many parts involved in the developing process, through a fully transparent supply chain, and also because of the services that they offer connected to the product such as free repairs of the jeans and discounts when returning old jeans for new ones. Moreover, the company also sells products second hand and has different projects related to recycling (Respondent 5). In order to get a third-party confirmation of all processes related to the production of their products, an external organisation named Fair Wear Foundation controls these processes every year, which increases the company's credibility (Respondent 5; Fair Wear Foundation, n.d.).

4.5.3.2 Place

The products are mainly produced in Italy and Tunis, and therefore trucks and boats are commonly used as transportation to the main warehouse in Sweden (Respondent 5). From the main warehouse all products are then distributed to the different markets and for countries such as the USA and Australia this can be done by flight which stands for a large amount of carbon dioxide emissions. The reason for the company still using flight as a distribution method is because of the time aspect and the need for some products to reach the market fast. However, the company has recently begun to develop new methods of distribution where they are now transporting bigger so-called "bulk shipments" that will end up creating a warehouse in different regions so that customers on a certain market will receive their deliveries from a warehouse in the same country by trucks or other more environmentally friendly transportation methods than flight. This will shorten the delivery time to the customers and improve the negative effects on the environment because of the reduced emissions from transportation (Respondent 5). When it comes to packaging the company has changed into more sustainable options such as certified paper and recycled plastic (Respondent 5).

4.5.3.3 Price

The price of Nudie Jeans products can be seen as higher than other brands that offer the same type of product and there are some small local variations when it comes to the price, this relates to the price point of a certain country (Respondent 5). This stems from the fact that

there are many parts involved in the process of making the actual product and the use of for example organic cotton which is more expensive than a non-sustainable option and motivates the company's price point (Respondent 5). The respondent means that free repairs that they offer on their jeans are not something that is included in the price of the product but rather something that the company sees as a long term investment that strengthens their brand.

4.5.3.4 Promotion

When it comes to marketing and communication it is important for the company to first do things and then talk and communicate what they have done and show the results (Respondent 5). Transparency is an important part of this communication and the respondent means that "transparency in itself is not sustainability, however it is a prerequisite for being able to do sustainability work" (Respondent 5). Furthermore, According to Respondent 5 Nudie Jeans uses digital platforms such as their website, Instagram and blog to communicate what they do in terms of sustainability to their customers. On the website there is information provided that shows which products are made out of for example organic cotton and for each product there is information that enables traceability all the way in the supply chain and provides information about the business partners that have been a part of producing the product. Another important channel for communication for the company is also through their physical stores, where a lot of information about the products are provided from the people working in the store (Respondent 5). In store the company provides free reparations of their jeans and the respondent means that this allows for multiple conversations in store with the customer. There is a big focus on educating the customer in both connection to the purchase on how to handle their jeans in the right way, in order to provide the longest shelf life possible and through the online channels in order to educate all customers to become sustainable customers by telling about the positive sides of sustainability. (Respondent 5). In the physical stores the company only uses labels for products with organic cotton. This is because it does not look good from an aesthetic perspective and often the customer does not know what they represent (Respondent 5).

4.6 KappAhl

KappAhl is a Swedish fashion brand that was founded in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1953 and designs clothes for many different people and lifestyles (KappAhl, 2021). The brand is

available in markets such as Sweden, Norway, Finland and Poland and has 345 stores. Moreover, KappAhl is also available online in all mentioned markets, as well as in Denmark and its trademark Newbie has also been established in the United Kingdom (KappAhl, 2020; Respondent 7).

4.6.1 What is sustainability for the company

The company aims to have a sustainable business model and to offer fashion that is responsible and affordable (KappAhl, 2021). Respondent 7 explains that sustainability is a hygiene factor for the company. She means that responsible fashion thinks of the wearer, but also of the entire chain from manufacturing to recycling and for them it is connected to 100 percent. The company has thus made a sustainability promise called Sustainable fashion:

“It's time fashion takes responsibility. We offer responsible fashion that feels right. For you and the world around us.” (Respondent 7)

4.6.2 International marketing strategy

The company is divided into two different business units which cover the whole business (Respondent 7). Within both of these business units there is one central marketing department located in Sweden. In addition to these central marketing departments, there is a marketing manager in every market they are available in. They help to manage the local marketing strategy according to the common structures created by the central departments. When it comes to communicating about sustainability outwards to consumers, KappAhl has a standardized international strategy. This means that they present and communicate sustainability to their customers in a similar way no matter the geographical location of the online or physical stores (Respondent 7).

4.6.3 Sustainable marketing mix

4.6.3.1 Product

The apparels and accessories that the company sells are made of materials of high quality (KappAhl, n.d.). According to the website, their products are secure and sustainably handled all the way from production to the customers. Furthermore, in their press release (KappAhl,

2021) mentions that one of the sustainability goals that the company has set for itself includes having clothes that are made of exclusively materials that are labeled as More Sustainable latest 2025, that is garments that are made of better than conventional materials, and today 70% of their collections already have this label. The company wants to be able to offer fashion to everyone and therefore they have a broad supply of different models and sizes on their clothes both for toddlers, kids, men and women. One example of a trademark KappAhl owns is kay/day, which is about garments that consumers can feel themselves comfortable in (Respondent 7). Moreover, the respondent means that they already strive to expand the lifespan of their garments by informing customers how to nurture their clothes. Even so when going forward, they will have an increased focus on extending the life of clothing, from design to production and use.

4.6.3.2 Place

According to the KappAhl's sustainability report, transportation during the supply chains accounts for a relatively small proportion of climate emissions when one refrain from air transports (2021). 89% of the transportation within the company is done by sea and air transportation includes only 1% of the logistics. As online shopping has increased during the last year, the company works on streamlining their logistic chains in order to achieve their goal of reduced transportation-related climate emissions in addition to the fact that they only transport their products to the online markets through sea-, road- and railways. Moreover, KappAhl has both social and environmental requirements on all their carriers irrespective of the transport mode (KappAhl, 2021).

4.6.3.3 Price

According to the company's website, it can be seen that the prices of the sustainable products do not vary to a large degree compared to the less sustainable options. For example on the website, the price of a garment with sustainable attributes can be seen having similar price as the traditional products (KappAhl, 2021).

4.6.3.4 Promotion

According to Respondent 7, the challenge when it comes to communicating sustainability to consumers is about explaining the complex concept of sustainability in a way that is easy for the customers to understand. Because KappAhl uses sustainability labels on their site, one can spot the sustainably made products on KappAhl's online shop easily, making the good choice of the sustainable product clear for the customers. In order to be as transparent as possible, KappAhl has also a lot of information about their sustainability work available on their web site and on their sustainability reports (KappAhl, 2021). They also use social media channels and other channels as tools to communicate about their innovations and sustainability work to different customer segments. The chosen channels depend on the size of the campaigns, some examples are TVS, VOD, Facebook, Instagram, newsletters and customer club's app.

4.7 Björn Borg

Björn Borg is a Swedish apparel company founded in 1984 by Björn Borg and Rodhi Heintz (Björn Borg, n.d.). Initially the company began offering sports apparel, but later expanded their business to creating and selling underwear. Moreover, the company is represented in 20 markets, the largest being the Netherlands and Sweden (Björn Borg, 2020) and their goal is to become the number one sports fashion brand for people who want to feel active and attractive (Björn Borg, n.d.).

4.7.1 What is sustainability for the company

Sustainability for Björn Borg is to implement sustainability in every aspect of the business. This includes activities such as transportation, communication, our products and relationships with both customers, wholesalers and other actors. The respondent means that they have seen that their customers and business partners such as the retailers demand sustainably made clothes, but this is not the reason why they work with sustainability as it is one of their internal goals. However, the demand has encouraged them to be innovative and the respondent believes that they would not have reached their goals as fast without other external parties' interest in this area. Furthermore, sustainability for the company is not only to have a focus on the environment, but to look at sustainability from a broader perspective

including social and economic aspects as well (Respondent 8). All these aspects have been summed up in their sustainability promise, B.Tomorrow (Björn Borg, n.d.).

4.7.2 International marketing strategy

Björn Borg has an overall standardized international marketing strategy and occasionally adapts to local conditions, for example by collaborating with local gyms. However, the overall marketing activities are the same in all markets and the channels for communicating with customers are global. Moreover, this applies for the communication of sustainability as well (Respondent 8).

4.7.3 Sustainable marketing mix

4.7.3.1 Product

As sustainability characterizes the company's vision, they aim to have their product as sustainably made as possible from the beginning. During the autumn of 2021, all their clothes will be performing according to their classification and sustainability requirements for clothes. These requirements are that at least 70% of the materials used in the products should be sustainably sourced. Such materials can be for example organic cotton, recycled polyester and recycled polyamide (Respondent 8). In addition to that, they have a goal to have 100% sustainable products within underwear and sports apparel in 2023 (Björn Borg, 2020). The company sources cotton from an organization called, The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). This does not ensure that the actual cotton they use in their products is sustainably made. However, by sourcing through BCI every penny that the company invests goes to a more sustainable cultivation of cotton and supports cotton-grower all over the world, which for example reduces the use of water and pesticides (Respondent 8). Furthermore, in some of their products with sustainable attributes they also use more innovative materials such as S.Café® which is made of a mix of coffee waste from local café chains' and recycled PET (Respondent 8; Björn Borg, n.d.).

4.7.3.2 Place

Half of the company's operational carbon dioxide emissions come from international transports (Björn Borg, 2021). In order to reduce these emissions, Björn Borg has recently

centralized their warehouses to one effectively located hub and strives to decrease air transportation from 3% to 2% of their total shipping volume. They also have a goal to reduce the overstock they create, which will be done by not producing or shipping products that are not requested with the help of improved buying strategies. When it comes to packaging, the company started using sustainable bags made out of recycled materials in their deliveries for all products sold online in 2020, except for underwear (Björn Borg, n.d.).

4.7.3.3 Price

The price point of more sustainable products have not affected the price towards the customers. There is a higher cost for the company to use certain materials that are more sustainable, however this increase in price is something that they deal with by streamlining the internal process (Respondent 8).

4.7.3.4 Promotion

The communication of sustainable products is done through all places where the company meets the customers. The physical stores are one of the best ways of communication, because this is where they can actually meet the customers in real life (Respondent 8; Björn Borg, 2021). Therefore, it is important for the company to educate the employees working in the stores in order for them to inform the customers directly about the benefits of sustainable products they offer. In addition to Björn Borg selling their products in their own stores, they have many wholesalers which account for 80% of the sales in physical stores (Respondent 8). Furthermore, Björn Borg also uses social media channels such as Instagram to communicate with customers about their sustainability work. The communication of sustainability is also done through packaging and hangtags. For example, the company has created its own label called B. Tomorrow, which has a green label on the hangtags and packaging in order to communicate and guide their customers to make better buying decisions (Respondent 8).

In addition to informing about environmental aspects of sustainability, respondent 8 points out that they also focus on other aspects: *"Our mission is to help people reach their full potential through training, to find balance, and thus lead a sustainable life. That is the core of our corporate culture, we train to live, we do not live to train. We are an inclusive brand, always have been, and we engage with people of all kinds, all nationalities, all stages in life.*

Informing about our climate goals and other classic sustainability areas is also a natural part of our communication.”(Respondent 8).

4.8 Summary

Through our gathered data a clear trend can be seen in that all the studied apparel companies engage in working with sustainable marketing on an international level, but in different ways. Two of the companies have an internationally adaptive sustainable marketing strategy and the rest an standardized strategy. They all are aware of the problems facing the industry in terms of environmental, social and economic issues and work actively with incorporating more sustainable marketing activities. Furthermore, all the studied companies use the sustainable marketing mix, but utilizes the four green Ps to various degrees. The data gathered from our conducted interviews showed that one green P that especially is utilized by all the studied apparel companies is the green Product. That is because all of the apparel companies work on creating responsibly made products to some degree, which either build their whole clothing collections or certain parts of them. In addition, recurring themes that most wanted to address were how transparency is important in order to communicate the sustainability work to consumers and a few companies also pointed out that in order to avoid greenwashing, sustainable actions should be taken first and that one should openly talk about them after implementation.

The most varied factors were the green promotion of the sustainable marketing mix as well as the degree of how substantial the green market segment is to the companies. All of the apparel companies mean that they have seen that there has been an increased demand from consumers on more sustainable products and some have said that also their business partners in the supply chain prefer working with responsible companies that care about the economic, social and environmental aspects. However, a few companies chose to concentrate on attributes such as style and functionality when communicating to their customers, while for others the green attributes were of high importance in the external communication.

5. Analysis

In this chapter each company will be analyzed by the use of the developed conceptual framework of international sustainable marketing strategy. Firstly, the sustainability of the green market segment, as well as the differentiability of greenness will be examined. Thereafter, the utilization of the sustainable marketing mix, as well as the companies decision two standardize or adapt their green Ps will contribute to an understanding of how sustainable marketing can be integrated to the companies international marketing strategies.

5.1 The Green Market Segment

The green market segment is essential to study in order for a company to decide which green marketing strategy to adapt (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004) and integrate into their international marketing strategy. This study focuses on the corporate perspective of the chosen companies and therefore any consumer-based surveys were not conducted. This makes it difficult for us to point out the exact market segment of the companies, however some conclusions can be drawn from the gathered empirical data. Furthermore, we believe that Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) are right when it comes to the fact that in general over half of all consumers do not think of sustainability as an important factor when purchasing products and often prioritize functionality, price and beauty. However we are convinced that during the seventeen years since this article was written, consumers have become more aware and interested in sustainability. The increasing demand on sustainable products internationally was something that all the respondents agreed on, some meaning that it is not only an increased demand from consumers, but also from business partners and higher management levels. However, the substantiality of the green market segment can be interpreted as varying among the studied companies.

The green market segment of Nudie Jeans can be interpreted as mostly Greenback Greens and partly Sprouts according to the definition provided in Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). This is because Respondent 8 means that there is an existing customer base in this segment, however the company does not expect all of their customers to be experts in the area, and therefore they also want to educate customers around the world to become more aware of sustainability. The existing green customer segment can therefore be seen as Greenback

Greens since they probably are more willing than the average consumer to purchase sustainable products and the other possible customer segment can be seen as Sprouts, which can be persuaded to buy sustainable products when being approached effectively (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004).

Respondent 3, representing COS pointed out that there is internationally a big demand for sustainable products from their customers and therefore their green market segment can be seen as partly Greenback Greens. However, the majority of the green market segment probably consists of Sprouts since Respondent 3 mentioned that even though sustainability can be seen as an integrated part of the collections of the brand, the main attributes of the products they offer are based on timeless, classic design that will last. Thus we believe that these attributes are what attracts most customers to buy their product, rather than only the sustainable attributes.

Similar to COS, the green market segment of & Other Stories can be interpreted as consisting mostly of Sprouts and partly of Greenback Greens, mentioned by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). This is because according to Respondent 4 the demand for sustainable products have increased in the last few years. However, Respondent 4 also mentioned that even though sustainability has been integrated in the brand for many years, the communication of it to customers has not always been their main focus. Therefore, we believe that the demand from their customers is not solely based on the sustainable attributes they offer, but also other attributes such as quality and detailed agreements, making the majority of the green market segment Sprouts on an international level.

According to Respondent 7, who represents KappAhl, the increased awareness of sustainability from customers in general has encouraged the company to become better at communicating their sustainability work to their customers internationally. Therefore, this leads us to believe that there is a demand for sustainable products from the customers of KappAhl. However, in addition to their sustainable collections they also offer products that focus on other attributes such as fashionable and comfortable clothes, which probably means that they have customers who purchase their clothes primarily based on those attributes. This leads to the conclusion that their green market segment could be categorized as the Sprouts from the definition mentioned in Ginsberg and Bloom (2004).

Furthermore, at Björn Borg the demand for sustainably made products is big from both consumers and business partners internationally according to Respondent 8. On the other hand, Björn Borg is also a company whose main goal is to become the number one sports fashion brand for people who want to feel active and attractive (Björn Borg, n.d.) and thus it can be interpreted that they also offer identity value for their customers. Therefore, we believe that sustainability might not be the sole reason for customers buying their products but to purchase high quality sports clothes and underwear, and the green market segment of the company can be categorized as Sprouts according to the definition from Ginsberg and Bloom (2004).

According to Respondent 6, Axel Arigato does not focus on marketing and communicating sustainable attributes to its customers to a large extent, and instead focuses on integrating sustainable processes internally. This could mean that their customers might mostly purchase their products due to attributes such as functionality and luxury as they might not be educated about sustainability to a high degree, but are capable of being persuaded to buy sustainable products when being appealed. This could make the green market segment of Axel Arigato classified as Grouser and Sprouts according to the definition of green market segment in Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). This applies for all their markets.

Lastly, Respondent 2 means that since H&M is a large company that operates in many different markets, the interest and demand for sustainable products varies among markets. Overall there is an interest for sustainable products according to Respondent 1 and 2, but since the mission of the brand is to offer fashionable and affordable clothes for everyone, we believe that this is the main reason for their customers buying their products and where the biggest demand is. Therefore, according to the definitions used by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), the green market segment of H&M can be seen as Basic Browns, Grouser, and Sprouts. The variation in substantiality of the green market segment in different markets could be due to variations in culture, living conditions and knowledge about sustainability.

5.3 Differentiability on Greenness

The differentiability of greenness is another important part that companies need to examine when deciding a green marketing strategy (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). The gathered data in

this study indicates that the degree of which the companies differentiate themselves in terms of greenness varies. In terms of the companies using the adaptive marketing approach, it even varies depending on the market they are in.

According to Respondent 5, sustainability is a philosophy that is a deeply integrated part of the business model and organization of Nudie Jeans, and thus shapes the values and activities throughout their entire value chain. The main driver for the company ever since establishment is to have a focus on sustainability and act sustainably before communicating it (Respondent 5). Therefore, it can be seen that the company has the internal commitment towards sustainability from the highest management level, which enables them to differentiate itself from competitors on the green dimension according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). Because the company has a standardized international approach for sustainability this does not vary in different markets.

Unlike Nudie Jeans, the development of Björn Borg was not driven by greenness from the start as their focus initially was on offering fashionable sports apparel (Björn Borg, n.d.). This could make them less competitive in the green dimension according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) as they might not have had complete internal commitment from higher management levels from the start. However, throughout the years they have aimed to integrate sustainability in their entire organisation and have set different sustainability goals for the organization (Björn Borg, n.d.). Therefore, today the company can be seen as able to differentiate itself in terms of greenness according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). Moreover, the relatively high ability to differentiate on greenness does not vary depending on the market as the company uses a standardized approach when marketing sustainability internationally.

Similar to Björn Borg, the creation of the H&M brand was not driven by greenness as their mission is based on the philosophy of creating fashion with good quality and price (H&M, n.d.). H&M does offer sustainable options and collections, and sustainability is today integrated in many parts of their organisation, as the brand wants to lead the change towards a more sustainable apparel industry (Respondent 2). However, we believe that because of the main philosophy of the brand, it could be difficult to differentiate and compete with other companies on the green dimension, since according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) the brand might not have the commitment from higher management. Moreover, according to Respondent 2, the company adapts the level of green attributes in different markets to fit the

local preferences. This could be seen as a way to maintain attractiveness to the targeted market, yet still remain competitive in the green dimension when possible.

According to Respondent 3 sustainability has always been an inherent part of the brand COS, as it is driven by the philosophy "buy better, keep forever". Because sustainability is integrated throughout the organization and can be seen as a part of their internal processes, the brand can be seen as able to differentiate itself on the green dimension according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). Moreover, since COS uses a standardized internationalization strategy when marketing sustainability, this applies for all markets they are in (Respondent 3).

Furthermore, similar to COS, Respondent (4) explains that & Other Stories also approach their activities with a sustainable mindset, as they strive to be a sustainable brand. Therefore according to the criterias presented in Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), the brand can also be seen as differentiated on the green dimension. Furthermore, similar to H&M, & Other Stories adapt some of their sustainable attributes depending on market (Respondent 4), which makes their ability to differentiate themselves on the green dimension lower in some markets.

KappAhl is similar to Björn Borg, H&M and & Other Stories when it comes to the creation of the brand (KappAhl, n.d.). The initial philosophy behind KappAhl cannot be seen as driven by greenness and this could make the company less competitive in terms of greenness according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). However, sustainable practices is a focus that has become more apparent and integrated also in KappAhl's marketing activities throughout the years and can now be seen as a hygiene factor for the company internationally (Respondent 7), which on the other hand enables them to differentiate themselves on the basis of greenness today.

Lastly, Axel Arigato as a fairly new company has had a focus on sustainability to some extent ever since they were established (Axel Arigato, n.d.; Respondent 5). However, Respondent 5 means the company wants the main focus to be on other attributes rather than having sustainability be the driving force behind their identity as a brand. Therefore, to differentiate themselves in terms of greenness is not something that the company focuses on or something that can be used as a competitive advantage towards other companies that differentiate themselves on the green dimension according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004).

5.4 International Sustainable Marketing Strategy

In this part of the analysis all the factors of the developed framework of international sustainable marketing strategy will be analyzed together. This will result in an international sustainable marketing strategy for each company.

5.4.1 Lean Green

5.4.1.1 H&M

H&M has an adaptive marketing approach when marketing sustainability internationally (Respondent 2), which means that the utilization of the four green Ps might vary depending on the market that the brand operates in, to better suit the local conditions (Vrontis et al. 2009). When analyzing the utilization of the four green Ps of H&M, we can see that H&M focuses internationally mostly on the green product. This is because there is a focus on development, designing and manufacturing the sustainable products by innovative processes and materials (Respondent 1; Respondent 2), which are the main characteristics of a green product according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001). Furthermore, the price of their sustainable products can be seen as equal to the price of their traditional products, but for the more innovative sustainable products the customers need to pay a premium price (Respondent 2). However, the average customer of H&M is not willing to pay a high premium for sustainable products (Respondent 2), which according to Rosenberger and Bloom (2004) is characteristic for Basic Browns and Grouzers. This means that the green price can not be seen as utilized at H&M according to Grove et al (1996) in their more sustainable collections. However, for other products with sustainable attributes that are not in this collection, green prices can be seen as utilized since the price of these products are the same as for the traditional ones. Furthermore, the overall communication of sustainability has improved over the years, however the brand still seems to not put as much focus on this part of the sustainable marketing mix as they do with for example the green product. Therefore, it can be concluded that the green promotion is less utilized to some extent, since green promotion needs to inform about the sustainability work connected to the company's activities to a larger extent according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001). Moreover, green promotion can be seen as the one P that varies the most internationally, as the interest of sustainability varies among the markets the brand operates in (Respondent 2). Lastly, the

analysis shows that the green place is the least utilized in the sustainable marketing mix. This is because even though they use more environmentally friendly transportation methods such as boat and train and are developing innovative ways such as 3D sampling to reduce emissions from transportation, the brand still uses flights which is a very unsustainable option of transportation (Respondent 1; Respondent 2), and is not in line with Polonsky and Rosenberger's (2001) description of the green place.

To conclude, since H&M utilizes mainly the green P product, and the analysis indicates that the substantiality of the green customer segment and the ability to differentiate on greenness are low, they could be positioned as having a Lean Green marketing strategy according to Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). Companies having a Lean Green strategy tend to not focus on marketing initiatives related to sustainability because of the fear of being held to a higher standard and not living up to it (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004), which could be the case for the brand to some extent. However, the brand can also be categorized as partly having a Shaded Green strategy. This is due to their adaptive approach that enables the green promotion to be utilized to a larger extent in some markets, as well as because the brand integrates sustainability in the organization more than before. The main reason for the brand not being categorized as having a fully Shaded Green strategy is because they do not communicate their sustainability work to their customers internationally today to a large extent. Also, having a Shaded Green strategy means that the brand can differentiate itself in the green dimension (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004), which the analysis indicates might not be the case for H&M today. In conclusion, the international sustainable marketing strategy of H&M could be seen as a combination of the Lean Green strategy and the Shaded Green strategy provided by Ginsberg and Bloom 2004, where the sustainable marketing mix can be adapted when necessary to suit the needs of the local market according to the concept of adaptation explained by Vrontis et al (2009).

5.4.1.2 Axel Arigato

Axel Arigato has an internationally standardized marketing approach when marketing sustainability and therefore their sustainable marketing mix is implemented in the same way in all markets (Vrontis et al., 2009). According to our analysis, the most utilized green P is the green 'product', similar to H&M. This is because they strive to use sustainably sourced materials and have a stocking strategy which contributes to decreasing waste already from the

beginning (Respondent 5). Moreover, Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) mean that it is important to use sustainable distribution strategies to minimize environmental costs in order to utilize the green place in the sustainable marketing mix. This can partly be seen in Axel Arigato, as most of their production is in close proximity to their current markets which contributes to decreased transport emissions (Respondent 5). However, parts of the production are also located in other parts of the world (Axel Arigato, n.d) and therefore, this aspect of green place does not apply for all products. Furthermore, since their products are mainly manufactured in Europe and are often made of sustainable materials, the prices in general tend to be higher. Because the analysis indicated that the customers could be categorized as Sprouts, they could be willing to pay a premium when approached effectively but in most cases would not pay more only because of sustainable attributes according to Ginsberg & Bloom (2004). However, it seems that the prices match their customer's willingness to pay and therefore, the green price could be seen as utilized to some extent. Even though the company informs and educates their customers about sustainability to some degree, sustainability is not the main prioritization in their communication strategy (Respondent 5), which could make the promotion the least utilized green P from the sustainable marketing mix.

The analysis indicates that the company can be characterized as having a Lean Green marketing strategy based on Ginsberg and Bloom's (2004) definition. Since they have a standardized approach when marketing sustainability, this strategy applies for all markets that they are in. The reason for Axel Arigato being categorized as Lean Green is because according to the analysis, the green customer segment is not very substantial and neither do they focus on differentiating themselves on greenness in the markets. However, Axel Arigato does integrate sustainable processes in their organisation and utilizes parts of the sustainable marketing mix both when it comes to economic, environmental and social sustainability and has done so ever since the establishment. These aspects are brought up in the Shaded Green strategy by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) and therefore, Axel Arigato could also be categorized as possibly having parts of the Shaded Green strategy. However, they tend to not focus on promoting these attributes (Respondent 5), as they make profit from other attributes rather than sustainability and therefore would not be considered as having a fully Shaded Green strategy (Ginsberg & Bloom 2004). To conclude, the international sustainable marketing strategy of Axel Arigato can be considered as a combination of the Lean Green Strategy and

parts of the Shaded Green Strategy and does not vary depending on the market since they have a standardized approach internationally.

5.4.2 Shaded Green

5.4.2.1 & Other Stories

Similar to the H&M brand, & Other Stories adapts its sustainable marketing mix when marketing sustainability internationally. However, the way in which the two brands utilizes the four green Ps differs. & Other Stories utilizes the green product by using certified, as well as recycled materials in many of their collections (Respondent 4). The brand can also be considered utilizing the green price according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) as their sustainable options in most cases do not lead to the customers having to pay a premium and they perform similarly to the traditional products (Respondent 4). This means that the prices of sustainable products are in line with their customers' overall willingness to pay, as the majority of customers could be categorised as mostly Sprouts, who generally are not willing to pay a high premium for sustainable products when not informed about the positive sides of sustainability (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004). Furthermore, the analysis shows that the brand also utilizes the green promotion, since there is a focus on communicating information that has a direct connection to the activities of the brand and tries to focus on internal processes before communicating them externally (Respondent 4). However, the brand adapts the level of green promotion mainly due to regulations in some markets that do not allow certain communication of sustainability (Respondent 4), and therefore in these markets the green promotion is not as utilized as in others. In addition to this, the sustainability page on their website is not as visible and easily accessed as for example for Nudie Jeans. These aspects could lead to less established communication and information to the customers, which according to Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) could make the integration of a green strategy less successful. Lastly, the brand uses transportation methods such as transporting by boat to reduce both financial and environmental costs, which according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) means that they utilize the green place. However, it can be concluded that the brand also uses other less environmentally friendly methods of transportation as flights when they consider it necessary (Respondent 4), which means that the green place might not be utilized to the same extent as the two previously mentioned Ps of the sustainable marketing mix.

The analysis indicates that the green customer segment of & Other Stories probably is substantial to some degree, and the differentiability on greenness of the brand can be seen as semi-high. This together with the utilization of mainly the three green Ps Product, Price and Promotion indicates that & Other Stories can be categorized as having a Shaded Green Strategy, which mean that they have a focus on investing in long-term environmentally friendly processes and could compete on the green dimension (Ginsberg & Bloom 2009). However, the brand tends to adapt parts of the sustainable marketing mix and inform about sustainable attributes in a less extensive or different way than in some markets, as well as at times adapt or refrain from selling certain sustainable products in some markets due to regulations (Respondent 4). This could result in the green promotion and product being less utilized at times and therefore the brand can also be categorized as having parts of a Lean Green strategy (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004). The lower utilization of the two Ps, however could be seen as a result of external factors rather than internal, and thus could be connected to what Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) mean regarding the fact that consumers and the political decision-makers also need to change their ways of thinking in terms of what they perceive as necessary attributes in order to satisfy consumers' needs. This concludes that the international sustainable marketing strategy of & Other Stories could be seen as having an overall Shaded Green Strategy, and due to the adaptive approach to suit local regulations they could also at times use a Lean Green marketing strategy.

5.4.2.2 COS

COS is one of the five companies that have a standardised approach to their international sustainable marketing. Therefore, the utilization of the four green Ps does not vary depending on the market (Vrontis et al, 2009). By examining how the brand uses the four green Ps it can be concluded there is a focus on the green product, since 86% of the materials in all their collections have been sustainably sourced so far in 2021 (COS, n.d.), which Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) mean is an essential part of the green product. Furthermore, the brand strives to use transportation methods such as ship and train (H&M Group, n.d.), which reduces environmental costs and also have reduced the amount of plastic in their packaging from production (Respondent 4), which are two essential parts of the green place (Polonsky & Rosenberger 2001). However, since Respondent 4 mentioned that they strive to use only environmentally friendly transports, this could be interpreted as that they do not fully do this

yet. Moreover, the brand seems to have established a good communication with their customers where they educate and inform about sustainability through social media, their website and online stores, which Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) mean is crucial to successfully integrate a green marketing strategy. Lastly, Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) explain that the price of a green product is often higher than the traditional product in terms of higher out-of-pocket price which can be seen at COS. However, the customers of COS do not mind paying a premium for more sustainable products if they are aware and informed about the sustainable attributes (Respondent 4). This agrees with the analysis of the green customer segment of COS, which categorized the customers of COS as both Greenback Greens and Sprouts. Therefore, COS utilizes the green price to some extent since their prices of sustainable products match the customers' willingness to pay. In conclusion, all the four green Ps seem to be utilized when marketing sustainability internationally according to the definition of Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001) to some degree, with green product and green promotion being the two most utilized out of the four.

Further the analysis indicates that according to definitions used by Ginsberg and Bloom (2001), the green customer segment of COS probably is substantial for them to some degree, and they can be considered being able to differentiate themselves on the green dimension on a quite high level as sustainability is one of the core values of the brand and an integrated part of the organisation. Therefore, COS could be categorized within the Shaded Green strategy. Even though the analysis indicates that the brand utilizes all parts of the sustainable marketing mix to some extent, the reason for the brand not being categorized within the Extreme Green strategy is because companies having this strategy have a highly substantial green market segment in addition to the high ability to differentiate themselves (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). Although COS can be differentiated, the customer segment might not be fully as substantial and customers probably purchase their products due to attributes such as simple and timeless design instead of mainly sustainability.

5.4.2.3 KappAhl

KappAhl also has a standardized international approach when it comes to their sustainable marketing mix (Respondent 7), where the four green Ps are utilized similarly in every market (Vrontis et al, 2009). When it comes to the green product, KappAhl works by integrating

sustainable and responsible processes since so far 70% of their collection is labeled as More Sustainable (KappAhl, n.d.), which goes in line with Polonsky and Rosenberger's (2001) description of green products. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the company also has a focus on green promotion to some degree. That is because they have become more transparent regarding the responsible work which they are committed to (Respondent 7) which is one of the key factors regarding green promotion according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001). Moreover, the price points of their products have mostly not been affected by the sustainable processes the company uses, and therefore they are according to the analysis in line with what customers are willing to pay as their green market segment could be categorized as Sprouts (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004). Lastly, their distribution channels have gone through some changes and therefore fits partly in the definition of the green place by Polonsky and Rosenberger (2001). That is, because they only transport their products to the online markets through sea-, road- and railways but that does not include all of their markets (Kappahl, 2021). In conclusion, KappAhl's operations have become more sustainable since the company was established because all the three aspects of sustainable development can be seen as a hygiene factor for the company today. Especially practices regarding products, price and promotion could be seen as the green Ps that have been utilized the most since the company was established.

According to the definitions used by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), the substantiality of the green customer segment is most likely quite low for KappAhl today and the company can differentiate themselves from their competitors on greenness on some level but there is still room for improvement. Therefore, KappAhl could be seen as having internationally a Shaded Green sustainable marketing strategy with some characteristics of the Defensive Green strategy. That is, because according to our interpretation the company still recognizes that it is profitable and important to work sustainably to have consumers from the groups of Sprouts, Greenback Greens and True Blue Greens even though their current customer segment consists of only Sprouts and that is why they work with green products and promotion at an increasing pace.

5.4.3 Extreme Green

5.4.3.1 Björn Borg

Björn Borg uses a global marketing strategy and standardized approach when it comes to marketing sustainability (Respondent 7), which means that the utilization of the sustainable marketing mix does not vary to suit any specific markets (Vrontis et al 200). By examining the green four Ps, we can conclude that all four green Ps are utilized to a large extent. Most of the garment collections of the brand can be seen as green products, according to the definition from Polonsky and Rosenberger (2009). This is because the brand uses materials such as cotton from the Better Cotton Initiative, which contributes to more sustainable processes of cultivating cotton, recycled polyester, as well as at times more innovative materials (Respondent 7). Furthermore, the company has also made changes to their logistics in order to streamline their transportations and to reduce the transport-related emissions, which according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2009) are one of the primary concerns when minimizing the environmental costs, and thus it can be concluded that the company also utilizes the green place. Moreover, the sustainable materials used in their products can be more expensive and thus lead to increased costs internally, however this is not visible in their prices towards their customers (Respondent 7). The analysis concludes that their customers could be categorized as Sprouts, who rarely pay a premium for green products, but do believe in environmental causes and can end up buying green products when appealed effectively (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004), which indicates that the company utilize the green price, as the price for more sustainable products does not vary from the traditional products. Lastly, the company actively communicates sustainability to their customers through various channels (Respondent 7) and even though they use wholesalers to a large degree, which could possibly lead to less control in terms of how well the customers are informed, the comprehensive information offered on their website could be seen as compensating for this and therefore, the green promotion can also be seen as utilized to a large extent.

According to Ginsberg and Bloom (2009), since the analysis of the sustainable marketing mix of Björn Borg indicates that Björn Borg utilizes all for green Ps, the company could be categorized as having a Extreme Green strategy. This means that sustainability is a part of the

core values of the company and an integrated part of the business and products (Ginsberg and Bloom 2009). However, the analysis also showed that the green market segment could perhaps not be considered as highly substantial, but they could be considered as being able to differentiate itself on the basis of green. This indicates that Björn Borg might not completely be categorized as having a Extreme Green strategy, but might also have parts of the Shaded Green strategy according to the framework developed by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004). To conclude, the analysis indicates that Björn Borg would end up having an international sustainable marketing strategy that is somewhere in between the Extreme Green and the Shaded Green Strategy and due to their standardized approach it would be the same in all markets.

5.4.3.2 Nudie Jeans

Nudie Jeans has a strong focus in all the four areas of the sustainable marketing mix on a global level (Respondent 6), which according to the definition from the article written by Vrontis et al (2009), means that the company uses a standardized international marketing approach. According to Polansky and Rosenberger (2001), the company utilizes the green products since all of their products are almost completely made of sustainable materials and processes (Respondent 6). Moreover, Nudie Jeans offer internationally free repairs for their jeans and take back consumer's old jeans, which makes their business model similar to a circular business model (Respondent 6). This means that the environmental and societal performance of their products in both production, use and disposal could be seen as significantly improved compared to similar products offered by competitors, which Peattie (1995), means is what defines a green product. Furthermore, by using transportation methods that reduce environmental costs such as trucks, boats as well as the new developed method of bulk shipments (Respondent 5), the company utilizes the green place according to the definition by Polonsky and Rosenberger (2004). However, the green place might not be fully utilized as the company still uses flight to transport their products internationally when there is a need to reach certain markets fast (Respondent 5). Furthermore, the price of the products offered by Nudie Jeans is often higher than other brands that offer the same type of product and is mainly due to the sustainable processes (Respondent 5). The customers of Nudie Jeans that belong in the True Blue Greens and Greenback Greens are willing to pay this higher

price and thus, it can be concluded that the company utilizes the green price according to the definition of green price by Grove et al (1996). Also, since the prices of their products can vary in relation to the different price points of certain markets (Respondent 4), this further indicates that the company utilizes the green place, as they adapt the pricing according to the customers willingness or ability to pay. Lastly, the company focuses on green promotion since they are very open with sharing information and educating their customers on sustainability through multiple channels (Respondent 6). When it comes to marketing and communication it is important for the company to first do things and then talk and communicate what they have done and show the results (Respondent 5), which according to Polonsky and Rosenberger (2004), is a crucial part of the green promotion. Moreover, the fact that there is an external third party organization that confirms the sustainability work they have engaged in (Respondent 6), makes their transparency about sustainability more credible.

The existing green market segment of Nudie Jeans can be seen for the analysis as highly substantial. In addition to already having customers that value and are willing to pay for sustainable products, they also aim to educate more consumers about sustainability within the apparel industry on an international level. Moreover, since sustainability can be seen as a rooted philosophy for the company (Respondent 6), the analysis indicates that the company can differentiate themselves from others on the green dimension, especially in the jeans industry. In conclusion, the two aspects mentioned above and because all parts of the sustainable marketing mix can be seen as utilized, the company can be categorized within the framework for green marketing strategies by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), as possibly having an Extreme Green marketing strategy. However, because the green place could be seen as the one P being utilized to a smaller extent than the other three, the company could also be seen as having partly a Shaded Green Strategy where less emphasis is put on the green place (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004).

5.5 Summarizing table

The conducted analysis can be summarized in the table below (See Table 2), which summarizes the international sustainable marketing strategy of each company based on the developed framework. First the companies are categorized on the basis of having an adaptive or standardized approach when marketing sustainability internationally. Thereafter, a second

categorization is made based on the utilization of the four green Ps from the sustainable marketing mix. Note that for the companies using an adaptive international approach, the adapted green Ps are mentioned. Lastly, based on these two mentioned aspects, as well as the level of differentiability on greenness and the substantiality of the green market segment, each company will be categorized according to their position in the Green Marketing Strategy Matrix.

Adaptation vs standardization	The Apparel Company	The Green Ps	Position in the Matrix
Standardized	COS	Utilizes all the green Ps to some extent.	Shaded Green strategy. High differentiability and semi-high green market segment.
	Axel Arigato	The most utilized green P is Product.	Lean Green strategy, but partly very strong characteristics of Shaded Green strategy. Low differentiability and low green market segment.
	Nudie Jeans	All the green Ps are implemented. Although Nudie Jeans have a standardized approach, their prices can slightly vary depending on the price point on different markets.	Extreme Green strategy with features of Shaded Green strategy. High differentiability and high green market segment.
	KappAhl	The green Product, Price and Promotion are of most importance.	Mostly Shaded Green Strategy but partly also Defensive Green strategy. Semi-high differentiability and low/semi-high green market segment.
	Björn Borg	All the four green Ps are utilized.	Between Extreme and Shaded Green strategies. High differentiaion level and low/semi-high green customer segment.
Adaptized	H&M	Internationally most focus is on the green Product. Green Promotion can vary depending on the market.	Lean Green strategy with some features of Shaded Green strategy. Low or semi-high differentiability and low or semi-high green market segment depending on the market.
	&Other Stories	Product, Price and Promotion are the most utilized green Ps. Green promotion can vary depending on the market.	Shaded Greem strategy with some components of Lean Green strategy. High or semi-high differentiability depending on the market and semi-high green market segment.

Table 2. Summary of the international sustainable marketing strategies of the seven studied companies.

5.6 Limitations of study

This research has some potential limitations. Due to the current situation with Covid-19, in-person interviews could not be conducted and instead the empirical data was gathered through the digital platform Zoom or by telephone, as well as through secondary sources such as available company reports. We believe that because of the circumstances of the pandemic,

it was a bigger challenge getting a large sample of respondents, as 92% of our interview requests were either denied or not answered, which limited us to only conduct interviews with either one or two respondents per company. Thus, the results and analysis can be limited due to the sample size of the multiple case study. Furthermore, the obtained data may in some cases be culturally biased, as all chosen research subjects are Swedish companies. The data may also be sample bias, as the respondents represent their company and therefore might not provide completely transparent information, either consciously or unconsciously. Furthermore, because the study focuses on a corporate perspective, the gathered data to analyze the customer perspective was limited and therefore could be further investigated, perhaps by conducting customer surveys to address the green market segment of each company more accurately.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the key findings in this study cannot be generalized for the entire apparel industry. However, it can act as guidance for similar companies in the industry that want to integrate sustainable marketing in their international marketing strategy and perhaps create an understanding of how this can be done. Despite the possible limitations of this research, we believe that we have still managed to present interesting and useful findings.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to bridge the gap between international marketing and sustainable marketing in the context of the apparel industry, which was found to be evident when reviewing literature within the field. We have tried to answer our purpose based on our main research question *"How can sustainable marketing be integrated in the international marketing strategy of a multinational company within the apparel industry?"*.

The study concludes that sustainable marketing can be integrated in the international marketing strategy of apparel companies by developing and using a sustainable marketing mix that is either adapted or standardized internationally. Furthermore, the integration depends on how the green Ps within the sustainable marketing mix are utilized in a company, as well as how interested and aware their customers' are of sustainability and how well the company can compete with other similar companies on the green dimension. Based on these

factors, a company within the apparel industry can develop an international sustainable marketing strategy.

When comparing the seven studied apparel companies, the analysis showed that the way in which sustainable marketing strategies are integrated in international marketing strategies varies. Based on the analysis two of the companies have an adapted international sustainable marketing strategy and five a standardized international sustainable marketing strategy. We believe that the variations among the companies can depend on external and internal factors that are specific to each company. For example, the varying strategies could depend on the size of the companies, since larger companies operate in more countries and therefore need to take into consideration differences in regulations and the varying demands from consumers to a larger extent than the smaller companies. These external factors lead to the need of a strategy that can be tailored to suit specific local conditions of a market, and thus some companies have an adaptive international sustainable marketing strategy. Furthermore, internal factors such as the philosophy of the company, its commitment from higher management level on sustainability, and level of integration of sustainability throughout the whole organization could further explain why and how companies integrate different international sustainable marketing strategies.

Overall, it was difficult to categorize the companies in only one strategy from the framework developed by Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), and instead most companies ended up somewhere in between two strategies. We believe that the reason for this is due to the fact that the companies are constantly evolving in the apparel industry in terms of working with sustainability. The increased awareness about these issues and increased knowledge on how to handle them through for example innovative technology enables companies to evolve and perhaps makes them more comfortable to market sustainable products internationally as a result, without the fear of consciously or unconsciously overclaiming their sustainability work.

Finally, a possible difficulty of integrating sustainable marketing in the international marketing strategy of a company within the apparel industry could be the ability to balance sustainability and the financial aspects. This may be a consequence of companies historically following a linear business model with financial profitability being the most important goal. Therefore, in order for a company to survive and to be an attractive company with longevity,

it will still be a balancing act as working more sustainably today might lead to less earning in the short-term for companies. However, we believe that it will be beneficial in the long run, not only financially but also socially and environmentally and should therefore be the new way of doing business.

6.1 Implications for Practice

The findings of our study suggest that it is important for multinational companies within the apparel industry working with sustainable marketing to take into consideration the specific circumstances of their company. As mentioned earlier, the size of the company can affect whether or not the company needs to adapt its marketing approach. It is also possible that the size might affect the capacity and ability to fully integrate the sustainable marketing mix internationally. Therefore, for companies in the apparel industry that want to integrate sustainable marketing into their international marketing strategy, it is important to focus on what is realistic to achieve and to not overclaim their sustainability work towards the customers, as it can harm the brand in the long run if they are not able to meet the expectations of their customers. In addition, according to our gathered data, having a third party to inspect and confirm the social, environmental and economic processes a company is engaged in, makes the companies sustainability reports more reliable and therefore should be considered as an important part of the Green P promotion.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

Furthermore, from the gathered empirical data, it can be concluded that many of the studied companies not only sell physical products, but also offer services. This is an important part of their work towards having more circular business models, as it often involves services related to the user phase such as recycling or reparations of products. Therefore, to also capture these aspects we suggest a modified version of our developed framework which includes an extended version of the four green Ps that include the additional Ps people, process and physical evidence developed by Booms and Bitner (1981).

6.3 Future Research

There were some aspects that were brought up by the respondents in this study that we found to be very interesting and important. However, the delimitations and scope of the study did not allow us to investigate these aspects further. An interesting subject for future research would be to examine how companies within the apparel industry implement CSR policies throughout their supplies' chains as many of the respondents mentioned that they work to provide better working conditions and processes in their supply chains.

Furthermore, we are aware that cultural bias is a possible limitation to our study as a consequence of only studying Swedish companies. Therefore, in terms of future research we suggest examining multinational companies within the clothing industry from different countries to compare with the findings of this study. This would contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon and provide a more generalized view of the industry and explore possible variations in international sustainable marketing strategies depending on the country.

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Appendices

Interview guide

Introduction

Present the purpose and aim of the research. Explain why the company in case fits well as a case study and thank the respondents for their time to be a part of the interview.

1. Could you briefly describe yourself and your academic and working background?
 - What is your role at the company and in which department do you work in?
How long have you been working at your current company and in your current department?
2. Could you shortly describe the company you are working at and the products you sell?
3. What is sustainability for your company, what is your general view on sustainability?
4. Could you explain more in detail some of the practical work that you do in your department that could be related to sustainability? This can be related to social, economical or environmental aspects.
5. How is sustainability communicated to your current and possible customers? (E.g. info at website.)
 - Do you use special packaging or eco labels to identify these products?
 - Are there any challenges when trying to inform consumers about sustainability?
 - How do you inform and educate customers of your sustainable products?
6. Is there a big demand from your customers on sustainable collections?
7. Since the company you are working at is an international company with operations worldwide, do you communicate sustainability in similar ways to consumers in regards to sustainability?
 - *If yes/no:* in what ways?

8. What does your international marketing strategy look like?
9. Working with sustainability today can create advantages for companies. What are some of the benefits of working with sustainability and are there any challenges?
 - What do you think specifically gives you advantages towards your competitors?
10. How has the company you are working at reacted to the growing awareness of sustainability over the recent decades? Has the way that you work with sustainability in your department changed over time?
 - *If yes:* How was it before and how is it now?
11. How has the sustainability trend affected the company's campaigns and/or collections?
 - Could you give some examples of some campaigns and/or collections that you have launched? How was it perceived by the customers and why?
12. How does your logistics work? What type of transportation methods do you use?
13. Has the incorporation of sustainable practices affected your prices both internally and in terms of the price that customers pay? (Both for the company and outwards to consumers?)
14. Are you selling more online or in brick and mortar stores?
15. Do you think that the company you are working at being a Swedish/Nordic company has affected the way that the company works with sustainability?
 - *If yes:* how, why?
 - *If no:* Why is that?
16. What are the core values that the company you work for stands for?
17. Is there something we have missed to ask or something you would like to add at the end of the interview?