



Rena

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Master thesis

**The impact of social and environmental  
CSR communication on brand image**

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## Preface

Our master thesis is the final step on our Master's degree in Economics and management with a major in Marketing Management (Økonomi og ledelse spesialisering Markedsføringsledelse) at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, campus Rena. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has limited our time spent at Rena, we are grateful for the experience and our professors who have made it educational and interesting regardless of the situation. The topic of this thesis comes from different subjects providing insights into social responsibility and marketing, increasing our interest in sustainability and branding. The master thesis has given us valuable insights into corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, brand perception, and brand image. Though it has been challenging at times, we have learned a lot, and it was interesting to expand our horizons in this field.

We want to thank everyone that has supported us through the time of our Master's degree and the process of writing our thesis, hence contributing to a great experience. We want to thank our supervisor, Tore Mysen, who has given us good guidance and helpful advice by always being accessible throughout this process. Furthermore, we want to thank our families, friends, classmates, and faculty members for their excellent support of the thesis. We want to thank each other for the good teamwork and team spirit and for continuously encouraging each other to finish writing this Master thesis.

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## Abstract

**Purpose-** This study aims to examine the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication on brand perception, precisely brand image.

**Methodology/approach-** This research uses an online self-completion questionnaire with closed-ended questions. Further, a quantitative and cross-sectional research method and a causal design are applied. This study collected data from Norwegian consumers above 18, which resulted in 145 respondents collected through convenience sampling. The received data was analysed through factor analysis, correlation matrix and multiple regression analysis.

**Findings-** The results of the study show that the CSR communication criteria “local community”, “use of environmentally friendly material”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste” are positively related to brand image. While the other investigated criteria, “health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, and “reducing consumption of resources”, did not have a significant influence on brand image. The findings show that the criteria of the social and environmental dimensions influence brand image differently. The results show that effective CSR communication has a positive impact on brand image.

**Limitations-** The study uses convenience sampling, making it more challenging to generalise the results. The size of the sample is a possible limitation. Another limitation is that the study does not include a control variable.

**Value-** This research contributes to the current knowledge of CSR communication. Considering there is little research conducted regarding the criteria of the social and environmental dimensions and their influence on brand perception and brand image, this study extends knowledge about the social and environmental dimensions and their underlying criteria impacting the brand image of a business. Hence, contributing with new insights to the fields of CSR, CSR communication, and branding.

**Keywords-** Corporate Social responsibility (CSR), social CSR communication, environmental CSR communication, brand perception, brand image, social brand image, environmental brand image.

## Norsk sammendrag (Norwegian abstract)

**Formål:** Formålet med denne studien er å utforske hvilken påvirkning CSR (corporate social responsibility) kommunikasjon har på kundens merkevareoppfattelse, presist merkevarebilde.

**Design/metode/tilnærming:** Forskningen er gjennomført ved bruk av et selvutfyllende spørreskjema med lukkede spørsmål, som ble distribuert på nett. Videre, ble det brukt kvantitativ metode og tverrsnittundersøkelse, og et kausalt design for oppgaven. Studien har samlet inn data fra Norske konsumenter over 18 år, som resulterte i 145 respondenter som ble innhentet gjennom et bekvemmelighetsutvalg. Deretter ble dataene analysert gjennom faktoranalyser, korrelasjonsanalyser og multippel regresjonsanalyse.

**Funn:** Resultatene av studien viser at kriteriene for CSR kommunikasjon «lokalsamfunnet», «bruk av miljøvennlige materialer» og «reduisering av forurensende utslipp og avfall» har en positiv effekt på merkevarebildet. I motsetning har de andre kriteriene «Helse, miljø og sikkerhet», «ingen diskriminering» og «reduere forbruket av ressurser» en ikke signifikant effekt på merkevarebildet. Funnene viser at flere av kriteriene fra den sosiale og miljømessige dimensjonen for CSR kommunikasjon har en positiv påvirkning på merkevarebildet. Konklusjonen er derfor at CSR kommunikasjon har en positiv påvirkning på merkevarebildet.

**Begrensninger:** Denne studien benytter et bekvemmelighetsutvalg, noe som kan påvirke generaliserbarheten til resultatene. Videre er størrelsen på utvalget en potensiell begrensning for studien. En begrensning for studien er også at den ikke inneholder kontrollvariabler, dette må tas med i vurderingen av resultatene.

**Originalitet:** Studien bidrar med bredere innsikt i eksisterende kunnskap innenfor CSR kommunikasjon. Siden det er lite forskning som er gjort i forhold til hvilken innvirkning de ulike kriteriene fra den sosiale og miljømessige dimensjonen for CSR har på merkevareoppfattelsen og merkevarebildet til bedriften, bidrar studien med ny kunnskap innenfor feltene CSR, CSR kommunikasjon og merkevarebygging.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and purpose

The past decade shows an increased focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) among industries, businesses, consumers, and researchers (Amatulli et al., 2018; Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2016; Dahlsrud, 2008; Dawson & Daniel, 2010; Wang et al., 2016). Amatulli et al. (2018) highlight corporate social responsibility as including social and environmental concerns in the business and throughout their communications with their stakeholders. The promotion of societal and environmental CSR performance is increasingly common across service providers; hence consumers are getting accustomed to seeing CSR communication (Liu et al., 2014). It is no longer a question of whether a business should engage in CSR actions but rather the degree and how to perform these activities effectively and strategically with a clear narrative of its effects on the business and its responsibilities (Wang et al., 2016). Viererbl and Koch (2022) confirm that engaging in CSR is imperative due to global issues like climate change, (future) pandemics, workers' rights, or inequality.

The increased focus on CSR leads consumers to seek information about business activities and how the business is handling corporate social responsibilities. According to the European Commission (2001), new expectations are developing among European citizens and consumers towards businesses adapting to the current and ongoing changes in the society of today. Frequently, the motive of the businesses is to determine the consumer's brand perception. For instance, when consumers can identify themselves with the business' values and corporate identity and perceive the characteristics to agree with their values and norms, it will increase their level of corporate identification (Crespo & Inacio, 2019). According to Crespo and Inacio (2019), will the business' CSR associations further affect consumer behaviour.

Bigné et al. (2012) argue that further research should be done on whether consumer involvement with the social cause can influence CSR perception. Viererbl and Koch (2022) additionally investigated the positive and negative effects of CSR communication and advised further research to analyse better context factors interacting with the perceptions of CSR communication. Also, Lauritzen and Perks (2015) mention the lack of research in CSR communication, especially the understanding of consumer perception of CSR communication. Similarly, Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2016) state that businesses often tend

to assume that their CSR initiatives and their communication about them are well received by their consumers, but no evidence is identifiable that this occurs.

Vera-Martínez et al. (2021) argue about the surprisingly sparse research on the relationship between consumer brand perception and CSR. Wu and Wang (2014) further assert that CSR and brand image are inextricably bound, but few studies exist on the relation between CSR and brand image. Lee and Lee (2018) add that only a few studies have examined if CSR improves a company's brand image and if it influences consumers' purchase intention. Additionally, Chan et al. (2020) recommend further research within the fashion industry to better understand through questionnaires and statistical analysis on CSR engagement supplementary findings to their current research. According to Lee and Lee (2018) brand image is one of the most important factors regarding the consumer's purchase intention within the fashion industry.

## 1.2 Research questions

Based on recent developments within the consumers and businesses gaining knowledge about CSR, the objective of this presented study is to investigate the following main research question:

***What impact does corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication have on brand image?***

Two supplementary research questions are developed to answer the main research question and define limits for the study. Based on previous research, it seems that the social and environmental dimensions are the main concerns of the consumers. Hence the two supplementary research questions are based on how social and environmental CSR communications influence brand image (social) and brand image (environmental) respectively.

- 1) What effect will the social CSR communication have on the brand image (social)?
- 2) What effect will the environmental CSR communication have on the brand image (environmental)?

### 1.3 Context

The study is performed within the fashion retail industry. The fast fashion industry is often characterised with short product lifecycles, catwalk fashion imitation, and affordable prices (Zhang et al., 2021). The reason is that the fast fashion industry often gets criticised for the impact of fast fashion brands on the surroundings. As Zhang et al. (2021) mention, the carbon footprint generated by the fashion industry is one of the largest, estimated to be responsible for 10 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as well as 20 per cent of global waste streams. Fast fashion brands are being criticised for generating huge waste and pressuring the environment (Zhang et al., 2021). Concurrent are also the consumers of the fast fashion industry growing to have more social and environmental awareness (Shen, 2014). This leads to consumers exhibiting great concern for the sustainability practices of fashion brands (Chan et al., 2020). Herewith, the demand to minimise the environmental pollution comes from fashion brands and consumers (Shen, 2014). This leads to fashion brands considering CSR as a crucial aspect of improving their brand image (Lee & Lee, 2018). Businesses having green fashion marketing efforts will create a positive brand image and increase purchase intention (Yang et al., 2017). Thus, it is important to carry out further research in the fast fashion industry, particularly on how CSR communication and its environmental and social dimensions impact the brand image of consumers.

### 1.4 Methodology

The study is a quantitative analysis of how consumers' brand perceptions are affected by CSR. The investigation aims to research the influence CSR communication has on the consumer's brand image. Thus, it is chosen a causal design to explore the relationship between the social and environmental variables ("health and safety practices", "no discrimination", "local community", "reducing consumption of resources", "environmentally friendly materials", "reducing polluting emissions and waste") and brand image ("brand image (social)" and "brand image (environmental)"). The data collection is done through convenience sampling, by distributing the questionnaire to university professors, a manager of a student association, publishing it on our social media, and using the snowball method by family and friends to recruit respondents.

## 1.5 Theoretical and practical implications

The theoretical implication of the study is to investigate the influence of the social and environmental criteria on the brand image of the consumers. Hence, contributing to new knowledge within CSR communication and brand building and investigating how brand image is affected by the interpretation of the consumer of the CSR activities of the business. This study will contribute with knowledge connected to six criteria within the social and environmental dimension of corporate social responsibility and how it affects the perception of the consumer through the brand image of the consumer. To our knowledge, little previous research has elaborated on the different criteria within the social and environmental dimensions that influence brand image. However, several investigations exist about the collective concept of CSR and its relation to brand image (Ramesh et al., 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014). Thus, this study will provide a better understanding of how each criterion (“health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, “local community”, “reducing consumption of resources”, “environmentally friendly materials”, “reducing polluting emissions and waste”) from CSR communication can influence brand image. Previous explorations state that effective CSR communication can increase the brand image of the consumers (Ramesh et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2017). The questionnaire, using the fashion industry in general, will provide information about the behaviour of consumers, which is affected by business’ CSR communication, the corresponding choices, and interpretations of the brand image of the consumer.

Managerial implications include managers gaining an understanding of different social and environmental criteria and their different influences on the consumer. Focusing their CSR communication on the criteria that are most influencing the consumer. This study provides managers with an understanding of how they should focus their CSR communication and which activities concern the consumers most. Additionally, businesses will be able to implement these criteria into their brand-building strategy. Thus, CSR communication will allow for more effective and strategic planning.

## 1.6 Outline of the study

The thesis is structured as follows. In the following chapter, the Literature review is presented by explaining the literature search before discussing relevant theories for brand perception and image. After that, the theoretical foundation for CSR, CSR communication, and the social and

environmental dimensions are elaborated. Then a discussion of previous research on the relation between CSR communication and brand image is performed. Followed by the theoretical model for the study, and a discussion of the study's hypotheses.

The chapter after explains the methodology of the study with its research design, method, data collection, development of the questionnaire, population, and pre-tests. As well as arguing the validity and reliability of the study, ending the chapter with a discussion of the ethicality of the study. Thereafter, the analyses of the study are depicted, followed by the results. In the discussion the results and the theoretical foundation from chapter 2 are discussed. The study will end with a conclusion, where the conclusions of the study and theoretical and practical implications are presented, before discussing the limitations of the study and possible areas for future research.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Overview

The chapter discusses different theories, perspectives, and definitions relevant to this study. First, the process for literature search is presented by revealing databases and major search words. Second, brand perception is discussed before narrowing in on brand image as the primary dimension. Third, before discussing CSR communication corporate social responsibility (CSR) is introduced. After that, the social and environmental dimension of CSR communication is elaborated, where the initiatives are concentrated into three criteria from the social dimension and three within the environmental dimension. Fourth, previous research on the connection between brand image and CSR communication is distinguished. Last, the thesis is positioned through a summary and conclusion by presenting the research model followed by the hypotheses.

### 2.2 Literature search

The literature search collects research papers across several search engines, see Table 1. Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar provide the opportunity to combine key search words to limit articles to relevant ones for this study. In comparison, Academia and Bibsys (Oria) are useful when the title of the academic paper is known. Last, it is helpful to use ScienceDirect to find and see relevant research articles connected to the topic.

*Table 1 - Search engines*

Academic Search complete	<a href="http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?profile=web&amp;defaultdb=a9h">http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?profile=web&amp;defaultdb=a9h</a>
Academia	<a href="https://www.academia.edu/">https://www.academia.edu/</a>
Bibsys (Oria)	<a href="http://www.nb.no/bibsok/start.jsf">http://www.nb.no/bibsok/start.jsf</a>
Google Scholar	<a href="https://scholar.google.com/">https://scholar.google.com/</a>
ScienceDirect	<a href="https://www-sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.inn.no/">https://www-sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.inn.no/</a>

The collection of relevant literature starts with searching for terms such as “*brand perception*” and “*corporate social responsibility*”, allowing the discovery of existing relevant literature and considering previous and significant references within this research topic. Academic Search Complete provided 1,962 academic articles about “brand perception”, and Google Scholar rose

to 50,000, respectively. The literature search for “corporate social responsibility” on Academic Search Complete provides 10,957 findings, whereas Google Scholar provide about 136,000 results. When combining the keywords “*brand perception*” and “*corporate social responsibility*”, the result is reduced to 35 on Academic Search Complete and 24,000 on Google Scholar. Thereafter, the terms with keywords such as “*CSR communication*”, “*brand perception*”, “*Corporate social communication (CSC)*”, “*environmental dimension*”, “*social dimension*”, “*brand marketing*”, “*consumer perspective*”, “*brand image*”, and “*CSR marketing*” are combined and searched separately to find further literature.

The search process was initiated by looking for literature review articles providing an overview of brand perception and corporate social responsibility. Thereafter, searching for additional academic articles by looking through relevant academic journals could provide further insight into the field. Combining different search words provides a more focused insight into different dimensions of brand perception and brand image. Thereafter, the process is repeated for CSR communication and its dimensions. First, researching the CSR communication and CSR as a concept and withdrawing the dimensions from there before narrowing the search into the two dimensions: “*environmental dimension*” and “*social dimension*”. Last, combining the dimension of “*brand image*”, “*brand perception*”, and “*CSR communication*” to find existing previous research within the field.

## 2.3 Brand perception

### 2.3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the aim is to depict and discuss brand perception and the underlying dimensions. To better grasp the concept of brand perception, it is clearly defined. Then, the underlying dimensions of brand perception are described and shown in Table 2. Based on the discussion of brand perception, there will be a deep dive into brand image and its importance for this study. Last, there will be a summary of the findings regarding brand perception and brand image.

### 2.3.2 Dimensions of brand perception

The definition of brand perception varies among different authors. One definition is that the interpretation and experience of stimuli transform into an overall meaningful impression (Pickens, 2005; Brunk & de Boer, 2020). Similarly, Solomon et al. (2013) define perception as the process where people select, organise, and interpret information from the outside world. Furthermore, Vera-Martínez et al. (2021) claim that a group of variables which influence consumer purchasing behaviour represents consumer brand perceptions. Whereas, Foroudi et al. (2018) argue that the impressions of the consumer of the brand, rather than objective indicators, determine the brand perception. Brand perception is often based on a collection of informational cues given by the brand, collectively deciding the brand perception of the consumer (Brunk & de Boer, 2020). Hence, the brand perception of the consumer will influence how the consumer acts, buys, and communicates about a brand.

Understanding how consumers perceive brands helps businesses develop and position new services and products, as well as understand the competitive market and create effective marketing communication (Dzyabura & Peres, 2021). Furthermore, Larkin (2013) argues that businesses with a high brand perception can benefit from higher stability, lower default probability, and a stable level of cash flow. Accordingly, it is argued for two branches of brand perception: the perspective of retailers and the perspective of the consumer (Foroudi et al., 2018). The business perspective may see the brand perception as an opportunity to add value to the products, hence creating opportunities for greater profits and revenue (Foroudi et al., 2018). In comparison, the consumer perspective focuses on the attitudes, perceptions, and ideas of the consumer, determining the probability of the consumer choosing one brand compared to a competitor (Foroudi et al., 2018). Hence, when using these definitions, the brand perception could be seen as a collective concept that describes the overall perception of consumers based on available information, preferences, and awareness. Accordingly, several terms are a part of the brand perception of the consumer in existing brand literature and are shown collectively in Table 2.



Table 2 - Brand Perception Dimensions

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Literature</b>
Brand association	... refers to all the thoughts in consumers' minds related to the brand and its intangible characteristics. It comes from brand knowledge and brand image.	(Foroudi et al., 2018) (Foroudi, 2019) (Dzyabura & Peres, 2021)
Brand attitude	... refers to the general liking the consumer either has or has not towards a brand.	(Foroudi, 2019) (Dzyabura & Peres, 2021)
Brand awareness	... refers to the presence a brand has in their consumers mind and involves the two main elements of recalling and recognition.	(Bruhn et al., 2012) (Foroudi et al., 2018) (Foroudi, 2019)
Brand image	... refers to different associations within a consumer's mind and their beliefs connected to the brand. Furthermore, it can be used as a communication tool, both direct and indirect, between the brand and the consumer	(Bruhn et al., 2012) (Foroudi et al., 2018, p.464) (Bigné et al., 2012) (Rao et al., 2021)
Brand loyalty	... refers to the consumers commitment to buy the same product or service again despite other influences for different situations and marketing campaigns that could cause switching behaviour.	(Foroudi, 2019, p.274) (Baghi & Antonetti, 2021)
Brand personality	... refers to when a brand is characterised by human-like traits and characteristics, which leads consumers to build a personal relationship with the brand.	(Brunk & de Boer, 2020, p.445) (Bigné et al., 2012) (Matzler et al., 2008) (Ghosh et al., 2013)
Brand reputation	... refers to consumers overall impression of the brand based on images from both its external and internal stakeholders over time. It is a combination of reliability, admiration, benevolence, respect, and confidence in the brand's present and future actions.	(Foroudi, 2019 p.274)

The dimension of brand image indicates the consumers association linked to a brand and their beliefs connected to the brand. It can further be divided into functional brand image (brand associations related to the attributes of a product) and hedonic brand image (brand associations unrelated to its specific attributes) (Bruhn et al., ). Brand association arises from brand image

and concerns all the thoughts consumers have related to a brand (Foroudi et al., 2018). Accordingly, brand image and brand association have a lot of similar aspects. The dimension of brand awareness further signifies the presence of a brand in a consumer's mind and how well they will recognise or recall that brand (Bruhn et al., 2012). Foroudi et al. (2018) confirm this statement and add that a higher level of awareness leads to higher brand perception. Consumers aware of a brand are more likely to choose that brand than other brands with lesser awareness (Foroudi et al., 2018).

Brand loyalty is essential and associated with the consumers' attachment to a brand (Foroudi, 2019). Brand loyalty increases when consumers associating with the brand, have an increasing fondness and perceive a brand as high quality (Foroudi et al., 2018). Brand attitude reflects the overall evaluation of a brand and is influenced by brand awareness and image as well as constituting a multiplicative combination of brand-based associations of attributes and benefits (Bruhn et al., 2012). Hence, brand attitude can be thought of as the consumers liking or disliking a brand (Foroudi, 2019). Brand reputation refers to the formation of aggregation of images held by the stakeholders and accumulates in the mind of the consumer over time into an overall brand evaluation (Foroudi, 2019).

Foroudi (2019) refers to brand reputation relying on reliability, admiration, benevolence, respect, and confidence in the present and plausible future actions of a business. Brand reputation further affects the concept of brand trust, which is based on the idea of the brand-consumer relationship and can further be defined as the willingness of the consumers to rely on the ability of the brand to execute their declared actions (Matzler et al., 2008). On the other hand, brand personality actually refers to the personification of a brand, where the consumers expect the brands they use to behave like responsible and aware citizens (Ghosh et al., 2013). Therefore, if human-like traits characterise the brand, it will lead to consumers building a personal relationship with the brand (Brunk & de Boer, 2020). Thus, brand personality is created from the consumers' viewpoint (Ghosh et al., 2013). The business can communicate and project a specific personality to the consumers (Ghosh et al., 2013), which can be connected to the brand image of the brand/business.

Most of the mentioned dimensions of brand perceptions overlap and have the same goal of promoting brand perception. The dimension of brand image has many coinciding variables with other dimensions such as brand association, brand attitude or brand reputation. Brand association is said to arise from brand image, whereas brand attitude is influenced by it, and

brand reputation is formed from the aggregation of brand image. Concludingly, brand image seems to be the dimension overlapping with most of the other dimensions.

### 2.3.3 Brand image

After looking at the different brand dimensions, the dimension of brand image seems to be the primary determinant affecting the brand perception of a business. As Rao et al. (2021) refer, to is brand image one of the key dimensions of the mindset of the consumer, influencing the behaviour of the consumers' through an unobservable underlying decision-making process. Bruhn et al. (2012) differentiate brand image into two parts: functional and hedonic brand image. In contrast, Wu and Wang (2014) divide brand image into three parts; functional, symbolic, and experiential images. Functional image can be described as helping consumers solve their issues and prevent potential problems (Wu & Wang, 2014). Hence is the tangible features of a product (Y. He & Lai, 2014). When consumers are dissatisfied with a functional aspect of a brand, they are often sufficiently motivated to communicate their dissatisfaction to other consumers (Bruhn et al., . In comparison, the symbolic images represent the intangible features which reflect the social approval, self-expression, or self-esteem of the consumers (Y. He & Lai, 2014). With symbolic image, a brand tries to satisfy the inner desire of consumers, such as enhancing self-value, social status or self-recognition (Wu & Wang, 2014). Last, in an experiential image, the brand tries to satisfy the pursuance of diversity among consumers to provide them with experiential pleasure (Wu & Wang, 2014).

Agmeka et al. (2019) argue that brand image can be considered one of the most important intangible assets impacting consumer perception in a business. The perceptions and feelings of consumers about a brand can determine their cognitive, emotional and attitudinal outcomes regarding the brand and herewith affect the consumer purchase intention (Huang et al., 2020). According to Burt and Davies (2010), brand image can be characterised as the current perceptions of consumers of the brand. In more detail, associations within the minds and beliefs of the consumers build on the brand uniqueness that differentiates the brand, personal symbolism that consumers associate with a brand, and general brand impressions about the business (Foroudi et al., 2018). Huang et al. (2020) affirm this statement by noting brand image being the integration of perceptions and evaluation of consumers and association with the main characteristics of the brand and their mental response to the essential elements of businesses.

Thus brand image is formed in the minds of consumers based on the knowledge and trust the consumer has in a business (Ramesh et al., 2019).

The brand image of businesses is an asset requiring familiarity as it impacts the perception of consumers on the operation of the business (Ramesh et al., 2019). As Foroudi et al. (2018) mention, brand image is based on personal experience, values, background and individual attributes and perceptions. Consequently, brand image indicates the overall associations linked to a business (Bruhn et al., . Hence, brand image is considered crucial when consumers want to make a purchasing decision (Agmeka et al., 2019). A good brand image can impress consumers with its tangible and functional attributes and emotional characteristics, which affect the positive feelings of consumers toward the brand (Huang et al., 2020). Consumers often prefer products corresponding with their image, expressing their personality or characteristics through correspondence with their self-image (Foroudi et al., 2018). Lee and Lee (2018) argue that within the fashion industry, brand image is one of the most important factors for the purchase intention of the consumer.

Brand image is a key point in promoting the competitiveness of the business, positively influencing the feelings of the consumer about a brand through its messages (Wu & Wang, 2014). Brand image can be influenced by a business's marketing activities and can further be recognised as a communication tool (Foroudi et al., 2018). Henceforth communication shapes the brand image perceived by consumers, which impacts their purchasing intentions (Rao et al., 2021). Additionally, user-generated information on brand fan pages may influence both hedonic and functional brand image (Rao et al., 2021).

#### 2.3.4 Brand perception/image: Summary and conclusions

As seen through the argumentation above, brand perception is represented by seven different dimensions influencing the overall perception the consumer has of the brand. The seven dimensions found within the literature are brand association, brand attitude, brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, brand personality, and brand reputation. Based on the arguments for the different dimensions, several aspects overlapped among the specific dimensions. For instance, brand image, brand awareness, brand personality, and brand associations seem to have several aspects in common, such as which impressions and thoughts consumers have about a specific brand. According to the argumentation of the dimensions, brand image has a

great influence on brand perception due to its impact on how consumers and stakeholders perceive a brand and business. On these grounds, brand image is considered one of the most intangible assets impacting brand perception (Agmeka et al., 2019). Another reason is that building brand image can be used as a communication tool, both direct and indirect, between the brand and the consumer (Foroudi et al., 2018).

As Huang et al. (2020) mention, the brand image is the feelings consumers have about a brand. Hence brand image should be measured by the feelings of the consumers. Further, brand image is measured through the beliefs, associations, and general impressions of consumers, as brand image is formed in the mind of the consumer based on the knowledge and trust the consumer has in a business (Ramesh et al., 2019). Foroudi et al. (2018) refer to brand image as the associations within the minds of consumers, beliefs built around the brand and the uniqueness that differentiates a brand from others. As well as personal symbolism that consumers associate with a brand and general brand impressions about the business (Foroudi et al., 2018). This study is based on the consumer perspective for brand perception and will measure brand image through questions based on the feelings, associations, and impressions of consumers.

## 2.4 CSR-communication

### 2.4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to define and discuss the concept of CSR communication and its dimensions. To better understand the complexity of CSR communication, it is necessary to define and discuss corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its dimensions. Hence, the chapter starts with the overall concept of CSR and discusses different definitions and explanations. After that, the concept of CSR communication is defined and discussed. Then, the social and environmental dimensions are conferred in-depth and reveal the different criteria falling underneath each dimension and their category. From this evaluation, the criteria which have the greatest impact on consumers are determined.

## 2.4.2 Concepts and dimensions

### 2.4.2.1 CSR

There is often confusion connected to corporate social responsibility (CSR), including several definitions used by researchers and businesses. The literature review of Dahlsrud (2008) claims that the most used definition for CSR is the one from the European Commission. The European Commission (2001, p.8) defines CSR as "... a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis". When using this definition, in addition to their economic performance, two main other dimensions, the environmental and the social concerns of their surroundings, are taken into account for businesses. Dahlsrud (2008) mentions that when CSR is explained in-depth, the environmental and the social dimensions are equally highlighted. Performing social and environmental responsibility is a competitive strategy that can generate better financial achievement, reduce the turnover rate of workers and improve productivity (Chan et al., 2020). As well as building trust among consumers, differentiates from competitors and improves brand equity (Chan et al., 2020).

Chan et al. (2020) explain the social dimension as to how society is affected by the activities of the business and how the business can contribute to enhancing the welfare and benefits of its workers. On the other hand, does the environmental aspect aim to minimise the potential negative effect on the environment from, for instance, the production process (Chan et al., 2020). Similarly, de Lenne and Vandenbosch (2017, p.484) refer to CSR as including "...respect for juridical and ethical guidelines, fair treatment of employees and the environment, and preventing harmful side-effects caused by organizational activities."

CSR is about responsibility, high social and environmental standards towards employees, marketing practices, value chains, and innovation processes that consider the needs and expectations of stakeholders in a business (Gajda, 2020). Herewith CSR can be seen as a business commitment, contributing to sustainable economic development, cooperation with employees, local communities, and society to improve the quality of life (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). Hence, businesses are responsible for society and must rethink their position accordingly (Winter & Lasch, 2016). Even if there is an increasing number of businesses involving themselves with CSR, media coverage and public criticism regarding irresponsible business practices are still rising (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013).

Dahlsrud (2008) argues that the confusion about defining corporate social responsibility could become a significant problem for both researchers and businesses. By operating with different definitions of the same term, each industry, field, and individual can have a different understanding of what that specific term entails. Hence, Dahlsrud (2008) provided five different dimensions for corporate social responsibility, collected from 37 different definitions: the environmental dimension, the social dimension, the economic dimension, the stakeholder dimension, and, the voluntariness dimension. The dimensions are summarised in Table 3.

*Table 3 - CSR Dimension*

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Literature</b>
Social dimension	... how the society is affected by the business' activities and how the business can contribute to enhance the welfare and benefits of its workers. Hence, the relationship between businesses and society	(Dahlsrud, 2008, p.4) (Chan et al., 2020)
Environmental dimension	.. minimise the potential negative effect of a business on the environment.	(Chan et al., 2020)
Economic dimension	..financial aspects including describing CSR in terms of a business operation	(Dahlsrud, 2008, p.4)
Stakeholder dimension	Stakeholder groups	(Dahlsrud, 2008)
Voluntariness dimension	Actions not prescribed by law.	(Dahlsrud, 2008, p.4)

#### *2.4.2.2 CSR communication*

CSR communication consistency is how steadily the business communicates its CSR goals and transparency openness of CSR information disclosure (S. Kim, 2019). Including both good and bad is considered important due to being superior to gaining the trust of the consumer and making communication messages seem more trustworthy (S. Kim, 2019). However, Farrow et al. (2021) argue that despite actions speaking louder than words, several businesses are often tempted to enhance or construct their CSR communication due to being cheaper than changing their CSR practices.

According to Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2016), proper communication about the business' CSR can contribute to good consumer responses, leading to managers confidently allocating more resources to promote corporate abilities or CSR activities. This is supported by Parguel et al. (2011), who argue that highlighting their CSR efforts using objective arguments can efficiently enhance their corporate brand evaluation. The findings of Lauritsen and Perks (2015) research suggest that CSR communication can positively influence knowledge, memory, and perceptions of CSR initiatives among consumers, which will strengthen the corporate brand image and reputation of the business. Consumers rely on CSR communication to determine and compare different brand morals and count on being openly informed about positive and negative business practices (Lauritsen & Perks, 2015). However, consumers expect the CSR communication to be based on facts with a low-key tone, and often disliking when messages are promotional and self-praising (S. Kim & Ferguson, 2018).

One key challenge of CSR communication is how businesses should minimise consumer scepticism (Du et al., 2010). Even though consumers claim they want insights into the CSR activities of the business, consumers become leery of the CSR motives of businesses if the businesses aggressively promote their CSR efforts (Du et al., 2010). However, according to the findings of S. Kim (2019, p. 84), CSR expectations and perceived moral inequity, situational motivation in problem-solving indicate that "... a) different consumers perceive corporate (mis)conduct differently due to their own reference standards for corporate responsibility and b) they may be motivated to engage in communication behaviours to address the issue for different reasons". In other words, consumers and businesses having different expectations and understandings of varying CSR initiatives make CSR communication more complicated. The degree to which consumers are aware of the CSR communication of the business plays a central role in affecting corporate benefits because CSR policies help consumers evaluate and distinguish individual brands (Lee & Lee, 2018).

Reactive CSR communication can positively affect the environmental legitimacy of the business, and rational appeals are more effective for environmental CSR communication (Bartikowski & Berens, 2021). Reactive CSR communication is when businesses engage themselves with CSR and CSR communication to protect their image after being called out for irresponsible behaviour (Groza et al., 2011). In comparison, emotional appeals are more effective for employee-related CSR communication (Bartikowski & Berens, 2021). CSR communication can also improve CSR knowledge among consumers and can be considered



necessary for securing the reputational benefits resulting from the CSR and CSR communication of the business (S. Kim, 2019).

Inadequate CSR communication results in increased distrust among stakeholders, resulting from not reflecting the actual CSR activities of the business (S. Kim, 2019). Hence, discrepancies between the CSR actions of the business and their CSR communications result in reductions in the trust of the consumer, which again results in some businesses considering CSR communication ineffective (S. Kim, 2019). Supporting this is Du et al. (2010), which argue that any discrepancies between the consumer's perceived CSR motives and the business' communicated motives will trigger scepticism and the feeling of being deceived. Thus, it is crucial to balance the extent of a business's CSR communication and its actual CSR activities (Viererbl & Koch, 2022).

#### *2.4.2.3 Social and environmental criteria*

According to the European Commission (2001), as previously stated, the main dimensions that businesses focus on besides their economic performance are the environmental and the social dimension through their concerns about their surroundings. Brønn and Vrioni (2001) argue that the relations of the business are often determined by their responsibility for the community and environment, knowing that the business exists and operates in a shared environment. Additionally, Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019) argue that environmental CSR activities have a crucial role in maintaining and keeping long-term relationships with consumers. Based on these arguments, the social and environmental dimensions are the two dimensions that the consumers want to gain knowledge about from businesses. Hence, businesses should concentrate on the social and environmental dimensions in their CSR communication.

The literature states that there are two main subcategories for the social dimension, *employees* and *society & community*. Accordingly, the two subcategories are divided into two tables (Table 4 and 5) for their corresponding criteria. The reason for separating the dimensions into different criteria and subcategories is that each of the dimensions covers a complex collection of different CSR responsibilities businesses have. Criteria for the environmental dimension are collected in Table 6. After each table, there is a discussion of similarities and differentiations of the criteria.

Table 4 - Social Dimension: Employees

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Authors</b>
No child labours	Employees must be over the minimum age of employment required by national law, no children that should attend school should work	(Winter & Lasch, 2016, p.187) (Brunk, 2010) (Dzyabura & Peres, 2021)
No forced labour	No prison work, slave labour, should be free start and termination of employment.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016, p.187)
No discrimination	No discrimination due to race, gender, disability, religion, social origins, cultures, background, family status, memberships, employee organisations, political opinion, and sexual orientation.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016, p.187) (European Commission, 2001) (Brunk, 2010)
No disciplinary and security practices	Absence of physical punishment and violence	(Winter & Lasch, 2016, p.187)
Freedom of association	For instance, worker committees, trade unions, and collective agreements, should be possibilities for complaints from workers.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016)
Working hours	Hours according to national law and industry standards.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016), (Brunk, 2010)
Employment compensation	Wages according to industry standards, in addition to compensation for overtime, holidays, sick leave, and maturity leave	(Winter & Lasch, 2016)
Health and safety practices	Fire safety, existence of personal protection equipment and precautions for work accidents, compliance with health conditions, temperature, dining area and drinking water.  Occupational health and safety management	(Winter & Lasch, 2016) (Brunk, 2010)  (European Commission, 2001, p.10)
Housing conditions	Separated housing from the factory, free access and exits, individual beds, privacy, safety requirements, clean facilities.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016, p.187)
Employment contract and working permission	Existence of work contracts, which have involved all relevant areas and structured personnel files.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016, p.187)

The content of Table 4 shows the social dimension with its subcategory employees and its underlying criteria. All of the criteria are about Human employee treatment; compliance with requirements for child labour, forced labour, freedom of association, workload and compensation, contracts and working permissions, and the possibility for complaints (Crespo & Inacio, 2019; Winter & Lasch, 2016). To emphasise the social dimension are a few of the criteria more closely characterised beside the definition in the table above.

According to Chan et al (2020), “health and safety practices” are commonly used as a social criterion. López-Fernández and Pasamar (2019) define it as the protection and maintenance of the physical, mental, and social well-being of all workers to the highest possible standards. The criteria “health and safety practices” include aspects of other criteria, such as the criteria “no disciplinary and security practices”, “housing conditions”, or “no disciplinary and security practices”, and can according to Crespo and Inacio (2019) be assembled to the subcategory employees. All these criteria have the common goal of protecting workers from unhealthy working conditions and risks at the workplace and assuring that the workplace is appropriate to the physiological and psychological capabilities of the workers (López-Fernández & Pasamar, 2019). “no discrimination” is another criterion that is, according to Winter and Lasch (2016), commonly used to define the social dimension. “no discrimination” includes job and wage discrimination based on age, ethnic origin, religion, gender and sexual orientation (Brunk, 2010).

Table 5 - Social Dimension: Society and Community

Criteria	Indicators	Authors
Local community	Local development and active labour market strategies. Community events, moving production overseas, any actions that are considered harmful to the local community. ... upliftment of the poor.	(European Commission, 2001, p.12) (Brunk, 2010) (Ghosh et al., 2013, p. 23)
Business community	No corruption, no bribery, special protection for young workers, day care, and an alternative insurance No corruption, the impact the business has on the business community such as suppliers, trade partners, or competitors	(Winter & Lasch, 2016) (Brunk, 2010)
Overseas community	How a business conducts its foreign business through issues relating to foreign workforce, exploitation of natural resources, taking advantage of underdeveloped nations without compensation, and investing in and trading with countries under questionable political regimes.	(Brunk, 2010)

The content of Table 5 shows the social dimension with its subcategory Society and community and its underlying criteria.

The criterion of “local community” is about caring about the local community and economy. Hence trying not to outsource production but carefully consider it, supporting local institutions, and contributing to local charity organisations (Brunk, 2010). The criteria ”local community” and “business community” both are a component of the subcategory society and community and care about the well-being of the community and society (Crespo & Inacio, 2019). Hence, the criteria” local community” and “business community” have in common to be aware of the impact the business has on the local/business community, such as local suppliers, trade partners or competitors, and want to support no corruption, no bribery as well as support the workers.

If a business feeds back to the community, it can lead consumers to identify themselves with the image of the business and become loyal to the brand (Wu & Wang, 2014). Furthermore, Brunk (2010) argues that there is a difference between how the consumers perceive the business’ initiatives locally compared to overseas, where the consumers are more likely to value local initiatives than the ones overseas. The “overseas community” criterion refers to

how the business conducts its foreign business through its workforce, use of natural resources, compensation to underdeveloped communities, and investments with countries with questionable political regimes (Brunk, 2010).

*Table 6 - Environmental Dimension: Environmental Protection*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Authors</b>
End-of-pipe control (wastewater treatment system)	Compliance with legal requirements about wastewater treatment (sewage and wastewater)	(Winter & Lasch, 2016 p.187)
Use of environmentally friendly material	Compliance with environmental standards.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016 p.187)
Carbon and hazardous substance management	Compliance with legal minimum requirements about handling chemicals	(Winter & Lasch, 2016 p.187)
Reducing consumption of resources	Consumption of energy, raw material, water, or non-renewable resources.	(European Commission, 2001) (Winter & Lasch, 2016) (Brunk, 2010) (Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019)
Reducing polluting emissions and waste	Prevent pollution and in general environmental damage.	(European Commission, 2001) (Winter & Lasch, 2016) (Brunk, 2010) (Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019)
Animal protection	Polarizing stand among consumers Develop products without testing it on animals.	(Brunk, 2010) (Ghosh et al., 2013, p.23)

The content of Table 6 comprises the environmental dimension with its subcategory environmental protection and its underlying criteria. A few criteria are more closely characterised beside the definition in Table 6 to emphasise the environmental dimension.

The criteria “reducing consumption of resources” is about the awareness of energy consumption, raw material, water or non-renewable resources as a business (Winter & Lasch, 2016). In addition to including and having overlapping aspects with the criteria and the goals of “end-of-pipe control” (wastewater treatment system). The criteria “environmentally friendly materials” is, according to Winter and Lasch (2016), commonly used to represent the

environmental dimension and refers to materials being compliant with the environmental standards set by the government. The use of environmentally friendly materials can be used to make 'green' packaging, hence resulting in a decline in the use of natural resources (Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014). Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014) argue that this will influence the reduction in environmental waste and the decrease in landfill space. Furthermore, having a lot of overlapping intentions with the criteria "carbon and hazardous substance management", "end-of-pipe control (wastewater treatment system) and "animal protection". Finally, the criteria "reducing polluting emissions and waste" is about being preventative of pollution, waste and in general environmental damage as a business (Winter & Lasch, 2016). According to Crespo and Inacio (2019) are the criteria "reducing consumption of resources", "end-of-pipe control", "environmentally friendly materials", "animal protection", "carbon and hazardous substance management", and "reducing polluting emissions and waste" belonging to the category of environmental protection and are about protecting the environment.

#### *2.4.2.3 CSR communication Summary and conclusions*

Table 7 shows the criteria for the social and environmental dimensions which will be included in the study. After Table 7, there is a summary of the main arguments for CSR communication and the social and environmental dimensions.

Table 7 - Social and Environmental Criteria for this study

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Authors</b>
Social dimension	No discrimination	No discrimination due to race, gender, disability, religion, social origins, cultures, background, family status, memberships, employee organisations, political opinion, and sexual orientation.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016) (European Commission, 2001) (Brunk, 2010)
Social dimension	Health and safety practices	Fire safety, existence of personal protection equipment and precautions for work accidents, compliance with health conditions, temperature, dining area and drinking water.  Occupational health and safety management	(Winter & Lasch, 2016) (European Commission, 2001) (Brunk, 2010)
Social dimension	Local community	Local development and active labour market strategies.  Community events, moving production overseas, any actions that are considered harmful to the local community.  ... upliftment of the poor.	(European Commission, 2001) (Brunk, 2010)  (Ghosh et al., 2013)
Environmental dimension	Reducing consumption of resources	Consumption of energy, raw material, water, or non-renewable resources.	(European Commission, 2001) (Winter & Lasch, 2016) (Brunk, 2010)
Environmental dimension	Use of environmentally friendly material	Compliance with environmental standards.	(Winter & Lasch, 2016)
Environmental dimension	Reducing polluting emissions and waste	Prevent pollution and in general environmental damage.	(European Commission, 2001) (Winter & Lasch, 2016) (Brunk, 2010)

When businesses use CSR communication, it may influence the knowledge, memories and perception the consumer has of CSR activities (Lauritsen & Perks, 2015). However, it seems

that some CSR and CSR communication areas are more important than others. Previous research shows that the social and environmental dimensions of CSR are more interesting and concerning for the consumer (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; European Commission, 2001; Farrow et al., 2021; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019). Hence, CSR communication is often concerned with the social and environmental dimensions of CSR.

It is presented two subcategories for the social dimension: employees and community (Brunk, 2010; Crespo & Inacio, 2019; Dzyabura & Peres, 2021; European Commission, 2001; Ghosh et al., 2013; Winter & Lasch, 2016). Based on the information for the different criteria, it seems that “health and safety” is a criterion commonly used for the social dimension (Chan et al., 2020), hence will be one of the criteria included in this study. Further, Winter and Lasch (2016) argue for the importance of “no discrimination” as part of the social dimension and will be included as a second criterion for the social dimension. According to (Brunk, 2010), there is a difference in how consumers perceive CSR activities within the local community instead of overseas. Additionally, the perception of the business will contribute to the local community being able to build the brand image of the business (Wu & Wang, 2014). Based on these arguments, “local community” will be the last criterion for the social dimension included in this study.

The criteria of the environmental dimension of CSR seem to be targeted toward environmental protection (Brunk, 2010; European Commission, 2001; Ghosh et al., 2013; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Winter & Lasch, 2016), which is per (Crespo & Inacio, 2019) definition of the criteria belonging to environmental protection. The criterion of “reducing the consumption of resources” involves the awareness of the use of different resources within the business (Winter & Lasch, 2016). By businesses being aware of their consumption, the business can communicate this to their consumers. Hence, the criterion of “reducing consumption of resources” is one of the criteria included in this study. Further, is the “use of environmentally friendly materials” commonly used to represent the environmental dimension (Winter & Lasch, 2016). Thus, it will be the second criterion included in this study. Another criterion often mentioned is the “reducing polluting emissions and waste” (Brunk, 2010; Crespo & Inacio, 2019; European Commission, 2001; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Winter & Lasch, 2016), hence will be the last criterion from the environmental dimension used in this study.



## 2.5 Connection between CSR communication and brand image

The communication and the action of the business need to meet the expectations of the consumer, if not it will negatively affect the perception (S. Kim, 2019). Therefore, the trend of higher visibility and CSR communication will make businesses “do more” and “do something unique” to differentiate their brand image (Liu et al., 2014). Further, Popoli (2011) highlights that brand image is influenced by positive or negative opinions of consumers on the degree of social responsibility demonstrated by the business. Similarly, Ghosh et al. (2013) argue that businesses involving themselves in CSR activities will give the business huge leverage to improve their brand image. Using CSR with other attributes to improve brand image and brand personality, makes businesses seem more “friendly” to society and people (Ghosh et al., 2013). Furthermore, becoming more attractive to present and potential consumers (Ghosh et al., 2013).

One way to benefit the overall attitudes of consumers towards a business is to engage in socially responsible behaviour (Chernev & Blair, 2015). This contributes to consumers viewing them as more compassionate, warmer, ethical, trustworthy, and less blameworthy in a corporate crisis (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Initiating a CSR approach can further encourage consumers to actively connect with a brand, further influencing and creating a positive brand image (Wu & Wang, 2014). Furthermore, Lee and Lee (2018) mention that CSR is known to improve brand image and help to enhance the purchase intention of consumers.

Chernev and Blair (2015) claim that CSR often is viewed as a tool for improving the reputations of businesses and creating goodwill among consumers. Additionally, the underlying moral tone of the motivation of the business for participating in CSR will often determine how consumers perceive the action of a brand (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Relatedly, CSR communication has been found to increase the memory and knowledge among consumers of CSR activities and functions as an inquiry in their CSR perception formation and brand image assessment (Lauritsen & Perks, 2015). However, Ghosh et al. (2013) argue that isolated CSR activities may satisfy the consumer immediately, but they will not have a lasting image in the mind of the consumer, and slowly those impressions will fade away.

There is a need to constantly communicate about the CSR initiatives and activities of the business to remain in the mind of the consumer and further improve the brand image of the business. Ghosh et al. (2013) recommend that businesses integrate programmers and target several aspects of societal problems for CSR to be successful. Herewith, the reputation for

social responsibility of the business plays a big role since it tends to increase the brand perception and loyalty of the consumer and decrease their price sensitivity (Chernev & Blair, 2015).

The results of Crespo and Inacio (2019) indicate that the personality and interests of the consumer determine their responses towards CSR, and those who are highly supportive of CSR have more thoughtful and favourable perceptions of CSR initiatives. Further, Yang et al. (2017) found that businesses with green fashion marketing efforts will create a positive brand image and increase purchase intentions from potential and existing consumers concerned with environmental issues. Until now, the fast fashion industry has been notorious for its low labour standards, which oppose the definition of CSR and can harm its brand image (Lee & Lee, 2018). Herewith, fast fashion businesses see CSR as an essential element of improving their image and sales (Lee & Lee, 2018). Oppositely, Moon and Lee (2018) found that consumers would only buy environmentally friendly clothes when it was trendy, up-to-date, and in price due to their purchase being attached to the clothing rather than to the social cause. Hence, sustainable brands must fulfil the same market requirements as their competitors to succeed (Moon & Lee, 2018).

When considering a brand, consumers often consider as many factors as possible hence associations connected to multiple other associations will have more influence on brand attitude than those not connected to other or fewer associations (Y. Kim & Oh, 2020). Thus, it becomes more desirable for the consumer the more transparent the information sharing is from businesses about sustainability in the supply chain (Shen, 2014). Brunk (2010) argues that concealment of important product details and sales strategies prevents trying other products and harms the brand perception.

Reinforcing brand image through CSR practice can be difficult since consumers can observe the difference between actual behaviour and mere image promoting operations based on declaration (Popoli, 2011). Lee and Lee (2018) argue that it is important for consumers to perceive reciprocity. Thus brands must help consumers appreciate their efforts by how they are working towards improving the community of the consumer (Lee & Lee, 2018). Hence, if businesses lack an understanding of the attributes of consumer engagement connected to CSR, it can lead to scepticism, consequently reducing the value of the brand for the consumer (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). However, Brunk (2010) argues that businesses must consider their activities according to their specific business context and communicate the concerns of

their consumers through corporate communication. Y. Kim and Oh's (2020) findings show that the perception of the consumer on the fit between the brand and sustainability will have a positive evaluation of the extension and accordingly suggests that the knowledge the consumer has of the brand should be considered when presenting sustainability as an image for a brand.

Businesses must understand how consumers think since it often is the unethical perceptions of the business that cause a faltering brand image (Brunk, 2010). CSR activities such as improving factory working conditions, working for greater equality and opportunity, building stronger communities and protecting the environment carried out by a business affect how the consumers see a business and their purchase intention (Lee & Lee, 2018). According to Vera-Martínez et al. (2021), the social dimension has a significant association with the credibility of the business and brand identification. Further, Du et al. (2010) argue that businesses investing in social initiatives will be able to generate favourable consumer attitudes and behaviours. In addition to, in the long term, improve their brand image, strengthen business-consumer relationships, and enhance consumer advocacy behaviours for the business (Du et al., 2010). However, the environmental and social activities of the business are often less well-known and can be challenging to analyse due to their complex nature, where consumers may be less sensitive to CSR communication if their awareness is limited (Liu et al., 2014).

Ramesh et al. (2019) suggest that respecting the environment, reducing the consumption of natural resources, engaging in social causes, and providing fair treatment to employees are connected to expanding a positive brand image. Similarly, Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019) argue that businesses should prioritise environmental CSR activities because consumers tend to support and reward businesses perceived as socially responsible. Including environmentally oriented CSR, such as the incorporation of environmental sustainability and the support of environmental activities into the operations of a business can, according to Wu and Wang (2014), strengthen brand image in the mind of the consumer. The research of Rodrigues and Borges (2015) verify that personal concerns regarding the environment and recycling play an important role in consumer decision. Consequently, a business that cares about environmental protection and seeks to maintain the natural environment can improve its brand image. Hence, social and environmental CSR can enhance the brand image of a business (Wu & Wang, 2014).

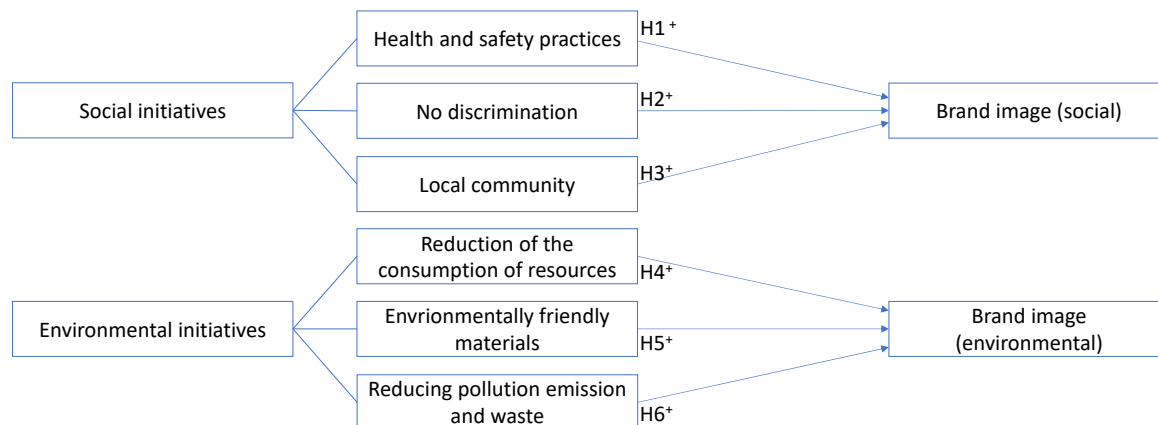
To better understand how CSR communication impacts brand image, studies focus on the concept of brand social responsibility image, referring to the perception and knowledge of the consumer about the activities and status of the business when it comes to its societal obligations

(He et al., 2016). In contrast, Lee and Chen (2019) explore the relation between CSR communication and green image, dividing brand image into a corporate image, social image, and product image. Moreover, Blombäck and Scandeliuss (2013) focus on the responsible brand image through their study of the effect of corporate heritage as a component in planned communication. Referring to the collective ratings of consumers on the social and environmental responsibilities of the brand and whether these are met (Blombäck & Scandeliuss, 2013). Accordingly, to understand the relation between the social and environmental dimensions criteria, they must be measured against the right side of brand image. By dividing the brand image into a social brand image and an environmental brand image, the study can capture nuances of the concept and tell the effect of the criteria against the appropriate brand image.

According to the discussion above, there is done research on how the social and environmental dimension affects brand image through CSR communication. However, to our knowledge, there is no research done on how CSR communication about each of the criteria influences the brand image. This is further discussed in chapter 2.6 *Summary: Discussions and conclusions*.

## 2.6 Summary: Discussion and conclusions

This chapter summarises the theoretical implications described through the definitions and discussion of the previous research. The research model (see Figure 1) summarises the theoretical implications and the research question.



*Figure 1 - Research Model*

As Winter and Lasch (2016) mention, is little research performed on the application of environmental and social dimensions relating to purchasing practices. Moreover, to our knowledge, less research has been conducted on how each of the criteria within the social and environmental dimension affects brand perception, precisely brand image.

Due to the limited research, to our knowledge, on how CSR communication about each of the criteria, namely “health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, “local community”, “reducing consumption of resources”, “use of environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste”, will influence brand image the research model is based on the knowledge from previous literature about the overall social and environmental dimension (Ramesh et al., 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014). Understanding how CSR communication about each of the criteria influences brand image will provide a better understanding of how a business can govern their brand image and which of the criteria should be the focus of the business. The following chapter will present the hypothesis for this study and argumentation for each of them.

## 2.7 Hypotheses

### 2.7.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the hypotheses for this study. The hypotheses are based on previous research on the relation between CSR-communication influencing the brand image. To our knowledge, the previous research has been done on CSR communication as a collective term consisting of several dimensions for CSR or through investigating how the social and

environmental dimensions influence brand image (Brunk, 2010; Du et al., 2010; Ghosh et al., 2013; Y. Kim & Oh, 2020; Lauritsen & Perks, 2015; Lee & Lee, 2018; Liu et al., 2014; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Popoli, 2011; Ramesh et al., 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014). Hence, by analysing the social and environmental dimensions through different criteria for each dimension, it is expected that each criterion will have a similar influence on brand image as the dimensions of CSR communication. The criteria for the social dimension (*health and safety, no discrimination, local community*) and the environmental dimension (*reducing consumption of resources, environmentally friendly materials, and polluting emissions and waste*) are expected to have a positive influence based on previous research (Ramesh et al., 2019; Wu & Wang, 2014).

The literature review has provided six hypotheses, where three hypotheses are based on criteria from the social dimension, and three hypotheses are based on the environmental dimension. First, the hypotheses for the social dimension and its relation to brand image are presented with their argumentation. Second, the argumentation and hypotheses for the environmental dimension are presented. Last, there is an overview of all hypotheses and the theoretical model.

### 2.7.2 CSR communication about the social dimension and brand image

When Chan et al. (2020) explain the social dimension of CSR, they describe it as how the society is affected by the business' activities and how the business can contribute to enhancing the welfare and benefits of its workers. Since the social dimension covers several different responsibilities businesses must fulfil, three different hypotheses based on three criteria from the social dimension are defined.

“Health and safety practices” are an important criterion for the social dimension. By implementing “health and safety practices”, the business aims to protect its employees (López-Fernández & Pasamar, 2019). The previous research on the connection between the social dimension of CSR and brand image indicates that CSR communication about the “health and safety practices” will contribute to positively increasing the brand image of the business. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: Health and safety practices are positively related to brand image (social)*

The criterion “no discrimination” is, according to Winter and Lasch (2016), commonly used when defining the social dimension. By not discriminating according to age, ethnic origin, religion, gender and sexual orientation (Brunk, 2010), the business shows that they respect all humans. The social dimension has a significant role in the business’ credibility and brand identification (Vera-Martínez et al., 2021), influencing the brand image of the business (Wu & Wang, 2014). The impact the social dimension has on brand image indicates through previous research that communication about “no discrimination” will positively influence brand image. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: No discrimination practices in a business are positively related to brand image (social)*

Consumers can often identify themselves with the image of a business if the business gives back to the community and carries out its social responsibility (Wu & Wang, 2014). Similarly, Lee and Lee (2018) argue, that if brands help the consumers appreciate their efforts through the business’ contributions to the consumer’s community, it will leave the consumer with a perception of reciprocity. Additionally, Brunk (2010) argues that consumers are more concerned about the businesses’ practices in their local community than practices overseas. Based on these arguments, it seems that CSR communication about the businesses’ practices towards the local community will have a positive influence on the brand image. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3: Interactions with the local community are positively related to brand image (social)*

### 2.7.3 CSR communication about the environmental dimension and brand image

As Wu and Wang (2014) mention, can businesses that care about environmental protection and seek to maintain the natural environment enhance their brand image. Similarly, Ramesh et al. (2019) argue that reducing the consumption of natural resources and respecting the environment can expand the brand image. This is because including environmentally oriented CSR, such as supporting environmental activities and incorporating environmental sustainability into the business can strengthen the brand image in the consumer’s mind (Wu & Wang, 2014).

Chan et al (2020) define the environmental dimension as to how the business can minimise the potential negative effect on the environment. Hence, there are several different initiatives a business can take to prevent harming the environment. Underneath it is argued for the three criteria for the environmental dimension and the influence they will have on brand image. With previous research on the influence of CSR communication about the environmental dimension have on brand image.

The criterion of "educing consumption of resources" is, according to Winter and Lasch (2016), about the awareness of the consumption of energy, raw material, water, or non-renewable resources by businesses. Further, Ramesh et al. (2019) argue that reducing the consumption of natural resources is connected to expanding a positive brand image. Based on these arguments and previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Reducing the consumption of resources is positively related to brand image (environmental)*

The criterion "use of environmentally friendly materials" is about businesses complying with the environmental standards of the industry (Winter & Lasch, 2016). According to Zhang et al. (2021), consumers tend to prefer natural and durable materials when becoming aware of environmental issues and their importance. Based on this argument and previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

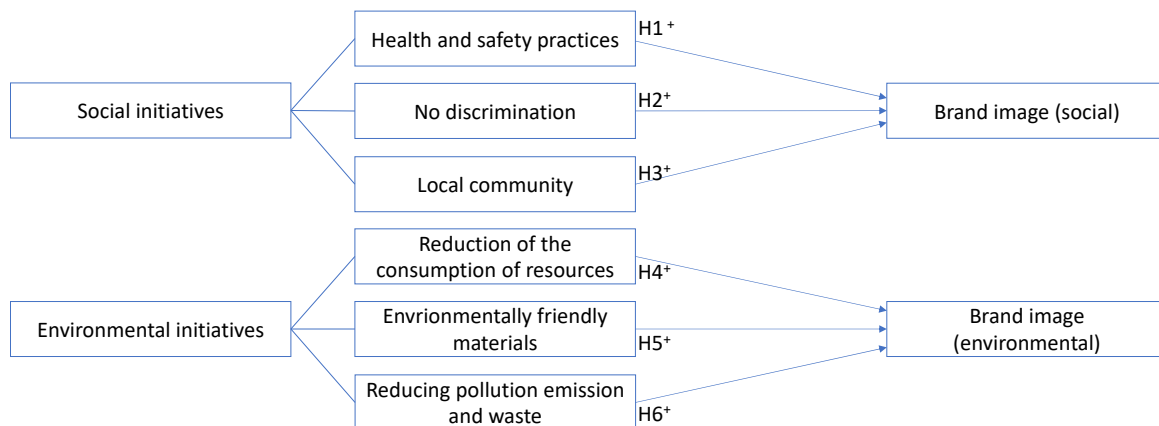
*H5: Use of environmentally friendly materials is positively related to brand image (environmental)*

The criterion of "reducing polluting emissions and waste" is about preventing pollution and environmental damage (Brunk, 2010; European Commission, 2001; Winter & Lasch, 2016). According to Wu and Wang (2014), caring about environmental protection help businesses improve their brand image. Based on this argument and previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H6: Reducing polluting emissions and waste is positively related to brand image (environmental)*



## 2.7.4 Summary



*Figure 2 – Research model*

H1: Health and safety practices are positively related to brand image (social).

H2: No discrimination practices in a business are positively related to brand image (social)

H3: Interactions with the local community are positively related to brand image (social)

H4: Reducing consumption of resources is positively related to brand image (environmental)

H5: Use of environmentally friendly material is positively related to brand image (environmental)

H6: Reducing polluting emissions and waste is positively related to brand image (environmental)

## 3 Methodology

This chapter explains the chosen methodological approach for the study, where the research design, methods for data collecting, processing, and discussing data are presented and discussed. First, the research design and method are presented. Further, the data collection with the selection of informants, the construction of the questionnaire, and the pre-tests are described. Last, the validity and reliability of the study are assessed, before ending the chapter with a discussion of the ethicality of this study.

### 3.1 Research design

The research design provides a framework for collecting and analysing the data in the study and is dependent on the topic of the research (Clark et al., 2021). Hence, choosing a research design that can answer the aim of the study is essential (Oppen et al., 2020).

There are three different research designs: explorative, descriptive, and causal. Explorative design is used when researchers want to define new concepts or develop hypotheses (Oppen et al., 2020). By doing a thorough literature search to understand how concepts are defined in previous research, see chapter 2.2. The descriptive design aims to describe the concepts researched, for instance, a phenomenon or situation and is not meant to describe anything connected to cause and to relate between different variables (Oppen et al., 2020). A causal research design aims to research the cause and influence of different variables (Oppen et al., 2020).

This study chooses a causal quantitative research design for the data collection through a self-completion questionnaire. The aim is to discover the influence different CSR communication themes (causes) have on brand image, particularly the discovery of a connection between the concepts (Oppen et al., 2020). Hence, it is important to know the different variables that may affect brand image and select these variables for further research (Oppen et al., 2020). Previous research using the collective terms when looking for the relation between CSR communication and brand image states a connection between these two variables. Hence it is reasonable to assume a similar effect between the six chosen criteria of CSR communication and brand image (social and environmental) used in this study. However, even though this study uses several

variables, there will be variables that are not applied affecting the causality of this study. Hence, the study can discover connections rather than causality.

The cross-sectional design fits the aim of the study to understand better how the perceived CSR communication of the brand influences the brand image at a single point in time. The cross-sectional research design involves collecting data at a single point in time, where the researchers collect a body of quantifiable and quantitative data in connection with two or more variables (Clark et al., 2021). The study collects the body of quantitative data through several different variables, which are examined to detect patterns of associations, allowing the identification of relationships between the variables (Clark et al., 2021).

An advantage of the cross-sectional design is that it reveals a quantification for a consistent benchmark and can identify relationships between the variables. However, a limitation of using a cross-sectional design is the restriction of time-dependent analysis. Using the currently available and collected dataset at one point, spring 2022, only this single period is the foundation for the observations. The reason for conducting the data collection at a single point in time is the limited time available for data collection, even though this could limit the validity of the study.

### 3.2 Research method

There are two main methods when choosing the methodology for the study: quantitative and qualitative. In the qualitative method, the objective is often related to deep dive into a topic to answer questions as to why and how (Oppen et al., 2020). On the other hand, the quantitative method aims to understand the width of the topic, how many, and how often (Oppen et al., 2020). Since the study aims to understand how CSR communication influences brand image, the study is conducted through a quantitative methodology. The reason is that the aim is to explore the relative importance of different CSR communication activities on the consumer's brand image, where Clark et al. (2021) suggest that quantitative methodology will fit these needs. The quantitative method makes it possible to study large populations and create statistical generalisations, where the degree of probability decides whether it is reasonable to assume that the gained knowledge is representative of reality (Oppen et al., 2020).

The quantitative research process further indicates quantification in the collection and analysis of data, and being linear (Clark et al., 2021; Oppen et al., 2020). However, since the research process is quite linear, it is difficult to make considerable changes later in the process and it can be costly to redo the data collection (Oppen et al., 2020). Further, quantitative research is often criticised for ignoring that people have different understandings of the world. Hence some researchers claim that it is not appropriate for studying the social world (Clark et al., 2021). As well as, the reliance on instruments and procedures can limit the connection between research and everyday life and create a static view of social life as if it is independent of people's life (Clark et al., 2021). According to Clark et al (2021), a response can be formulated by using fixed-choice answers in questionnaires, just solving the problem by ignoring it.

### 3.2.1. Method for data collection

The data is collected through a self-completion questionnaire with closed-ended questions in this study. As mentioned previously, this could limit the research since it does not account for the respondent's different perceptions of the world around them. However, it will provide the opportunity to make statistical generalisations. Self-completion questionnaires involve that respondents complete the questionnaire themselves by answering the questions (Clark et al., 2021).

There are several advantages of using a self-completion questionnaire. For instance, cheap and quick to administer by sending out an unlimited number of invitations to online questionnaires, which is often convenient for the respondents (Clark et al., 2021). A self-completion questionnaire is used for the data collection to reach as many respondents as possible during a limited time. Nettskjema was used to develop and publish the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed through private social media and emails to professors and a student union leader to reach as many as possible. Using social media and distributing the questionnaire through the Internet will be self-recruitment for the study and can be problematic when aiming for a representative sample (Oppen et al., 2020). Since social media and the Internet are used to distribute the questionnaire, there is no overview of whom has answered the questionnaire, hence there are limited possibilities for a representative sample of the population being used in this study (Clark et al., 2021; Oppen et al., 2020). Additionally, it was recommended that respondent share the questionnaire with their friends and followers to reach more respondents, hence using the snowball method.

With self-completion questionnaires, there are no possibilities for interviewer effects, such as respondents feeling uneasy if their answer does not correspond with social norms (Clark et al., 2021). This is relevant for the study due to the increased focus on CSR and sustainability, where consumers may want to present themselves as more aware of these issues and for others to perceive their actions as more social and environmentally friendly than they are. However, some limitations of using self-completion questionnaires compared to interviews are that there are no opportunities for the respondents to ask questions about the questionnaire, hence the questions must be clear and unambiguous (Clark et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is recommended to limit the number of questions in the questionnaire to avoid respondents getting tired and losing their concentration when answering (Clark et al., 2021; Oppen et al., 2020). Another limitation of self-completion questionnaires is that the response rate tends to be lower (Oppen et al., 2020). A lower response rate may affect the representativeness of the sample, hence the external validity of the findings (Clark et al., 2021).

### 3.3 Data collection

#### 3.3.1 Population and selection of respondents

The population for this study is consumers of the fast fashion industry above the age of 18, aiming to investigate if the CSR communication of the business affects the brand image of the respondents. When choosing the sample of the population to participate in the study, there is to choose from probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Clark et al., 2021). Probability sampling uses a random selection, where each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected (Clark et al., 2021). In contrast, non-probability sampling implies using a method where some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others (Clark et al., 2021). This study uses non-probability sampling to research how the perception and attitude of the consumers towards CSR through CSR communication relate to brand image.

Applying convenience sampling can have the disadvantages of leading to biases in the selection and can cause problems with generalisation. According to Clark et al. (2021), a consequence of sampling bias can be a distortion in the representativeness of the sample that arises when some members of the population stand little or no chance of inclusion in the sample. The questionnaire was distributed to women and men of different ages through social media, which is intended to increase the variation and breadth of the sample. However, there will still be

limited opportunities for the sample to represent the population, which will make generalisations about the population more challenging.

### 3.3.2 Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is associated with relevant literature, and the different items are divided into different variables based on the different dimensions and criteria from the literature review. The questionnaire must be based on items from previous research to ensure a good questionnaire. Using items from previous research provides insight into the reliability and validity of the questions and provides the opportunity to compare the findings of this study to previous research (Clark et al., 2021).

The items in the questionnaire are either adapted or adopted from previous research. Herewith the items were partly tested and validated through other studies. However, since most of them are adapted, they are not identical and therewith not perfectly comparable. Having several items on each variable in this study ensures that more aspects of the variable are covered. When deciding the items of the study, the aim was to cover several aspects of each variable. Hence it is used at least three items to cover each variable.

The questionnaire is translated to Norwegian from English to avoid misunderstandings among respondents. The translation is done by two former students from the International Baccalaureate Programme with a Bilingual Diploma with Norwegian and English as their first language. Two pre-tests are performed to ensure that the items are easy to follow and understandable after the translation before distributing the questionnaire. The results of the pre-tests and the changes applied accordingly are discussed further down.

The questionnaire uses closed-ended questions, entailing that the respondents receive items with fixed answer options. Applying closed-ended items is chosen to be more functional in processing the answers. Administering close-ended items allows having pre-codes for the fixed choice answers to be automatically entered into the software program (SPSS). A seven-point scale was used, where the respondents could choose from the alternatives; strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, either agree or disagree, somewhat agree, agree, completely agree (see translation in Appendix 1).

Questions are asked about the age and gender of the respondents to gain information about the sample of the study. This information is not relevant for answering the research question. However, it is still collected since it provides insight into who the respondents are.

### *3.3.2.1 Operationalisation of variables*

Operationalisation represents how the variables of the study are measured (Oppen et al., 2020). This chapter shows the chosen items for the questionnaire and the articles used.

Items about general information and brand image are mostly adapted. A few items were adopted from Zhang et al. (2021) and are chosen due to their similarity in research direction, the fashion industry, the topic of sustainability, and their correspondence with the research purpose.

Items adapted from Rodrigues and Borges (2015) are relevant by focusing on CSR activities, such as the social and environmental dimensions. Items from Liu et al. (2014) are adopted due to their relevant items concerning the environmental and social dimensions, despite their study focusing on the hotel industry; hence the adapted items are made to fit this study and the fashion industry. Further, Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019) have suitable items for the environmental and social dimensions. Due to Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019) focus on the hotel industry, the items are adapted to fit this research. S. Kim and Ferguson (2018) have relevant items concerning CSR activities of the business in context to perception and expectations of the consumer, hence being relevant for this study and adapting some items. The research of Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014) focuses on environmentally friendly packaging and consumer perception; hence has some significant items that are adapted to fit this study. Items about brand image were adapted from Foroudi et al. (2018) due to their relevance in measuring brand perception and brand image in their research. In addition to the items adapted from Rao et al. (2021) because of their pertinence in measuring brand image.

### *Health and safety practices*

The variable of “health and safety practices” is measured by three items (Table 8). Two items adapted from Rodrigues and Borges (2015), and one item adapted from Liu et al. (2014) and Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019).

Table 8-- Items: Health and Safety

Code	Item		Source
HS_1	I do not buy clothes from fast fashion brands whose employees live and work in poor conditions.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
HS_2	If possible, I buy clothes from fast fashion brands that provide a healthy and safe working environment for employees.	Adapted	(Liu et al., 2014; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019)
HS_3	If possible, I will not buy clothes if the fast fashion brand that sells it has poor health and safety practices.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)

### *No discrimination*

The variable for “no discrimination” is measured by four items (Table 9), where three items are adapted from Rodrigues and Borges (2015), and one item adapted from S. Kim and Ferguson (2018).

Table 9-- Items: No Discrimination

Code	Item		Source
ND_1	I do not buy clothes that use advertising depicting minority groups in a negative way.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
ND_2	In the past, I have not purchased clothes because its advertising depicted women in the wrong way.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
ND_3	I do not buy clothes from fast fashion brands that discriminates against minorities	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
ND_4	I want to know potential results of a business' current no discrimination practices.	Adapted	(S. Kim & Ferguson, 2018)

### *Local community*

The variable of “local community” is measured by four items (Table 10). Two items adapted from Liu et al. (2014) and Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019) in combination with Zhang et al. (2021). In addition to one item adapted from Rodrigues & Borges, 2015), and one item adapted from S. Kim and Ferguson (2018).



Table 10-- Items: Local Community

Code	Item		Source
LC_1	If possible, I only buy clothes from brands contributing to campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of society.	Adapted	(Liu et al., 2014; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019)
LC_2	If possible, I will only buy clothes from a brand targeting sustainable growth, which considers and creates a better life for future generations.	Adapted	(Liu et al., 2014; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021)
LC_3	If possible, I will not buy clothes if the fast fashion brand that sells it harms the local community.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
LC_4	I want to know potential results of a fast fashion brands current activities for the local community	Adapted	(S. Kim & Ferguson, 2018)

### *Reducing consumption of resources*

The variable for “reducing consumption of resources” is measured by four items (Table 11). Two items are adapted from Rodrigues and Borges (2015), one is adapted from Liu et al. (2014) and Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2019), and the last one is adapted from Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014).

Table 11-- Items: Reducing Consumption of Resources

Code	Item		Source
RCR_1	I only try to buy clothes that are made from materials that can be recycled.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
RCR_2	I only buy clothes from brands that implement special programmes to reduce consumption.	Adapted	(Liu et al., 2014; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019)
RCR_3	If possible, I only buy clothes from brands that use recyclable materials	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
RCR_4	If possible, I only buy clothes from brands using recyclable materials.	Adapted	(Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014)

### *Environmentally friendly materials*

The variable of “environmentally friendly materials” is measured with four items (Table 12). Two items are adapted and a combination of Rodrigues and Borges (2015) and Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014). One item is adapted from Rodrigues and Borges (2015), and one is adapted from S. Kim and Ferguson (2018).

*Table 12-- Items: Environmentally Friendly Materials*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Item</b>		<b>Source</b>
EFM_1	If possible, I will choose the clothes that are environmentally friendly.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014)
EFM_2	I have purchased products because they are made from organic or green materials.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014)
EFM_3	If possible, I will buy clothes from fast fashion brands that use environmentally friendly materials.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
EFM_4	I want to know potential results of a business' current practices of using environmentally friendly materials.	Adapted	(S. Kim & Ferguson, 2018)

### *Reducing polluting emissions and waste*

The variable of “reducing polluting emissions and waste” is measured by four items (Table 13). One item is adopted from Zhang et al. (2021), one item is adopted from Parguel et al. (2011). Whereas one item is adapted from (Rodrigues & Borges 2015), and the last item is adopted from S. Kim and Ferguson (2018).

Table 13-- Items: Reducing Polluting Emissions and Waste

Code	Item		Source
PEW_1	I feel disgusted when I learn how much waste and pollution are generated by the fast fashion industry.	Adopted	(Zhang et al., 2021)
PEW_2	I try not to buy from a fast fashion brand that strongly pollutes.	Adopted	(Parguel et al., 2011)
PEW_3	If possible, I always choose clothes that contribute to the least amount of pollution.	Adapted	(Rodrigues & Borges, 2015)
PEW_4	I want to know potential results of a fast fashion brand's current practices to reduce polluting emission and waste	Adapted	(S. Kim & Ferguson, 2018)

*Brand Image – Social and environmental dimension*

The concept of brand image is divided into two variables “brand image – social” and “brand image – environmental” and are measured by four items (Table 14 and Table 15). Two items are adapted to both the variables from Zhang et al. (2021), one item adapted from Foroudi et al. 2018) and one item from Rao et al. (2021).

Table 14 – Items: Brand Image (Social)

Code	Item		Source
BIS_1	I feel good if I choose a fast fashion brand that engages in promoting social activities	Adapted	(Zhang et al., 2021)
BIS_2	I feel interested in fast fashion brands that engages in promoting social activities	Adapted	(Zhang et al., 2021)
BIS_3	I like the fast fashion brands that promotes social activities	Adapted	(Foroudi et al., 2018)
BIS_4	Communicating about social activities makes the brand attractive to me as the consumer.	Adapted	(Rao et al., 2021)

Table 15 – Items: Brand Image (Environmental)

Code	Item		Source
BIE_1	I feel good if I choose a fast fashion brand that engages in promoting environmental activities	Adapted	(Zhang et al., 2021)
BIE_2	I feel interested in fast fashion brands that engages in promoting environmental activities	Adapted	(Zhang et al., 2021)
BIE_3	I like the fast fashion brands that promotes environmental activities	Adapted	(Foroudi et al., 2018)
BIE_4	Communicating about environmental activities makes the fast fashion brand attractive to me as the consumer.	Adapted	(Rao et al., 2021)

### 3.3.3 Pre-tests

A pre-test (pilot study) is performed before administering the actual questionnaire to detect faults in the questionnaire. Clark et al. (2021) refer to the importance of conducting a pilot study to check that the items of the questionnaire operate well and to check if the research instrument functions effectively. Pre-testing is especially important in self-completion questionnaires, which is the case in this study since no interviewer present could clear up any confusion (Clark et al., 2021). The selected respondents for the pre-test were chosen since they are comparable to members of the population from which the sample of the study is taken.

There are two pre-tests in total completed. The first pre-test was conducted with only a few people, such as family members and friends, to get general feedback such as detecting if the questionnaire has the right length and if the items are comprehensible. The feedback was similar in writing the questions more accurately and reducing the number of items. Otherwise, the questionnaire was too long, and the respondents would get tired of answering all the items, leading to not all of them finishing it. Thus, the questionnaire was altered and shortened by removing redundant items. Furthermore, the respondent wanted a description of what was meant by fast fashion, brand image (social dimension), and brand image (environmental dimension). Hence information based on the definitions of Dahlsrud (2008) for the social and environmental dimensions was applied, in addition to the fast fashion characteristics from [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#).

The second pre-test was conducted with university students. From the second pre-test, the response was to be more specific about the meaning of some items. Further, it was commented

on the similarity of some items, and the vocabulary of some items was unclear. Concludingly, some items were rewritten, specifying more clearly the meaning and indication of the item as well as changing the vocabulary to make it more comprehensible. Fundamentally, removing the few items that were too similar and therewith were excessive.

### 3.4 Validity and reliability of the collected data

In research studies, especially those using the quantitative method, measures must be valid and reliable. Hence, validity is a criterion of quality in all investigation studies, which is concerned with the integrity of conclusions generated from a piece of research (Clark et al., 2021). Validity can be divided into internal- and external validity. Internal validity relates mainly to the issue of causality, concerning whether a conclusion proposing a causal relationship between variables is fundamentally convincing (Clark et al., 2021). Correct implementation of the questionnaire is a way to achieve intern validity. Before the questionnaire was sent to different professors and spread on social media, pre-tests were conducted, and changes were made to improve the questionnaire (chapter 3.3.3). Achieving a high internal validity requires that no errors occur when the data material is collected and analysed.

External validity concerns whether the results of the study can be generalised beyond the specific research contexts. The questionnaire was shared on social media and distributed by university lecturers and one student association leader in this study. Hence convenience sampling and not random sampling is used in this study. Herewith the transferability to a larger population must be interpreted with care.

Reliability is concerned with the consistency of measures (Clark et al., 2021), indicating whether the results are reliable, stable and reproducible. This suggests that other researchers would come to the main results by doing the same research (Oppen et al., 2020). The items in this questionnaire are adapted, meaning they are somewhat comparable to previous studies as well as there were pre-tests to ensure the questions are understandable and relevant. As mentioned, can pre-testing further reduce the risk of misinterpretation of the respondents and facilitate the use by future researchers. Using an electronic questionnaire on Nettskjema.no also reduces measurement errors occurring through the manual processing of questionnaires. This way, incorrect registrations can be reduced since everything is done electronically. Such as the

data collection of the responses to transferring the data from Nettskjema.no to the analysis-program SPSS is increasing the reliability of this research.

### 3.5 Ethics

When considering the ethical aspects and information of the respondents, the questionnaire is completely anonymous. The anonymity extension provided by the used creation tool (Nettskjema.no) ensures that the researchers have no access to personal information. Meaning that the answers to the questionnaire cannot be traced back to the respondents. The only personal information provided by the respondents is gender and age, which cannot lead to any identification of the respondents since the questionnaire was distributed through social media and university Canvas internet platforms, implicating a range between 1000-2000 people. Due to the provided checklist from NSD indicating that an application is not required for this research as the questionnaire is completely anonymous and does not deal with any sensitive topics, there is not sent an application to NSD.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter shows the data material, analysis, and results of the study and its hypothesis. All 145 respondents answered all of the items, and therefore the statistics contain the whole sample. First, the descriptive statistics are presented, containing the age and gender of the sample. Second, skewness and kurtosis for different items are discussed. Third, the convergent and divergent factor analyses are introduced. Thereafter, the correlation analyses are shown. Fifth, the multiple regression analysis is given by using seven regression assumptions. Last, a conclusion is drawn on the relation between the results and the hypotheses.

### 4.2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics is about describing the variables that emerge from the analyses of the data received. Table 16 shows the age difference of the respondents, whereas Table 17 shows the gender distribution.

*Table 16-- Descriptive Statistics: Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-24	55	37,6 %
25-30	51	35,1 %
31-40	6	4,2 %
41-50	11	7,7 %
51-60	14	9,8 %
61 or older	8	5,6 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Missing system	1	
Total	146	

Table 16 shows the distribution by the age of the respondents. A wide distribution of ages from 18 to 61 or older can be seen. The respondents from 18 to 61 or older are all included in the analysis. However, one respondent was not included in the analysis due to being below the age of 18. This respondent is shown as missing in Table 16. The results reveal a difference in how

many respondents each age group has. This inequality is based on sharing this questionnaire on social media. Most of the acquaintances have around the same age as the investigating researchers within the age groups from 18-24 and 25-30. As well as the university lecturers and the leader of the student association distributed the questionnaire to their students, also having the same age. This is represented in Table 16 showing 37,6 and 35,1%, resulting in a total of 72,7 % of all the respondents.

*Table 17-- Descriptive Statistics: Gender*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Women	106	73,1 %
Men	39	26,9 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Missing system	1	
Total	146	

Table 17 displays the gender distribution of the respondents. A much higher number of women are detected than men responding to the questionnaire. The gender statistics show 106 women and 39 men out of the 145 respondents. Having such a large difference in gender distribution challenges a generalisation of the findings in this questionnaire because it is not representative of the general distribution of gender in the overall population.

### 4.3 Skewness and kurtosis

Skewness and kurtosis are examined according to the normal probability plot to better understand the distribution of the data material. The skewness determines whether the data material is skewed either to the right or left, whereas kurtosis describes whether the data material is either platykurtic or leptokurtic. The limits for standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis are +/- 2, based on the recommendations of [Oppen et al. \(2020\)](#), and further in more detail, their recommendation for +/- 1 very skewed, +/- 1 to +/- 1/2 moderately skewed, and +/- 1/2 slightly skewed are used.



#### 4.3.1 Social dimension

Table 18-- *Skewness and Kurtosis: Social Dimension*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. deviation</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
HS_1	1	7	4,14	1,575	-0,101	-0,675
HS_2	1	7	5,31	1,465	-0,862	0,384
HS_3	1	7	5,07	1,508	-0,624	-0,061
ND_1	1	7	5,56	1,448	-0,919	-0,407
ND_2	1	7	5,53	1,491	-0,966	0,461
ND_3	1	7	5,66	1,405	-0,901	0,292
ND_4	1	7	5,61	1,430	-0,941	0,467
LC_1	1	7	5,22	1,250	-0,536	0,559
LC_2	1	7	5,41	1,256	-0,761	0,907
LC_3	1	7	5,97	1,118	-1,186	1,823
LC_4	1	7	5,41	1,402	-0,480	-0,503

Table 18 shows that all items are within the limit of  $\pm 2$  for skewness, kurtosis, and standard deviation. The mean for all items is between 4,14 and 5,97, with the standard deviation between 1,118 to 1,575. The skewness of the items varies between -0,101 and -1,186, which indicates that all items have a right-handed tail. Nearly all items are slightly skewed to the right, except LC\_3. LC\_3 is very skewed to the right. The kurtosis for the items varies between -0,675 and 1,823, where HS\_1, HS\_3, ND\_1, and LC\_4 are platykurtic (negative), whereas the remaining items are leptokurtic (positive). Based on the results from the social dimension, all items are within the limit for skewness, kurtosis, and standard deviation and are kept for further analysis.

### 4.3.2 Environmental dimension

Table 19-- Skewness and Kurtosis: Environmental Dimension

Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
RCR_1	1	7	4,90	1,480	-0,497	-0,260
RCR_2	1	7	3,90	1,466	-0,033	-0,397
RCR_3	1	7	4,23	1,593	-0,077	-0,502
RCR_4	1	7	4,55	1,532	-0,458	-0,077
EFM_1	1	2	5,62	1,339	-1,054	1,262
EFM_2	1	7	4,32	1,840	-0,332	-0,830
EFM_3	1	7	4,50	1,621	-0,376	-0,498
EFM_4	1	7	5,50	1,463	-0,816	0,081
PEW_1	2	7	6,05	1,227	-1,375	1,451
PEW_2	1	7	5,10	1,466	-0,597	0,068
PEW_3	1	7	5,26	1,378	-0,761	0,419
PEW_4	1	7	5,69	1,341	-0,868	0,598

Table 19 shows that all items are within the limit of +/- 2 for skewness, kurtosis, and standard deviation. The mean for all items is between 3,90 and 6,05, with the standard deviation between 1,227 to 1,840. The skewness of the items varies between -0,033 and -1,375, indicating that all items have a right-handed tail. Most of the items are slightly skewed to the right. However, EFM\_1 and PEW\_1 are very skewed to the right, and EFM\_1 and PEW\_4 are moderately skewed to the right. The kurtosis for the items varies between -0,077 and 1,451, where EFM\_1, EFM\_4, and PEW\_1-4 are leptokurtic (positive), and the rest of the items are platykurtic (negative). Given these results, all items are within the limit of skewness, kurtosis, and standard deviation and are kept for further analysis.

### 4.4 Factor analysis

Factor analyses are a collective term for several different approaches to reducing data, which is often useful, albeit when having several items measuring the same term (Oppen et al., 2020). In the following chapters, the convergent and divergent factor analysis for the social and the

environmental dimension is carried out. In both the convergent and the divergent factor analysis, “maximum likelihood”, is chosen by giving the strictest results. Using “maximum likelihood”, then “direct oblimin” must be selected in this performance by requiring more than three items, which is the case in this study. In factor analysis, factor scores should generally be between 0,3 to 0,5 for having adequate results, whereas a value of over 0,7 means the variable measures the term solidly (Oppen et al., 2020).

#### 4.4.1 Convergent Factor analysis

In the convergent factor analysis it is examined whether elements within the same variable correlate highly with each other or not (Oppen et al., 2020). In other words, it is analysed if the items under the variables social dimension correlate with each other and the same with the items of the environmental dimension.

Table 20-- Convergent Factor Analysis: Social and Environmental Dimension

Variable		Factor charge
Health and safety	HS_1	0,681
	HS_2	0,813
	HS_3	0,866
No discrimination	ND_1	0,897
	ND_2	0,833
	ND_3	0,890
	ND_4	0,481
Local community	LC_1	0,778
	LC_2	0,763
	LC_3	0,687
	LC_4	0,617
Reducing consumption of recourses	RCR_1	0,702
	RCR_2	0,669
	RCR_3	0,884
	RCR_4	0,908
Environmentally friendly materials	EFM_1	0,738
	EFM_2	0,663
	EFM_3	0,784
	EFM_4	0,660
Reducing polluting emissions and waste	PEW_1	0,522
	PEW_2	0,734
	PEW_3	0,765
	PEW_4	0,698

Table 20 indicates the convergent factor analysis of all items of the social and environmental dimensions. Most of the items have a factor score above 0,7, hence measuring the term solidly. One item differentiates itself with a factor score of 0,418 (ND\_4). This factor score is above the set limit of 0,3. However, it is kept for the divergent analysis before the decision is taken if it should be included for further analyses. Resultingly, all items are kept for further analysis.

#### 4.4.2 Divergent Factor analysis

The divergent factor analysis examines whether the items of the social dimension and environmental dimension respectively accumulate under the same factor and do not fall under other factors in the dataset (Oppen et al., 2020). The divergent factor analysis is performed to avoid items having cross scores across other factors. The divergent analysis uses “maximum likelihood” and “direct oblimin” and suppresses factor scores below 0,3. Further, the factor score must have a difference of at least 0,2 between each other to be included for further analysis.

##### 4.4.2.1 Social dimension

Table 21-- Divergent Factor Analysis: Social Dimension

	Factor		
	1	2	3
HS_1		0,664	
HS_2		0,767	
HS_3		0,831	
ND_1	0,873		
ND_2	0,819		
ND_3	0,902		
LC_1			0,520
LC_3			0,651
LC_4			0,858

In the divergent analysis of the social dimension (Table 21), the variables are based on three factors, which is an ideal performance. The variables HS and LC charge on different factors, indicating that the items measure the term individually. Most of the items of ND charge on factor 1. However, in the first divergent analysis one item ND\_4 charges on factor 2 the same as the items of LC. This means that ND\_4 describes the same as items from LC. Therefore, they must be removed from further analysis. Further, the variable LC\_2 has to be removed because its factor charge is 0,348, representing a value below the chosen limit of 0,4.

Concludingly, items ND\_4 and LC\_2 are excluded from further analysis in this research (See Appendix 3).

#### 4.4.2.2 Environmental dimension

Table 22-- Divergent Factor Analysis: Environmental Dimension

	Factor	
	1	2
RCR_1		-0,507
RCR_2		-0,542
RCR_3		-0,917
RCR_4		-0,939
EFM_1	0,609	
EFM_2	0,511	
EFM_4	0,655	
PEW_1	0,577	
PEW_2	0,823	
PEW_3	0,563	

In the first divergent analysis, several items were gathered under one factor. Additionally, some of the items under the same variable had different charges (see Appendix 4). Hence, removing one item from “environmentally friendly materials” (EFM\_3) and one item from “reducing polluting emissions and waste” (PEW\_4) solved the problem. Based on the divergent analysis of the environmental dimension (Table 22), it can be detected that the variables are charged on two factors instead of the desired three factors. Having only two factors indicates that several items describe the same concept. Several items from the variables EFM and PEW are charged on the same factor as the items from RCR. Hence, removing some of these items from further research must be considered. However, the other variables charge on the same factors indicate similar items in both variables. However, the theory shows that these two variables have two different concepts; hence it would not make sense to merge them, and therefore are kept.

#### 4.8 Reliability, Cronbach`s Alpha

Reliability concerns the accuracy and stability of a measured term (Oppen et al., 2020). To measure the reliability, the measure Cronbach`s Alpha is used. The formula of Cronbach`s Alpha calculates a value between 1 and 0, where anything above the value of 0,7 is considered acceptable, concerning the reliability (Oppen et al., 2020).

*Table 23-- Reliability: Social Dimension*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach`s Alpha</b>	<b>N of items</b>
HS	0,826	3
ND	0,905	3
LC	0,801	4

In Table 23, the value for Cronbach`s Alpha for the reliability of the social dimension is presented. The value of all the variables is over 0,7, indicating that the term social dimension is measured solidly, and all the variables can be accepted according to Cronbach`s Alpha.

*Table 24-- Reliability: Environmental dimension*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach`s Alpha</b>	<b>N of items</b>
RCR	0,873	4
EFM	0,709	3
PEW	0,707	3

The reliability statistics of the environmental dimension shown in Table 24 present the minimum requirement of Cronbach`s Alpha slightly over 0,7. All variables being over this value are accepted by indicating that they measure the term accurately.

#### 4.5 Correlation analysis

The correlation analysis calculates the covariations and the strength between (Oppen et al., 2020). Before the correlation analysis was performed, the variables for the study were indexed with the questions that were approved through the previous analyses (see appendix 5). The correlation coefficient used in this analysis is Pearson r. Measuring the degree of the linear relationship between the variables. The strength of a correlation is stated by a correlation

coefficient, which will always lay somewhere between -1 and 1. Where values close to -1 indicate a negative correlation and values close to 1 indicate a positive correlation. Whereas a value of exact 1 means perfect correlation and 0 means no correlation (Oppen et al., 2020). Oppen et al. (2020) further indicate that values under 0,300 have a weak correlation, values from 0,300 – 0,499 have a moderate correlation and 0,500- 1 have a strong correlation.

#### 4.5.1 Social dimension

Table 25 - Correlation Analysis: Social

		<b>Health and safety</b>	<b>No discrimination</b>	<b>Local community</b>	<b>Brand image social</b>
Health and safety (HS)	Pearson Correlation	1	0,525**	0,390**	0,115
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000	0,168
No discrimination (ND)	Pearson Correlation	0,525**	1	0,477**	0,262**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,000	0,001
Local community (LC)	Pearson Correlation	0,390**	0,477**	1	0,500**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000		0,000
Brand image social (BIS)	Pearson Correlation	0,115	0,262**	0,500**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,168	0,001	0,000	
**Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed)					

Table 25 shows a correlation matrix with all the variables of the social dimension. There is a correlation between all the variables, however with varying strength. The highest correlations are between the variables HS and ND with a value of (r= 0,525, p= 0,000). The variables LC and brand image social have a strong correlation of (r=0,500, p=0,000). Whereas the variables ND and LC show a moderate correlation of a value of Pearson (r= 0,477) as well as the variables HS and LC with (r=0,390, p=0,000). However, all the others only show a low



correlation below 0,300. Herewith, a few of the variables have a strong or moderate correlation, whereas most of the variables only show a low or no correlation.

#### 4.5.2 Environmental dimension

Table 26-- Correlation Analysis: Environmental Dimension

Correlations					
		<b>Reducing consumption of resources</b>	<b>Environmentally friendly materials</b>	<b>Reducing polluting emissions and waste</b>	<b>Brand image environmental</b>
Reducing consumption of resources (RCR)	Pearson Correlation	1	0,754**	0,638**	0,430**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000	0,000
Environmentally friendly materials (EFM)	Pearson Correlation	0,754**	1	0,752**	0,588**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,000	0,000
Reducing polluting emissions and waste (PEW)	Pearson Correlation	0,638**	0,752**	1	0,560**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000		0,000
Brand image environmental (BIE)	Pearson Correlation	0,430**	0,588**	0,560**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	
**Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed)					

Table 26 is a correlation matrix with all the variables of the environmental dimension. It is a correlation between all the variables. However, there is a stronger correlation between some

than others. For example, there is a strong correlation between the variables RCR and EFM ( $r=0,754$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). As well as EFM having a strong correlation with PEW ( $r=0,752$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). Further also a strong correlation is between RCR and PEW ( $r=0,638$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). The variable BIE has a slightly lower correlation than the previous one, but still a strong correlation with EFM ( $r=0,588$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) and with PEW ( $r=0,560$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). In the whole correlation matrix of the variables of the environmental dimension, the only moderate correlation is between the variables RCR and BIE ( $r=0,430$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). Herewith, it can be said that there seems to be a strong correlation between most of the variables, except for the correlation between RCR and BIE being moderate and no variables with low or no correlation.

#### 4.6 Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis investigates how several independent variables act on one dependent variable because there are often several variables that may affect the dependent variable in the theoretical model (Oppen et al., 2020). The multiple regression analysis is divided into one for brand image social and the activities for the social dimension, and one for brand image environmental and the activities for the environmental dimension. For the regression analysis, the significant level is set to 95%.

##### 4.6.1 Social dimension

*Table 27 - Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>: Social dimension*

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. error of the estimate</b>
1	0,513	0,263	0,247	1,13674
a. Predictors_ (constant) Health and safety, No Discrimination, Local community.				

Table 27 shows that the independent variables explain 24,7 % (Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>) of the changes on the dependent variable in the theoretical model.

Table 28 - Multiple regression analysis: Social dimension

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		
1	Constant	1,606	0,557		2,886	0,005
	Health and safety	-0,130	0,087	-0,129	-1,493	0,138
	No discrimination	0,086	0,089	0,087	0,960	0,339
	Local community	0,648	0,107	0,509	6,083	0,000
a. Dependent variable Brand Image Social.						

Based on Table 28, has “health and safety” a negative effect on brand image (social); however, this effect is not significant ( $t=-1,493$ ,  $p=0,138$ ). The Unstandardised Beta is  $-0,130$ , entailing that brand image social decreases with  $0,130$  when “health and safety” increase. “no discrimination” has a positive effect on brand image (social). However, this effect is not significant ( $t=0,960$ ,  $p=0,339$ ). The unstandardised beta is  $0,086$ , showing that brand image (social) increases with  $0,086$  when “no discrimination” increases. “local community” has a significant positive effect on brand image (social) ( $t=6,083$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). The unstandardised beta is  $0,648$ , illustrating that brand image (social) increases with  $0,648$  when “local community” increases. The results can be explained by the low correlations in the correlation matrix, where “health and Safety” and “no discrimination” both have low correlations with brand image (social).

#### 4.6.2 Environmental dimension

Table 29 - Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>: Environmental Dimension

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0,617 <sup>a</sup>	0,380	0,367	0,96588
a. Predictors_ (Constant), Reducing polluting emissions waste, Reducing consumption of resources, Environmentally friendly materials.				

Based on Table 29 the independent variables explain 36,7 % (Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>) of the changes on the dependent variable in the theoretical model.

Table 30 - Multiple Regression Analysis: Environmental Dimension

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
Model		B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2,132	0,417		5,109	0,000
	Reducing consumption of resources	-0,074	0,096	-0,078	-0,764	0,446
	Environmentally friendly materials	0,398	0,109	0,435	3,635	0,000
	Reducing polluting emissions and waste	0,381	0,115	0,283	2,776	0,006
a. Dependent variable Brand Image Environmental						

Based on Table 30, “reducing consumption of resources” has a negative effect on brand image (environmental). However, this is not significant ( $t = -0,764$ ,  $p = 0,446$ ). The unstandardised beta is  $-0,074$ , indicating that brand image (environmental) is reduced by  $0,074$  when the “reducing consumption of resources” increases. “Environmentally Friendly Materials” have a significant positive effect on brand image (environmental) ( $t = 3,635$ ,  $p = 0,000$ ). The Unstandardised Beta is  $0,398$ , showing that brand image (environmental) increases with  $0,398$  when “environmentally friendly materials” increases. The “reducing polluting emissions and waste” has a significant positive effect on brand image (environmental) ( $t = 2,2776$ ,  $p = 0,006$ ). The unstandardised beta is  $0,381$ , which entails that brand image (environmental) increases with  $0,381$  when “reducing polluting emissions and waste” increases. The results can be explained

by the low correlations in the correlation matrix, where “reducing consumption of resources” has a lower correlation with brand image (environmental) than the other two variables.

## 4.7 Regression assumptions

To be able to carry out a satisfactory regression analysis, some assumptions are set (Oppen et al., 2020). Estimating the unknown quantities of regression parameters, the method OLS (ordinary least squares) is used. With the intention of finding estimates the sum of the squared deviations is as small as possible. Oppen et al., (2020) propose using 7 regression assumptions. The 7 regression assumptions are depicted in the following chapters.

### 4.7.1 Assumption 1: Dichotomous, quantitative continuous, and unbounded variables

The first regression assumption is about all the variables being without measurement errors. While the independent variables can be quantitative or dichotomous, the dependent variable must be quantitative, continuous or unbounded (Oppen et al., 2020).

In this study, there are no dichotomous variables, meaning all the variables have more than two answer alternatives, and none of them only has two, such as yes/no. This study uses a seven-point interval scale, which indicates that all the variables are quantitative. To perceive errors, reliability analyses are made to test for random errors as well as there were conducted pre-tests to avoid such errors. There is performed a conducted factor analysis to check for systematic errors. Hence, regression assumption 1 is herewith considered to be fulfilled.

### 4.7.2 Assumption 2: Variance

All variables have a variance and standard deviation being different from 0, concluding that this assumption is also fulfilled, for further details see Appendix 6.

### 4.7.3 Assumption 3: Absence of multicollinearity

Multicollinearity studies the correlations of the variables. To avoid multicollinearity and the variables contributing with the same information from the sample, a limit of +/- 0,800 is used

(Oppen et al., 2020). In Table 25 none of the variables correlates above this limit and in Table 26 none of the variables correlates above the limit of +/- 0,800. However, “environmentally friendly materials” has high correlations with both “Reducing consumption of resources” and “reducing polluting emissions and waste” (Table 26). The correlation between “Environmentally friendly materials” and “reducing polluting emissions and waste” is not surprising based on both variables gathering under the same factor in the divergent analysis. However, the assumption is fulfilled based on the recommended limit for correlations between the variables.

#### 4.7.4 Assumption 4: Average of the deviation is zero

The original P-P-plot for the social dimension shows a linear correlation. Still, it is conducted a double and triple regression analysis to investigate whether other concepts are occurring to describe the regression line better than the original term. When looking at both the double and triple P-plot diagrams, none of them resulted in significant p-values that were lower than the original terms. Herewith, the original term in the social dimension is kept, and the conditions for assumption 4 are fulfilled. (Appendix 7).

The original P-P-plot for the environmental dimension shows a linear correlation. Nevertheless, a double and triple regression analysis is conducted, to examine if there might be other concepts that describe the regression line better than the original term. However, none of the double or triple regression analyses resulted in significant p-values being lower than the original term (Appendix 8). Herewith, the original term in the environmental dimension is kept and assumption 4 is fulfilled for the environmental dimension

#### 4.7.5 Assumption 5: Control variable

Assumption 5 is the use of a control variable which should not correlate with each independent variable within the research model (Oppen et al., 2020). This study does not include a control variable. Hence, the assumption is not accepted. Several limitations occur when not including a control variable, and the conclusions of the study will not be as robust (Oppen et al., 2020). Further assessments of the corresponding implications of the study will be discussed further in chapter 7.3, with suggestions for possible control variables for future research.

#### 4.7.6 Assumption 6: Homoscedasticity

Assumption 6 states that the results should be homoscedastic, meaning that the variance from the regression line should be the same for both high and low values of the independent variables (Oppen et al., 2020).

The scatterplot (Appendix 9) of brand image (social) and the independent variables “health and safety”, “no discrimination”, and “local community” shows that the distribution of the variables is close to equal for both high and low values. Hence, this implies that there exists homoscedasticity. Concludingly, the conditions for assumption 6 is fulfilled for the social dimension.

The scatterplot (Appendix 10) of brand image (environmental) and the independent variables “reducing consumption of resources”, “environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste” shows that the variables are scattered along the regression line. There are equal variations and distributions along the regression line, indicating that the variables of the environmental dimension are homoscedastic. Thus, assumption 6 is fulfilled is for the environmental dimension.

#### 4.7.7 Assumption 7: Normal distributed residuals

Assumption 7 is about normally distributed residuals, investigating if the deviations are normally distributed or erroneous (Oppen et al., 2020). P-plot and histogram are used to test if the distribution is normal.

In the P-plot diagram (Appendix 11), the variables are distributed close to the regression line, indicating a demanded normal distribution of the residuals. In the histogram (Appendix 12) most residuals are distributed according to the normal distribution, whereas a small tail on the right contains a few higher residuals than the distribution curve. However, evaluations have shown that elaborations on extreme values are difficult but seem, in general, to be unproblematic. Therefore, assumption 7 is fulfilled for the residuals of the social dimension.

In the P-plot (Appendix 13), the variables are distributed quite closely to the regression line, which indicates a normal distribution. In the histogram of the environmental dimension

(Appendix 14), all the residuals are distributed along the distribution curve, indicating a normal distribution. Herewith, also assumption 7 is fulfilled for the residuals of the environmental dimension.

#### 4.7.8 Summary: Regression Assumptions

*Table 31 - Summary: Regression Assumptions*

	<b>Summary Regression assumptions</b>	<b>Accepted</b>	<b>Declined</b>
A1	Dichotomous, quantitative continuous and unbounded variables	X	
A2	All independent variables have a variance different than 0	X	
A3	Absence of multicollinearity	X	
A4	Average of the deviation is zero	X	
A5	Control variable		X
A6	Homoscedasticity	X	
A7	Normal distributed residuals	X	

In the analysis of the regression assumptions, seven assumptions are tested. The results as displayed in Table 31 show that all assumptions are accepted, except for assumption 5. Assumption 5 is not met, since there is no control variable included in this thesis. The detailed regression assumption for each assumption can be found in the appendix. Additionally, not having a control variable, assumption 5 is further discussed under future research and limitations in chapter 7.3.

#### 4.9 Summary analysis

In chapter 4 analysis, the validity of the analysis is determined. Reviewing the analysis, most steps were accepted and fulfilled. In chapter 4.4.2, two items from the social and environmental variables were removed in the divergent factor analysis. For the social dimension, the items ND\_4 and LC\_2, and for the environmental dimension, the items EFM\_3 and PEW\_4 are removed due to charging on the wrong factor. In the regression analyses there were support for “local community”, “environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste”, results are discussed further in *chapter 5 Results*.



Further, all regression assumptions are accepted and situated within the requirements and are fulfilled, except assumption 5. The reason for not fulfilling assumption 5 is the lack of a control variable in this study, which is further explained in chapter 7.3 Limitations and future research.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the test of the hypothesis of this research study which is based on the analysis performed in the previous chapter 4. Investigating the connection and impact between CSR communication and brand image. More precisely, how the social dimension and its underlying criteria (HS, ND, and LC) and the criteria of the environmental dimension (RCR, EFM, and PEW) impact brand image, respectively. Before presenting the results of the hypothesis testing, the research question is displayed to repeat the relevance of the hypotheses.

*What impact does corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication have on brand image?*

### 5.2 Hypothesis 1

*H1: Health and safety practices are positively related to brand image (social)*

In chapter 4.5.1, in the correlation matrix can be seen a low correlation (0,115) between “health and safety practices” and brand image (social). Simultaneously the p-value shows a value of 0,168, meaning it is not significant. Further in the regression analysis in chapter 4.6.1, “health and safety practices” show a negative effect on brand image (social). However, this effect is not significant ( $t=-1,493$ ,  $p=0,138$ ). Indicating that there is no strong correlation between “health and safety practices” and brand image. Hence, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

### 5.3 Hypothesis 2

*H2: No discrimination practices in a business are positively related to brand image (social)*

A low correlation is detected ( $r= 0,262$ ) between “no discrimination” and brand image (social) in the correlation matrix in Table 25. Further, the P-value show a high significance of ( $p=0,001$ ). The regression analysis reveals that “no discrimination” has a positive effect on brand image (social). However, the values of the regression analysis in Table 28 are not significant ( $t=0,960$ ,  $p=0,339$ ). Further, the unstandardised beta has a value of 0,086, representing that brand image (social) increases with 0,086 when “no discrimination” increases. Herewith, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

## 5.4 Hypothesis 3

*H3: Interactions with the local community are positively related to brand image (social)*

In the correlation matrix between “local community” and brand image (social), a strong correlation is revealed and a high significance is detected ( $r=0,500$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). Indicating an increase of “local community” as well as brand image (social), supporting H3. However, the causal relationship between the variables must be tested by the regression analysis. The regression analysis demonstrates that “local community” has a significant positive effect on brand image (social) ( $t=6,083$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). The unstandardised beta shows an increase in brand image (social) with 0,648 when “local community” is increasing. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

## 5.5 Hypothesis 4

*H4: Reducing consumption of resources is positively related to brand image (environmental)*

The correlation matrix for the environmental dimension in chapter 4.5.2 shows a strong significance between “reducing consumption of resources” and brand image (environmental) ( $p=0,000$ ). On the other hand, Table 26 only explains a moderate correlation between “reducing consumption of resources” and brand image (environmental) ( $r=0,430$ ). Furthermore, when testing the causal relationship through the regression analysis, “reducing consumption of resources” has a negative effect on brand image (environmental) and does not represent any significance ( $t= -0,764$ ,  $p=0,446$ ). The unstandardised beta reduces brand image (environmental) by -0,074 when the “reducing consumption of resources” is increased. Herewith, hypothesis 4 is not supported.

## 5.6 Hypothesis 5

*H5: Use of environmentally friendly material is positively related to brand image (environmental)*

The variables “environmentally friendly materials” and brand image (environmental) show a strong correlation as well as a strong significance ( $r=0,588$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) in the correlation matrix found in chapter 4.5.2. In the regression analysis in Table 30, “environmentally friendly materials” has a significant positive effect on brand image (Environmental) ( $t=3,635$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). With an unstandardised beta of 0,398, increasing brand image (Environmental) when “environmentally friendly materials” is increasing. Therefore, a causal relationship exists between “environmentally friendly materials” and brand image (Environmental). Finally, hypothesis 5 is supported.

### 5.7 Hypothesis 6

*H6: Reducing polluting emissions and waste is positively related to brand image (environmental)*

In the correlation analysis of the environmental dimension, a strong correlation is observed between “reducing polluting emissions and waste” and brand image (environmental) ( $r=0,560$ ). Further, a strong significance between the two variables is detected ( $p=0,00$ ). The regression analysis points to the fact that “reducing polluting emissions and waste” has a significant positive effect on brand image (Environmental) ( $t=2,2776$ ,  $p=0,006$ ). This indicates a causal relationship between “reducing polluting emissions and waste” and brand image (Environmental). Herewith, hypothesis 6 is supported.

## 5.8 Summary results

Table 32 - Summary: Results

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Supported</b>	<b>Not supported</b>
<i>H1: Health and safety practices are positively related to brand image (social)</i>		X
<i>H2: No discrimination practices in a business are positively related to brand image (social)</i>		X
<i>H3: Interactions with the local community are positively related to brand image (social)</i>	X	
<i>H4: Reducing consumption of resources is positively related to brand image (environmental)</i>		X
<i>H5: Use of environmentally friendly material is positively related to brand image (environmental)</i>	X	
<i>H6: Reducing polluting emissions and waste is positively related to brand image (environmental)</i>	X	

In this chapter the results of the analyses formulated in chapter 4 are described and the six hypotheses are accordingly being declared to be supported or not supported. The results are summarised in Table 32. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 are, according to the analysis in chapter 4, not supported. Whereas hypothesis 3, hypothesis 5, and hypothesis 6 are supported according to the analysis.

## 6 Discussion

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the findings from the analysis against previous research reviewed in detail in chapter 2. There are no direct references, to our knowledge, for immediate comparisons between the results from this study and previous literature. Herewith, making it difficult to do a joint discussion of how this study compares to previous research. Hence, the discussion is based on indications drawn from previous research focused on the collective concept of CSR communication and its relation to brand image.

In the study of Winter and Lasch (2016), CSR is divided into the environmental and social dimensions, where they provide several different activities affecting each of the dimensions. This provides the opportunity to investigate how each activity for the environmental and social dimensions may impact the brand image. As opposed to previous analyses found in literature, CSR is often used as a collective term influencing the brand image (Lee & Lee, 2018; Wu & Wang, 2014). The chapter is divided into two parts by discussing how brand image is influenced by the different criteria of social and environmental dimensions. First, a consideration of the social criteria (“health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, and “local community”) and their effects on brand image is evaluated. Afterwards, discussing the environmental criteria (“reducing consumption of resources”, “use of environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste”) and their consequence on brand image.

In the social dimension, hypotheses 1 and 2 are not supported, whereas hypothesis 3 is supported. Previous research mentions “health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, and “local community” belong as criteria to the social dimension (Winter & Lasch, 2016). Moreover, according to Du et al. (2010), investing in social initiatives can build brand image in the long term. It was expected to find all three hypotheses supported based on previous research. However, the analysis revealed no support for hypothesis 1 (Health and safety practices are positively related to brand image (social)). This is surprising considering the study of Lee and Lee (2018), who states that the improvement of working conditions is specifically a part of the CSR activities which consumers evaluate. However, the results from the analysis even show that the variable of “health and safety practices” has a negative effect on brand image, which is an apparent contradiction to some previous research, where the impact of social CSR communication on brand image was investigated (Lee & Lee, 2018).

Neither support for hypothesis 2 could be found (No discrimination practices in a business are positively related to brand image (social)). This finding again disagrees with the analyses performed by Lee and Lee (2018), who claim that CSR activities such as working for greater equality and opportunity affect how the consumer perceives the business. Respecting all humans despite age, ethnic origin, religion, gender, and sexual orientation (Brunk, 2010), may affect the perception consumers have of the business. Based on the argument by Vera-Martínez et al. (2021) that the social dimension has a significant role in the credibility of the business, this should influence the brand image of the business (Wu & Wang, 2014). Hence, it is surprising that there is no significant effect between “no discrimination” and brand image (social).

Hypothesis 3 (Interactions with the local community are positively related to the brand image (social) is supported according to the analyses. These results fully confirm the study of Wu and Wang (2014), which express that a business carrying out community-oriented CSR within the social dimension enhances its brand image. Based on previous studies and the analyses of the study, “local community” is a criterion of the social dimension (Winter & Lasch, 2016). Therefore, it was anticipated that “local community” would have a positive effect on brand image.

In general, previous research expected support for all three hypotheses due to “health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, and “local community” being common social criteria within CSR (Winter & Lasch, 2016). However, previous research, including items for “health and safety”, “no discrimination”, and “local community” practices, has investigated this topic through the collective lens of social CSR and brand image (Ramesh et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2017). Hypotheses 1 and 2 are not promoted after the analysis, as concepts of the social dimension of CSR communication building brand image. However, hypothesis 3 is integrated and in unison within the social CSR dimension.

The collective term of social CSR on brand image was investigated by former studies, which were able to explain the deviation from this research, and additionally why the criteria “health and safety practices” and “no discrimination” have not a significant impact on brand image (social). Liu et al. (2014) claim that due to the complex nature of social CSR, the consumer often lacks knowledge of the CSR activities of the business. This provides another explanation as to why “health and Safety” and “no discrimination” practices will not have the expected effects on the brand image. For instance, if consumers are not aware of which “health and

safety” or “no discrimination” practices the business does, they cannot evaluate the actions of the business based on this criterion. On the other hand, the study of Brunk (2010) helps to understand why hypothesis 3 is confirmed by the analyses of this study. Brunk (2010) mentions that consumers often being more concerned about business practices in their community than practices abroad (Brunk, 2010). Herewith the awareness of consumers is more thoughtful about the criterion of the “local community” and therefore confirms that consumers are more affected and concerned with practices in their community. This contributes to Hypothesis 3 that the interactions with the local community are positively related to brand image (social).

In the environmental dimension, hypotheses 5 and 6 are supported, whereas hypothesis 4 is not supported. Previous studies show that the criteria “reducing consumption of resources”, “use of environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste” belong to the environmental dimension of CSR (Winter & Lasch, 2016). Other studies mention that brand image is being strengthened by including environmentally oriented CSR into the operations of a business (Wu & Wang, 2014; Mohammed Al-Swidi 2019). It was expected that all three environmental criteria, “reducing consumption of resources”, “use of environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste”, are positively related to the brand image (environmental) of businesses.

The analyses of this study are supportive of hypothesis 5 (Use of environmentally friendly material is positively related to brand image (environmental)) and hypothesis 6 (Reducing polluting emissions and waste is positively related to brand image (environmental)). The support for hypotheses 5 and 6 coincides with a previous study by Ramesh et al (2019), who further argue that for businesses to strengthen their brand image it has to include environmentally oriented CSR. Winter and Lasch (2016) refer to the “use of environmentally friendly material” and “reducing polluting emissions and waste” as belonging to the environmental dimension. Explaining why hypotheses 5 and 6 are being supported.

Unexpectedly, hypothesis 4 (Reducing consumption of resources is positively related to brand image (environmental)) was not supported by the analysis. Former research by Ramesh et al. (2019) indicates a positive impact of the criterion “reducing consumption of resources” on brand image (environmental). However, environmental activities such as “reducing consumption of resources” are often not well known (Liu et al., (2014)). Lack of awareness can be why this research does not show that “reducing consumption of resources” is positively related to the brand image (environmental). Additionally, the study by Mohammed and Al-



Swidi (2019) shows that businesses should place more on CSR activities, especially within the environmental dimension. Therefore, environmental activities still must be increased and can be another explanation why “reducing consumption of resources” might currently not occur to support hypothesis 4.

Previous findings suggest that social and environmental CSR have a positive influence on the brand image of businesses (Ramesh et al., 2019). In contrast, the study of Winter and Lasch (2016) conclude that environmental and social criteria are not as important as many previous studies have claimed but rather a method to prevent reputation loss and create a competitive advantage. The results of this study indicate that the separate criteria of the social and environmental dimensions have different impacts on brand image. Implying that some environmental and social CSR communication criteria may be more important than others, partly confirming the findings of Winter and Lasch (2016). The results show that three out of six hypotheses are supported. Two hypotheses in the social dimension are not supported, however the third one got a strong significance in the analysis. In the environmental dimension, two out of three hypotheses are supported. All these results are mostly indicating that there is an influence of CSR communication on the social and environmental criteria on brand image. Coinciding with the study of Ramesh et al. (2019) it refers in the same direction to respect the environment and engage in social causes, and overall support and endorse the expansion of a positive brand image.

## 7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to uncover the influence CSR communication has on brand image. Thereby answering the research question: *What impact does corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication have on brand image?* The study investigated the topics of CSR communication, the underlying social and environmental dimension, as well as the belonging criteria and their influence on brand perception and its underlying dimension of brand image.

The study has several interesting findings. The first supplementary research question on whether the social dimension has a positive impact on brand image was answered through a regression analysis, where one out of three hypotheses was supported. Hypothesis 1, “health and safety”, and hypothesis 2, “no discrimination”, could not be further facilitated by the investigations. Further, “health and safety” is manifesting a negative influence on brand image, which is opposed to what previous literature suggests. However, hypothesis 3, “local community”, is supported and has a significant positive effect on brand image (social). Concludingly, some criteria of social CSR communication will positively influence brand image (social), whereas this study cannot further assist the two other hypotheses.

The second supplementary research question was about investigating if the environmental dimension has a positive effect on brand image. The analysis showed that the criteria of the environmental dimension hypothesis 5, “use of environmentally friendly materials”, and hypothesis 6, “reducing polluting emissions and waste”, are positively related to brand image (environmental). Whereas the third criterion in the environmental dimension, “reducing consumption of resources”, is not positively related to brand image revealing no significance for hypothesis 4. Two out of three hypotheses of the environmental dimension are after the analyses finally supported. Therefore, most of the criteria of environmental CSR communication positively influence brand image, whereas others will not.

The goal was to investigate the influence of each criterion in the two dimensions of CSR communication on brand image. Three criteria are measured from both the social and environmental dimensions, where the study acknowledges how different criteria will influence brand image.

This study has provided new and great insights into CSR communication and brand image. By using the separate criteria from the social and environmental dimensions, this study has discovered that some criteria will have a more significant impact on brand image than others. Additionally, by dividing brand image into brand image (environmental) and brand image (social), the study can accord the criteria of each dimension to the right brand image. Hence, the study sees some nuances of how CSR communication acts on different parts of brand image. The results show that some aspects of CSR communication will have a greater positive impact on brand image than others. Since CSR communication is measured through the social and environmental dimensions in this study, it can be concluded that CSR communication has a significant positive impact on brand image. Hence the research question can generally be positively affirmed. The new approach to studying the relationship between CSR communication and brand image contributes with valuable knowledge on these topics and is an excellent opportunity for future research.

### 7.1 Theoretical implications

The study contributes to the literature on CSR communication and brand image. Provides insight into the influence of different criteria on the social and environmental dimension of CSR is having on brand image. Most of the previous studies measured the impact of CSR communication on brand perception or the influence of social and environmental dimensions of CSR on brand image (Ramesh et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2017). The conceptual model is built after carefully investigating available previous research on CSR communication and brand image. This study investigated the impact of CSR communication on brand image in two contexts: the social dimension of CSR against brand image (social) and environmental CSR against brand image (environmental). The findings of the study confirm the research of Ramesh et al. (2019), who found that social and environmental CSR have an impact on brand image.

This research extends existing research about CSR communication in the literature by providing detailed information about different criteria of the social and environmental dimensions of CSR communication and their direct influence on brand image. The study specifically investigates three criteria from the social dimension (health and safety practices, no discrimination, and local community) and three criteria of the environmental dimension (reducing consumption of resources, use of environmentally friendly materials, and reducing polluting emissions and waste). The three identified criteria from the social and environmental

dimensions are described in more detail, directly measuring their individual impact on brand image, which was previously not a focus in research about CSR communication. The results are revealing, suggesting that each criterion of the social and environmental dimensions has a different impact on brand image. The general context and the tested hypothesis can also be applied in other industries than the fashion industry to investigate the impact of social and environmental criteria on brand image to identify improvements within the struggle to handle the implication of CSR communication better.

This research applies insights to the existing literature in brand building by dividing the concept of brand image into brand image (social) and brand image (environmental). The division contributes to researchers being able to discover nuances within brand image, CSR, and CSR communication. The two researched areas of brand image against the six CSR communication criteria extend previous research by investigating the impact of specific areas of CSR communication on separate areas of brand image.

## 7.2 Managerial implications

This research can support businesses with information about the influence CSR communication, specifically each criterion of the social and environmental dimensions, have on brand image. Especially fast fashion brands and other businesses can use the identified CSR activities to improve their brand image. Businesses should include the social and environmental criteria in their CSR communication to their consumers to improve their brand perception and brand image.

The different criteria examined are the social criteria “health and safety practices”, “no discrimination”, and “local community”, and the environmental criteria “reducing consumption of resources”, “use of environmentally friendly materials”, and “reducing polluting emissions and waste”. It reveals that businesses can increase their brand image and perform a competitive advantage by including the criteria of CSR communication. Furthermore, businesses can use the different CSR activities (criteria) in performance measurement by recognising where they must improve to emerge their brand image.

### 7.3 Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations and contributions to future research. The research is measured using a quantitative methodology based on analytical and confirmative methods. Hence, it is recommended for future studies to use in-depth interviews or experiments to gain better insights into how brand image is affected by CSR communication. Another limitation is convenience sampling which may influence the generalisability of the results and increase the bias in the sample. Although the sample size is not very considerable, it is big enough, according to Oppen et al. (2020), it has still enough extent to perform multivariate statistics where the sample size should be ten times the number of variables. Nevertheless, future research should include a greater sample size to confirm the obtained results. Further limitations have to be considered regarding the uneven gender distribution in this study. The consequence of an unequal gender distribution is to weaken the reliability and reduce the transferability to other studies. Future research can use a probability sample to increase the chance for each unit (such as gender and age) in the population to be selected and increase external validity.

The study only measures the data at a single point in time when using a cross-sectional design. Hence, future studies should apply longitudinal designs. Measuring the data over a longer period may increase the internal validity because it allows an entity to be set in order (Clark et al., 2021). The use of a causal design can lead to the study missing the whole picture of the situation due to missing variables. This study focuses on three variables from both the social and environmental dimensions. Recommendations for future research are to include more criteria from the social and environmental dimensions and investigate how these affect brand image. Alternatively, variables such as ethicality were not included in the analysis of this study. According to Brunk and Blümelhuber (2011), to positively influence consumers' perceptions, their ethical expectations must be met based on norms and balancing needs. Failure to do so will contaminate the brand perception and the corporate reputation of a business. Hence, future studies should include the consumers' ethical expectations as an additional variable when researching the influence of CSR communication on brand image.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of a control variable. The study cannot control the results against competing variables suggested within previous research by not including control variables (Oppen et al., 2020). Hence, future research should investigate the effect of possible control variables. For instance, previous research suggests that the interest in CSR or

sustainability of the consumer could affect how the consumer perceives the CSR communication from the business (Crespo & Inacio, 2019). The findings of Crespo and Inacio (2019) suggest that the personality and interest of the consumer may influence how the consumer is affected by CSR communication. Hence, the interest and personality of the consumer may be a possible control variable for future studies. Secondly, in this study, it must be considered that prior knowledge about CSR can influence the response of respondents to the questionnaire. As Lee and Lee (2018) disclose, the degree to which consumers are aware of the CSR communication from a business plays a central role in how this is affecting corporate benefits. CSR policies help consumers certainly to evaluate and to distinguish individual brands. Which Chernev and Blair (2015) agree to, by mentioning there is an association between consumers' awareness of a business's engagement in socially responsible activities and their brand-specific beliefs in the case of businesses that integrate social responsibility into their competitive positioning. Hence it must be considered that having many respondents with good knowledge of CSR communication and business activities can influence on the results of this study. Thus, the consumer's awareness is another possible control variable for future research.

A general limitation of the study is the small amount of previous literature and research regarding what effect each criterion within the social and environmental dimensions has on brand image. Having no direct correlation between the criteria only with the main topic of the social and environmental dimensions makes it difficult to compare this research study to earlier studies. This study is performed within the context of the fashion industry, however future research is recommended to be performed within varying industries and contexts to compare the results of the study and increase the external validity.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Questionnaire pre-tests (translated: Norwegian)

### Spørreundersøkelse

#### Generell informasjon

Kjønn:

Kvinne     Mann     Annet

Alder

\_\_\_\_\_

Interesser/kjøpemønster:

#### Mote

1. Jeg er interessert i bærekraft.

#### Bærekraft

5. Jeg er interessert i bærekraft.

6. Jeg har kunnskap om bærekraft praksiser hos ulike klesmerker.

-

1. [Helse, miljø og sikkerhet \(HMS\)](#)

14. Jeg kjøper ikke klær fra klesmerker der deres ansatte lever og jobber i dårlige forhold.

15. Om mulig kjøper jeg klær fra klesmerker som skaper trygge og sunne arbeidsvilkår for de ansatte.

16. Om mulig kjøper jeg ikke klær laget av bedrifter som er dårlige på HMS.

## 2. Ingen diskriminering

18. Jeg kjøper ikke klær som viser minoritetsgrupper i et negativt lys gjennom sine reklamer.

19. Jeg kjøper ikke klær som viser kvinner i et negativt lys gjennom sine reklamer.

20. Jeg kjøper ikke klær fra klesmerker som diskriminerer mot minoriteter.

22. Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan bedrifter arbeider mot diskriminering.

## 3. Lokalsamfunnet

23. Om mulig kjøper jeg klær fra klesmerker som deltar i kampanjer og prosjekter som bidrar til et bedre samfunn.

24. Om mulig kjøper jeg klær fra klesmerker som gjør investeringer for å skape forbedringer for fremtidige generasjoner.

25. Om mulig kjøper jeg fra merkevarer som fokuserer på bærekraftig utvikling som tar hensyn og skaper forbedringer for fremtidige generasjoner.

27. Om mulig, ønsker jeg ikke å kjøpe klær fra klesmerker som skader lokalsamfunnet

28. Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan klesmerker arbeider for lokalsamfunnet.

## 4. Redusere ressursforbruket

29. Jeg prøver å kjøpe klesprodukter som er laget av materialer som kan resirkuleres.

30. Jeg kjøper bare fra klesmerker som jobber for å redusere ressursforbruket.

32. Om mulig, kjøper jeg kun klær fra klesmerker som bruker resirkulerbare materialer.

33. Om mulig, kjøper jeg kun klær fra klesmerker som støtter gjenvinning av ressurser.

## 5. Miljøvennlige materialer

36. Om mulig ønsker jeg å velge produkter som er miljøvennlige.

37. Jeg har kjøpt klær fordi de er laget av organiske eller grønne materialer.

38. Om mulig, ønsker jeg å kun kjøpe klær fra klesmerker som bruker miljøvennlige materialer.

39. Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan bedrifter bruker miljøvennlige materialer.

## 6. Redusere forurensning og avfall

40. Jeg føler avsky når jeg lærer mengden av forurensning og avfall som moteindustrien skaper.

41. Jeg prøver å ikke kjøpe klær fra klesmerker som forurensrer mye.

42. Om mulig kjøper jeg klær som bidrar til minst mulig forurensning.

44. Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan bedrifter arbeider for å redusere forurensende utslipp og avfall.

## 7. Merkevarebilde – sosiale dimensjonen

45. Jeg føler meg bra om jeg velger et klesmerke som engasjerer seg i å fremme sosiale aktiviteter for samfunnet.

46. Jeg er interessert i klesmerker som engasjerer seg i å fremme sosiale aktiviteter.

47. Jeg liker klesmerker som fremmer sosiale aktiviteter.

48. Kommunikasjon om sosiale aktiviteter gjør klesmerket mer attraktivt for meg som kunde.

## 8. Merkevarebilde – miljømessige dimensjonen

49. Jeg føler meg bra om jeg velger et klesmerke som engasjerer seg i å fremme miljøaktiviteter.

50. Jeg er interessert i klesmerker som engasjerer seg i å fremme miljøvennlige aktiviteter.

51. Jeg liker klesmerker som fremmer miljøvennlige aktiviteter.

52. Kommunikasjon om miljøvennlige aktiviteter gjør klesmerket mer attraktivt for meg som kunde.

## Appendix 2: Final questionnaire

Tusen takk for at du ønsker å delta i vår spørreundersøkelse!

Spørreundersøkelsen er en del av datainnsamlingen til vår masteroppgave ved Høgskolen i Innlandet campus Rena. I denne undersøkelsen ønsker vi å si noe om hvilken påvirkning CSR-kommunikasjon om sosiale og miljømessige aktiviteter har på merkevarebildet til forbrukere.

Spørreskjemaet består av 36 spørsmål, og det vil ta ca. 10 minutter å gjennomføre. Over noen av spørsmålene vil du finne en forklaring for hva som menes med ulike begreper.

Deltakelsen i spørreundersøkelsen er frivillig og anonym, hvor alle spørsmålene i spørreundersøkelsen må besvares. Om du velger å besvare spørreundersøkelsen har du gitt samtykke til å delta. Derimot om du underveis ikke lenger ønsker å delta i undersøkelsen kan du la være å levere inn skjemaet. Etter skjemaet er levert er det ikke lenger mulig å trekke svaret tilbake siden det er levert inn anonymt og ikke kan spores tilbake til deg.

Hvor kom du over spørreundersøkelsen?

- Læringsplattform (eks. Canvas, Blackboard, osv.)
- Sosiale medier (eks. Facebook, Instagram, osv.)

Kjønn

- Mann
- Kvinne
- Annet

Alder (0 – 100+)

Fast fashion:

Ved «fast fashion» viser vi til klesmerker som har en rask produktrotasjon, lave priser, hopper på nye trender og bruker billig arbeidskraft og billige materialer for å redusere kostnader.

For eksempel: H&M, Zara, Gap, Cubus, Jack & Jones, Dressmann og lignende.

Helse, miljø og sikkerhet (HMS)

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Jeg kjøper ikke klær fra klesmerker der deres ansatte lever og jobber i dårlige forhold							
Om mulig kjøper jeg klær fra klesmerker som skaper trygge og sunne arbeidsvilkår for de ansatte.							
Om mulig kjøper jeg ikke klær laget av bedrifter som er dårlige på helse, miljø og sikkerhet							

### Ingen diskriminering

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Jeg kjøper ikke klær som viser minoritetsgrupper i et negativt lys gjennom sine reklamer.							
Jeg kjøper ikke klær som viser kvinner i et negativt lys gjennom sine reklamer.							
Jeg kjøper ikke klær fra klesmerker som diskriminerer mot minoriteter.							
Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan bedrifter arbeider mot diskriminering.							

### Lokalsamfunn

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Om mulig, kjøper jeg klær fra klesmerker som deltar i kampanjer og prosjekter som bidrar til et bedre samfunn.							
Om mulig, kjøper jeg fra klesmerker som fokuserer på bærekraftig utvikling som tar hensyn og skaper forbedringer for fremtidige generasjoner.							
Om mulig, ønsker jeg ikke å kjøpe klær fra klesmerker som skader lokalsamfunnet.							
Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan klesmerker arbeider for lokalsamfunnet.							

### Redusere ressursforbruket

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Jeg prøver å kjøpe klær som er laget av materialer som kan resirkuleres.							

Jeg kjøper bare fra klesmerker som jobber for å redusere ressursforbruket.							
Om mulig, kjøper jeg kun klær fra klesmerker som bruker resirkulerbare materialer.							
Om mulig, kjøper jeg kun klær fra klesmerker som støtter gjenvinning av ressurser.							

#### Miljøvennlige materialer

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Om mulig, ønsker jeg å velge klær som er miljøvennlige.							
Jeg har kjøpt klær fordi de er laget av organiske eller grønne materialer.							
Om mulig, kjøper jeg bare klær fra klesmerker som bruker miljøvennlige materialer.							
Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan bedrifter bruker miljøvennlige materialer.							

#### Redusere forurensning og avfall

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Jeg føler avsky når jeg lærer mengden av forurensning og avfall som moteindustrien skaper.							
Jeg prøver å ikke kjøpe klær fra klesmerker som forurenser mye.							
Om mulig, kjøper jeg klær som bidrar til minst mulig forurensning							
Jeg ønsker å vite hvordan bedrifter arbeider for å redusere forurensende utslipp og avfall							

### Merkevarebilde – Den sosiale dimensjonen.

Den sosiale dimensjonen viser til klesmerkens forhold til verden rundt seg i forbindelse med deres sosiale aktiviteter som bidrar til lokal samfunnet, diskriminering og HMS (Helse, Miljø og Sikkerhet).

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Jeg føler meg bra om jeg velger et klesmerke som engasjerer seg i å gremme sosiale aktiviteter for samfunnet.							
Jeg er interessert i klesmerker som engasjerer seg i å fremme sosiale aktiviteter.							
Jeg liker klesmerker som fremmer sosiale aktiviteter.							
Kommunikasjon om sosiale aktiviteter gjør klesmerket mer attraktivt for meg som kunde.							

### Merkevarebilde – Den miljømessige dimensjonen

Den miljømessige dimensjonen handler om å minimere klesmerkens negative påvirkning på miljøet. Miljøvennlige aktiviteter vil derfor vise til aktiviteter som påvirker miljøet positivt.

	Helt uenig	Stort sett uenig	Noe uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Noe enig	Stort sett enig	Helt enig
Jeg føler meg bra om jeg velger et klesmerke som engasjerer seg i å fremme miljøvennlige aktiviteter.							
Jeg er interessert i klesmerker som engasjerer seg i å fremme miljøvennlige aktiviteter.							
Jeg liker klesmerker som fremmer miljøvennlige aktiviteter.							
Kommunikasjon om miljøvennlige aktiviteter gjør klesmerket mer attraktivt for meg som kunde.							

Tusen takk for at du deltok i vår spørreundersøkelse!  
For å levere spørreundersøkelsen trykk «Send».



### Appendix 3: Divergent Factor Analysis: Social Dimension

	Factor		
	1	2	3
HS_1			0,626
HS_2			0,780
HS_3			0,835
ND_1	0,853		
ND_2	0,790		
ND_3	0,898		
ND_4		0,587	
LC_1		0,524	0,309
LC_2		0,348	0,548
LC_3		0,557	
LC_4		0,921	

### Appendix 4: Divergent Factor Analysis: Environmental Dimension

	Factor	
	1	2
RCR_1	0,682	
RCR_2	0,728	
RCR_3	0,964	
RCR_4	0,930	
EFM_1	0,464	-0,370
EFM_2	0,568	
EFM_3	0,677	
EFM_4		-0,838
PEW_1		-0,338
PEW_2	0,427	
PEW_3	0,578	
PEW_4		-0,983

## Appendix 5: Indexing of variables

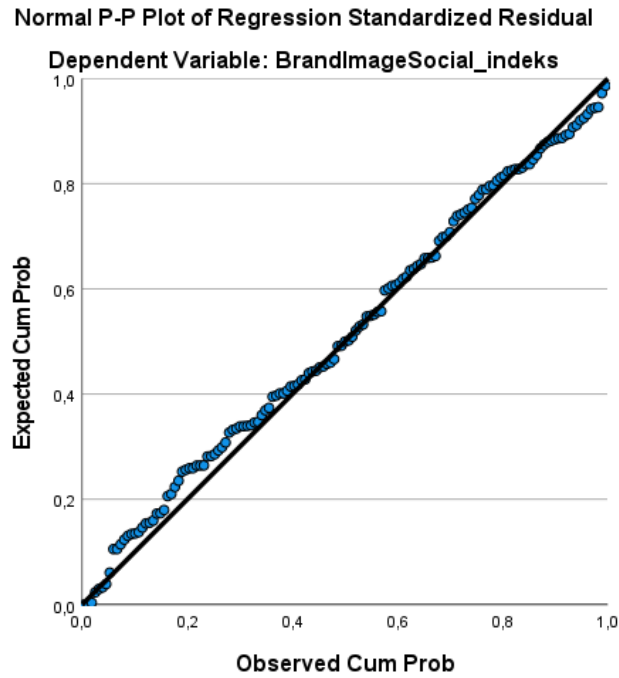
<b>Term</b>	<b>Data name</b>	<b>Approach</b>
Health and safety	HealthSafety_indeks	$(HS\_1+HS\_2+HS\_3)/3$
No discrimination	NoDiscrimination_indeks	$(ND\_1+ND\_2+ND\_3)/3$
Local community	LocalCommunity_indeks	$(LC\_1+LC\_3+LC\_4)/3$
Brand image (social)	BrandImageSocial	$(BIS\_1+BIS\_2+BIS\_3 +BIS\_4)/4$
Reducing consumption of resources	ReducingConsumptionResources_indeks	$(RCR\_1+RCR\_2+ RCR\_3+ RCR\_4)/4$
Environmentally friendly materials	EnvironmentallyFriendlyMaterials_indeks	$(EFM\_1+EFM\_2+EFM\_3)/3$
Reducing polluting emissions and waste	PollutionEmissionsWaste_indeks	$(PEW\_1+PEW\_2+ PEW\_3)/3$
Brand image environmental	BrandImageEnvironmental	$(BIE\_1+BIE\_2+BIE\_3 +BIE\_4)/4$

## Appendix 6: Regression assumption 2-Variance

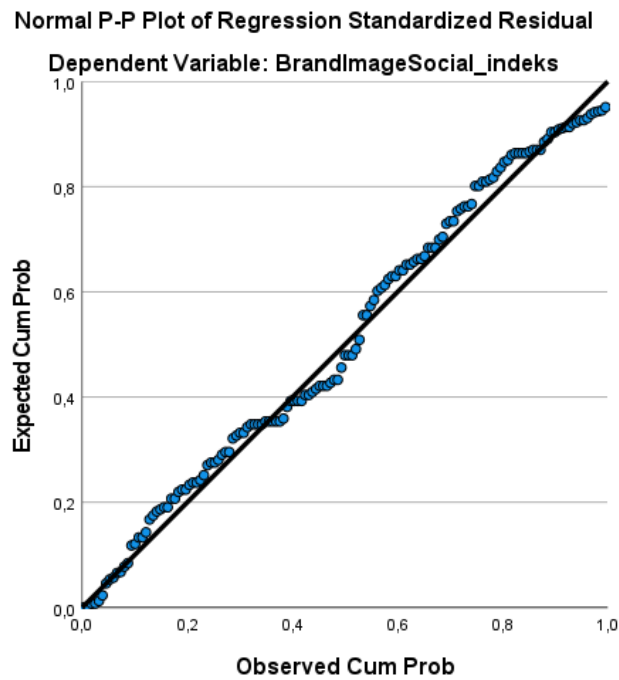
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Variance</b>
Health and safety	145	4,8391	1,30650	1,707
No Discrimination	145	5,5839	1,32784	1,763
Local community	145	5,5356	1,02913	1,059
Reduction of consumption and waste	145	4,3931	1,29158	1,668
Environmentally friendly materials	145	4,8138	1,32688	1,761
Polluting Emission and Waste	145	5,4690	1,08048	1,167
Brand image (social)	145	5,0483	1,31012	1,716
Brand image (environmental)	145	5,4621	1,21419	1,474

Appendix 7: Regression assumption 4, social dimension and brand image

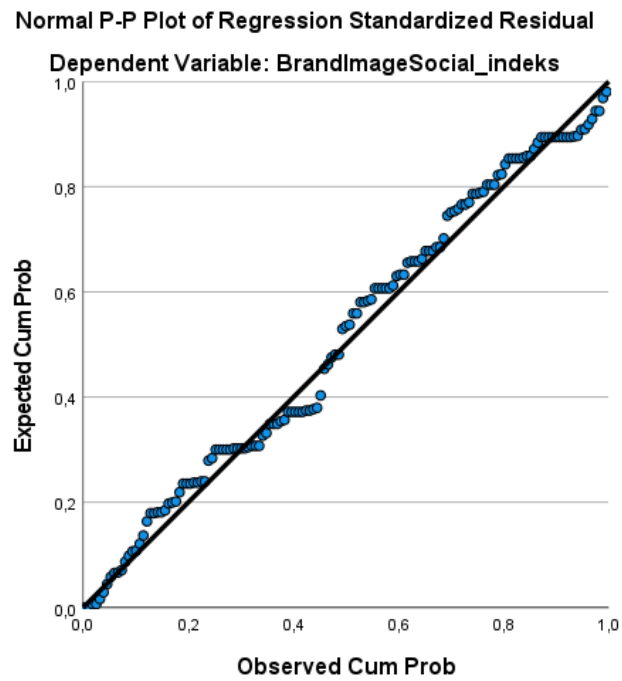
All variables of the social dimension



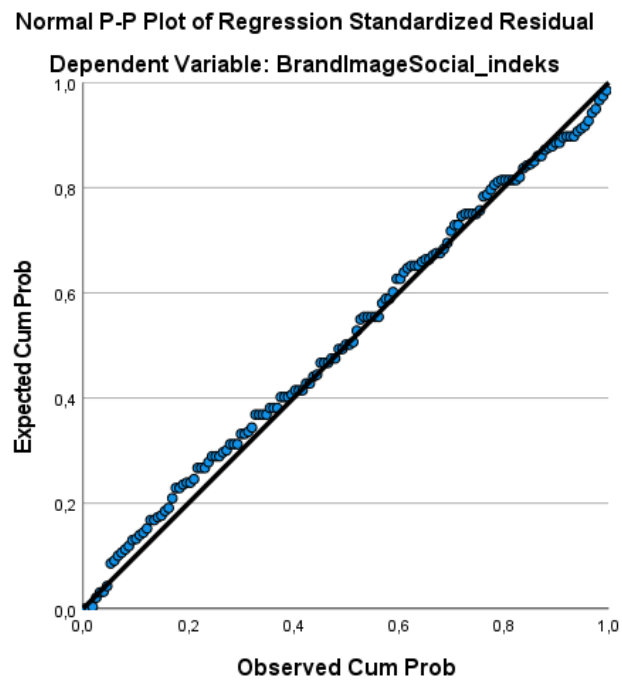
Health and safety



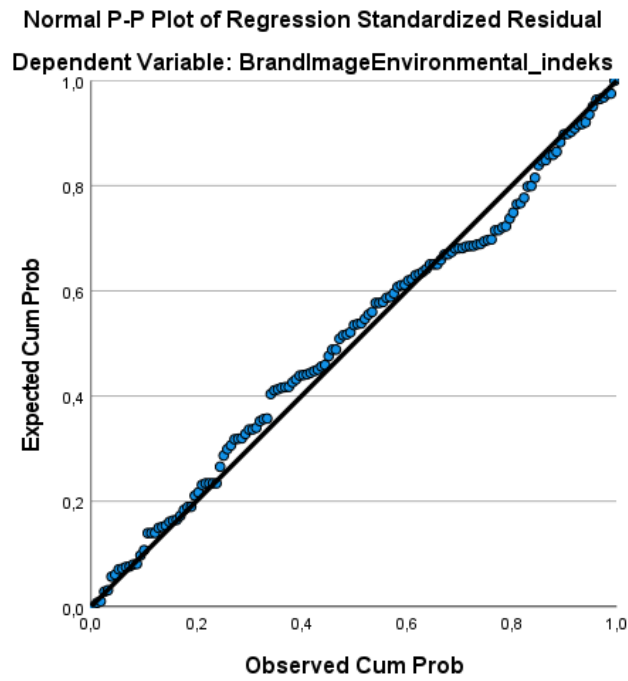
## No discrimination



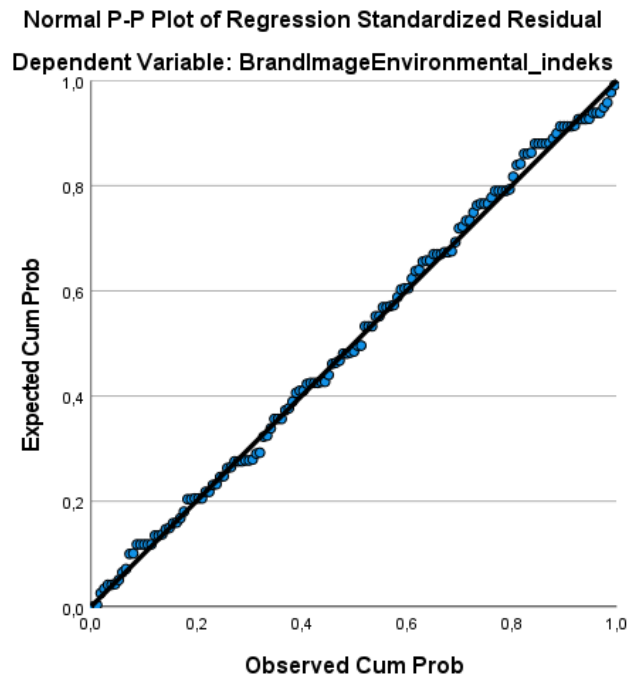
## Local community



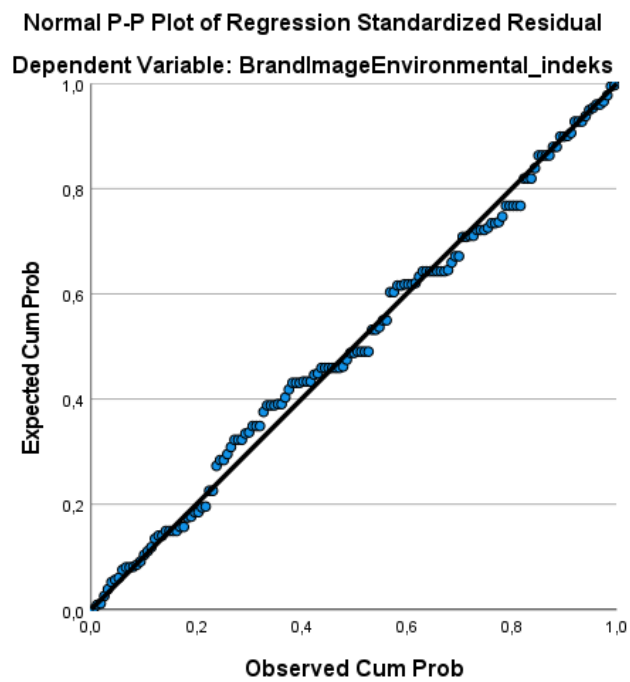
**All variables of the environmental dimension**



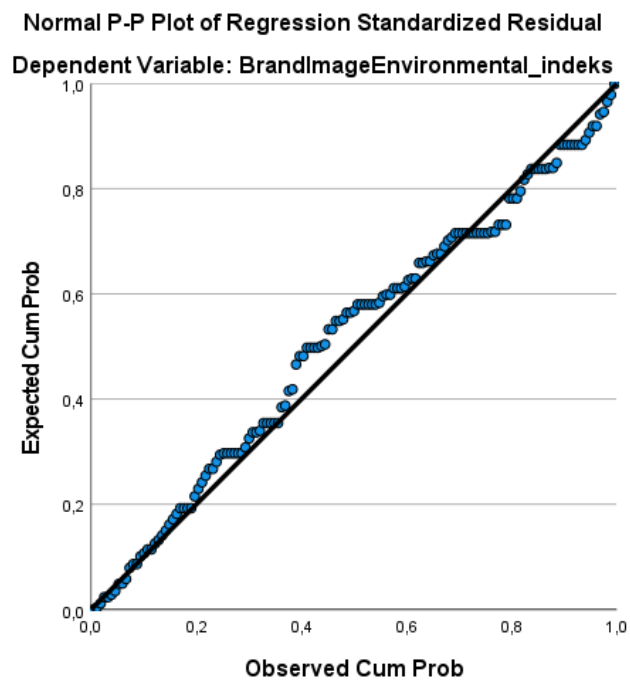
**Reduction of consumption of resources**



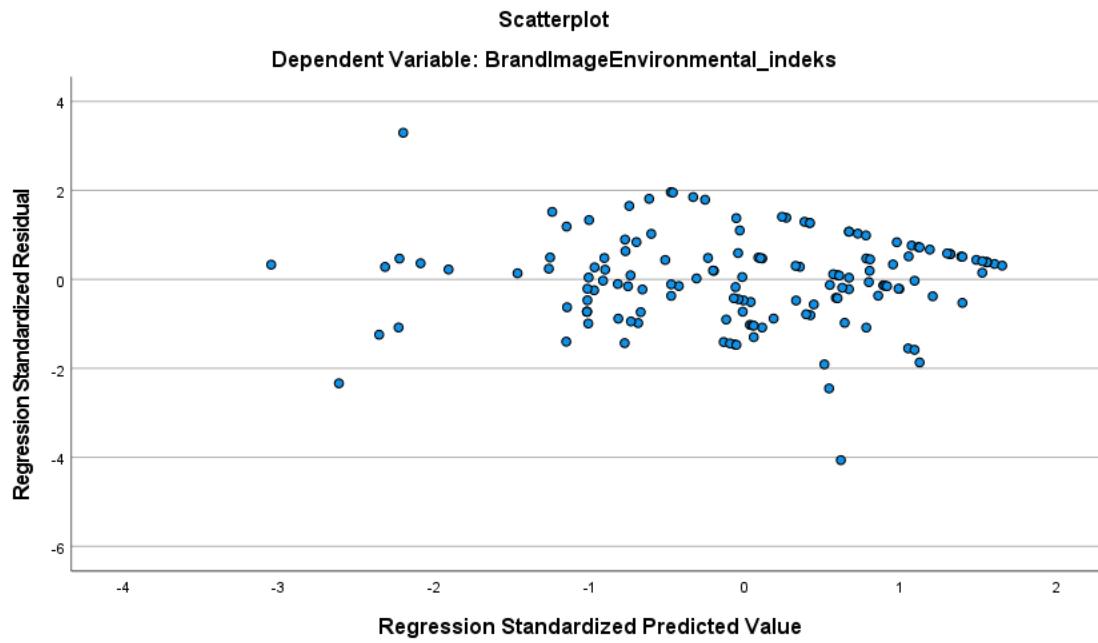
## Environmentally friendly materials



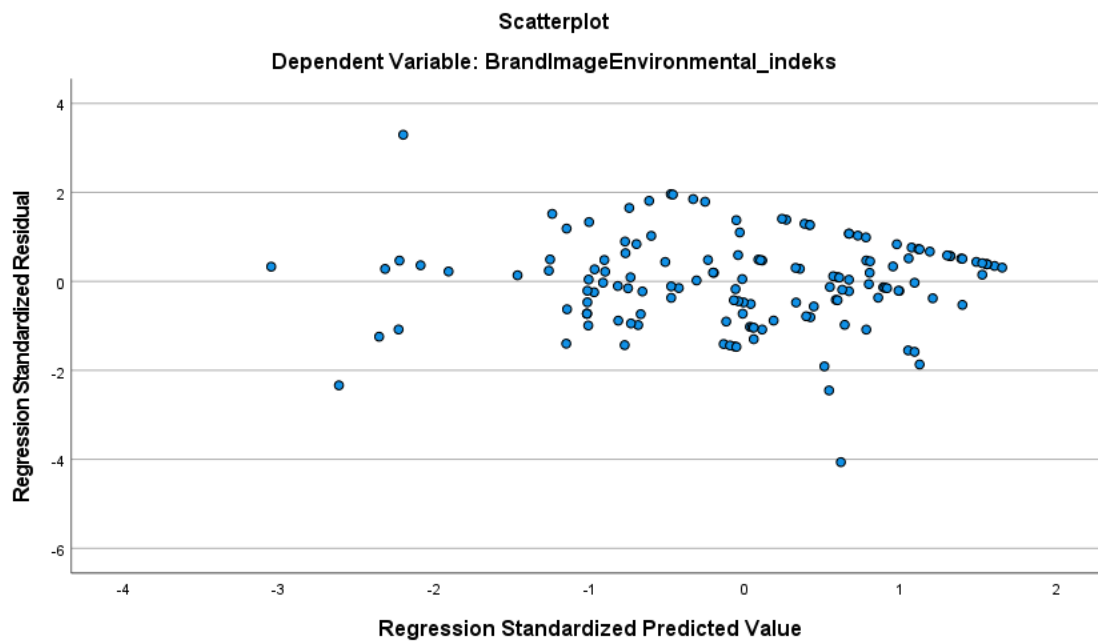
## Reducing polluting emission and waste



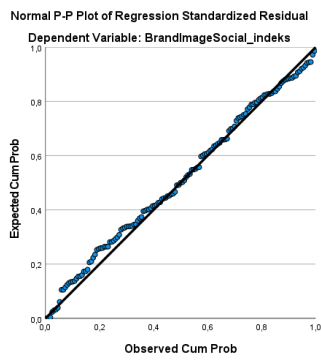
## Appendix 9: Assumption 6, Scatterplot social dimension



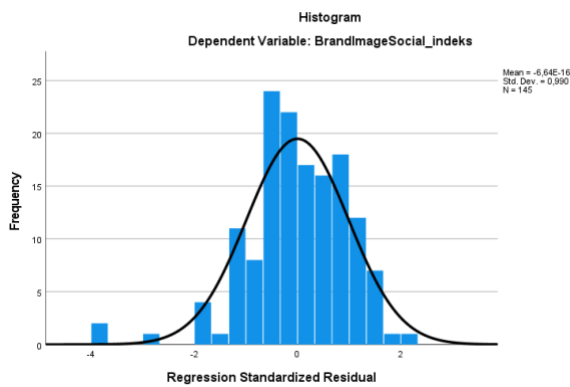
## Appendix 10: Assumption 6, Scatterplot environmental dimension



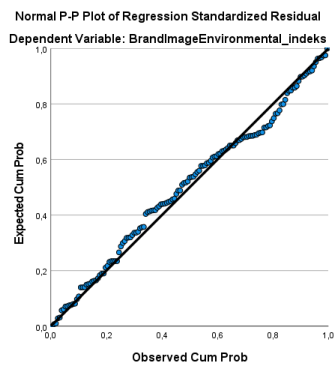
## Appendix 11: Assumption 7: P-Plot, social dimension



## Appendix 12: Assumption 7 Histogram, social dimension



## Appendix 13: Assumption 7, P-plot environmental dimension



## Appendix 14: Assumption 7, Histogram environmental dimension

