TRANSPARENCY IN SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION
— DEVELOPING AND TESTING A NEW MODEL TO ASSESS CONSUMER-FACING SUSTAINABILITY TRANSPARENCY COMMUNICATION OF FASHION BRAND/RETAILER’S WEBSITE.

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Title: Developing and Testing a new Model to assess Consumer-Facing Sustainability Transparency Communication of Fashion Brand/Retailer’s Website

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Abstract

**Background.** Consumer facing Transparency is a function of communication that has become essential for the fashion business ecosystem and to have the reputations of legitimacy and credibility. As a contemporary subject, it is surrounded with ambiguity and heterogeneity in definitions, different Fashion brands/fashion brands/retailers/Fashion brands/retailers try to have their own definition and approach towards transparency. The communication strategy and disclosure of information therefore varies within these companies. With the increase in e-commerce, corporate Websites are currently the largest medium of sustainability communication. Fashion brands/fashion brands/retailers/Fashion brands/retailers use a combination of visual communication, data, text, reports and design to communicate the sustainability of their supply chain. There is however, a need to be able to measure the level of transparency of such communication against a standardized model. A model that Fashion brands/fashion brands/retailers/Fashion brands/retailers can adopt to assess the transparency in their communication.

**Theory.** Consumer facing transparency is an interdisciplinary subject where media, social accountability, information accessibility and quality, openness and effective design interplay to create what can be called “Perceived Transparency”.

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study is to build and test a model tool to assess transparency in website based communication.

**Research Question.** What informational, communication design and behavioral attributes constitute the perceived transparency, create legitimacy and credibility?

**Method.** The study is divided into two parts.

Part I: Conceptual literature review for Model Development
Part II: Testing the model on a real-life Fashion Brand/Retailer website using Applied Discourse Analysis

**Contribution:** - The model provides a multifocal approach to assess web design and communication strategy to improve transparency in sustainability communication by focusing on factors such Coherence, comprehensibility, navigability, attestation, engagement and correspondence

**Limitations:** - The model is still a prototype and therefore there is room for improvement. It needs to be tested further on a larger scale involving multiple cases. Although the applied discourse analysis method focuses on empirical evidence, the analysis can be objective depending upon the user.

**Keywords:** Transparency, Sustainability, Web-based Communication, Discourse analysis
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27 August 2017

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this dissertation constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions or writings of another.

I declare that the dissertation describes original work that has not previously been presented for the award of any other degree of any institution.

Signed,

Wajahat Hussain
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This one-year master thesis was conducted during the spring/summer of 2017 at The Swedish School of Textiles. It has been interesting to research transparency in sustainability communication as a part of the fashion industry and a learning process in which we have gain new valuable knowledge. I hope that this research also will enhance the reader’s knowledge and insight into the problem area.

I would especially like to thank David Goldsmith, who’s support, guidance and encouragement has been pivotal in this research.
1 Introduction

The need for transparency is a much talked about subject among scholars, media, businesses and consumers. Many Fashion brands/retailers regularly publish their CSR and financial reports for their stakeholders. Many also publish and promote their charitable and social initiatives. Amidst the global environmental and social impacts, transparency is at the forefront of discussions in the fashion industry.

The modern view is that organizations thrive using communal resources, operate within the communities, affect livelihood and surroundings either positively or negatively. Therefore, they should be accountable as well as responsible for their activities. Fashion brands/retailers who source globally and have activities spread across the world are facing a shift in thought process i.e. shareholder value to real stakeholder value. This change will affect the CSR approach from a traditional charity based one to real accountability. (Aula & Heinonen, 2016)

The terms transparency and sustainability have been subjected to broad use and multiple often subjective definitions. While the current research itself aims to understand what consumer facing transparency in sustainability communication is, for now a simplistic explanation of transparency by Henriques (2007) can be taken where transparency is.

“Walking the talk and talking the walk” (Henriques, 2007)

As for the term sustainability, the world commission on environment and development defines it as

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 41)

or more recently defined by researchers as

“economic development that creates value for consumers, shareholders, stakeholders, and society by designing and operating business in a way that aligns with ecosystems, in service of human prosperity, today and in the future” (Figge, 2011, para. 4) in (Ott, et al., 2016)

The globally sourcing Fashion brands/retailers have complex supply chains and rely on low labor cost countries, their operations such as (including retailing, supply chain, logistics etc.) have both environmental as well as social impacts. The negative impacts range from emission of toxic substances in the land, rivers, atmosphere to generation of textile waste, depletion of raw material sources, labor exploitation to pro-consumption behavior. Sustainability both in broader and narrower scope therefore remains one of the biggest challenges (Giau, et al., 2015). It is thus a fashion brand’s/retailer’s supply chain whose impact to sustainability and practices have to be known and communicated transparently. There many fashion brands/retailers have taken an initiative to move from the existing linear economy towards what is called circular economy which promises improvement in the efficiency of usage of raw material. But how are these issues related to transparency?

The answer is not complicated and it lies in general wisdom that the first step to the solution of any problem starts with the acknowledgement of the existence of the problem, followed by an intent and effort towards a solution, if that problem affects multiple stakeholders, they are made aware of the problem and then a taken towards the solution. This is analogous to the desire of achieving a sustainability for everyone affected by a fashion brand/retailer, where transparency
can be said to be analogous to the acknowledgement of impacts (positive or negative),
communication to the stakeholders involved and finding a solution. Transparency therefore is
the first step towards a genuine and practical sustainability effort as well as a pre-requisite for
achieving sustainability.

The development of internet has been fueled by collaboration and sharing. It is no longer
possible for companies to communicate what they want and when they want. Which is changing
the transparency and sustainability communication landscape. Therefore, a company’s life is
essentially public where accountability and sustainability are essential for them to build a good
reputation. (Aula and Heinonen, 2016). The information flow between the two poles of the earth
is only a click away. Fashion Brand/Fashion brands/retailers operating in this realm are
currently using it to retail, communicate, promote their business etc. they not only sell products
but generate consumable media content to engage their consumers.

In the context of using internet for sustainability communication, the issue of developing
communications with consumers in the field of sustainability is still new to the fashion industry,
but it is rapidly becoming relevant, the newness is evident from Giau, et al., (2015) who states
that only a few companies are in fact efficiently adopting web based communication for
sustainability, the main purpose of online presence mainly remains to build brand image and
therefore the communication design is designed to complement it (Giau, et al., 2015). On the
contrary, access to information about a fashion brand’s impact is no longer dependent upon
what they disclose or publish about themselves, it is also not confined to NGO’s who in the past
investigated and published data about a fashion brand’s practices (Aula & Heinonen, 2016).

Although many researches have been published within the last decade to create an
understanding of what Transparency is and what web based sustainability communication is,
however a perspective that connects the different dimensions is still lacking (Giau, et al., 2015).
This research therefore aims to contribute by studying consumer facing transparency in web-
based sustainability communication. It views the act of producing a website as a communication
design process rather than a technical design process. The communication that the website
generates is representative of the communication practices and policy within the fashion
brand/retailer’s organization. Web design is a process of deliberate decisions and activities to
achieve a communicative goal. (geest, 2005)

This exploratory research involved the search and study of multiple disciplines such as
Transparency, Fashion Supply chain, and website based communication to build a unified
prototype model that could be used to assess consumer facing transparency in sustainability
communication. The research was qualitative in nature and aims to build an understanding of
the prototype model.

1.1 Why is Transparency needed?

Transparency is essential for the fashion brand’s/retailer’s business ecosystem it can help them
to gain legitimacy and reputational benefits, in addition to this it is also a pre-requisite for
achieving both environmental and social sustainability. Henriques, 2007 in his book states that
sustainability in the context of globalization whether it is environmental or social is the property
of a global system therefore it does not belong to an isolated entity within that system. The case
for transparency is the fundamental point that the boundaries of a company are arbitrary and
should not be defined in isolation from the ecosystem. Such a view has also been resonated by
other researchers such as Aula and Heinonen (2016) who argue that transparency, sustainability
and accountability are critical for a business to build reputation and legitimacy in order to
succeed and these are not the things that can be bought by money (Aula & Heinonen, 2016).
1.1.1 Transparency for improved reputation and competitive advantage

The cross-sectional study of sustainability reports of 59 FORTUNE’s most admired companies by Brown, et al., 2010 found that a high-quality sustainability report improved the reputation while a low-quality report (specially for socially exposed companies) resulted in erosion of reputation. By quality they refer to the presence of environmental and social indicators in the report. They concluded that improvement in reputation is a consequence of providing truthful and robust information on sustainability issues (Brown, et al., 2010). Fashion brands/retailers invest heavily in communications in order to intensify sales and to create a positive public image. This in most cases has been instigated by a fierce competition in promoting a socially responsible image and pricing. Transparent sustainability communication can be used to raise awareness as well as to change attitudes.

Stefanska and Nestorowicz, (2015) believe that the success of such communication to result in reputation improvement depends upon factors like

- Consistency between underlying ethical values and ethical values of the community.
- Perception of the message to be a genuine manifestation.
- Transparency in conducting business and informing the public
- Consistence related to the persistence and uniformity of the message.

It can be inferred that Transparency can lead to multiple benefits such as

- Brand enhancement
- Provide opportunity to charge premium
- Attract potential employees (Stefanska & Nestorowicz, 2015)

1.1.2 Transparency as a pre-requisite to sustainability

Transparency is closely connected to sustainability, it is the moral baseline for a business conduct, even though that multiple pan geographical studies have positively linked social performance with financial performance. The way in which sustainability is defined depends and varies among different stakeholders. The world commission on environment and development defines it as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 41) or more recently as “economic development that creates value for consumers, shareholders, stakeholders, and society by designing and operating business in a way that aligns with ecosystems, in service of human prosperity, today and in the future” (Figge, 2011, para. 4) in (Ott, et al., 2016).

It is therefore a set of environmental, social and economic issues for which a minimum degree of performance is required, it therefore also maps out the scope of issues for which transparency matters. Transparency’s connection to sustainability problems has led to the demand for more sustainable products has seen a continuous surge (Henriques, 2007). It is also a tool for an organization to build trust with the stakeholders, to improve sustainability conditions, as a corporate tool to improve revenues and a way to counter the “green washing” criticism. (Zandén & Hansson, 2016). Awaysheh and Klassen, (2010) in the context of transparency in supply chain concluded that a higher level of transparency through disclosure of social sustainability information increases responsible practices (Marshall, et al., 2015). The general emphasis on transparency is reflected in the sustainability literature by (e.g., Dooley, 2011; Dubbink et al., 2008) which presents transparency as necessary (e.g., Augustine, 2012) and as connected to desirable characteristics such as accountability (Dubbink et al.,2008). (Zandén, et al., 2015)
In the context of supply chains, it is not only about “declaring the truth”, but more often about declaring a particular perspective beneficial to some actors. (Zandén, et al., 2015)

1.1.3 Transparency as a tool to Build Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a condition which is visible when an organization’s value system is congruent with the value system of the larger social system of which the organization is a component (Islam, 2015).

“a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574) in (Kent Walker, 2012)

It is also important to point out that legitimacy is a social construct based on cultural norms. It is a dyadic process between society and fashion brands/retailers where legitimacy is a negotiated point between the societal perceptions and organizational decisions regarding issue of concerns. Which is determined by the social and environmental sustainability practices of an organization (Panwar, et al., 2012). It explains why fashion brands/retailers sourcing from developing countries adopt social accounting, reporting and disclosures. In other words, legitimacy is a function of the right fashion brand/retailer in the right position doing the right thing as perceived by customer’s beliefs, the beliefs of their peers and of the community. Therefore, the economic realm cannot be studied in isolation from political, social and institutional framework in which the economy is based (Islam, 2015). Transparency in communication is an ethical decision rather than being a reactive measure to counter the perceived legitimacy threats. A well-defined and communicated corporate purpose can be a cornerstone for business success and legitimacy which can also lead to greater access to resources, strengthen relationships with business partner and lead to a stronger work force. (Kent Walker, 2012) and (Aula & Heinonen, 2016)

From the perspective of legitimacy, transparency is a way to manage a fashion brand’s/retailer’s reputation which may collapse if perceptions and experiences are based on a wrong information or on the contrary it can be improved (Aula & Heinonen, 2016). Transparency therefore acts as a way to transfer power from organization to its stakeholders such as consumers (Zandén, et al., 2015)). It enables customers to protect their interest and to control the way their lives are affected by organizations. In the context of this research the stakeholder in focus here are consumers who not only have the power to decide whether to purchase a product from a fashion brand/retailer

1.1.4 The Legitimacy Gap

A Legitimacy gap according to Sethi (1974,1979) in occurs as a result of discrepancy between the societal expectation and the perceived current behavior of an organization (Panwar, et al., 2012). Panwar, et al., (2012) in Figure 1 illustrated a multi gap based model to provide an understanding of what legitimacy gap is and has classified it into three types.
Factual Gap: Involves the difference of opinion on what two different groups consider to be facts.
Ideal gap: Involves the difference of opinion on what two different groups consider to be an ideal situation.
Conformance gap: This is an internally focused gap which the business considers their current state to be versus what they think is expected of them.

It can be inferred that a legitimacy gap can therefore arise from:
- Change in Societal expectations
- Disclosure of information in media other than reported by the organization itself.
- Organizations not researching and focusing on what the societal expectations really are.
- Organizations failing to communicate and engage stakeholder with their social or environmental activities.

1.2 Transparency in Sustainability Communication?
Organizations such as a fashion brand/retailer have a huge impact on our lives either in the form of consumers, employees or as a citizen. Whether that impact is good or bad we have little control over them and it appears that there is a democratic deficit, which can only be remedied by increased knowledge, awareness and transparency. Although, scholars and Fashion Brand/Fashion acknowledge the need of transparency there is no homogeneous practice or standard to assess or measure the Transparency in sustainability communication (Henriques, 2007). Different fashion Brand/retailers have their own meanings of sustainability, transparency and therefore the communication is mostly tailored for branding purpose. In the absence of a standard model to assess transparency in sustainability communication, even a sincere effort to be transparent may not be rightly perceived.
Substantially, along with the increasing use of the web and requests for fashion brands/retailers industry to improve their social performance, they are increasingly required to communicate the social practices of their operations and supply chains in a clearer way (Giau, et al., 2015).

Therefore, this research aims to build and test a model that can be used to assess the transparency of sustainability communication on a Fashion Brand/Retailer’s website.

1.3 Purpose
This research aims to contribute in the area of transparency and sustainability communication by building a prototype assessment model/rubric that provides an approach to achieve transparency in web-based sustainability communication. The aim of this research is to explore,
understand and explain the factors that contribute to transparency in web based sustainability communication.

The main purpose was subdivided into two sub-purposes

a) Part 1: - To develop an interdisciplinary model / tool that incorporates key features of consumer facing transparency.

   **RQ1:** What are the factors that influence the transparency of sustainability communication on a fashion brand’s/retailer’s website?

b) Part 2: - Develop an understanding by Testing it on a real-life fashion brand’s website to answer

   **RQ2:** Is the fashion brand’s/retailers website transparent in sustainability communication, based on the model?

### 1.4 Research Target Group
This current research has an academic focus. Since it is a prototype model, it should be considered as a first step, with the need of further improvement.

### 1.5 Research Structure
Although this is single research, it was divided into two parts since it was done in two steps, it aims to achieve comprehension for the reader. Each part has its own separate research methodology section and results.

However, the final discussion & limitations were combined.

**Part 1 – Building the theoretical Model**

This part focusses on building the theoretical model that can be used to assess the transparency in sustainability communication of Fashion brands/retailers.

To answer RQ1 and to fulfill the quest of building a model, the exploration was led by 3 main sub questions

What is Transparency? Where in the fashion industry is Transparency needed? How is transparency in communication perceived on a website based communication?

![Figure 2 Part I](image-url)
Transparency – Looks at what Transparency is, its significance and its implications in the business/social ecosystem. The main ideas have been consolidated in the theory section of the research.

Supply Chain Transparency in Fashion industry - to understand where in the fashion industry is transparency needed.

Website based communication – Based on the understanding developed through literature review of transparency, I looked into the aspects of online communication that contribute to the perception of transparency i.e. to the idea

Model: - The literature review was then synthesized into the development of the researched model

Part 2 - Application of the model on a real/life clothing brand.

The second part of the research focuses on testing the model on a real-life brand’s website, Figure 3 demonstrate the research structure followed for Part II.
2 Fashion business and the aspects where transparency in sustainability communication is needed

It is widely acknowledged that consumers currently don’t get enough information to make an informed purchasing decision and understanding of terminology (Bohemia, et al., 2017). This lack of information lead to lack of awareness among the consumers who neither know the impacts of their purchase nor the impact of association with that Fashion Brand/Retailer. Other than the presence of this information, it is equally important to address what type of content does this information needs to carry. The chapter thus identifies the areas of Fashion Brand/Retailer’s business whose information needs to be provided to the consumer.

2.1 Supply Chain

The increased share of purchased materials and component in expenditure, transparency requirements have been broadened to a scope outside of an organization’s boundaries giving rise to the notion of “Supply chain Transparency” (Marshal, et al., 2016). The global fashion industry is based on cheap labor, production and transportation cost while on the other hand it has expensive inventory holding costs. The “race to the bottom” trend by fashion brands/retailers in order to compete on low prices led to the search of large and cheap workforce. In addition to this the just in time nature of fashion had adverse impact on the labor working conditions and result in temporary work contracts to the extent of daily contracts, overtime, night shifts and working on the weekend. (Manners-Bell, 2014). Such complexity has enabled corporations to locate unethical activities to countries where they would not be readily visible. Sourcing managers are more concerned about issues such as location, price and quality. (Islam, 2015).

It is also important to see what sustainable initiatives a Fashion Brand/Retailer has taken and how does it impact the supply chain. Most previous empirical studies by authors such as Fraj-Andre’s et al., 2009; Pagell and Wu, 2009; Banerjee, 2002 focus on sustainability as a holistic concept or on environmental sustainability, finding that organizations with sustainability cultures are more likely to adopt sustainability practices above and beyond regulation. For example, sustainability culture was shown to have a direct positive relationship on the adoption of green supply chain practices including green purchasing and eco-design (Wu et al., 2012). Additionally, conceptual development of sustainability culture predicted that sustainability culture would lead to the adoption of sustainability practices (Linnenluecke and Griffiths, 2010). Pagell and Wu, 2009, in their study of ten supply chain sustainability exemplars, found sustainability culture to be an important driver of sustainability practice adoption.

The communication in this context would deal with the presence of information regarding the provenance, social and environmental impact (Marshal, et al., 2016). Therefore, transparency in supply chain is also a way for an organization to improve its credibility and legitimacy (Zandén & Hansson, 2016).

2.2 Social Accountability in Supply Chains and its reporting

The voices of actual suppliers, worker and communities are generally not taken into consideration. One argument presented by Zandén, et al., 2015 is the possibility of an organization’s attempt to safeguard their reputational capital by tailoring the transparency to soothe the sensibilities of their consumers. Without taking into regard whether the means to reach there were approved by the workers or not. (Zandén, et al., 2015)

To assess the transparency in communication it is important to understand the nature of content and information that needs to be presented. Therefore, the existing international standards for social accountability can be used as a starting point.
2.2.1 Using Globally Accepted Standards as ISO2006/ SA8000/ AA1000 as a Base for the Model

In order to have a more holistic and complete understanding of social accountability some points from globally accepted social accountability standards such as ISO2006, SA8000 and AA1000 were synthesized.

The ISO (International Standards Organization) define social accountability as

The actions of an organization to take responsibility for the impacts of its activities on society and the environment, where these actions:

- are consistent with the interests of society and sustainable development;
- are based on ethical behavior, compliance with applicable law and intergovernmental instruments; and
- are integrated into the ongoing activities of the organization.

(ISO, 2006b)

This has further been elaborated by the standard AA1000 (also known as Accountability Principles Standard) which developed by Accountability organization (www.accountability.org), although similar to the process in SA8000 (by Social Accountability International) standard. It has one major difference which is the principle of inclusivity. The AA1000 set of principles of what accountability in practice might mean are listed as

- inclusivity (of stakeholders in organization management);
- completeness (of management processes and communications);
- materiality (of management processes and communications);
- regularity and timeliness (of management processes and communications);
- quality assurance (of accountability processes);
- accessibility (of communications);
- information quality (of communications);
- embeddedness (of accountability processes);
- continuous improvement (of performance). (Göbbels & Jonker, 2003)

These principles therefore can be adapted to analyze the transparency in the communication by Fashion Brand/Fashion brands/retailers

2.2.2 Transparency in Social Reporting

“the preparation and publication of an account about an organization’s social, environmental, employee, community, consumer and other stakeholder interactions and activities, and where possible, the consequence of those interactions and activities.” (Islam, 2015)

Social Reporting is a part of the social accounting process. Through social compliance auditing, companies assess their impacts on society and measure and report it to their stakeholders. This social performance is in relation to society’s requirements. These social audits are as a starting point to building disclosure. However, Gray (2000) differentiates disclosure from attestation, and defines it (attestation) as an act of verification of disclosure by an Independent authority. Therefore, social audit is used as a “personal pulse taking” of a company and the results of which may not be published. (Islam, 2015)

An organization may disseminate information only that advances their corporate image and legitimation hence not being fully transparent. However, the organizations may have two mutually exclusive objectives a) for management control to look for opportunities to enhance legitimation and b) for accountability, democratic and sustainability purposes with the aim of benefitting the society. This would also constitute how well the issues reported have been described, the indication about what has been included and what should have been included but has not been included. As Henriques, 2007 states in his book that the reporting should be more
than just discharge of responsibility. Which implies that the companies publish minimum information so that they can claim that they have published a sustainability report but make no effort in practical action. Notions such as accuracy, quantification, non-quantification of data, effective and accessible communication thus automatically relate social accountability with Transparency. On the other hand, it is largely a voluntary practice, the amount of effort an organization makes and the way the information is presented. According to Deegan 2007 companies should report information such as, interaction with the local community; level of support for community projects; level of support for developing countries; Health and safety record; Training, employment and education programs; and environmental performance in (Islam, 2015).

2.3 Disclosures about environmental impacts, buying practices and provenance

Secrecy attempts to create silence in the future. Transparency, secrecy and silence have an important relationship with Trust. In order to appear legitimate and legal behavior, transparency will increase trust. On the other hand, if stakeholders come to know that a company is withholding information, it can result in a state of mistrust towards that company (Henriques, 2007)

Secrecy – Deliberate, articulated plan to conceal information in the future
Silence – the absence of disclosure in all forms (not just speech)

2.3.1 Disclosure of Suppliers

A holistic view of transparency in supply chains defined comprises

- Disclosure of supplier names producing the products, which increases the traceability of the products.
- Information about the sustainability conditions at these suppliers
- Buying organization’s purchasing practices. (Zandén, et al., 2015)

As organizations are assumed to focus more on their successful examples while not being completely transparent about their hot spots, stakeholders are not willing to rely solely on the published information.

2.3.2 Buying Practices

Fashion brands/retailers exert large degree of power on the suppliers, to drive lower prices. Supply chain as interconnected buyer-seller relationships, each having a certain “relationship atmosphere” that can be described in the dimensions: power, control, and conflict. The implementation of transparency involves power struggles with uncertain outcomes where organizations may use normative power or authoritative power which is the most common way as it provides the organization with a standardized procedure which is also easy for external communication. (Manners-Bell, 2014).
3 Theoretical Frame of Reference

3.1 Theories of Transparency and Ethics
The transparency framework proposed by David Heald illustrates the way in which power operates around an organization. In his original framework Heald has defined transparency as “upwards”, “downwards”, “outwards” and “inward”. The concept most relevant to current research is in “Transparency inwards” in which those outside an organization can observe what is happening inside it. (Henriques, 2007)
This chapter aims to examine and build an understanding of transparency from the perspective of communication. It explores the different theories that help to explain transparency from an Information perspective. It also provides the types of transparency within an organization and the one that is being focused in the current research.

3.2 Theories within Transparency
Therefore, it is essential to first understand the different theories of transparency, its meaning within in an organizational context and its relationship with Ethics.

3.2.1 Correspondence and Coherence Theories of Transparency
In his book (Henriques, 2007) has identified five main theories to define what transparency is, out of them two theories i.e. the correspondence theory and coherence theory were deemed more relevant and measurable. Other theories such as consensus theory, pragmatism and constructivist theories deal with the difference of perception and creation of truth which are out of the scope of this research.

- Correspondence Theory – suggests that statements are backed up by an underlying reality.
- Coherence theory – Truth resides in the consistency of statement with other statements. Where inconsistency among statements or narrative casts doubt on all of them. In the scope of this research, the coherence theory shall also be applied to the consistency of message between Statements, conversations and visual communication. (Henriques, 2007) –Which implies that inconsistency / incoherence in information is less likely to be taken into consideration, it may affect both transparency and reputation of the organization.

As Henriques has pointed out, companies make expressive statements for which it may be inherently hard to find evidence. e.g. corporate values or logos such as “every little help”. Which are not backed by any facts and if these are considered to be then it needs to be known that What helps, who was helped and when and where. It is important that the Fashion Brand/Fashion back up their claims and initiatives with empirical and accessible data.
Web Based Sustainability Communication and Reporting

The chapter focusses on describing the role of company websites in communication and what transparency of sustainability communication mean in an online environment. Many scholars like (Bortree (2011), Capriotti and Moreno (2007), Kim and Ferguson (2014); Kim and Rader (2010); Signitzer and Prexl (2008)) have argued that internet has become as key medium for organizations to communicate information and that the stakeholders are increasingly turning towards company websites to access information (Ott, et al., 2016). Scharl, (2004) emphasizes on the importance of presentation, navigation and quality of the website to effectively communicate. They should be developed in a way so that they are useful and useable. The design, content, structure and navigation should support findability and support users. Professionals agree that successful websites are: accessible, appealing, consistent, unified in design, simple, navigable, safe to use, easy to learn, easy to remember how to use. (Scharl, 2004)

Sustainability Communication

4.1 Reports and Assurance Statements

Reports such as annual reports, CSR report are a common tool used for disclosure. Many companies assume that transparency and reporting are same thing; however, it is important to understand that transparency is not same as reporting. Reporting is just one of the ways to partly communicate transparency, there are more ways to be transparent and there is more to transparency then what’s being reporting. Assurance statements may also be used a tool to reduce information asymmetries and enhance reliability. However, such statement should be backed up by data and 3rd party attestation so that the potential benefits of such statements is not countered and the quality of assurance doesn’t diminish. (Gürtürk & Hahn, 2016)

Figure 4 – demonstrates the sustainability information that customers look for.

Figure 4 Environmental Information Consumers Look for (Scharl, 2004)

4.1.2 Comprehensibility of Information

Voluminous, vague and presentation in an inaccessible technical vocabulary makes it difficult for the consumers to engage with the information. Which hinders acting responsibly and navigating through a diverging disclosure of information. The information on sustainability is usually voluminous, unclear, uses technical vocabulary and scattered which makes it difficult for the user to engage with it and to understand it (Zandén & Hansson, 2016). For example, a
user has evaluated what statements like “all payments were made in cash, mostly to workers parents” or “the exit sign in the warehouse is not properly mark” infer. Henriques has referred this barrage of information has been referred to as “data bombing”. Transparency is a function of communication and not the function of quantity of information technically disclosed. He also found that Non-media companies who often present their impacts as “stories” or “case studies” court lack of transparency which is why more and more companies involve PR agencies to write CSR reports. (Henriques, 2007)

Figure 5 Web based Sustainability Communication by (Giau, et al., 2015)

Fashion Brand/Fashion create their online presence through using websites. Trust here means that the people see the organization as competent to fulfil its obligations and to act in a responsible way. Just like an offline situation, the Fashion Brand/Retailer itself bears the burden of presenting themselves as trust worthy. To attain this trust companies must work to improve their reputation, performance and appearance. Appearance here means the design of the website interface. Consumers interaction with a website not only have to trust the website but also the company behind that website. (Beldad, et al., 2010). The properties of cyberspace that have led to its tremendous success are: freedom of expression, transparency and openness, participatory policy and technology development. while the Internet has enabled access to more information there is an overload that creates a feeling of uncertainty, mistrust and raises doubts about the credibility of information (Lugmayr & Zotto, 2016)

4.2 Role of Website Design in Transparency of Communication

The presence of large amount of information on websites have led to the complexity of information structures. The term “website design” here refers to visual design, navigation, information structure. Therefore, the view that web design is communication design is vital to present the information in a simpler form. The website for any given Fashion Brand/Retailer is representative of their sustainability communication strategy and the design process itself is a deliberate set of decisions which has to be in line with the communication strategy. The process determines the “usefulness” of the website which is whether the users understand the information, find it credible. (geest, 2005)

From communication point of view the designers have to consider

- How to prevent consumers from the wealth of information being provided
- How do consumers find the information?
- How to integrate multi modes of presentation such (text, images and video) in one coherent document.
The visitors will not be able to learn from content if they are unable to find it, if design elements are distracting and if the individual pages don’t highlight the crucial information. The sustainability policy therefore must be accessible and visible (Scharl, 2004).

4.2.1 Website Navigability

Navigability of a website is a measure of how easily users (or consumers in this case) can locate and access information they need (Vaucher, et al., 2013). Effectiveness of navigation can build trustworthiness the websites shall also be free of error and contain high quality content that is useful, accurate and complete (Beldad, et al., 2010), while he cites these as the antecedents for economic exchange, these are somehow similar to the antecedents of transparency too and thus it can be implied that it is true for a social exchange. In light of AA1000 standard explained previously and that consumers are turning towards websites to access information (Ott, et al., 2016). Effective search and navigation shall increase accessibility to information and it will contribute to perception of transparency. Geest points out that when the pages are attractive, logically consistent and easy to use it leaves a positive impress on the user. Navigation on a website is like a “first impression” and a subtle marketing message (geest, 2005). The presence of clipart, colors, 3D, dynamic clip art enhanced the feelings of trustworthiness. There is a positive relationship of color layout and attributes such as brightness and placement with trustworthiness, the specificity of the context limits the generalizability of the finding (Beldad, et al., 2010). This has also been supported by Scharl (2004) by the statement that experts in the field look for source’s credential where-as the non-experts pay more attention to the superficial elements of the site such as design (Scharl, 2004).

1.1.1.1 Structure & Quality of Information

The Clarity of purpose of the website and content at entry points such as homepage. Pages such as home page are used for branding, image building and are like a first impression to the users. It is this page where users decide whether to spend more time on the website, to explore more pages or not to. Users find it more appropriate to have summary information on the main pages with expansion into the subject through offering a link to pages containing more detailed information about the subject.

The content (text and graphics) of the website should be relevant, it should be comprehensible for the people it is meant for. The important parts of contents should be stressed. reported that an introductory level of language is appreciated by the users as it enables the novice user to understand the problems. Following some other aspects that contribute to the quality of information structure and content.

- The speed and ease of searching information.
- Grasp ability of structure of information and signaling by visual cue’s
- Consistency of the content (Scharl, 2004)

4.2.2 Trusting online information

For sustainability information to be trust worthy there are number of factors that promote trust. mentions “common ground” as valuable in trusting online information and it includes: knowledge that participants have in common and shared experience and norms. In addition, it is important to provide the source of data and information to establish credibility. Such information should also be accompanied by authors name so that the users know that someone is accountable for putting the information, there should be a provision to contact them (Scharl, 2004).
4.2.3 Visual Communication in the form of Pictures and videos, Design.

Graphic design is a powerful communication tool today which enables recipient to have the ability to decode the message content. Design of a webpage plays important role in establishing credibility. The evaluation process described by Lugmayr & Zotto, 2016 divides the evaluation process into 3 levels: superficial credibility, credibility of the message and evaluation of the content. Superficial credibility deals with the presentation and organizational element of a webpage (Lugmayr & Zotto, 2016). For the credibility of message presence of sources was important and for the evaluation of content they combined evaluation of sources with personal knowledge and need for information. Therefore, the superficial credibility was mostly based on impression and credibility was based on labelling of sources.
5 Part I – Developing the Model

5.1 Literature Review

The model was developed using a conceptual literature review which is a type of a traditional literature review and defined as

“A conceptual review aims to synthesize areas of conceptual knowledge that contribute to a better understanding of the issues.” (Jesson, et al., 2011)

The process of synthesis begins with a few conceptual definitions, the operational definitions become more specific as the researcher becomes more familiar with the research. During this type of research, it is usual to come discover operations and unanticipated domains that they did not know existed but are relevant to the construct being studied. The research also needs to take care to reevaluate the correspondence between the abstractness of the concepts and the way they define the operations. (Cooper, 1998).

5.1.1 Criticism to Traditional Literature review.

The process of traditional literature review is criticized for being too open and flexible. There is no obligation to provide the process of identification of sources, the reason for including and excluding topics (Jesson, et al., 2011). However, at the same time this method supports the exploration of ideas and therefore it was suitable for the current research.

Since this research involves the study of different disciplines, I have mentioned the process that was used in identification of material, the criteria for inclusion/exclusion and to achieve wholeness in concepts used. In addition to avoid misinterpretation, multiple authors were studied for each concept.

5.1.2 Literature Selection and Review Process

The figure explains the process that was employed for this literature review. The study started with a wide scope which was then narrowed down to fit the scope of this research. No similar studies related to this research area were found therefore the search was done by breaking down the research problem into areas that overlapped.

The search and selection of material was done through a criterion of leading questions as in figure. The scope of the research was narrowed down to focus on consumer facing transparency in sustainability communication.

Therefore, during the selection process the literature that specialized and focused on areas such as Transparency in Financial and accounting practices, human computer interaction, computer mediated communication, supplier/investor/employees as stake holders of transparency etc. were excluded.

![Figure 6 Literature Review Process](image-url)
Determine source to examine, synthesize valid retrieved studies. Applying editorial criteria to separate important from unimportant information. To separate “Valid” from “invalid” studies. (Cooper, 1998) The conceptual relevance of the study was decided on the base of abstract and in some cases after complete review of the research. The research was started with an open mind and broad conceptual definition, during the data evaluation stage irrelevant concepts were excluded from the study.

To relate concepts to concrete events, a variable must be operationally defined which is the description of observable events that determine if a concept is present in a particular situation.

Content Reporting – The content was categorized based on the AA1000 standard

Structural information – location of sustainability communication i.e. location from the homepage, title of the Homepage (Ott, et al., 2016)
6 Part I – Result and Discussion the Perceived Transparency Model

Based on the literature review, I propose a prototype model to assess transparency in web based sustainability communication Figure 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency in Website based sustainability communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attestation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The operational definitions of the terms in this model are specific to “Transparency in sustainability communication”

- **Coherence**: Implies that there is a consistency of message within the website and reports. The meaning of the word “message” here doesn’t merely restrict to text. Instead it refers to incorporating and communicating a message in a way that it reflects in the visual communication, written text as well as the web design. A high level of coherence would mean that the sustainability message is consistent applied and reflected in all form of communications within the website and Low level of coherence would mean that the sustainability message is isolated to a few pages or reports.

- **Correspondence**: Any quoted facts, figures, communicated message (assurance statements and claims) should correspond to reality. Anything that is not true should not be stated. The message should be clear and not vague. A high correspondence would mean that all quoted facts, figures and statements are true, whereas low correspondence would mean that facts, figure and statements are incorrect.

- **Attestation**: It is an attribute of information that means that any assurance statements, claims, promises or statistics should be backed up by accessible empirical and comparable data. This data can either be provided by the company itself or through a 3rd party. High level of attestation would mean that all given information is supported by evidence and endorsement whereas low level of attestation would mean that not all information has been backed up with evidence, no attestation means absence of evidence and endorsement.

- **Navigability**: Applicable to web design which refers to the ease of access and availability of the information. A high level of navigability may mean that actionable information is readily and easily available at a point where consumers can evaluate it and make an informed decision. In contrast, a low level of navigability would mean that
information is hard to access and consumer needs to search and dig deeper into the website to access information.

- **Engagement:** Members of the organization should be in reach of consumers, the website should offer dialog to the consumers. It is attribute of a Fashion Brand/Retailer’s general disclosure and communication policy. It has a wider scope as engagement can be reflected in web design, visual and written communication. Engagement can be highly active, passive or zero engagement,
  - **active engagement** would mean that sustainability information/awareness is present on high traffic pages of the website (e.g. home page), the Fashion Brand/Retailer is offers dialog via multiple channels email, chat, phone or to meet.
  - **passive engagement** would mean that sustainability information/awareness is either not communicated or on pages that have low consumer traffic, in other words it does not reach the consumers. The Fashion Brand/Retailer is providing dialog through limited communication channels.
  - **Zero engagement:** the website does not generate any awareness communication and offers no dialog

- **Comprehensibility:** Can be applied to textual, visual communication as well as the web design. For the written text, the language should be clear and understandable. Similarly, the use of visual communication should also be clear and understandable. Technical terms and concept should be clearly defined. A *high level of comprehensibility* would mean that information is presented in a simplified form and technical language is assisted with a dictionary. *Low level of comprehensibility* would mean that the communication is vague and consumers are presented with unfamiliar language without any glossary support.
7 Part II – Testing the Model – Research Method

Bearing in mind that the model is qualitative and explorative in nature, it will be by no means perfect. Therefore, for future researches it was important to develop and document tools, methods in as much detail as possible so that the results can be published in a transparent way. Since the model employs assessment of elements such as multi-modal communication, website navigability it was important to select the methods that could evaluate all of these elements. Firstly, Discourse analysis considers communication and language as a social practice therefore it was used as the method to assessment of multi-modal communication. In addition to this since the model proposes navigation as influencers of perceived transparency, navigation models were used to understand the ease of use and accessibility.

7.1 Using Discourse Analysis as Research Method

There are many different approaches to discourse analysis which include but not limited to the study of linguistics, grammar and some concentrate on the ideas, issues and themes as they are expressed in writing and talking. Gee’s approach to discourse analysis is of “applied discourse analysis” where he focuses on problems that are important to people, society and the world. The idea of “applied discourse analysis is to maintain empirical standards and to avoid politicizing by relying on data (Gee, 2014)

Two authors Gee,2011 “An Introduction to discourse analysis : theory and method”, “How to do discourse analysis: A tool kit” and Rodney H. Jones, 2015 Discourse and Digital practices: doing discourse analysis in the digital age were studied to use DA as a tool. Gee offers insight into the basic theory and method of performing DA on text whereas Jones focuses on performing a multi modal discourse analysis in a digital world. It examines digital practices from multiple approaches including textual analysis, conversation analysis, interactional socio linguistics, multi modal discourse analysis, object ethnography, geo-semiotics and critical discourse analysis. How technologies allow use to combine semiotic elements to create socially recognizable text which are then transformed into socially recognizable action

Discourse Analysts pay attention to four things

**Text:** Text here includes written and spoken texts as well as conversations. Further, it also includes videos, photographs, drawings, paintings, street signs, websites, software interfaces, video games, and any other aggregate of semiotic elements that can function as a tool for people to take action. For something to be text, it must have a “texture” which is a property of connectedness created through “Coherence” and “Cohesion”. Here coherence is the way text is organized sequentially so that it makes a logical sense. Cohesion refers to the way different part of the text are held together. (Rodney H. Jones, 2015). Connection with other texts in the form of hyperlinking, embedding, copying and pasting, combining and curating. Digital texts are always multimodal, consisting of writing, visuals and sound.

**Context:** the social and material situation in which the texts are created, consumed, exchanged and appropriated

**Action and interaction:** The use of text and how people use it with each other

**Power and Ideology:** The use of text to dominate and control others and to create certain versions of reality

All approaches of discourse try to understand how these four elements work together i.e. how texts are put together and used to take specific action in a situation, how the construction of the text reflects and perpetuates a certain social order.
7.1.1 Tools used for Discourse analysis

In order to study these elements Out of the 28 tools that (Gee, 2014) proposed, the following 8 tools were deemed suitable to assess transparency communication. The Selection of Situated Meaning tool: - The concept that any word or structure in language has a certain “Meaning Potential”. This can be a specific meaning that a word has or a meaning in a specific context. To keep the research out of personal bias, the situated meaning of terms will be referenced with scholarly definitions.

Social Language tool: - The concept that people speak a variety of languages. For any communication ask how it uses words and grammatical structures (types of phrases, clauses and sentences) to enact a given social language. This tool will be used to identify what kind of language was used on the website by the brand. This is done by studying the features such as word choice, grammatical structures, patterns of grammatical structures and situated meaning.

The Intertextuality Tool: - When one text refers to, quotes or alludes to another text, it is called intertextuality. This is done by finding intertextual references.

Figured World Tool: - Done by examining what a particular communication are assuming and inviting listeners/readers to assume.

The Fill in Tool: - Based on what was said and the context in which it was said, what needs to be filled in here to achieve clarity. What is not being said overtly, but is still assumed to be known or inferable. What knowledge, assumptions and inferences do listeners have to bring to bear in order for this communication to be clear and understandable and received in the way the speaker intended it.

Resistant Listener: purposely refuse to make and buy into the taken for granted knowledge, assumptions and inferences a speaker intends listeners to make. This is to make the listener fairer.

Significance Building Tool: - For any communication as how words and grammatical devices are being used to build up or lessen significance for certain things and not others.

Identities Building Tool: - For any communication, ask what socially recognizable identity the communicator is trying to enact to get others to recognize.

The make Strange Tool: - To view the communication as an unfamiliar person.

7.2 Case Selection

The case selected to test the model was “Gina Tricot”.

Gina Tricot is a Swedish fashion chain offering exciting, feminine fashion to women in over 30 countries. Since the company was founded in 1997, we’ve been growing exponentially, now with 180 stores in five European countries and more than 2,000 employees. We have a passion for fashion, with the goal of offering consumers a new and exciting shopping experience, regardless of how often they shop. We're still expanding, while keeping a constant focus on the future to see how we can evolve as an international fashion supplier. (Gina Tricot, 2017)
The selection was inspired by multiple facts, firstly that they retail internationally through their E-stores. But what really caught my attention was the criticism\(^1\) on their 2017 ad campaign known as “This is the Way\(^2\)”, though the video had been taken off soon after receiving negative public response, however it is still present at multiple instances on the “You-tube”

The ad that was reportedly filmed in India among the native cotton growers was criticized for glamourizing sensitive environmental issues and it was also considered culturally insensitive as it refreshed the memories of British Colonialism in the country (ETC.se, 2017). Other points of critique included Cultural appropriation (Omni.se, 2017), Irresponsible communication (Resume.se, 2017).

More search on the internet revealed that in the past they have had accusations of neglecting “Child Labor” (www.thelocal.se, 2014), the “abuse of Syrian refugees” (cleanclothes.org, 2017) in their supply chain.

Furthermore, I have no acquaintance with the Brand beyond its name and had no prior knowledge about their products, as an organization, their market positioning or sustainability initiatives etc. Although my visit to their website was for academic purposes, the experience can have said to be analogous to a first-time user of the website.

Although Gina tricot is a Swedish store their online store serves 27 out 32 countries in English through a single interface. This number however is not the right representation of their Market size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Countries Served</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, UK, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ginatricot.com/eu/en/start">http://www.ginatricot.com/eu/en/start</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ginatricot.com/dk/da/start">http://www.ginatricot.com/dk/da/start</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ginatricot.com/se/sv/start">http://www.ginatricot.com/se/sv/start</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ginatricot.com/no/no/start">http://www.ginatricot.com/no/no/start</a></td>
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<td>Finish</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ginatricot.com/fi/fi/start">http://www.ginatricot.com/fi/fi/start</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.ginatricot.com/de/de/start">http://www.ginatricot.com/de/de/start</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 List of Market's by Language

### 7.3 Data Collection and Sampling

Data collection is an important part of “applied discourse analysis”, given the importance of storing data permanently (Mautner, 2005). I first attempted to download the complete website and realized that the size of the website is could exceed 1 Gb. Therefore, I decided to take detailed screen shots. The web-browser used to explore this website was Mozilla Firefox\(^3\) version 55.0.1 (64-bit), the ad blocker was turned off so that there is no hindrance in the

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2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6izwpcL2wE8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6izwpcL2wE8)

functionality of the website. The screenshots were taken using a Firefox extension addon called Nimbus Capture.

7.3.1 Selection of Webpages

There is no adequate framework to perform probability sampling on such huge website. Based on the model, the goal was to understand how the website had been structured in terms of design, information and navigation. So that adequate depth and breadth of the model can be tested. Therefore, the method to selection samples was done by on the concept of “stratified sampling”, in which the population (webpages in current context) is divided into separate groups. Followed by random sampling within each group. The purpose of using this method was to include sample representations of all heterogenous pages. The separate groups created were as followed.

1. Uniqueness by Design: Different sections of the website had a similar design and information structure, therefore Selection of page based on having a distinct and different design /information structure. E.g. the pages such “Product Information” and “Product Category” had a homogenous design for a wide range of products – whereas the example of “unique pages” refer to pages such as “company information”, “landing pages” etc. all of which are different from each other from design and communication perspective.

2. Unique by Information Content: - Pages having unique information that was not present on other parts of the website were selected e.g. pages like “about us”, “design process” etc. which presented unique information content which was not present on other pages.

3. Probing and Verification: - Since the research focuses on transparency in sustainability communication, the information, claims, statements found on the already selected webpages were probed further to verify the “correspondence”, “navigability”, “coherence” and “attestation” operations of the Model.

4. Sustainability Information: the pages containing sustainability information were purposely located and examined under the proposed model.
The purpose behind this sampling method was to cover maximum aspects of the information and design present on the website.

### 7.3.2 Data Coding

All data (individual screen shots) were named using the format “screenshot-\{domain\}-\{date\}-\{time\}”. Different elements in the screen shots were then marked with a geometrical shape such as a rectangle or a square, each having their own corresponding number. The pages where design and visual information were to be analyzed were marked with red boxes. Each box was allocated with a corresponding number. The box numbers have been addressed with “PT” as a prefix, an abbreviation I have used for the word “point” followed by the box number, e.g. PT 1, PT 2

The pages where a message, part of a message, a phrase or a term was to be analyzed were converted to text and written with the syntax “statement” + “numerical digit” e.g. Statement 1, Statement 2 etc.

The different points of the analysis of the selected statements was written using syntax “Analysis” + “numerical digit” e.g. Analysis 1, Analysis 2 etc. It is important to note that the analysis itself or the numerical digit used in the analysis does not correspond to a preceding statement. The analysis is independent of the statements and while making a comment it explicitly calls out the statement number(s) under discussion.

All collected data has been reported in the 9, the screenshots have been hyperlinked with the visited URL. In addition to this all visited URLs have been reported in Appendix B.

### 7.3.3 Navigation flow

To understand navigability, it was important to bear in mind and document the different possibilities of navigation a consumer would follow. I have used a simple, semi-structured and non-technical categorization of the navigation flow, that was inspired by (Mautner, 2005). The “Semi-Structured” flow here means that the way I accessed the website was partly planned, as I had intentionally explored all parts of the website, while at other points the navigation decisions were led by the design.

![Website Navigation Model](Figure 11 Website Navigation Model)
8 Result of Part II

1.2 Analysis on the base of Transparency model

The website was analyzed based on the proposed model, all of the content was analyzed based on the operations defined in the model.

8.1.1 Coherence

- In the social responsibility section, the company has emphasized on the importance of sustainability to the brand, however the Landing page, product information page doesn’t carry any visual or textual information carrying the message.
- There is an inconsistency in the usage of terms, at some points “sustainable fabrics”, “sustainable material”, “more sustainable cotton”.
- From Visual communication perspective, there is an inconsistency in the use of “the good project” logo. As 59 products, out of a total of 196 didn’t have the logo.
- The design process page (appendix A.6) and the company information (appendix A.5) do not mention sustainability as a part of the process or work environment etc.

8.1.2 Correspondence

- On page 24 of the sustainability report for 2016, they claim to “encourage consumers to wash less frequently”, however during the examination of their website no message that would correspond to this claim existed. Similarly, the website doesn’t communicate any method of end of life garment whose collection has been claimed in the report.
- The design of the website and communication currently focuses on maximizing product exposure to the consumer and it encourages the consumer to buy more.
- The term “sustainability” and its scope of application has not been defined, at most instances it has been associated with Raw materials such as cotton or other fibers. Other areas such as the use of chemicals in dyeing, wet processing, jeans processing etc has not been mentioned anyway. This lack of clarity sends a message which is technically inaccurate.

8.1.3 Attestation

- In the description of their Falsterbo collection “most of the garments are made from sustainable materials”, but no empirical evidence to demonstrate what number “most” signifies.
- On the product information pages including the so called “sustainable collection” (in appendix A.4), there was no information or data. that would indicate why that particular product is sustainable.
- In the definition of “sustainable materials” as a material containing 50% elements from sustainable resources, the source of the definition has not been mentioned.

8.1.4 Navigability

The thorough examination of Landing Page, 1.2A.2 Drop Down Menu, Category Page, Product info page, Search Navigation revealed (click on the pages to see appendix)
• In general, the sustainability information cannot be accessed from the main navigation menu of these pages.
• The products do not carry any information about their sustainability at the product information page. Even the products from the so called sustainable collection do not carry any information about what makes the products sustainable. (See A.4)
• Sustainability information is not easily accessible to general consumer, it can only be accessed through the link named “social responsibility”, It is the small size of text and the location of the link at the bottom of the website that makes it difficult to access and can only be found by user who specifically look for (Figure 13).

8.1.5 Engagement
• Visual communication of sustainability has not been given any space on the landing page and other pages such as Category or Product information pages. Instead, the space is dominated by messages that communicate new fashion trends and encourage consumer to purchase (Landing Page)
• The contact information for the team working on “good project” is located deep in the website structure in social responsibility section (Check A.9)

The level of engagement of the website is passive.

8.1.6 Comprehensibility
• Category Pages such as “The Good Project”, “Equestrian Collection”, “Falsterbo Collection” use terms such as “sustainable fabrics”, “made from sustainable materials” in their description however they don’t provide any “in text” definitions or links to what it actually means.
• On the Product info page several terms such as “Better Cotton Initiative” have been used however no explanation or hyperlinks have been offered to explain what it is.
• In the definition of “sustainable materials” as a material containing 50% elements from “sustainable resources”, What is a sustainable resource is not defined.

8.2 What if the Model were to be used?
Based on the criteria of the model, the evidence suggests that current sustainability communication on Gina Tricot’s website has a low level of transparency and reflects a low level of commitment towards sustainability.
Based on the findings it will be helpful to understand what the major problems were and how use of this model would have helped in creating a more transparent website that would reflect a high level of commitment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>If Model were to be used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Information at point of Sale</td>
<td>Material and impact information at point of sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No integration of Sustainability in marketing,</td>
<td>Sustainability related messages are actively posted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>design process, company’s way of working and</td>
<td>The policy is clearly defined and reflected in daily work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work environment</td>
<td>and processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition/ explanation of Technical Terms</td>
<td>An option to understand and expand the technical terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missing at the point of use.</td>
<td>present at the point of usage e.g. external link, popup box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or other design feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability information is Buried and has single access point that may only be searched by a “super conscious consumer”</td>
<td>High level of communication through multiple access points and by providing right information at the right spot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources for Figures and Claims are missing</td>
<td>All figures, claims are backed up with evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material grading method has not been disclosed.</td>
<td>Material grading criteria should be made public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of sustainability poorly defined.</td>
<td>Sustainability is clearly defined, along with disclosure on which areas of supply chain are sustain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provenance not declared in the product info</td>
<td>Product information would contain details about source of production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable behavior and practices are not communicated on high traffic pages.</td>
<td>High traffic pages such as landing page has space allocated to sustainability information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.3 Limitations of the Model

This research was Qualitative in nature with the objective to develop and explain a model. Due to limiting factors such as time, number of words and pages only one case was studied.

- **Limited Case:** The case studied was selected on purpose since it had attracted negative attention, the explanation of the model would have benefitted further if another case of a company with a positive image was also selected. In such a situation, the model would have been explained to its full potential. However, it is intended to be a prototype and not a final version so further research using multiple cases is recommended.

- **Subjectivity:** The qualitative interpretation in the research are subjective, another research having a different background or knowledge may interpret the factors of the models differently. E.g. It would be interesting to see how an expert in the field of communication or sustainability use and interpret the model. Secondly, a researcher bias exists as the opinion of fashion brand/retailer studied in the research was not taken into consideration.

- **Quantitative Tool:** It would be really helpful to perform a quantitative research to test the model. A rating scale such as a Likert Scale might be useful to develop a scoring tool might be helpful in comparative analysis of transparency within different Brands.
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9 Appendix

A.1 Landing Page

The first page that appears when the website is browsed. Figure 12 represents an over snapshot whereas Figure 13 gives an enlarged view.

Figure 12 Landing Page
A.1.1 Analysis of Home Page

1. Top bar: Offers a drop-down menu
2. Ad Gallery: Animated gallery bearing messages
   a. Highlights the upcoming AW 17 collection and uses the words “season must have” and it leads towards a video presentation of the products that they want the consumers to look for.
   b. “Season News” takes to the Store section with all the current products.
   c. “Red Alert” like point a is trend feed.
   d. “Final Sale” has a red background with text in contrasting white color that attempts to catch the consumers attention and redirects then to the store
3. “Shop New arrivals here” “Shop jeans here” “Shop tops here” – all three tabs are there to provide the consumers with convenient access to the store
4. “Most Loved Right Now” – it signifies the most sold products currently, it appeals and encourages consumers to buy the products that everyone else is buying to gain social approval.
5. a. “Vacay Work out”
   b. Denim and Crisp white are the perfect combo
   c. “Don’t Miss! New Arrivals Every Day”
6. Product Category
7. Social Feed
8. Reinforcing Brand Image and encouraging to buy
9. Information Panel at the bottom.
10. “Social Sustainability” at the bottom section in a small font.
A.2 Drop Down Menu

The Figures 6-11, are the drop-down menus that are located right at the top of the website as visible in the landing page on Figure 13. This Navigation feature remains constant in all pages of the website. The drop-down menu leads towards Product category pages, Social Feed and New Trends.

**Analysis:** The drop-down menu model which provides the main navigation to the website,

1. Doesn’t provide any access to any information page related to “sustainability”.
2. It provides the consumer with easy access to navigate towards the store. Hence encouraging them to shop.
3. The Visual communication designed here is sales focused, there was no sustainability oriented knowledge.

![Dropdown Menu](Image)

**Figure 14 Dropdown Menu "News"**

![Dropdown Menu](Image)

**Figure 15 Dropdown Menu "Clothes"**

![Dropdown Menu](Image)

**Figure 16 Dropdown Menu "Jeans"**

![Dropdown Menu](Image)

**Figure 17 Dropdown Menu "Accessories"**
Figure 18 Dropdown Menu "Social"

Figure 19 Dropdown Menu "Trends"
A.3 Category Page

Once a category is selected from the drop-down menu, it leads toward category pages as demonstrated from Figure 12 – 17.

Figure 21 – Category Page

1. Drop down menu
2. Side Bar – Is an additional navigation menu which is meant to provide convenient access to Other product categories and store.
3. Category Information: - For all categories there is a small description which will be analyzed later in detail.
4. Popular Styles in the Category
5. Display of different fits

Figure 20 Category Page "Full"

Figure 21 Category Page "Close"
Figure 22 Category Page "Bottom"4

Figure 23 Falsterbo Collection

Statement 1. *most of the garments are made.*

Statement 2. *from sustainable materials.*

Analysis 1. In statement 2 “Sustainable Materials” has not been defined here in the text or through a hyperlink.

Analysis 2. The statement is abstract as it lacks attestation with quantifiable information such as percentage or quantity. It is not possible to comprehend what “most” means.
The Good Project – Sustainable Collection as Figure 24

Discover the latest trends in sustainable fabrics that are better for the environment.

Analysis 3. W: The statement is confusing, as it means “latest trends in sustainable fabrics”, as a trend is as something that keep on changes. Whereas sustainability is not a trend but a need.

We also support more sustainable cotton farming through the Better Cotton Initiative.

Analysis 4. W: The context of sustainable cotton has not been defined, the phrase “we also support” is abstract and does not provide more information of what this support means. The better cotton initiative has also not been defined. In addition, there is no hyperlinks that would lead consumer to a link where the explain is available.

Read more about our journey towards more sustainable fashion under the heading, The Good Project, here at ginatricot.com

Analysis 5. W: - There is a correspondence and navigation issue in this statement, there is no heading on this page with the title “the good project” neither is there a hyperlink leading towards it.

Analysis 6. W: The Box 1 having description is not easily accessible due to its placement, font size and scroll bar Figure 24
A.4 Product info page

Figure 25 Represents the standard format of the product information page where

Analysis: - The design of product info page is same for regular collections as well as the collections where use of sustainable material was mentioned. “Equestrian collection”. “Good project” Figure 27 “Falsterbo Collection product that utilized Better Cotton” Figure 28.

No additional information informing what makes the sustainable collection sustainable and how? has been offered. The pages also don’t offer any hyperlinks to any other parts of the website where the definition or explanation may exist.

The links such as Size guide, Material spec were also discovered and no information on how the materials

Figure 25 Product Info Page
Figure 25 – The Screenshot was taken from “The Good Project” category page. There is an inconsistency in design visual communication in this picture. In part 2 of the screenshot, there is a “good project” logo on the top right corner of the pictures. Whereas it is missing in Part 1 – whereas all of these products belong to the “good project collection”
Analysis 1. The get to know section provides information about the company’s atmosphere, what the company does and the desired traits that they see in a prospective employee. Phrases such as “passionate about fashion” and “creating commercial products” with a larger focus on “becoming an international supplier for fashion” have been used to describe the company and its work environment.

Analysis 2. However, any term such “sustainability” or any related to it has not been used been used in the text.
Analysis 1. The Focus of the design process, collections, planning and concepts is focused on fulfilling the consumer demands by anticipating trends and responding to it by delivering the right product at the right time at the right place. The complete design process does not mention “sustainability” as part of the process.
A.7 Gina Tricot Sustainability Work

Figure 32 are the highlights from Gina’s sustainability report 2016.

Pt 1 –  

Statement 1. states “sustainability work 2016” in a large font, Pt 2 states these as highlights.
Analysis 1. Analysis: the header indicates that the information following is about the sustainability work done in 2016.

Pt 3 – is a message from their EVP, the statement uses phrases such as

Statement 2. "we are lucky to do something we are passionate about".
Statement 3. "it is clear in our culture, teamwork and products".
Statement 4. "we have created a unique set of values".
Statement 5. "success and individual development is made possible".
Statement 6. In the next paragraph, it is stated "If you want to join a dream team, with crazy amount of passion then Gina tricot is the perfect place, we would love to have you".

Analysis 1. In these set of statement that come under the heading of “sustainability work 2016”, it is unclear what the passion is about, the context to statement “clear in the culture teamwork and products” implies that it is about the “passion”, statement 4 and 5 indicate that the audience of this statement are prospective employees.

Analysis 2. This text has been given a central placement and it is immediately visible to the visitor. Therefore, it can be said that communicating this information is of higher priority.

Analysis 3. The statements are abstract in nature and do not offer any empirical data or access to data through a hyperlink.

Pt 4 –

Statement 1. 30 percent of our products were made of sustainable materials in 2016 and in 2015 the corresponding number was 20%.

Analysis 1. The numbers 30% has been written in a font larger than other information.

Analysis 2. No empirical evidence has been offered to support the claim.

Analysis 3. The definition to what “sustainable materials” has not been specified.

Analysis 4. No hyper link has been provided to provide in depth information.

Pt 7 and 8

Analysis 1. Size of the numbers is large whereas the accompanying information that support the comprehension of these number is small and unreadable.
A.8 The Good Project Page

Figure 33 Good project
Figure 34 Better Cotton and Gina Tricot

Statement 1. Gina Tricot has been cooperating with Ellos in a training project run by Better Cotton.

Statement 2. The project focuses on training cotton farmers in Gujarat, India.

Statement 3. During the 2015-2016 season, 2,000 farmers from 15 villages were enrolled in training and the farming area impacted by the project totalled 8,500 hectares.

Statement 4. “Using pesticides without understanding the soil requirements had a bad effect on my land and it was one of the reasons why I had such a poor harvest. Once I got involved in the project, I started using natural fertilizers,” says cotton farmer, Chaturbai Devjibhai. “The use of compost is also very popular in my village. This is something we learned during the training.”

Since joining Better Cotton, Devjibhai made a profit for the first time with his crop and he also decided to invest in a drip irrigation system.

Analysis 1. In Statement 1, The role of Gina Tricot in the training project by Better Cotton is unclear, the better cotton has also not been explained. It lacks comprehensibility.

Analysis 2. The type of training has not been mentioned, what are the farmers being trained for and what the impacts were. It lacks Attestation and comprehensibility as no evidence or

Analysis 3. is a testimonial from a farmer and implies that poor knowledge about the use of pesticides led to a poor harvest. The proceeding statement in Pt 5 indicates that use of natural fertilizers was a consequence of joining the project. However, the impact of natural fertilizers has not been mentioned and the relationship with the negative impact of pesticides has not been made clear.

Analysis 4. Similarly, in Pt 6 use of compost has been mentioned however
Statement 1. cotton farming – done in the way it is today – gives rise to many sustainability issues. Better Cotton Initiative aims to address many of them.

Statement 2. In order for cotton farming to become more sustainable, water consumption needs to become more efficient. The use of chemicals also needs to change. That’s why we are active members of Better Cotton Initiative, which is the first really large-scale global initiative towards more sustainable textile manufacturing.

Statement 3. Organic cotton farming is fantastic and it is definitely a cutting-edge industry.

Statement 4. However, in order to achieve a comprehensive, major impact, we need to work with education on a much larger scale.

Statement 5. Together with the UK organization, CottonConnect, Gina Tricot is supporting education initiatives for cotton farmers in Gujarat, India. The project is being implemented together with Ellos.

Statement 6. Here at The Good Project, you can read more about what goes on at Better Cotton.

Analysis 1. In Statement 1 the current cotton farming practices have been associated with sustainability issues, however “the issues” have not been communicated.

Analysis 2. In statement 2, highlighted texts are abstract and don’t specify what kind of change in the use of chemicals need to take place and how their association with BCI would lead toward sustainable textile manufacturing. Similarly, the statement 4 and 5 states a support for education cotton farmers. However, the type of education, its relationship with problems associated with sustainability or water efficiency or use of chemicals has not been mentioned.

Analysis 3. Overall, the information provided in the article is abstract, ill defined, lacks empirical data.
Figure 36 Sustainable Materials - What are they?

Statement 1. Under the heading, “Sustainable materials” in our web-shop, we’ve collected garments that have been manufactured from sustainable materials.

Statement 2. All textiles make an impact on the environment.

Statement 3. We use a grading system whereby all textiles are assessed according to certain production factors, like farming method, chemical content, ability to recycle and quality. The best materials are those that are easy to produce, while also being highly durable. This is why organic cotton scores so high, and also Tencel®, which is manufactured from a controlled raw material from eucalyptus trees, without using any harmful chemicals.

Statement 4. The best materials are those that are easy to produce, while also being highly durable. This is why organic cotton scores so high, and also Tencel®, which is manufactured from a controlled raw material from eucalyptus trees, without using any harmful chemicals.

Statement 5. Sustainable, it must contain at least 50% sustainable material, calculated according to total weight.

Statement 6. Recycled polyester is here to stay and manufacturers are refining their processes accordingly.

Analysis 1. Statement 1 has a correspondence issue – there is no such heading in the website.

(check Figure 12 Landing Page, Drop Down Menu)
Analysis 2. Statement 2 is unclear in explaining what “impact” means. So it is incomprehensible.

Analysis 3. In Statement 3, the grading system has neither been disclosed publicly nor is it present at point of sale.

Analysis 4. In statement 4, it is unclear what “easy” means and how it is related to sustainability, it also does not explain how Organic cotton is “easy” to produce. The statement lacks correspondence as well as attestation.

Analysis 5. Statement 5 – it is unclear where the definition came from, it also does not define what “sustainable means” and what is a “sustainable source”. This statement lacks correspondence and attestation.

Analysis 6. The overall the information lacks accessibility as it is not availability in the main pages, category pages and product information page.

Figure 37 Doing Laundry the right Way

Statement 1. “Sustainability is important to Gina Tricot, so we work hard to minimize our products environmental impact during production and transport.

Statement 2. Wash as infrequently as possible

Statement 3. Many Pieces don’t even need to be washed if they do not have any dirty spots, just air them instead.

Analysis 1. Statement 1 – implies that environmental issues are only caused by production and transport. It does not appear take into account the importance of design in the process.

Analysis 2. Statement 2 does not present any empirical data or impacts of on how washing infrequently is the right way as stated in the main heading “doing laundry the right way”.

Analysis 3. Statement 3 – implies that clothes that don’t have spots don’t need to be washed. This claim has not been attested with an expert’s information. It is unclear how authors came to this conclusion.
Figure 38 Gina Production

A.9 Social Responsibility Page
A.10 Search Navigation

Analysis 1. Tin

The search bar in the top left corner was used to search words such as “sustainability”, “sustainable”, “organic” and “better cotton”. The query responds by presenting garments in which these words are mentioned in their text. It did not lead to any document, report or webpage having information related to sustainability. Hence the functionality of this search box is limited to searching the products.
Appendix B. List of URLs Visited

B.1 Product page Links

Global Search
http://www.ginatricot.com/ceu/sustainable/search-p1.html

FAQ

B.2 CSR