Fashion shouldn’t cost the Earth: an exploratory study on small businesses driving sufficiency in the Swedish fashion industry

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We present our humble contribution to a topic near and dear to us.
ABSTRACT

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Research Questions:
RQ1: How do small firms management develop and implement strategies to promote sufficient consumption?
RQ2: How do small firms implement stakeholder management to minimize the challenges caused by the promotion of sufficient consumption?

Purpose: To provide a better understanding of the processes, factors and forces that enable companies to promote sufficient consumption, and how they manage to overcome challenges with internal and external stakeholders that are created by the implementation of sufficient consumption practices.

Methodology: Being an exploratory qualitative research, this study uses primary data collected through 6 semi-structured interviews with management roles of 4 sustainable companies, as well as secondary data obtained from official data bases, books, and websites.

Conclusion: Small businesses in the fashion industry implement different sustainable strategies that promote sufficient consumption among others. Whether they are designed and implemented with sufficiency as a goal or not, these strategies bear challenges with multiple stakeholders that firms must face. Some of the main challenges are related to consumer and supplier resistance, as well as lack of awareness, challenging governance, and the internal sustainability vs. profitability debate. This study empirically contributes to past literature in terms of strategies and challenges, and it contributes theoretically in terms of solutions put in place through stakeholder management.

Keywords: CSR, Stakeholder Management, Sustainability, Sufficiency, Sufficient Consumption, Sustainable Fashion
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Definitions

CSR: A defined conceptualization of CSR includes four dimensions to a firm’s social responsibilities these are: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary.

Sustainability: The Brundtland Commission defines that sustainability is the long-term wellbeing of the planet and human society as divided into environmental, social, and economic perspectives.

SDG: 17 different Sustainability development goals created by UN were all implements several aspects and lays ground for strategies such as how government's, organisations and firms can do to create a better world and more sustainable environment.

Stakeholder management: Stakeholder management is the process of maintaining good relationships with the people who have most impact on your work. Communicating with each one in the right way can play a vital part in keeping them "on board”. Examples include employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, communities, and governments.

Sufficient consumption: At an individual level, sufficient consumption involves rethinking personal needs for changing excessive consumer behavior and reflecting on the relation between affluent consumption and life fulfilment. Also referred to as strong sustainable consumption, sufficiency is based on living well with less or “being satisfied with less new material goods than usually consumed today, while enjoying the existing ones.

Green marketing: It is based on the practice of developing and advertising products based on their real or perceived environmental sustainability.

Greenwashing: the concept of disinformation disseminated by an organization to present an environmentally responsible public image.

Fast fashion: Is a concept driven by trends and sales, fast fashion is more about less quality to gain a lower price and provide consumers with trendy clothing and is an opposant towards sustainable fashion strategies.
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Sustainability has become a hot topic for both researchers and practitioners, especially since the announcement and establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations (UN) back in 2015 (Voola, Bandyopadhyay, Azmat, Ray & Nayak, 2022). These are global goals that aims for sustainable development, to destroy poverty, stop climate changes and to reach a peaceful and safe society (Egels-Zandén, 2016). These are suitable for organizations and firms to work with, even though some are more suitable to multinational firms and some for smaller domestic firms, as well as different goals could be considered as more or less important for certain industries (Friedrich, 2021). In the fashion industry for example the goals with the environment as well as social responsibility are considered particularly important to be addressed by both luxury brands and fast fashion brands (Friedrich, 2021). Fast fashion refers to companies who do not directly invest in too detailed design and materials compared to luxury or more sustainable brands, to be capable to create products inspired by the most prominent and auspicious trends at fashion shows, as well as by cues given by the mainstream consumers (Agins, 1999; Reinach, 2005).

The concerning overconsumption and overproduction of goods and services is addressed by Goal number 12, Responsible Consumption and Production (UN, 2015). Said goal aims to implement the necessary fundamental changes to improve the current un-sustainable production and consumption patterns that threaten the longevity and survival of natural resources. While progress has been made since the goals were announced in 2015, the latest report still highlights the need for circular economies (UN, 2021), meaning that companies need to consider the entire life cycle of their economic activities when implementing changes that can help create a shift towards more sustainable consumption patterns.

On top of the pressure from the UN, businesses are seeing an increasing demand for more transparency, accountability, and sustainability practices, not only from consumers but also from potential investors (Mol, 2015; Sciarelli, Cosimato, Landi & Iandolo, 2021). Younger generations are showing increasing awareness when it comes to sustainable consumption patterns (Ertmańska, 2021) and research is confirming the need to support and promote better consumption patterns to also improve the psychosocial well-being of individuals (Seegebarth Peyer, 2015). However, the integration of more sustainable practices and strategies is rather

The responsibility of businesses towards its many stakeholders, nowadays known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), has been established many years ago (Bowen, 1953; Carroll, 1979). Companies are expected to be profitable, obey the law, and engage in activities that are ethical and benefit the general well-being of society. Given that in essence, CSR requires companies to consider their effect on all their stakeholders, it is crucial to investigate stakeholder management (Freeman, 2010). The latter addresses the importance of taking into consideration all individuals and groups that can be affected by a company’s economic activity, as they can also affect the company’s success. Moreover, CSR has also proven to be a great tool that can benefit relationships with multiple internal and external stakeholders (Hall, Harrison & Obilo, 2021), and can even create multi-dimensional stakeholder relations with the same individual (Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2006). Ultimately, CSR and stakeholder management can boost and strengthen each other (Khojastehpour & Shams, 2020), yet firms need to learn to exploit them accordingly in their favour (Russo & Perrini, 2010; Sen & Cowley, 2013).

The fashion industry is not known for being associated with high-focused CSR, it’s more known to be the second largest polluter, after the oil, given its high carbon emissions, wastewater production, and large amounts of landfill waste as well as for its poor working conditions (Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company, 2019). As consumers are being more and more concerned about companies focusing on CSR strategies and aligning with the SDG’s, the fashion industry has been affected and forced to find sustainable strategies and solutions (Shrivastava, Jain, Kamble & Belhadi, 2021). There are many strategies that the fashion industry is currently using and aims to establish, for example, ensuring that the supply chain takes environmental concerns seriously, producing more environmental pieces and using more reused materials. One Italian brand and fashion house Salvatore Ferragamo has started the trend by using fabrics made from oranges from Sicily (Orange Fiber) as a more sustainable solution (Friedrich, 2021).

Consumer perception in green marketing and on sustainability is connected to their awareness and as Sweden is a country with high sustainable awareness their perception is that sustainable brands are mostly positive and trustworthy (Dharmalingam & Palanisamy, 2019.) The awareness of environmental issues and the advent of a “green product” movement may have
seen a change in attitudes of the consumers. The consumers are paying more attention to green products. The environment protection programmes has also increase the awareness on green products. The support for the green products actively not only fulfils their needs but those are also environmentally friendly. There is all about trust but also how the consumer views sustainability as something important or if other factors such as economical situations may be more important (Dharmalingam & Palanisamy, 2019). The trust towards brands affected the consumer perception as brands have to be transparent on how they implement their strategies as greenwashing is a threat and can ruin the trust completely. According to previous studies, the majority of consumers think it’s important that brands take responsibility for sustainability (Dharmalingam & Palanisamy, 2019).

The idea of sufficiency emerged in the early 2000s, encouraging everyone to reassess their needs as a way to readjust the current unsustainable consumption and production patterns (Princen, 2005). Freudenreich and Schaltegger (2020) have suggested that, to implement sufficiency in their business approach, firms need to consider production and consumption jointly. But the success of such strategies has been identified as dependent on different stakeholders, mainly external, that can become both key players and potential barriers to the implementation of more sustainable practices (Gossen, Ziesemer & Schrader, 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg, 2021). According to those different practices, the concept of sufficient consumption was beginning to be a part of the development of sustainability in the business world (Fung, Chang, Choi & Lui, 2021). Sufficient consumption is a concept on how to consume less or choose wisely, where you can buy long-lasting products.

Northern Europe, and especially Scandinavia, is known for their effort towards sustainability (SolAbility, 2021). Sweden has been an environmental pioneer, evolving to one of the strongest leaders in sustainability, being in the top ten of the Environmental Performance Index for years and leading the Global Sustainable Competitive Index ranking for the last two years (Swedish Institute, 2021). In this sustainably driven environment, more companies have emerged with sustainability at their core. That is the case of fashion brands like Deadwood, Mini Rodini, One We Like, and Swedish Stockings, which will be studied in this research. All four companies are of Swedish origin and share similar values when it comes to environmental and social responsibility (Deadwood, n.d.; Mini Rodini, 2020; One We Like, n.d.; Swedish Stockings, 2020). They all implement different practices to not only reduce their impact but to also increase consumer awareness.
1.2. Problem Discussion

The fashion value chain is considered to be of global importance, as it entails employment of millions and enables foreign trade that is essential for the growth of many developing countries (UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, 2021). That said, it remains one of the most unsustainable and least regulated sectors (Cherny-Scalon & Agnes, 2016), making it a key target when it comes to improvement in production and consumption patterns to comply with the call for action from the UN. Furthermore, the implementation of sustainable practices across the multi-tier supply chains is known to be challenging, especially when there is geographical and/or institutional distance between the buyer and its suppliers (Govindan, Shaw & Majumdar, 2021). This hinders a company’s ability to control and monitor the sustainable practices being implemented across its supply chain, which increases information asymmetry and decreases transparency (Wilhelm, Blome, Bhakoo & Pau, 2016).

In the last decade, researchers have started to shed some light upon the concept of sufficient consumption, its practices, and the benefits of promoting it (Gossen et al. 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021). For instance, Hepner et al. (2020) have shown that when a brand’s marketing and communication strategies are clearly based upon sustainability it can become a solid competitive advantage. But this phenomenon proves to be far more complex as consumers' attitudes and acceptance of such strategies can vary a lot depending on their perception of the brand and their true intentions (Hwang et al., 2016; Reich & Soule, 2016). Despite having consumers at the core of consumerism, the burden of achieving sustainable consumption should be shared with other stakeholders that might have more power to reform the market and influence consumers (Akenji, 2014; Gossen et al., 2019). One of the key actors in the transition to sufficiency are businesses (Sandberg, 2021). The negative effects of sufficient consumption could be firms that could suffer since they might not sell so much, make financial losses then they will have to let people go which will be negative for them and maybe the society as well. For example, when it comes to supply chains and factories in developing countries, they could maybe benefit from having a job instead of not having one at all, there is an ethical problem as firms want to choose more sustainable partners in the supply chain (Fung et al., 2021).

Research suggests that companies can contribute to a more sustainable consumer behaviour by including sustainable practices in the supply chain, marketing strategies and business models (Bocken, 2017). Some of the most common strategies implemented by companies are linked to the redesign of products to ensure longer product life (Niessen & Bocken, 2021). However,
certain practices with a more direct effect on the profitability of a company seem to be harder to accept and implement by practitioners despite their awareness of the key role being played by businesses.

1.3. Purpose and Contribution

Given that the promotion of sufficient consumption is still a relatively young phenomenon, the following research questions are proposed to guide this exploratory study:

- **RQ1**: How do small firms management develop and implement strategies to promote sufficient consumption?

- **RQ2**: How do small firms implement stakeholder management to minimize the challenges caused by the promotion of sufficient consumption?

By answering these questions, the authors aim to provide a better understanding of processes, factors and forces that enable companies to promote sufficient consumption, and how they manage to reconcile the trade-offs with internal and external stakeholders that are created by the implementation of sufficient consumption practices. This comes partially from the suggestion from Gossen et al. (2019) on developing further research from the firms’ perspective as there are very few studies on the matter. Plus, in practical terms, obtaining better insight on these strategies can help guide other firms that might be starting their sustainability transformation or might find themselves at a crossroad, not knowing how to move towards more sustainable practices without damaging their businesses.

Dealing with a rather unfamiliar phenomenon and in the attempt to obtain a better understanding of it, an exploratory study seemed most appropriate. Therefore, this paper will take on a qualitative methodological approach. This will contribute to reducing the gap of qualitative work in academia, especially in the area of international business and marketing where quantitative studies remain dominant (Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Valtakoski, 2020).

Moreover, the data collected for this paper will be from interviews with professionals within the fashion industry in Sweden, one of the most sustainable countries in the world (Robeco, 2020). While most of the firm-level marketing research linked to SDGs are conducted in Europe, there is still a big gap when it comes to the fashion sector (Voola et al., 2022), which this study can help reduce.
The study at hand is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework is presented, going from the origins of CSR to the phenomenon of sufficient consumption strategies, as well as the origins of stakeholder management and its role in the implementation of sufficient consumption practices. After this, the methodology is presented, followed by the findings. Then the main takes and findings are discussed in contrast with previous theories. And lastly, the paper finishes with a conclusion, managerial implications, and suggestions for future research.
2. Literature Search

2.1. Methods of Literature Search

As this is an inductive study, its literature review outlines what is currently known and reveals a gap in the knowledge within the area (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019) that being better understanding of businesses driving and promoting sufficiency. To provide the appropriate context for the research topic, the literature review is entirely based on secondary literature, which are those sources published by journals or books. To ensure the quality and reliability of the literature, only peer reviewed articles were used. Then, to include key theories and ideas that were pertinent to the research topic, the authors included overviews of the origins and evolution of CSR, governance, and stakeholder management. Following the suggestions made by Saunders et al. (2019), initial search parameters and search terms and phrases were defined to ensure that relevant literature was located (see Table 1). However, during the literature search some of the parameters were adjusted. For instance, the publication period had to be expanded to find the origins of certain theories like CSR or stakeholder management.

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<th>Table 1. Search Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Search Parameters</strong></td>
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<td>Subject area:</td>
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<td>Industry:</td>
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<td>Literature type:</td>
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**Search terms and Phrases**

Sufficiency; sufficient consumption; sustainable fashion; sustainable consumption; CSR; sustainable development; sustainable strategies; stakeholder management for sustainable development; governance for sustainable development; etc.

Primarily, the search method used was database search, where peer-reviewed articles were searched through renowned databases such as ProQuest and Emerald Insight. But given that the phenomenon of sufficient consumption is still rather novel, the snowballing method was also implemented, both backward and forward. This means that the authors made use of not only the reference list in the articles found, but also investigated other studies that were citing those relevant papers. The Web of Science platform was rather useful for this last part. Lastly,
another rather very practical platform that helped locate articles connected to those found initially was Connected Papers, a tool that generates graphs in the form of maps where similar articles are grouped accordingly (Connected Papers, n.d.).

2.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

Archie Bowen’s work is considered one of the earliest conceptualizations that provided the foundation of CSR. Back in the 50s, Bowen initiated the discussions on social responsibilities within the business world in his book Social Responsibilities of the Businessman (Bowen, 1953). In it, he explained how there were already many businessmen who had genuine care and interest in their impact and social responsibilities, which materialized in the form of policies and actions. Then, it was in 1979 that researcher Archie Carroll introduced a more defined conceptualization of CSR that included four dimensions to a firm’s social responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (Carroll, 1979). In short, these refer to being profitable, obeying the law, being ethical, and being an overall good corporate citizen. According to Carroll, these categories provided companies with a framework to understand society’s expectations on which responsibilities they needed to assume.

In essence, CSR focuses on many concepts that aim to fulfil companies' responsibilities towards different stakeholders, that include and go beyond consumers, shareholders, and employees (Turker, D., Toker, H., & Altuntas, 2013). It encompasses all activities that may benefit the firm, its stakeholders, and society, such as integrating human rights, environment protection, social responsibility as well as anti-corruption in strategies and organization for firms to contribute to a better world.

Pure communication without implementation or pure implementation without communication ideally represent the two key dimensions of CSR engagement which recently is debated in the growing CSR literature (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013, Wickert et al., 2016). CSR strategies and CSR practices can be motivated by different drivers related to an organizational perspective (Wickert et al., 2016), an economic perspective (Campbell, 2007) and an institutional perspective (Hawn and Ioannou, 2016).

Young and Makhija (2014) argue that while CSR may have economic value for firms, the benefit from engaging in CSR activities will still vary depending on the visibility and economic vulnerability of each firm. Their research shows that less visible and less economically
vulnerable will benefit less and therefore will not be as motivated to invest in CSR activities. That said, according to Vishwanathan, Oosterhout & Heugens (2020), strategic CSR ensures that the firm benefits itself financially when engaging in activities that create social good. This financial value creation for the company can be done by “either enhancing the firm’s reputation, increasing stakeholder reciprocation, mitigating firm- specific risks, and/or improving innovation” (Vishwanathan et al., 2020).

Traditionally, the literature on corporate social responsibility has focused on large corporations. Little is known empirically about the nature and extent of social responsibility in small businesses (Vyakarnam, Bailey, Myers, & Burnett, 1997; Schaper and Savery, 2004). A key difference between large and small firms is that ownership and management in small firms are not as independent as in large multinational corporations (Spence and Rutherford, 2001). Thus, control remains in the hands of one of the owners, potentially allowing them to make personal decisions about resource allocation (Spence, 1999). Therefore, the acceptance of CSR by SMEs largely depends on the personal attitude of the owner/manager (Hopkins, 2003).

CSR strategies in the fashion industry are challenging as the fashion industry is considered a huge contribution toward overconsumption (Neumann, Martinez M & Martinez F, 2020). Almost all fashion brands share their vision online on how they work with sustainability. However, in the fast fashion segment this might be in line with green washing and could be very criticised as they may be only words without actions. There is also a power challenge for firms to use CSR strategies as some smaller firms may not be able to take as much responsibility as bigger firms when it comes to the fashion industry (Neumann et al., 2020). The bigger multinational companies have more power and ability to make a real change to the climate as well as the social parts of CSR strategies compared to smaller firms (Vyakarnam et al., 1997). As a result, by using CSR, the marketing in the fashion industry is affected and takes on more importance as being a part of the sustainable development and following trends (Neumann et al, 2020).

Sustainable marketing is extremely popular especially in the fashion industry to try to show consumers how they work with sustainability goals and sufficient consumption concepts (Brandão & da Costa, 2021). According to marketing literature, there is no clear definition on sustainable marketing as some define it as more holistic and others as an environmental concept. (Lunde, 2018). Holistic definitions focus on all-inclusive measures and the
environmental concept focuses solely on environmental measures (Colucci et al, 2020; Lunde, 2018).

### 2.3. Triple bottom line

The three most used dimensions for sustainability in marketing literature are environmental, social, and economic (Elkington, 1998). The concept of sustainability and Triple Bottom Line (TBL) are two related constructs that are used interchangeably in the literature (Hacking & Guthrie, 2008). The business concept of the TBL is that firms should commit to measuring their social and environmental impact in addition to their financial performance, rather than solely focusing on generating profit, or the standard “bottom line.” The TBL concept can be broken down into “three Ps”: profit, people, and the planet (Elkington, 1994).

![Figure 1. Dimensions of TBL. Own work, 2022.](Image)

In terms of economics and profit, it refers to how business organizations' practices affect the economic system. The economic growth of organizations is highly related to the economic system which provides support for future generations (Elkington, 1994). Sustainability in TBL is defined as the set of skills and leverages that allow a company to structure its business processes to achieve sustainable performance (Gimenez, Sierra & Rodon, 2012).

The economic part of TBL is the management’s responsibility to keep the business profitable but also refers to the economic situation of the community and not only the organisation itself (Friedrich, 2021). In the fashion industry there is a balance between being economic and sustainable as companies can’t make huge losses to only reach their sustainable goals as they
also have employments to look after and pay (Gimenez, Sierra & Rodon, 2012; Friedrich, 2021).

The definition of social in TBL is connected to economics as the company has a social responsibility towards their employees but also to the community by providing job opportunities as well as taking care of their employees (Gimenez, Sierra & Rodon, 2012; Friedrich, 2021). In the fashion industry, the social aspect of TBL is about making sure they offer diversity, treat their employees well, and have control over their supply chain, making sure that they also take their social responsibility and focus on a sustainable working environment (Fung et al., 2021).

The environmental aspect of TBL is connected to management creating sustainable strategies for the organisations (Gimenez, Sierra & Rodon, 2012). These strategies can be to partner up with more sustainable and environmentally friendly suppliers, creating more sustainable practices in their office such as reducing electricity, recycling materials, products and companies could support environmentally friendly organisations as well (Friedrich, 2021).

Management in the fashion industry needs to make sure that their supply chain follows the same visions as the company to be able to create sustainable practices that can make a difference in the fashion industry (Hacking & Guthrie, 2008; Fung et al., 2021). For example, by searching for new materials or solutions that can be beneficial to the environment (Friedrich, 2021).

The ultimate goal of sustainability and the concept of TBL is to find the balance between limited planet resources and the long-term development of human society (Friedrich, 2021). Thus, the environment cannot be neglected. Therefore, to achieve sustainable fashion, firms need to take severe considerations of these three main areas throughout the whole fashion industry and certain lay focus on this in production and decision making (Friedrich, 2021; Gillan, Koch & Starks, 2021).

2.4. Green marketing and advertising

As the knowledge about the environment and green products increases, that could result in consumers making more informed purchasing decisions (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Maheshwari 2014). Additionally, rather than educating consumers about general environmental issues, companies could focus on green marketing communications to be based on emphasizing the green properties of future products (Akehurst et al., 2012). Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015) also
discuss that green consumers' own environmental concerns should be considered when implementing green marketing efforts to clearly highlight their interests and encourage green purchasing decisions.

Green advertising and marketing are defined to be marketing in sustainable and profitable ways that fulfil firms’, society’s and consumers’ needs without harming the natural environment and ecosystem. (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Maheshwari, 2014). The concept of green marketing is a category of marketing where products and services are promoted based on their environmental benefits. Green marketing can also be defined as the marketing of eco-friendly products which are not harmful or could be described as better towards the environment, as well as they are also produced using eco-friendly production processes (Lunde, 2018).

Companies engage in green marketing because of one or several reasons, for example following reasons, environmental pressures, competitive advantage, corporate image, new markets, new opportunities as well as increasing product value (Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015). Companies are facing a challenge using green marketing as they want to avoid being accused of greenwashing. Greenwashing is the practice of marketing a company or organisation, so they appear more environmentally friendly, ecological, recyclable, when in practice its activities do not benefit the environment (Lunde, 2018). As the interest in sustainable products grows, companies are almost forced to try to meet the consumers’ expectations (Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015). In the fashion industry there are plenty of brands that work with green marketing as a part of their CSR strategies and try to implement reduced consumption through different strategies such as to market seconds hand, recycle garment programs in the company (Fung et al., 2021).

Green marketing could be described as measures aimed at all consumers and covering a broad range of marketing activities including plans, production, processes, advertising, and people, aimed at demonstrating a firm’s minimization of the impact of its products and service on the environment (Groening, Sarkis, and Zhu 2018). While green marketing has the general characteristics of advertising: to inform, sell as well as persuade, it has also been argued that the main purpose of green marketing is to stimulate awareness, curiosity and interest in green products and brands (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Maheshwari, 2014).

Green marketing challenges are many as companies struggle with the concept of green washing and promoting products and brands green advantages but does not include where they can do better (Groening et al., 2018). Also, green marketing is affected by the sufficient consumption
concept and the challenges to combine it while still being profitable (Fung, et al., 2021). Advertisement credibility can be defined as the degree to which a receiver perceives claims about a brand in an advertisement to be truthful and believable (Lutz, 1985).

Previously research has found that there is a positive relationship between the extent to which a green marketing ad is seen as credible, attitudes towards the ad and the purchase intention of a consumer (Sagapova, Buchtele & Dušek, 2022). There is also the problem that some green marketing campaigns have been misleading because companies have falsely claimed to be sustainable and supportive of green values. This is a result of the competitiveness of brands that are true to their environmental values, and the ones that truly can be considered as sustainable brands have been harmed (Furlow, 2010). The issue of dishonest green marketing, also called green washing, can lead to greenness of products becoming meaningless to consumers and can therefore undermine the green movement (Ottman, 2011).

Other research findings indicate that different green strategies and green advertising generates different responses from consumers, which means that some green advertising has more favourable influences on consumers’ purchase decision, while others do not (Kim & Damhorst, 1997). The consumer perception about sustainability is affected by the growth of greenwashing but also by politics and society, previously studies showed that the consumers overall consider sustainability as important (Neumann, Martinez, M. & Martinez, F., 2020). When it comes to the consumer perception regarding the fashion industry consumers are divided by the economic values and their sustainability values (Sagapova et al., 2022). There has been a development in fast fashion where they have started to adapt after the consumers wishes but also the change in the market towards more sustainable practices, even though it is debatable regarding if fashion and especially brands that are in the fast fashion segment even available to adapt (Neumann et al., 2020). Consumer perception is indeed a factor that can change the fashion industry’s choices as consumer behaviour is a part of the development towards sustainable fashion (Sagapova et al., 2022).

### 2.5. Sufficient Consumption

The origins of sufficiency as a concept are traced back to the early 2000s. Sufficiency was first conceptualized by Thomas Princen in his book *The Logic on Sufficiency* (2005) as the consumption of goods and resources at an optimal level that did not involve either over- or underconsumption. The author further argued the need for society and individuals to reassess their own needs to ensure that global production, distribution, and ultimately consumption was
just enough to reach a satiating point. In doing so, Princen claimed that sufficiency could harvest better long-term sustainable results than either a profit maximization or an efficiency approach.

Rooted in the growing sustainability movement, changes in consumption for more environmentally friendly patterns and their impact have become of interest in the academic world (Touchette & Nepomuceno, 2020; Vita et al., 2019). It has been further confirmed that the reduction of consumption is key to the deceleration of the current environmental crisis (Touchette & Nepomuceno, 2020), and one way to achieve said reduction is through sufficient consumption. The emerging concept of sufficient consumption has yet to achieve a clear and universally agreed definition, yet researchers have been trying to provide more clarification on what it entails (Gossen et al., 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg, 2021).

Sandberg (2021) developed a typology that identifies four different types of changes in consumption patterns that can yield sufficiency. These types of consumption changes are absolute reductions, modal shifts, product longevity, and sharing practices. Absolute reductions refer to a clear decrease in the quantity that an individual consumes (Sandberg, 2021); this type of net reductions in consumption have also been suggested as a more fruitful strategy to alleviating the current negative ecological impact (Vita et al., 2019). Modal shifts refer to changes that, instead of decreasing the amount of consumption as a whole, only shifts the consumption mode to one that is less resource intensive (Sandberg, 2021). Product longevity aims to extend the product lifespan to the maximum. Increasing the longevity of clothing’s life cycle is often suggested as one of the most promising tactics to decrease the carbon footprint. Lastly, sharing practices refer to the maximization of usage of goods by having individuals share them among themselves.

It has also been suggested that the effectiveness and feasibility of different sufficient consumption patterns will vary from industry to industry (Sandberg, 2021), meaning that it is key to ensure that the right consumption changes are implemented in each market. Moreover, there are different barriers that need to be considered when transitioning to sufficient consumption. Some of these barriers are consumer attitude and behaviour, organizational orientation to increasing sales and profit, culture, economic and political system, physical environment, operating in an industry based on economic growth, among others (Gossen et al., 2019; Sandberg, 2021).
Businesses have been identified as key actors in the shift towards sufficient consumption (Sandberg, 2021), as they hold power to enable sufficiency for consumers (Niessen & Bocken, 2021). In their systematic literature review on sufficient consumption within the area of commercial marketing, Gossen et al. (2019) suggest that marketing bears the tools and means to influence consumer behaviour into shifting towards more sufficient consumption patterns. These practices are related to the four Ps: product, promotion, price, and place. Researchers suggest that companies can promote sufficient consumption by providing products of maximal longevity, promoting repair and reuse of products, providing second hand products, increasing awareness through consumer education, not offering discounts, among others (Gossen et al., 2019). Researchers Sheth and Parvatiyar (2020) make a similar proposition challenging marketing to address the sustainability issues by becoming a market-driver and guiding consumers towards more responsible and sustainable actions. This is further encouraged by the UN Fashion Alliance (2021) that also suggests the use of global communications to create and improve consumer awareness that can change consumer attitudes and their consumption habits.

Implementing a marketing strategy that promotes sufficient consumption might not sound as intuitive, but academics have proven that there are many practices within marketing that could help shift towards sufficiency (Gossen et al., 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2020). The redesign of products and services to maximize their longevity is the most common approach. According to Niessen & Bocken (2021), companies might perceive this strategy to be less costly and to require less effort and sacrifice compared to other practices. Another approach suggested by scholars is the promotion of responsible consumption by creating awareness and educating consumers to prevent the appeal to consume more than what they truly need (Gossen et al., 2019; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2020). However, it has been found that these practices that call for a direct decrease in consumption are not applied as commonly as they are perceived to have a counterproductive effect on the profitability of businesses (Niessen & Bocken, 2021).

Lastly, it is also important to mention that while sufficiency sounds like an ideal approach to address the current overconsumption and overproduction crisis, research shows that it could have potential negative trade-offs in other sustainability aspects (Vita et al., 2019). For example, through the implementation of sufficiency measures globally, economic growth and employment could be hindered. Similarly, some of the sufficiency consumption might reduce the environmental impact on some of the planet’s resources, these could also relocate that impact onto other resources like the use of land and water.
2.6. Governance

Initially the definition of corporate governance was limited to the interest of a company’s shareholders and the way in which their objectives were met (Berle & Means, 1932; Shleifer & Vishny, 1997). It was identified as a way to deal with a conflict of interest or agency problem that involved shareholders and managers, so that the first could ensure the return of their investments. But this traditional view of a firm’s responsibility towards its shareholders only was later challenged by a broader view that encouraged the consideration and internalization of the welfare of other stakeholders such as suppliers, employees, and customers (Tirole, 1999). Menard and Shirley (2005) explain that agents make use of different organizational arrangements as forms of governance that support production and exchange. Such arrangements can be markets or firms, contractual agreements, and behavioural traits, and they facilitate transactions and provide a framework that guide companies in their economic activities.

Based on the previous, it can be argued that corporate governance refers to the methods and systems put in place to direct and control a company as it works its way towards the goals and interests of various stakeholders. However, since the exact meaning of governance within sustainability can be quite complex, researchers Lange et al. (2013) have proposed a definition for governance that alludes to it being a process of interactions between entities that can be private or public that aim towards achieving collective goals. Nowadays governance for sustainability is far more challenging as it requires the identification and development of solutions that will be suitable for global commons as opposed to local or regional (Petschow et al. 2017). Yet some of the methods used at a regional local level could either be transferable or provide guidance for a more global approach.

2.7. Stakeholder Management

Back in 1984, Freeman presented the Stakeholder Theory in which he addressed the need for firms to acknowledge, value and engage with all the groups and individuals that not only are affected by but can also affect the success of an organization’s purpose and objectives (Freeman, 2010). This theory was deeply rooted in the everchanging developing industries that required businesses and researchers to reconsider their views on the firm’s managerial views. In his work, Freeman (2010) referred back to the origins of the term “stakeholder” in a memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute in 1963, and the original list of stakeholders that included shareowners, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders and society. But more
specific groups joined the list as time enabled the emergence of environmentalists, consumer advocates, media, competitors, governments, etc., within the external environment and network of many businesses (Freeman, 2010). Nevertheless, companies have been known to focus their attention mainly on shareholders, employees and customers and they believe these are the vital and most critical stakeholders to the existence and success of the firm (Agle et al., 1999).

According to Hillman & Keim (2001), in a business environment that continues to change and develop, companies are forced to try and obtain long-term organizational advantages that come from nurturing their relationship stakeholders and engaging in activities that positively influence these to increase shareholder wealth. Following a similar thread of thought, Post et al. (2002) developed the so-called “Stakeholder View” of organizations that highlights the importance of stakeholder relationships, both internal and external, in the creation of the firm’s wealth. This view encourages companies to stop looking at their connection to stakeholders as transactional and to actually develop and maintain good relations that can provide a more sustainable competitiveness. To achieve these, companies are told to develop and implement consistent policies and practices.

An important aspect of stakeholder management is a firm’s stakeholder culture, which is defined as “the beliefs, values, and practices that have evolved for solving stakeholder-related problems and otherwise managing relationships with stakeholder” (Jones et al., 2007, p. 142). Stakeholder culture essentially serves as guidance for manager’s thinking and decision making when faced with the tension of self-interest and concern for others. In their paper, Jones et al. (2007) identify five different types of stakeholder culture: the amoral “agency culture”, that is rooted in egoism and therefore has no concerns for others; the “corporate egoist” and “instrumentalist” that only care about shareholders’ interests; and then the “moralist” and the “altruist” cultures that show genuine care for the welfare of all stakeholders. That said, it is important to notice that a company’s overall stakeholder management can still vary over time, as the industry and companies themselves go through changes like size or the accumulation of knowledge with age (Shropshire & Hillman, 2007). Similarly, a firm’s approach to stakeholder management and CSR can also be highly influenced by other levels of culture, such as national culture (Kumar et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Khojastehpour and Shams (2020, p. 306) suggest that “managing stakeholder relationship is intimately connected to the idea of creating value for stakeholders through creating ethical relationship with them”. This highlights the interplay of CSR and stakeholder
management, where CSR benefits the firm’s stakeholder relationships, and stakeholder management enables the implementation of CSR practices. Moreover, stakeholder relationships, along with trust and openness, are said to be key drivers to sustainability for SMEs (Russo & Perrini, 2010), yet these companies have yet to fully exploit these advantages. Russo and Perrini (2010) also suggest that SMEs’ management could benefit from implementing a stakeholder-focused approach to ensure an even more effective management of their relational capital. Research also shows that, in the context of social responsibility, SMEs consider CSR as an important opportunity to increase their social capital to make up for their limited resources and influence in comparison to larger companies (Sen & Cowley, 2013).

Sen et al. (2006) highlight the importance of CSR as a tool to not only develop but also nurture stakeholder relationships beyond consumption. They suggest that CSR initiatives have the potential to influence individuals into becoming not only customers or increasing their consumption, but to also increase their intent to work and/or invest in the company. But, to truly obtain benefits of such activities, companies need to increase awareness through effective and efficient communication. For instance, previous research argues that CSR storytelling can be a communication tool used to positively impact both internal and external stakeholders’ perceptions, attitudes, and intentions (Hall et al., 2021). And such information can be shared across different media such as reports, events, etc. Moreover, Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) suggest that stakeholders’ perception of a firm’s trustworthiness can be increased if the firm shares quality and relevant information clearly, accurately and in a timely manner.

Recently, research has shown that internal and external stakeholders can highly influence and pressure businesses to implement more sustainable practices within fashion production (Li et al., 2019). However, they also seem to be considered barriers by firms attempting to implement more sustainable strategies (Gossen et al., 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg, 2021). Consumers are said to be an important obstacle when implementing sufficient consumption practices, due to lack of awareness and knowledge, and their lack of trust towards a company’s sustainability claims (Niessen & Bocken, 2021). Other obstacles are found in the supply chain, not only in terms of reaching a mutual agreement and understanding with the suppliers, but also due to lack of proper regulations within the industry to shift towards more sustainable activities (Niessen & Bocken, 2021).
2.8. Conceptual Framework

To better visualize how the previous theories complement one another, a conceptual framework was drawn (see Figure 2). The CSR environment that encloses this model represents a business’ area where we find all efforts implemented by companies to address their overall impact and responsibilities towards the planet, people, and the company itself. It is within this environment that we find strategies like those that foster sufficient consumption, which is the key topic of this study. As previously mentioned, sufficient consumption entails a reassessment of individuals’ need with the goal to reduce the unsustainable and irresponsible consumption of the planet’s goods and resources (Princen, 2005). Within sufficient consumption strategies we can find not only absolute reductions but other types of consumption changes such as modal shifts, product longevity, and sharing practices (Sandberg, 2021). However, the most common changes implemented by businesses would be through modal shifts and product longevity (Niessen & Bocken, 2021).

**Figure 2. Conceptual Framework**

Companies might engage in strategies that promote sufficient consumption due to external pressure, genuine care, and interest for their stakeholders, or in hopes of gaining financial value. That said, regardless of their motivation, all businesses will ultimately encounter barriers and or challenges when designing and implementing such strategies. Literature shows that these can be linked to different stakeholders (Gossen et al., 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg, 2021). The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2 divides the various
stakeholders in three groups: internal, main, and external. The internal stakeholders would represent the shareholders and employees, while the main stakeholders refer to those that have a more direct relationship with the company’s economic activity such as customers and suppliers. Lastly, the external stakeholders refer to those groups that are affected by and can also affect the company’s successful activity but are not as directly linked to the business itself. As suggested by the literature presented in the previous subsections, the CSR strategies are not only beneficial but also key to the nurturing and developing of relationships with stakeholders (Sen et al., 2006). Given their role within the CSR environment as both enablers and barriers, stakeholder management is considered a critical aspect to be studied alongside the implementation of sufficient consumption strategies by small businesses.
3. Method

Understanding which is the research philosophy behind a study is crucial to ensure that it is designed systematically with coherence between the different methodological layers (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, the methodology chapter will first present its background in terms of research philosophy, theory development, and methodological approach. Then the sampling and the data collection is presented, followed by the choice of data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with the quality criteria and the ethical considerations.

3.1. Design of the Study

3.1.1. Philosophy and Epistemology

A research philosophy encompasses the beliefs and assumptions that are made throughout a study (Saunders et al., 2019). These assumptions can be categorized in ontological, which refer to the world and the nature of reality; epistemological, which refer to what is considered valid, legitimate, and acceptable knowledge; and lastly, axiological, which refer to the role that values and ethics play in the research process. Whether knowingly or not, these assumptions will ultimately shape the research from the design of the study and formulation of the research questions, all the way to the interpretation and understanding of the findings.

Based on the assumptions made within each category, five major philosophies can be identified when it comes to business research: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism (Saunders et al., 2019). The research philosophy that encloses this specific study is interpretivism, which views reality as a rich and complex flux of processes, experiences, and practices. It acknowledges the existence of multiple meanings of reality and how it requires interpretation. Unlike positivism and its emphasis on explaining reality, interpretivist studies aim to understand human behaviour and actions which requires a different logical research procedure (Bell et al., 2019). The focus is then placed on narratives and stories with different perceptions and interpretations (Saunders et al., 2019). It is a philosophy that is influenced by values, including the researchers’, given that their interpretation of the findings is key to contribution.

3.1.2. Research Approach

There are three main different approaches to theory development: deductive, inductive, and abductive (Saunders et al., 2019). The first starts with theory as a foundation of a hypothesis
that is then tested in the study, generalizing from general to specific. The second collects data to explore a phenomenon, generalizing from specific to general. Lastly, the third begins with collecting data that generates or modifies existing theory that requires further testing through additional data collection, generalizing from the interactions between specific and general. Based on the previously mentioned and given that this is an exploratory study that aims to understand a rather novel phenomenon within business – promotion of sufficient consumption – an inductive approach to theory development is deemed most suitable. The selected approach enables the authors to implement the flexibility that studying a new phenomenon requires.

Furthermore, another important aspect of the research design is the methodological choice. There are three types of research: quantitative, qualitative, and lastly a combination of the first two. The first focuses on numbers and measuring that help examine relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2019). It is most often associated with positivism and deduction but can also be useful for other research philosophies and approaches when applicable. The second places more emphasis on words than numbers, focusing on individuals’ perceptions, experiences, and opinions (Bell et al., 2019). It is most often associated with interpretivism and induction, but just like quantitative research can be applicable to other philosophies and approaches (Saunders et al., 2019). The third and last combines data collection and analytical techniques from the first two, and it is mainly associated with pragmatism and critical realism. For the research at hand, the authors made the conscious choice of using a qualitative methodological approach. This enables the researchers to gain better insight and understanding of phenomena as it provides more elaborated and extensive information (Bell et al., 2019), which is most appropriate for this specific study as it aims to explore rather than explain.

3.1.3. Research setting

At the early stages, both authors showed a common interest for sustainability as a general part of the research at hand. This was influenced by the increasing discussion and inclusion of sustainability in both the academic and social environment of the authors. Guided by previous literature on sustainability within business, the concept of sufficient consumption sparked interest and was then chosen as a phenomenon to be explored in this study. The idea that companies could promote sufficient consumption seems contradicting, especially from a financial and marketing perspective. By essence, it is often assumed that firms would aim for selling as much as possible to subsequently increase their profits. However, the current global environmental and social crisis demands that the impact of an economic activity is considered
beyond its responsibility of being profitable. Therefore, it seemed important to address the possibility of businesses to promote better consumption patterns.

As for the choice of the fashion industry, it was almost intuitive considering it stars in many overconsumption articles both in media and academia. In an article for Harvard Business Review, Kenneth Pucker (2022) explains how while the real impact of the fashion industry remains unknown, it is still very large, especially given its global reach and its multitiered supply chain. Moreover, the fashion industry has been identified by the European Commission as key area of focus for sustainability changes (Kent, 2022). This is due to the textile consumption being among the biggest sources of negative environmental impact in terms of climate change, water and land pollution, and virgin material consumption and greenhouse emissions.

From the beginning the aim was to study an industry within Sweden, both due to it being a pioneer country in sustainability and for easier access as it is the country where both authors reside, study, and work. Furthermore, Sweden has a sustainability approach that includes changing the behaviour of consumers and how they meet their needs (Swedish Institute, 2021). For a few years now Swedish fashion brands have been implementing different sustainable strategies to try and improve consumers behavior. That is the case of Deadwood, Mini Rodini, One We Like, and Swedish Stockings, fashion brands with sustainability at their core and innovative business models that push for better consumer habits through the use of better-quality material, the maximization of products’ life cycles, etc. It is important to mention that one of the researchers of this study currently works within the financial department of Mini Rodini, one of the sustainable brands included in the sample. While this was not the only reason for the choice of industry, it most definitely influenced the decision as it secured a participant. Given the time limit, obtaining access to a case from the start was crucial for the development of the research.

3.2. Sampling

The population of any research refers to the full set of cases or elements that can be studied within a specific study (Saunders et al., 2019). However, the limitations and lack of resources often force research to select a sample or subgroup from that initial population to facilitate the data collection. There are many sampling techniques that can be categorized in two big groups: probability and non-probability. (Bell et al., 2019). The first refers to those that select the sample randomly so that the probability of each unit being chosen is known, which reduces
bias. The second refers to the opposed, meaning a sample that is not selected at random and is instead chosen due to specific characteristics. While it is still a very valid sample method, it is important to acknowledge that it has limitations when it comes to generalisation being drawn from it.

Based on the previous, all companies within the fashion industry in Sweden that implement strategies to promote sufficient consumption are the population of this study. Then, purposive sampling was implemented, a type of non-probability sampling that requires the researchers own judgement in the selection of the cases that will enable them to obtain answers to their research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Going even further, it falls under homogeneous sampling, meaning that it involves a subgroup that shares similar traits. In the case of this research, the sample includes a total of 4 Swedish companies from the fashion industry that are sustainability-oriented and implement at least one sustainable strategy that promotes sufficient consumption (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Study sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Company description</th>
<th>Founding year</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>Sufficiency-promoting strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deadwood</td>
<td>Sustainable clothing</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>10&gt;</td>
<td>Design for product longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Design for product longevity; communication of better practices for maximizing product life…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini Rodini</td>
<td>Sustainable children's clothing</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>60 ≈</td>
<td>Design for product longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One We Like</td>
<td>Sustainable children's clothing</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10&gt;</td>
<td>Design for product longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stockings</td>
<td>Sustainable hosiery</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10 ≈</td>
<td>Design for product longevity; communication of better practices for maximizing product life…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample includes the following companies:

- **Deadwood.** Swedish sustainable fashion brand founded in 2012 by friends and colleagues Felix von Bahder and Carl Ollson (Deadwood, n.d.). With its origins as a vintage store, it evolved into a clothing line that challenged the traditional ways of the fashion industry. The company produces its garments from materials such as deadstock skins, repurposed vintage clothing, upcycled post-production waste, and the latest a vegan leather made from cactus.

- **Mini Rodini.** Swedish sustainable kids clothing brand that was founded in 2006 by artist Cassandra Rhodin, who not only is still one of the owners but also actively works as Creative Director of the company. From the beginning, Mini Rodini’s vision has been “to make it both easy and exciting for parents to buy better products for their kids
in regard to the design as well as environmental and ethical aspect of the production” (Mini Rodini, n.d.). According to their 2020 Sustainability Report, Mini Rodini is present in 57 countries thanks to its 327 retailers. The brand also counts with their own web shop that ships internationally, as well as 2 physical stores, one in central Stockholm, Sweden, and another in the iconic Notting Hill area in London, United Kingdom.

- **One We Like.** Swedish sustainable kids clothing brand founded in 2013 by Vicky Bucknell Springfeldt, who is still the owner and creative director (One We Like, n.d.). The ambition of the company is to create a more sustainable option for children’s clothes by creating high quality and timeless collections in organic cotton. The brand has a physical store in Stockholm, Sweden, as well as a web shop that ships internationally.

- **Swedish Stockings.** Swedish sustainable hosiery brand founded in 2013 by Nadja Forsberg and Linn Frisinger, as a reaction to learning about the issue surrounding the unsustainable production and consumption of pantyhose (Swedish Stockings, 2017). In fact, Swedish stockings was the very first brand on the market to offer only sustainable hosiery (Swedish Stockings, 2020). The company offers a wide range of premium tights, knee-highs, leggings, and socks made of recycled materials (Swedish Stockings, n.d.) and is proud to combine “sustainability, quality, and great design” (Swedish Stockings, 2020 p.3).

Initially the researchers aimed to gather a sample that included as many companies as possible to increase the variety and richness of the data. Companies that claimed to be sustainable were then researched to learn about the sustainable practices being implemented to identify those that could be considered as sufficiency-promoting based on previous theories (Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg, 2021). A total of 23 companies were then contacted via email by the authors, giving a brief explanation of the study being conducted and requesting interviews with some of the professionals within each company. Out of those 23 potential participants, 9 declined mainly due to lack of time and availability, 7 never replied, 3 were forwarded by their customer service to those in charge of sustainability but without an answer, and, finally, 4 accepted to participate in the study. Reminders were sent twice to those without an answer with no luck. Due to the time limit of the study, the interviewing process was closed by the 25 of April 2022.
3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Primary & Secondary Data

There are two types of data that can be collected by researchers with the goal of answering their research questions: primary data and secondary data (Saunders et al., 2019). The first refers to data that is new and collected specifically for the purpose of the research at hand, while the second refers to data that was previously gathered by others for a different study or purpose. Both are great sources of information and can help answer or partially answer different research questions. But it is crucial to proceed with caution when making use of secondary data by evaluating its suitability, reliability, and the potential bias in it.

To be able to answer the research questions guiding this study, the authors initially made the choice to collect primary data through semi-structured interviews. This method is known to allow researchers to obtain rich and detailed information and is considered better suited for studies that aim to explore new phenomena (Saunders et al., 2019). Having access to management roles within each of the companies included in the sample of the study enabled the authors to gather richer and personalized data to understand the participants’ opinions and experiences.

Moreover, the study also makes use of secondary data. As previously mentioned, secondary data is the data that somebody else has collected with a different purpose than the study at hand (Saunders et al., 2019). It can be found in different forms, from raw different to already processed and stored. In this research, the secondary data used is sourced from official websites and reports from the companies included in the sample, as well as articles and reports from official renowned organizations such as the Swedish Fashion Association. The use of secondary data used requires the authors to be selective. As it is important to ensure that the sources are in fact appropriate for the study being conducted, the ones selected for this research are related to the fashion industry. Given the time limitation and lack of access to more primary data, the use of secondary data was crucial to the development of this study.

3.3.2. Design of the Interview Questions

Saunders et al. (2019) highlight the importance of formulating the correct questions to ensure that the data obtained can in fact help answer the study’s research questions. Some of the types of questions that can be used during an interview are open questions, which enable the participants to describe situations and events however they wish, probing questions, which can
be worded as open questions but aim to obtain answers regarding topics of significance to the study at hand, and specific closed questions, which can help to obtain more specific information or further confirm opinions and facts. A series of potential questions were first created and then revised by the study’s supervisor. After edition based on the feedback received, the interview guide was then developed to help navigate each interview. The interview guide constructed for this study includes a mix of all three types of questions (see Table 3) to ensure that the information needed is obtained, while simultaneously leaving room for the participants to share any facts or experiences they might find appropriate.

Table 3. Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Scope</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND</td>
<td>• How long have you worked in this industry? And how long is your work experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Could you describe your role within the company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can you tell us about your experience with being confronted by the SDGs in your work environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can you tell us what the unique selling point of your company is? (What is it that the company develops/offers to customers?) For how long has the company offered this value proposition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRM &amp; STAKEHOLDERS BACKGROUND</td>
<td>• Could you also describe the organizational structure of the firm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Could you also roughly describe what your supply chain looks like? And which are the main locations for your sourcing? (Countries? Continents?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where are most of your customers located?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you have any sort of sustainability report that we can have access to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUFFICIENT CONSUMPTION STRATEGIES</td>
<td>• Could you describe what kind of sustainable practices your company implements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Describe your role in the development of these practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the key factors for these practices to work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Which of these practices you think is most effective in tackling overconsumption?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are consumers supportive of these practices? Could you give examples where or how you notice this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How could companies help consumers to reduce the amount they consume?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHALLENGES</td>
<td>• What are the internal challenges you have experienced? Please give examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What kind of motivational and relational factors have facilitated overcoming these challenges? Please give examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What kind of external challenges have you encountered? Please give examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What kind of motivational and relational factors have facilitated overcoming these challenges? Please give examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BONUS QUESTION</td>
<td>• Do you have any advice for companies that might be starting their sustainability transformation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As suggested by Bell et al. (2019), the interview guide was employed with flexibility during each interview, allowing each conversation to follow its natural flow. Moreover, as the interviews were conducted, the interviewers used expressions to follow up on some of the answers such as “that’s very nice”, “that’s really good information”, “that makes sense”, etc. Saunders et al. (2019) encourage the use of such for the sake of prompting further answers from the informants. These were not planned but rather came up when necessary if the interviewers felt there was more information to be shared by the participants.

3.3.3. Qualitative Interviews

Participants were approached in multiple ways. Two participants were approached only via email. Then another participant was initially emailed to the company’s general information email address and later approached via LinkedIn private message. And the other three were initially approached in person as they share workspace with one of the authors, and the interviews set and confirmed via email. All emails that were sent out to unknown people to the authors were done via the university email address to increase the credibility and trust from the potential participants. The researchers made sure to share the same information with all participants from the beginning, introducing themselves and the topic of the study to justify why they were chosen to take part of it. Time availability and the potential duration of the interviews were also provided.

A total of 6 interviews were conducted, where five were carried out online and only 1 was done in person (see Table 4). For the virtual interviews the authors made use of the video communication software Zoom. This facilitated the recording of both audio and video of each interview. As for the face-to-face interview, it was conducted in the Headquarters of the company in Stockholm, in a meeting room that allowed privacy. This interview was then recorded with the interviewer’s phone application Voice Memos. The interviews took around 30 minutes, which matched the researchers’ prediction and information provided to the participant. All recordings were then transcribed for a better analysis of the data collected. Recording and transcribing interviews is highly recommended as it allows a more thorough examination without the limitations of the researchers’ memory (Bryman and Bell, 2015).
3.3.4. Data analysis procedures

Qualitative data can be rather diverse and the technique and procedure to analyze it will therefore vary a lot depending on the focus of the analysis and the need for fragmentation or maintaining the integrity of the data (Saunders et al., 2019). Given that the data collected for this study is rather extensive and non-standardized, it requires to be fragmented and reorganized. One of the most common techniques that enables researchers to fragment and sometimes even reduce the data is Thematic Analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). The essence of this type of analysis is to identify themes or patterns within the different data sets of a study. Some of its advantages include being flexible and accessible, as it can adjust to each study and does not require a lot of theoretical knowledge to be implemented (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun & Clarke’s (2006) first phase of thematic analysis highlights the importance of becoming familiar and creating an understanding of the content of the data. The process to become familiar with the data set already started during the transcribing process as it required the authors to listen to the audio recordings multiple times. This created a general base or knowledge on some of the content that could be found in the data. Then, once all transcripts were ready to be reviewed, the authors not only read through them multiple times, but they also would play the audio as they went through the text to ensure that nothing was missing and identify if there was any information regarding tone or emphasis that needed to be noted as part of the transcript. Before moving on to the next step, the authors investigated the frequency of certain words that were related to the topic of the study (see Table 5). An interesting fact seen in this is while some of the most repeated words were sustainable and sustainability, not a single interviewee mentioned the word sufficiency nor sufficient are any point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name and Last Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deadwood</td>
<td>2022-04-05</td>
<td>Felix von Bahder</td>
<td>Co-founder &amp; Creative Director</td>
<td>Online via Zoom</td>
<td>00:36:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini Rodini</td>
<td>2022-04-07</td>
<td>Teresa Tayzon</td>
<td>Head of Marketing &amp; PR</td>
<td>Mini Rodini HQ - Stockholm</td>
<td>00:37:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2022-04-08</td>
<td>Elin Lindén</td>
<td>Sustainability Manager</td>
<td>Online via Zoom</td>
<td>00:32:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2022-04-11</td>
<td>Håkan Ström</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Online via Zoom</td>
<td>00:37:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One We Like</td>
<td>2022-04-08</td>
<td>Victoria Bucknell Springsfeldt</td>
<td>Founder &amp; Owner</td>
<td>Online via Zoom</td>
<td>00:33:59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stockings</td>
<td>2022-04-20</td>
<td>Helena Leach Squire</td>
<td>Brand Director</td>
<td>Online via Zoom</td>
<td>00:36:48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second phase involves an initial coding of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process allows researchers to not only identify interesting and valuable segments of the data but organize these features that would then be easier to group in themes. Table 6 shows an example of part of the coding process conducted in this study. Moreover, the authors made use of color coding to help highlight the content within the data where potential patterns could be identified. The use of colors made it helpful to go back to those sections later in the research when trying to find appropriate quotes to include in the presentation of the findings.

Table 5. Relevant words/phrases and their frequency within the full data set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Factor*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Consumer*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>We need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Overconsumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*includes other variants with the same root of the word.

Table 6. Data extract with codes applied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| "I mean, that I would say it's a super strength of the company, that people are so interested in taking this as natural part of the work specifically. And then we have some special competence like Elin, for instance, or Cassandra herself because this is also an area where things are changing rapidly, and we don't know everything." | 1. Importance of human capital that aligns with the company's culture  
2. Sustainability is a complicated concept |

The color coding was then used again to organize the codes in themes and identify whether some themes were addressed by all companies or if it was specific to some. This was useful to see how, for example, some internal challenges were mentioned by more than one informant, but they all belonged to the same company.
Codes were organized and reorganized in search of themes. Initially the authors had grouped them in themes such as consumer related, supplier related, etc. But as the themes were reviewed and reread, it made more sense to group the codes in more general themes as the previously considered still included some similarities. The final themes chosen that would then guide the presentation of the analysis were: strategies, challenges, and problem solving.

The final step of the thematic analysis involves the writing of the findings in a way that is coherent, logical, and tells an interesting story for the reader (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To help with the previously mentioned, the authors chose to include extracts from the data set to support the reporting of the results.

3.4. Quality Criteria

The goal of establishing trust in a qualitative study's data collection is to ensure that they are truthful, believable, and credible (Bell et al., 2019). Therefore, the criteria of validity and reliability are presented.

3.4.1. Validity and Reliability

Validity can be described both as internal and external validity (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The internal validity can be confirmed in this research by the fact that the authors aim to investigate the fashion industry firm's sustainability strategies, improvements as well as their contribution towards the concept of sufficient consumption. As well as focus on understanding their role as an intermediary as well as the relevance between the chosen firms for this research and the theories. The external validity, also referred to as transferability of the study (Saunders et al., 2019), measures to what extent the research results are generalizable. That is, whether the finding may be equally applicable to other research settings, such as other organizations and firms (Fisher, 2010). Therefore, the authors provided detailed documentation and descriptions to ease the process for those who want to transfer the findings to their own study to then judge its transferability.

A study's reliability is affected by whether data is produced and handled in a reliable manner (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Reliability and confirmability in a study is measured by the assurance that the study's results can be confirmed by other researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Therefore, the authors have been clear that they have not let neither theoretical inclination or personal values influence the conduct of research and the study’s outcome.
To confirm the reliability of this study, the authors also made sure that all interviews were conducted, recorded, and carefully transcribed. This was done to show the correlation between what was observed during the interview and the proposed theory, and the relevance between them was confirmed.

All the interviews were conducted in English, and the opportunity to speak Swedish was handed out as one of the authors is Swedish, but there was no need for that according to the informants. There is a risk by not having the interviews in the informants’ native language (Fisher, 2010). It was offered as a possibility anytime they wanted to switch to Swedish, as it could be easier for informants to give more information, and express deeper feelings, and thoughts in their native language (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

To overcome this, the authors thought that the respondents should be offered this. As English is a language that is taught at an incredibly young age in Sweden, and the respondents use English naturally in their work when they communicate, the respondents felt comfortable to fully express themselves in English. The authors also focused on retaining a certain style of asking and explaining questions or added information during the interviews. This procedure was considered as it can increase the interview quality (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

To reduce the possibility of research answers being misinterpreted, the research design has two key areas of focus, validity as well as reliability (Saunders, 2019). It is also the importance of the quality assessment of these terms (Bell et al., 2019). To the extent to which data collection techniques or analytical procedures provide consistent results is the description of reliability (Blumberg et al., 2014). Furthermore, the credibility of a qualitative study aims to establish confidence that the collected results from the informants are true, believable, and credible (Bell et al., 2019). Therefore, the authors decided to conduct four pre-tests to validate the interview questions to avoid misunderstandings.

3.4.2. Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted, once the questions had been formulated, with the purpose of ensuring that the interview questions were easy to understand and that there were no ambiguities on the part of the informants (Bell et al., 2019). They were analysed by the given supervisor as well as given out to four people representing the industry but with a more the purpose that they could give a critical perspective on question formulations, and target for this study, as a test for the interview guide took place. This gave the authors an idea of how the questions could be interpreted and if there were any way they could be improved. It was
important that the informants of the pilot study were not included in the sample for the study since the individuals' answers would not be useful and could be affected by their previous experience of the pilot study. Bryman & Bell (2017) claims that by including pilot-studies in the real sample can lead to a potential impact on the credibility of the study’s result. When the pilot-test had been carried out, the interview questions did not need to change as they also were adapted and inspired from reliable studies.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

According to Saunders et al. (2019), before conducting a study, there are several factors to consider. Integrity, secrecy, and anonymity are three of these factors that must be implemented in the study. This refers to how the informant’s will be studied and treated throughout the procedure. It's also crucial that the informants' consent is obtained, and that no crucial information is withheld (Bryman & Bell, 2017). On that note, the authors requested the consent of the informants to have the interview audio recorded. Poortinga (2016) emphasized this point by bringing up the term's equivalency and prejudice. The authors also emphasize the importance of conducting each interview in an impartial and unbiased manner. The informants were being informed and asked in advance but also during the interview for their consent and permission to record the interviews as well as using their identity and answers in this study.

The significance of treating the informants' personal information with the utmost confidentiality was underlined by Bryman & Bell (2017). Therefore, unauthorized individuals will not have access to the informant's private information. The respondents were available to be anonymous, but they all agreed to not be, therefore it was important for the authors to handle their information in a respectful and responsible manner. Transparency in the study is important as well, by not being anonymous it is easier to know that the received information is reliable and could strengthen the credibility of the data collection (Saunders et al, 2019).

The concept of transferability is based on what degree the results of a qualitative study have the strength to be transferred or generalized to other settings or contexts (Bell et al., 2019) The authors found it important to provide detailed descriptions and documentation to ease the process for others who would want to transfer the findings to new studies, to then judge its transferability. Moreover, the term dependability means to ensure that the findings of a qualitative study are repeatable with similar use of codewords and group of informants (Saunders et al., 2019) To create a study of dependability, the authors made sure to compose
well-documented descriptions of the study's method including detailed descriptions of the data collection process.

3.6. Limitations

This study has three main methodological limitations that have been identified. The first one is related to the research setting and sample. As the research focuses on the fashion industry in Sweden and its sample only includes small companies, the findings obtained from it might not be generalizable for other industries or bigger companies. Another important limitation is the lack of access to more data as only four companies accepted to take part of the study and only one of those companies could give access to interviews with more than one management role. While the current sample enables some theoretical and empirical contributions, these will remain limited to the cases studied rather than the whole industry. And lastly, the lack of time to continue the data collection is another limitation linked to the previous one. In fact, many companies that were approached to participate in the study had to decline due to the short timeframe for conducting the interviews as they had fully booked schedules for the following months.
4. Empirical Findings

4.1. History and Evolution of the Fashion Industry in Sweden

Previous research has focused on mandatory on the economic developments of the textile and clothing industries, and there is still a lack of information of cultural and national aspects’ effects and how these industries operated in relation to a fashion-oriented network. There is still more information missing about how these changes in society and manufacturing contributed to a change of professionals shaping fashion production (Kyaga, 2017). The Swedish fashion industry had a major influence from the Italian and French fashion systems and choice of materials during the 1930-1980 (Bengtsson, 1980) and is still on the trend part seeking international influences but also in the 2000’s started to embrace the Scandinavian style based on cultural values as sustainability (Kyaga, 2017).

In her book Kläder, shopping och flärd: Modebranschen I Stockholm 1945–2010 (in English Clothes, shopping and vanity: the fashion industry in Stockholm) published in 2019, economic historian Carina Gräbacke presents an overview of the dynamic development of the Swedish retail sector in the post-war period and its decline between 1960 and 1980. In particular, this dynamic development was a result of increased import penetration from low-wage countries. The import of cotton, clothes and shoes decreased by 0,35 % from 1931-1941 and then increased by 99,825 % from 1941 to 1960 (SCB, 1972).

Ethnologist Viveka Berggren Torell looked at the Swedish clothing industry in the twentieth century with a focus on manufacturing in the children's clothing segment. There is a huge development where trends have shifted more towards sustainability compared with being easy to wash or just trendy as between 1900-2000 (Berggren Torell, 2003). Before there was a lot of import when it came to fashion, then companies as H&M that was founded in 1947 and later became an international success, it created more possibilities to export and create as well as invest in other brands in different fashion styles as H&M Group. As for H&M Group they have brands that focus on more sustainable materials as & Other stories and Arket or more premium brands such as COS. H&M represent 82,3% of the export in 2019 and can be defined as one of the biggest actors in the Swedish fashion industry (Swedish Fashion Association, TEKO report, 2019). Many other Swedish brands were created in the 90s, such as Gina Tricot, Twist & Tango where the Swedish fast-fashion segment started to grow (Kyaga, 2017). The shift for more sustainable materials became very important for brands after the 2000’s, for example brands like & Other stories founded in 2013 and Arket founded in 2018 that focused more on
sustainability and quality but still being a part of the H&M group (TEKO, 2019). This was caused by the trend of sustainability, the new UN’ goals as well as the big interest for consumer awareness about more sustainable and sufficient consumption (TEKO, 2019).

The financial perspective shows that the interest in Swedish has increased along with the purchase intent from Swedish consumers directed towards national brands (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2020). The revenue in the Swedish fashion industry increased between 2011-2015 from 207,2 MKR to 304,7 MKR, where the export and domestic market also increased (TEKO, 2016). The Swedish fashion export resulted in 272 MKR in 2019, which is an increase by 12,3 % on the Swedish export in the fashion industry compared with 2018 (TEKO, 2019).

As the attitude toward the concept of sustainability increased over the years for consumers, the fashion industry global and especially in Sweden had to adapt after those changes (Kyaga, 2017). The Swedish fashion industry started to turn to new sustainable solutions such as reused materials, selling pre-used clothing and some changed their supply chain. The awareness of sustainability led to many new brands that were highly focusing on sustainability and an alternative towards the fast fashion Swedish brands as H&M and other international brands. Fast fashion demands short development cycles, small batches, rapid prototyping, and variety in order to give customers the latest designs (Tokatli, 2008). The fast fashion industry also has lower manufacturing and labour costs that lead to overall lower costs of production. This ultimately results in the ability to produce higher volumes, as well as charge low prices for their products (Tokatli, 2008). For fashion brands that want to focus on more sustainable practices their fashion system is more towards quality over quantity as well as producing trendy clothes that can still be timeless and re-used (Fung et al., 2021).

It has gone from a few brands having mainly focus for sustainability towards every fashion brand offering a side where they write their sustainability strategies as well as realising sustainability reports (Fung et al., 2021).. Also being able to give customers a chance to leave in old clothes so companies can reuse it or if there is still being able to sell it, they can sell it to next customer are some strategies that Swedish fashion brands use in 2022 and been using for a couple of years according to a report from Swedish Fashion Association, TEKO (2019).
4.2. Case Companies

4.2.1. Mini Rodini

Mini Rodini’s production suppliers are located in Turkey, Portugal, Lithuania, China, and India, with the first two producing together 73% of their goods (Mini Rodini, 2020). Mini Rodini’s Sustainability Manager shared that having production in the same country or area as where the raw material comes from is also part of their sustainable strategies to reduce their environmental impact (E. Lindén, personal communication, April 8, 2022). In addition, the company works with the tech company Trustrace that enables them to trace up to 56% of their lower tier supply chain, which allows them to get a better understanding of their environmental and social impact beyond the production factories they work with (Mini Rodini, 2020).

The brand is known for its unique prints and designs created by artist and founder Cassandra Rhodin, its high-quality garments, and its strong dedication towards sustainability (Mini Rodini, 2020). For instance, in 2017 the brand was actually awarded by the Swedish Habit Fashion as the Most Sustainable Brand of the Year (Mini Rodini, 2017). Mini Rodini’s definition of sustainability is “an act that does not take anything away from nature or from people, but ensures they are protected and sustained into the future” (Mini Rodini, 2020 p.8). Not only it is seen as an obligation and has been a core value from the start, but the brand strongly believes they can “ignite change”.

They identify 3 dimensions to their sustainability efforts: better products, social justice, and at home (Mini Rodini, 2020). The first refers to a production with better material, better chemicals, and better certifications. The second involves responsible sourcing with help of the Fair Wear Foundation and the living wages project. Lastly, the “at home” dimension refers the organization’s responsibilities, its ethical values, and its ecological footprint (see Image 1). The company’s interviewees shared their awareness regarding the SDGs. While not all had them on top of their mind, both the CEO and the Sustainability Manager shared how since the SDGs were introduced by the UN, the company has made an effort to not only use it as guidance on the design of their sustainable practices, but they have actively reviewed and selected those which felt they had a bigger impact on and could address better. Moreover, the measuring and reviewing of their sustainable strategies is part of their sustainability framework and was also mentioned throughout the interviews. Part of the management tasks within the company is to ensure these are carried out successfully throughout the different departments by supporting their teams and making tough decisions when need.
Mini Rodini’s sustainability efforts go further than just producing good, attractive long-lasting products sustainably (Mini Rodini, 2020). Through the years they’ve implemented different strategies that reduced waste of clothing and textiles. An example is their Treasures concept store, where the brand offered a selection of items from past collections that have been mended, returned, or even samples that never made it into a collection (Mini Rodini, 2020). With this business model with a circular mindset, Mini Rodini ensures the maximization of their products and hopes to inspire their customers to “repair more, waste less and value all things” (Mini Rodini, 2020 p.21). In addition, Mini Rodini creates new collections through upcycling of their leftover fabrics that helps reduce waste by repurposing textiles that would otherwise end up in a landfill. One of our interviewees explained how this was one of her favourite sustainable practices and that it was clearly supported by consumers just by looking at how these collections sell out (T. Tayzon, personal communication, April 7, 2022).

Another approach is through communicating how to care for their garments through their care guides in the official website, so that customers can make sure that the products last for a long as possible and can be enjoyed many times and passed on to newer generations (Mini Rodini, n.d.). The company values their products greatly which is why they also try to actively avoid price reductions so that customers can also understand the value in them from the materials used to the work from every individual involved in the creation of a single item (H. Ström,
More on their sustainability efforts can be found in their annual sustainability reports, which the brand has been publishing and made available to the public since 2014 in their official website https://www.minirodini.com/.

Image 2. Screenshot of Mini Rodini’s webshop. Source: https://www.minirodini.com/

4.2.2. Swedish Stockings

From the very beginning, the mission of Swedish Stockings has been to change and influence the industry towards more sustainable production (Swedish Stockings, 2020). Their vision is to be “the world’s first circular hosiery brand” (Swedish Stockings, 2020 p.6) and they continuously work towards it. The key core values of the brand are design, quality, responsibility, and innovation. The first two are key to ensuring the longevity of their products, while the last two guide their transparency and drive to find new and better ways with the goal of decreasing the impact on the planet.
The production of their goods is strictly produced in Italy (Swedish Stockings, 2020). When selecting the people and factories that the company works with, they consider factors such as the factory’s commitment to environmental issues and their employees, their work with sustainable materials, and also their geographical location and economics. Swedish Stockings has the ambition to continue to bring production closer to Sweden, where both their headquarter and warehouse are located. However, this is yet to become a possibility given that factories that produce what they need following their strict demands can only be found in Italy.

They have a variety of approaches to sustainability. One of them is their Recycling Club, an initiative that allows their customers to send old broken tights that are then recycled into new products (Swedish Stockings, 2020). Another recent initiative is their recent collaboration with furniture designer Gustaf Westman, in which tables were made from recycled tights mixed with recycled fiberglass further supporting their circular mindset.

Furthermore, on top of producing high quality durable products, Swedish Stockings provides a care guide. This guide can be found in the brand’s official website and gives a rather thorough step-by-step on how to wear and care for their tights (Swedish Stockings, n.d.). This is very much in line with one of their goals of not only educating themselves but also spreading awareness to their stakeholders via their social platforms (Swedish Stockings, 2020 p.30). More on their sustainability efforts can be found in their Sustainability Edit 2020 and their sustainability section on their official website.
4.2.3. Deadwood

The vision of the brand is being as sustainable as possible, which is proven by the use of material that would otherwise go to waste (Deadwood, n.d.). By making use of recycled and upcycled leather that would otherwise end up in a landfill, Deadwood produces more sustainable products while simultaneously reducing the environmental impact from other companies and their textile waste. In an interview with Vogue Spain, co-founder and creative director Felix shared that at the beginning of the company, the irregular looking jackets were far from perfect but the people from Stockholm liked what the founders were trying to do and supported them regardless (Valera, 2020). Organization-wise, the company remains small, with co-founders Felix von Bahder and Carl Ollson at the foundation of it, and a small team that includes an art director and someone in charge of customer service (F. von Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022). The company outsources sales representatives as well as production and public relations teams. However, they are still considered the extended family of Deadwood.
The company also aims to distance itself from fast fashion, updating their collections only twice a year and creating pieces that are timeless and can be worn for many years (Deadwood, n.d.). In their vision section of their website the company encourages “think twice, shop once”. The company further addresses the durability concerns by making garments that can last long both thanks to quality material and design. Instead of following trends like many fast fashion brands, Deadwood’s designs are created based on functionality (Valera, 2020). When asked about where they see themselves in 10 years, Felix also shared that both him and the other co-founder, Carl, would like to continue being “the voice of reason” in the fashion world or even the “rebellion”.

While the brand talks about sustainability, it still acknowledges that they are far from perfect but continue to make an effort. “We talk about sustainability, but we also are quite humble to the fact that it’s a quite complicated matter” shared Felix von Bahder (personal communication, April 5, 2022). The informant continued expressing that they’re aware that their strategy does not in fact fix the problem with overconsumption but rather alleviates the impact of it on the environment by making the leather industry more waste efficient. Other practices like providing repair services have been previously implemented and communicating more about the repair and care of their products is being considered for the future of the brand.

Regarding suppliers, Deadwood sources leather scraps, leftovers, etc., in Northern India and the transports the material to the small family-owned factory in Noida, India, that is rigorously audited in terms of working conditions as well as sustainable practices (Deadwood, n.d.). The company highlights the friendly relation that they’ve developed with the owners of the factory
and how impressed they are with the mindful approach that their suppliers have both in terms of life and the production of garments. Additionally, the company explains how they would rather contribute to a developing economy than to give more support to an already rich and developed country like Sweden. When it comes to the Cactus collection made from vegan leather, the material is sourced from Mexico and then shipped to India for production (F. von Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022). That said, the company has been considering the possibilities of opening a secondary production in Mexico to make the production of the Cactus collection more sustainable and efficient. Once all garments are finished, they are shipped to distribution centers in Sweden and the United States or shipped directly to stores located in Asia and Australia due to proximity.

4.2.4. One We Like

The company One We Like aims to produce “pieces that are passed down to younger siblings for years to come” (One We Like, n.d.). With sustainability at its core, One We Like’s production is made with certified organic cotton in a small family-owned factory in Portugal. Several visits are made to the factories by the owner herself as well as by the company’s agent in the location of production with the goal to ensure quality control, good working environment for the workers across the supply chain, and that suppliers are actively working to reduce their environmental impact.

As of today, founder and owner Victoria Bucknell Springfeldt is the one running all operations, from production tasks such as material sourcing and approval of samples, to selling to customers online and in the store (V. Bucknell Springfeldt, personal communication April 8, 2022). That said, the company still has a graphic designer and outsources people to help with sales, but especially after the Covid-19 pandemic some of its past members had to be terminated.

Aside from sourcing sustainable materials for their products, One We Like also aims to improve the consumption habits by creating collections that enable consumers to mix and match. The owner shared: “Sounds like a small thing but, you know, it's always good that you have collection that can be mixed and matched [...] because that means that you don't have to change your whole wardrobe, just because you bought a new t-shirt...” (V. Bucknell Springfeldt, personal communication April 8, 2022). The brand addresses the environmental impact from shipping by trying to ship their goods in the smallest packages possible as well as reusing packaging when shipping to retailers in hopes to reduce the resource waste.
4.3. Thematic Findings

4.3.1. Challenges

Throughout the thematic analysis different challenges were brought up by the participants. It is important to mention that some of the challenges were actually shared during the open questions instead of those which directly addressed what internal or external challenges they faced. This further emphasizes the presence of barriers as a natural part of implementing sustainable strategies. The main challenges found were related to resistance from different stakeholders, but mainly suppliers and customers; lack of awareness in terms of sustainability and sustainable practices from both internal and external stakeholders; challenging governance both in terms of corporate governance and external regulations; and finally, the internal debate of sustainability vs. profitability. Table 7 shows a visual representation of the framework for this overarching theme.
In terms of challenges with external stakeholders, the one that came up in every single interview was the consumers’ resistance, followed by the production factories that were also brought up as a big problem in at least 4 of the 6 interviews, and all 4 companies. The lack of awareness and even interest from consumers regarding sustainability was addressed, and interviewees acknowledge just how hard it is to actually change consumer behaviour. While improvement might be seen, the process of becoming more open and accepting to industry changes and sustainable improvement is still rather slow and delayed in certain regions of the world. Consumers still seem to be very price-sensitive and despite their desire to improve their impact, the willingness to pay the price for it is not quite there yet. Moreover, the participants also recognized that there are different types of consumers with different priorities, where sustainability might fall further behind or not even be considered at all when planning and making a purchase.

“Because customers don’t want to pay the price as it is. That’s what I hear. You want to take care of the climate, you want to make a positive impact, but you don’t want to pay the price for it. Which everyone has to.” (E. Lindén, personal communication, April 8, 2022)

“But still, you know, there are so many people in the world that they don’t care about [sustainability]. I mean, first of all, their problem is if they have food on the table, they don’t...
As for the production factories, the interviewees shared their struggles with the high minimum order quantity required by the factories to even accept to produce for them. While having a minimum might be understandable, the participants found that the requirements placed by the factories along with the incentives of lower prices with higher volume orders put them and other companies in a position where they sometimes have no other choice but to produce more than what they initially intended to or needed. Furthermore, some of the participants also shared that the textile production is still a rather traditional industry that shows resistance to changing their old ways, which simultaneously makes it harder to find suppliers that meet their standards, limiting their resources.

"When it comes to trying to get factories, and yeah, suppliers to sort of think outside the box, it's usually quite difficult, because it's... I mean, for being an industry that pretends to be very like forward thinking and forward leaning, it's sort of a traditional industry at the same time." (F. van Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022)

"I think one of the hardest things, generally, with being - trying to be a sustainable or environmentally good brand is getting the factory on board. The factories themselves, many factories, not all the factories, are not that interested in being [sustainable]. [...] one of the things I think it's a huge problem in the textile industry is the overconsumption of an overproduction. And I think that's just - I get so frustrated every time I talk about it, because basically, to produce something you need to have - the factory has a minimum, which is fine, you know, we can understand why. But they also have the sort of thing that if you produce more then you get a lesser price. So, for a lot of companies, big and small, it's worth it to produce more than you actually need." (V. Bucknell Springfeldt, personal communication, April 8, 2022)

4.3.1.2. Lack of Awareness

To begin with, a common challenge mentioned by some of the interviewees was the fact that sustainability is a rather complicated concept. The interviewees acknowledged the complexity of sustainability and expressed how that makes it hard to be fully addressed, and how it enables different companies to approach it in different ways and lengths. The lack of regulations to clearly differentiate between what is and what isn’t sustainable makes it hard for small companies whose entire business model revolves around sustainability to compete against bigger companies that implement greenwashing. And on top of the lack of regulations to
address this issue, sustainability is an ever-evolving area with constant changes. This means that choosing a sustainable strategy or practice is far from an intuitive and straightforward answer, and rather becomes a challenge.

"Also, just trying to figure out what's actually good in the bigger picture and the longer term. I mean, for example, is it better to ship cactus material from Mexico to India? Or is it better to just make it plastic leather in India? And cut that extra transport? That's a quite a hard equation to figure out." (F. van Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022)

"But it's a tricky word because sustainability - I think the rules for sustainable and not sustainable, they're not crystal clear. I mean, you could be, you know, this sustainable cotton product and there's just a few percentages that is sustainable and you could call it that for them. It's not fair, there is no strict regulations, I would say. It should be much better with all greenwashing." (H. Ström, personal communication, April 11, 2022)

Moreover, one participant also shared that not all employees were fully aware of the strategies implemented and therefore needed to be further educated and informed about them as this can sometimes hinder their work.

"So that's a kind of like, concern, this issue because we're promoting sustainable outside, but here in our company, people are not aware of what exactly we're doing. We're just, okay, we're just sustainable but down to the details we don't really know. So, the challenge is we really need to educate internal staff, staff in the office, staff in the warehouse, in the stores." (T. Tayzon, personal communication, April 7, 2022)

Furthermore, another stakeholder group mentioned through the data set but not as consistently as the previous are wholesale customers. These follow a similar trend as the final consumers, where they lack awareness and sometimes understanding towards sustainable small business with things like potential delays in the delivery of orders due to general delays in production for the implementation of more sustainable practices.

4.3.1.3. Governance

Various participants shared how difficult it was for them to not only implement strategies but to also drive change within the industry with their size. The lack of resources, power, and influence in comparison to bigger companies seemed to be considered the main reasons why their ability to carry out sustainable ideas or practices are limited. Similarly, the interviews shed light on the feeling of helplessness and lack of power that small companies feel when it comes to influencing their suppliers to become more sustainable and follow their demands.
Some of the participants shared the feeling of frustration with either having to accept the factories’ requirements or managing to get their way but being put last on a long queue as they represented a rather small percentage of the total production of those factories.

“In a small company as ours is, it's sort of difficult. We don't really have the bandwidth to do everything that we would like to do”. (F. van Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022)

Moreover, other external stakeholders such as competitors and other players from the supply chain beyond tier 1, such as farmers, were also mentioned by the participants. The general idea shared by some of the informants is that to get certain changes within the industry, they need to get involved. For example, one interviewee explained that for everyone to switch to the use of organic cotton, first the agriculture would have to be changed as it is only 1% of the global cotton production that is actually organic (E. Lindén, personal communication, April 8, 2022). Without others becoming organic producers, the resources would simply not match the demand of an entire industry. Similarly, other competitors within the fashion industry that produce and sell in a rather unsustainable manner would need to make changes in their model from producing less and better to increasing the pricing to truly match the cost of those better made garments.

“So, I think in general behaviour has to change but that's the hardest thing to change. And maybe the cost is something that, you know, the price in general, if the prices would go up then I think it would change. But this is something the big giants [fast fashion brands] have to do.” (H. Leach Squire, personal communication, April 20, 2022)

4.3.1.4. Sustainability vs Profitability

When it comes to the internal stakeholders, participants acknowledge the struggle of maintaining a balance where the company aims to be sustainable but also needs to remain profitable and drive sales. The interviewees agreed on the responsibility that the company has to maintain a healthy finance and drive sales to keep the business and the economy going. In these situations, difficult decisions must be made by those in management positions, even though some of the members of the company might not be happy about them. Lastly, the need to really consider the effect cost and profit-wise of their decisions due to a more vulnerable position in the market was also highlighted.

“[…] we also have responsibility for the company. So, if a product is super later, I say okay, we're gonna miss a lot of business if we don't fly it. Then I say then we need to fly it because then it's not sustainable for the company. We will end up with these products in the warehouse, and it's not sustainable. But then it will always end up with discussion “no, we never fly” and so it's meant to be balanced.” (H. Ström, personal communication, April 11, 2022)


” [...] being in small businesses always sort of - it's always a sort of deal and we always have to think about the cost versus the benefits.” (V. Bucknell Springfield, personal communication, April 8, 2022)

4.3.2. Problem Solving

Different current and potential solutions to the previously mentioned challenges were identified by the participants. The most discussed solution to many of the challenges was effective communication with all different stakeholders, followed by creating and maintaining good stakeholder relationships through collaboration and understanding. Moreover, the need for a present and committed sustainability culture and the need for more external regulations were also brought up as key factors to enable a shift towards sustainability. Table 8 shows a visual representation of the framework for this overarching theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Thematic framework of the analysis results</th>
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<tr>
<td>Extract</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;And then I think we also have - it's also about educating the consumers, of course, but also about educating other customers like to our wholesale accounts, so they understand sustainability [...].”</td>
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<td>&quot;And sometimes you can circumvent that trade-off by telling the story [...]. But it takes a lot of effort and time and sometimes money to communicate those stories. [...] same thing with trying to convey the upsides of waiting longer for your order when you're a big department store.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I mean, for suppliers, for instance, the suppliers we have there’s one that has been in there for more or less from the beginning, one supplier in Turkey. And we kind of, more or less - I would say we change their business but we’ve been a part of this because they are really at the forefront now of trying to find new materials, helping farmers to transform into sustainable cotton [...].”</td>
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<td>&quot;I mean, that I would say it’s a super strength of the company, that people are so interested in taking this as natural part of the work specifically.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;But we even took it as far as we went to the Swedish government and spoke to - I think it was the Social Democrats there and talk to them about, you know, would it be possible for us to or would it be possible in general to try and come up with the fact that there needs to be a law that says that if you are a sustainable brand, that you can label your products on some sort of a scale.”</td>
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4.3.2.1. Communication

Communication was identified as the main tool to fight the lack of awareness and encourage better habits from the consumers and retail customers. In different ways, all participants addressed that the only way to get to consumers was to keep pushing the message out there
through different channels, from social media and newsletters to even information on the e-com websites. By providing this information, consumers can become more aware of not only the products’ sustainable characteristics but also learn how to better care for their items and make better-informed purchases.

“And also, from the e-com team, they are looking at what can we do? How can we inform? [...] So, they are looking at that and then maybe trying to impact and have just informed customers and trying to encourage them to take the better decisions.” (E. Lindén, personal communication, April 8, 2022)

Participants shared that through communication, they also aimed to ignite change from different stakeholders, both directly and indirectly. Campaigns in media can be used to encourage consumers to question themselves and the companies they purchase from. And direct communication with wholesale customers regarding sustainability can influence them into also shifting their demand to other companies, pushing competitors to become better to match the new demands.

“I mean, we even went so far off in the autumn, us as a super small brand, we campaigned something last year, we called it it's time and the idea that it's time to, you know, coming out of the pandemic, it's time to sort of socialize, to live, love, laugh, everything like that. But also, time to react, to question, and to act.” (H. Leach Squire, personal communication, April 20, 2022)

“So, if we are in the forefront and discuss this with our customers for the wholesale account, they will also start putting pressure on other brands” (H. Ström, personal communication, April 11, 2022)

Some of the interviewees made a point on the importance of storytelling to getting consumers and customers to be more accepting and understanding. When products are delayed or have a different texture or finish, through storytelling companies can make people understand the value in it and why they might take longer to deliver the products than other less-sustainable brands.

“And sometimes you can circumvent that trade-off by telling the story [...] But it takes a lot of effort and time and sometimes money to communicate those stories. [...] same thing with trying to convey the upsides of waiting longer for your order when you're a big department store. And
doing that, only because of reducing emissions? Well, if you're a good enough storyteller, you can probably convince some people, some buyers, some department stores that, sure, they can wait two more weeks or whatever.” (F. van Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022)

When it comes to the internal challenges, participants brought up that setting clear strategies and being consistent helped ensure that the company, as a whole, implemented sustainability on a daily basis. And, once again, communication was identified as a key component to get people to understand and accept some of the tough decisions that need to be made at some point that might require a compromise. When asked about how they address these situations, one of the participants shared:

“I do this by also explaining, because it's also our responsibility. If we want to have an impact on the consumers in the market/markets, we need to stay in the market. We need to stay in business.” (H. Ström, personal communication, April 11, 2022)

To ensure that the communication reaches everyone, team meetings with the whole staff are encouraged. Similarly, for more direct discussions, one of the companies carries out meetings with all the departments to address their impact in a more personalized way and keeping track of the development of their sustainable initiatives. Once again, the communication is not only to inform the employees of what sustainable practices are being implemented but they also encourage all individuals to assess their own impact within their field and come up with potential solutions to test out.

“So, I have meetings within each department and encouraging and saying that what do you do? And how can you do? How can you do in a better way? And then trying to get those feedback more regularly. What did you? Just to know that this is important to everyone in the company.” (E. Lindén, personal communication, April 8, 2022)

4.3.2.2. Good Stakeholder Relationships

For the obstacles faced regarding the production factories, interviewees expressed the need to be persistent and sometimes persuasive, especially to get suppliers to improve and implement sustainable practices. To ensure that these practices are actually carried out in their supply chain, companies make regular visits whenever possible and also put trusted agents in place that can report back to them. Furthermore, the need for maintaining good relations with the suppliers, being understanding and flexible towards them, and investing in developing together were also highlighted as crucial to ensure that the work is done correctly, and the supply chain can evolve sustainably alongside the brands.
“[...] it does take some persuading, and some persistence to make them sort of rethink what's to consider like trash and wants to consider valuable.” (F. van Bahder, personal communication, April 5, 2022)

Moreover, informants also shared their collaborative development with suppliers as key for making their sustainability strategies successful. Not only does this help maintain good relations with the supply chain, but it also ensures that they have the means and drive to develop and implement sustainable practices of their own.

“I mean, for suppliers, for instance, the suppliers we have there’s one that has been in there for more or less from the beginning, one supplier in Turkey. And we kind of, more or less - I would say we change their business, but we’ve been a part of this because they are really at the forefront now of trying to find new materials, helping farmers to transform into sustainable cotton [...] We develop this together... So that’s super fun.” (H. Ström, personal communication, April 11, 2022)

4.3.2.3. Sustainability Culture

Another aspect mentioned in various interviews is having employees that not only share the same values and interests but are also specialized in the topic and continue to inform themselves on the latest trends and findings. In doing so, companies ensure that the workers remain dedicated to the cause and that the company continues to evolve alongside the ever-changing concept of sustainability. Similarly, the need of sustainability leaders that set an example for the rest of the company was also addressed.

“I mean, that I would say it’s a super strength of the company, that people are so interested in taking this as natural part of the work specifically. And then we have some special competence like Elin [CSR], for instance, or Cassandra herself [Founder & Creative Director] because this is also an area where things are changing rapidly, and we don't know everything. And so, you need to be on top and read a lot of things. Cassandra, she does that and also Elin reads a lot about it as well, Songul [Head of Assortment], and so on.” (H. Ström, personal communication, April 11, 2022)

4.3.2.4. More Regulations

Moreover, companies addressed the need for better legislation to regulate the industry. But this is something that requires bigger actors such as the government and other bigger companies within the market. One of the participants shared their efforts to reach out to both government and competitors, personally and in the form of an open letter to the industry (H. Leach Squire, personal communication, April 20, 2022). However, while these attempts to communicate with
other actors obtained some reactions, no changes were made and the government even suggested for them to make it a bigger movement, which would require competitors to also get on board.

“But we even took it as far as we went to the Swedish government and spoke to - I think it was the Social Democrats there and talk to them about, you know, would it be possible for us to or would it be possible in general to try and come up with the fact that there needs to be a law that says that if you are a sustainable brand, that you can label your products on some sort of a scale.” (H. Leach Squire, personal communication, April 20, 2022)
5. Theoretical Discussion

This study explores how small businesses implement strategies that promote sufficient consumption within the fashion industry in Sweden, and how they handle the challenges that come up along the way. In this section, the findings presented in the previous chapter will be discussed in comparison to the literature introduced in chapter 2. To help illustrate the empirical and theoretical contributions obtained through the study, the conceptual framework presented at the end of that chapter was modified (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Modified Conceptual Framework

This study contributes empirically to past literature by supporting the theories regarding the sustainable strategies being designed and implemented to promote sufficient consumption, as well as the barriers and challenges that companies encounter when engaging in such activities. As can be seen in Figure 3, some of the main strategies identified in our findings are related to product design ensuring the items are made with high quality materials and designed so that they can last as long as possible and enjoyed by many generations, product repair and care either through care guides or own repair services so that customers can continue to extend a product’s life, and also increasing sustainability awareness on consumers.

In addition, the results further demonstrate that many different stakeholders that are more or less directly linked to a company’s economic activity can hinder the successful implementation of sufficient consumption strategies. Some of these stakeholders are from the internal environment, such as employees, some are from the external environment, such as the government and competitors, and the ones that seem to have the biggest impact are ultimately...
suppliers and customers. This comes to no surprise as they have always been considered main stakeholders given their high influence on the success of any company (Agle et al., 1999).

Furthermore, this study provides insight on the different tools and techniques from stakeholder management that help overcome the challenges faced by small firms trying to implement sufficient consumption. Some of these practices are storytelling, collaborative develop, sustainability culture, etc. These not only provide a better flow of information and increases awareness from all parties, but they also help nurture and develop better relations that subsequently help increase openness and decrease resistance. The correct use of stakeholder management in these situations will then be crucial for a successful implementation of sufficient consumption strategies.

5.1. CSR Strategies

The results show that all the small businesses that participated in this research implement multiple strategies that promote sufficient consumption, from product design to maximize the longevity of the goods to implementing communication with various stakeholders to improve their awareness in terms of sufficiency. This confirms the sustainability trend that has been developing more and more in Sweden since the 2000s (Berggren Torell, 2003; Kyaga, 2017). Also, this is very much in line with previous studies that suggest a vast array of practices, especially within marketing, that can be used to shift the industry towards more sufficiency-oriented activities (Gossen et al., 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2020).

That said, it is important to mention that when asked about sustainability practices and strategies being implemented, most if not all participants gravitated towards sustainable practices that have a more direct impact on the environmental and social concerns rather than the idea of reducing consumption itself. This might suggest that despite having strategies that promote sufficient consumption, the effect on overconsumption might be more of a by-product of sustainability strategies implemented to reduce their more direct impact. Additionally, Niessen & Bocken (2021) argue that companies might consider these strategies to be less costly and to require less effort and sacrifice from their part. However, all companies present in this study shared their struggles in terms of production with their supply chain, which opposes the idea that the strategies are easy to implement at all.

The triple bottom line theory can be found in many of the current strategies as the informants spoke about both social and environmental strategies that they implement and how this can be affected by the economy but also how they all are a part of their business. As brands that focus
on sustainability, it can be an economical advantage and a challenge. The firms need to make profit to be able to support communities, to provide working opportunities, lower environmental impact as well as being able to develop new strategies and to do more research to gain knowledge regarding the sustainable aspects and improvements in the fashion industry. As the strategies regarding the choice of suppliers and materials were shared between all case companies where they all thought it was important to make the right choices and look in a more sustainable perspective when it comes to choosing materials and the right supply chain for their brands. There they could have used an economical strategy that was to find the cheapest materials and factories but instead they choose the ones that also tries to implement some sustainable strategies as well, where they have fair working conditions, more sustainable materials, relatively close location, and might also lay resources on finding better solutions. As for the development of strategies the case companies go through certain new solutions and research to find these solutions mostly together with their supply chain and collaborations in the industry. As the informants mentioned, it’s about finding new solutions by aging more research themselves as well as look at others in the industry and what strategies they implement as well as new better materials as well as hire employees that has much knowledge as a CSR manager. It’s all about having managers and employees that also focuses on new sustainable solutions to be able to develop new strategies.

When it comes to green marketing the strategies are pushing the environmental concern, the products benefit and being able to present how the firm implements these strategies through sustainability reports and communication. It is also important to not push to much or hid information otherwise consumers might preserve that as greenwashing. As the informants was talking about not trying to push consumption too much, as some did not participate at black-Friday sales and focusing at creating lines that can be mixed matched and then given away to another child is also a part of green marketing strategies.

5.2. Sufficient Consumption Challenges

Previous literature (Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg, 2021) has identified consumers as an important obstacle when implementing sufficient consumption practices due to their lack of awareness and knowledge. The results of this study also support this idea. While some disagreement was found in terms of how supportive consumers are, all companies still agreed that aside from those who are more conscious and aware of their consumption, there are still many consumers who have no knowledge, no interest, or simply have different priorities due
to their background. Informants also acknowledged that consumers’ values and economic situations vary a lot, which has an impact on their purchase decision. The companies are aware that often times consumers have no choice but to buy those items that have a lower price, setting sustainability aside. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that consumers continue to be a challenging aspect for the further development of sustainable consumption patterns.

Niessen & Bocken (2021) also pose that consumers’ lack of trust towards a company’s sustainability claims can also hinder the effectiveness of sustainability practices implemented by companies. The empirical data previously presented also addresses such concerns. Many of the informants mentioned that companies that aim to be sustainable need to be careful with greenwashing and potential mistakes that could destroy the image of the brand. This is also in line with previous studies that suggests that companies face the challenge of being accused of greenwashing when promoting and communicating their sustainability efforts (Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015; Lunde, 2018).

According to our results, supply chains located in very traditional environments that also lack awareness and even interest on sustainability pose a difficult challenge for small businesses. This further supports the idea suggested by Sandberg (2021) that culture can become a barrier for the transition towards sufficient consumption. This might also be influenced by different economic and political systems between the country of origin of the brands and the country of origin of their supply chain (Sandberg, 2021). Based on our results, a big portion of production is conducted in Asia or Southern Europe, which are considered more traditional compared to Sweden.

Another important challenge is the internal debate of being sustainable vs. remaining profitable. Our results suggest that while small firms might have sustainability at their core, they are still very much aware of their responsibility as a business to remain profitable, not only to continue their business activity but also to contribute to economic growth. This is in line with one of the core dimensions of CSR theory (Carroll, 1979) that acknowledges the importance of being economically responsible. As one of the participants shared, to continue pushing for change in the industry and the market, first you need to remain in the market. This does not mean that companies should only focus on being profitable, but rather they should not lose sight of their financial health for the sake of tending solely to their responsibility towards the planet.
Moreover, despite being considered important actors that hold power to enable sufficiency for consumers (Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Sandberg 2021), this study shows that some businesses due to their size and lack of resources in fact struggle to implement sustainable strategies. The results reveal that small firms find themselves feeling frustrated and hopeless when attempting to ignite change, especially in consumers and suppliers. This aligns more with previous work by Neumann et al. (2020), in which the struggles of smaller companies to take on more responsibilities compared to bigger firms is highlighted. This can be observed in the inability to control their supply chains beyond tier 1 as well as the lack of influence to get the government to develop regulations that could help differentiate small sustainable companies from big giants implementing greenwashing.

5.3. Solutions

Based on our results, more and better communication regarding sustainability is both a solution and a goal. The participants shared their current efforts to push messages through different media that promote sufficient consumption such as educating consumers on product characteristics as well as how to care for them to last as long as possible. This is in line with previous research that suggests marketing has the means and reach to influence consumers toward more sufficient consumption patterns (Gossen et al., 2019).

It is also important to note that, despite the challenge that consumers as a whole might pose to the small companies trying to implement more sustainable practices to help with the overconsumption crisis, more and more consumers in the market are becoming more open to innovation. The informants shared that having a global reach enables them to observe different patterns and movement in different market locations and that change is happening in many places but at a slow pace. This could be due to the increasing knowledge on not only the environmental concerns but also the more sustainable products and habits that enable consumers to make better-informed purchasing decisions (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Maheshwari, 2014). Furthermore, to overcome the potential scepticism from consumers, participants strongly encouraged being consistent with the sustainable practices and increasing their transparency. For example, all companies included in this study have sustainability at their core and at least two of them publish annual sustainability reports that are easy to find through their official websites. This also aligns with past research that suggests a company’s trustworthiness can be increased by sharing relevant information in a way that is easy to digest (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016).
Yet communication not only refers to addressing consumers, but it also refers to communication with other stakeholders. For instance, communicating sustainability efforts and educating retail customers can influence their demand to other brands that will need to step up their sustainability efforts. Hall et al. (2021) suggest that storytelling is a great communication tool to foster positive impact in both internal and external stakeholders’ perceptions, attitude, and intentions. One of our informants also made a point that through storytelling they could sell ideas and avoid potential order cancellations of wholesale customers. For example, storytelling done right can make consumers become more accepting of irregular and imperfect finishes in their sustainable garments, and retailers can become more understanding toward potential delays in their orders. However, the finding also show that communicating such stories can also be costly and sometimes even risky business.

The importance of developing, nurturing, and maintaining relationships with stakeholder is highlighted in the literature (Russo & Perrini, 2010; Post et al., 2022) as a way to create sustainable competitiveness. The findings obtained in this research also support this idea. In all companies, the informants brought up their close ties with different stakeholders such as production factories, production agents, wholesale customers, etc. These relationships foster trust in the fact that sustainable requirements are being met when the supply chain is at a greater distance; acceptance of innovations and new demands; and collaborative development for both the brands and the factories, ensuring they remain at the forefront of the industry in terms of sustainability. Similarly, all informants shared a genuine interest and concern for the wellbeing of their various stakeholders in the form of strategies that, for example, ensure living wages throughout their supply chain. This can be linked to the more moralist and altruist approach to stakeholder culture (Jones et al., 2007), in which all stakeholders are taken into consideration instead of only thinking of the shareholders interest. Ultimately the stakeholder culture of the companies will guide the practices and strategies put in place.

Another important aspect to be considered is the role played by the organizational culture and the match made when hiring people to join the organization. Our findings show that employing people with similar values and interest toward sustainability not only facilitates the implementation of sustainable practices, but it also makes it a natural part of the company’s everyday life. As one of the participants shared, having people with a similar sustainable culture ensures dedication and commitment which then transfer to all tasks within the company’s economic activity. This is in line with previous literature on the importance of culture when implementing sustainable strategies as well as when managing stakeholder related
issues (Jones et al., 2007; Kumar et al., 2017; Sandberg, 2021). In addition, research shows that implementing CSR strategies and communicating them effectively can not only influence consumer purchase, but it can also make individuals consider either working on investing in a company (Sen et al., 2006). In doing so, businesses could tackle the lack of consumer awareness while simultaneously ensuring that people with similar values and interest will want to join their economic activity.

Lastly, all participants shared their concerns regarding lack of regulation and explained how either they are expecting new legislation or are pushing for it themselves. This falls in line with the need for clear governance arrangement to be put in place to guide not only fashion brands but other stakeholders to (Menard & Shirley, 2005). All companies interviewed have either strictly written or as part of a known process some form of code of conduct, but maybe more agreements and methods should be put in place to reach different needs and concerns from different stakeholders. That said, considering the global reach of the fashion industry and the ever-evolving area of sustainability, expecting regulations that will fit everyone sounds rather utopic. As Petschow et al. (2017) suggest, the development of governance for sustainability is rather challenging as it requires global suitability. However, looking into local approaches could serve as foundation or even be transferable to other regions.
6. Conclusion

This study was designed and conducted to explore a rather novel phenomenon: sufficient consumption within the fashion industry in Sweden. In doing so, the authors aimed to obtain better insight and understanding of the processes and dynamics at play when small businesses implement strategies that promote sufficiency. This is an important area of research as sufficiency has been suggested as a more effective method to address the current overproduction and overconsumption crisis that continues to endanger the planet and its inhabitants (Gossen et al., 2019; Niessen & Bocken, 2021; Princen, 2005; Sandberg, 2021).

In an attempt to guide the study, two research questions were constructed and presented in the introduction chapter. To be able to answer them, the authors conducted a qualitative research where primary and secondary data were collected, the first in the form of interviews and the second sourced from previous literature and other official reports. Through thematic analysis the authors were able to identify patterns than were then discussed in the previous chapter. Based on said discussion, the answers to the research questions were obtained.

The first research question was:

**RQ1: How do small firms management develop and implement strategies to promote sufficient consumption?**

One of the most crucial findings provided by this study is that small businesses, in fact, don’t develop strategies to only promote sufficient consumption but rather develop sustainable strategies and practices to reduce their environmental and social impact which then, in turn, foster the promotion of sufficient consumption as more of a side effect. This does not mean that small businesses do not promote sufficiency, instead the study suggests that the promotion of sufficiency is one of the many positive outcomes that the sustainable strategies implemented can have.

The main strategy implemented by small firms to promote sufficient consumption continues to be related to product design. Companies make efforts to ensure that the items they offer to customers will last long enough to be enjoyed multiple times throughout seasons and sometimes even generations. This is also supported by the strategy of care and repair of products. Firms not only make long-lasting products, but they also educate consumers on how to care for them to last as long as intended, and sometimes they even provide repair services so that consumers can continue to enjoy the products. The previous strategies also help to
indirectly increase more awareness with different stakeholder but especially consumers. However, companies still share more direct messages that not only share products’ sustainable traits, but they also provide information and try to raise awareness on the current global crisis with overconsumption and the impact it has on the planet and people.

To develop such strategies, small businesses conduct research on resources and production, while simultaneously ensuring collaboration with different stakeholder, from employees and different department within the company to factories and even competitors. Setting a clear strategy in written form that can guide the process and inform all the parties involved of the requirements and guidelines of the strategy was also identified as a key factor for an effective implementation of sustainable practices.

Furthermore, all small firms seem to encounter similar barriers due to consumer and supplier resistance, lack of awareness both externally and internally, and also lack of power due to their size in comparison to much bigger companies. As opposed to MNEs, small firms have less influence over their production suppliers and less access and/or reach to their supply chain beyond tier 1. This hinders the design and the implementation of sustainable strategies not only because the supply chain might not accept them, but also because they would struggle to monitor whether those strategies are carried out or not. Moreover, being small might also hinder the reach of their communication efforts to raise awareness, as they might be limited to their closest environment that already has a tendency and overall knowledge on sustainability. It is giant corporations with a much higher global reach who could boost the spread of sustainable messages.

The second research question was:

*RQ2: How do small firms implement stakeholder management to minimize the challenges caused by the promotion of sufficient consumption?*

Once again, our study remarks the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders. For instance, getting the factories on board with sustainable practices was one of the main challenges encountered by small companies. An effective way to decrease this resistance from suppliers is to implement collaborative development where factories and brand continuously challenge one another to do better and create sustainable competitiveness within the industry. Moreover, better communication with internal and external stakeholders was found to be a crucial tool to overcome certain obstacles such as lack of consumer and customers awareness, lack of understanding from retailers, etc. By providing easily digestible information, small
businesses can ensure that their stakeholders make better-informed decisions and also, they can influence and ignite change for companies to produce less and better, and for customer to buy more mindfully.

Overall, the study suggests that it is crucial that companies continuously reassess the sustainable strategies and practices. This means that the questioning does not end when the designed strategies are implemented. Instead, small businesses, and especially the management roles, need to keep track of the performance of the different strategies to identify the challenges than can be then turned into opportunities to improve stakeholder relationships and create more sustainable competitiveness.

That said, it is important to highlight that while sufficient consumption might still be a developing area for many industries, especially fashion, it only addresses one direct SDG goal related to overconsumption and overproduction. But it is not the only global concern in terms of sustainability. There are plenty more SDGs to be tackled and sometimes it requires trial and error. Additionally, it is important to also address that as nice of an idea as sufficient consumption might sound, the potential consequences of carrying this to term fully by an entire industry could also have a negative impact on other sustainability concerns such as economic growth, especially for developing and underdeveloped countries.

6.1. Managerial Implications

To begin with, practicing managers should continue to understand the present industry conditions on sustainability to be able to inform future strategies design. It is an area that is continuously developing and evolving, which requires companies to remain up to date. Furthermore, the study further supports the importance of communicating the sustainable strategies being implemented not only to customers but also other stakeholders such as suppliers and employees. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that companies design and execute communication strategies to address the different stakeholders accordingly. This is important as they all are crucial parts of the successful implementation of said strategies.

In addition to communicating their sustainability efforts, companies should also address consumer awareness on the topic of overconsumption and sustainability. Some companies already see themselves as educators that help consumers make better-informed decisions when it comes to purchasing. This will not only increase consumer awareness, but it can also help reduce consumer resistance and scepticism, as it will show brand consistency for those
companies that already implement sustainability throughout the different stages of their economic activity.

Last but not least, companies should consider collaborations with other businesses, even competitors, to increase the influence on factories. The study shows that a big challenge is the lack of power that small companies have on the factories as they represent a small percentage of their total production. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that smaller companies work alongside to push factories to implement better sustainable strategies. Further collaboration should also be considered in terms of pushing for more stakeholder awareness and subsequently creating a bigger movement. It is crucial that all parties work together towards the same goal, shifting the market towards sustainability.

6.2. Future Research

As previously mentioned, this study is limited by its research setting and sample. Given its inability to provide generalizable findings for other industries and companies with different sizes, the authors strongly encourage future research that focus or also include bigger companies and different industries. It would be interesting to see if new or similar patterns are found in different settings to further develop the theory surrounding the implementation of sufficient consumption. Also, as most research on sufficient consumption is being conducted in Northern Europe, this study included, an interesting idea would be to conduct a cross-cultural study to see the role that culture might play in the perception of different stakeholders and businesses.

Moreover, given the limitation due to the lack of access to more data from companies within the same industry, another suggestion for future research is recreating this study with more companies with similar characteristics that can still be divided into groups to maybe implement other data analysis techniques such as cross case comparisons. This could also provide richer findings in terms of patterns that might be specific to size and organizational structure, which are hard to see when the sample is small. Lastly, as the current study suggests the importance of different stakeholders in the implementation of sufficiency strategies, exploring the different perceptions from internal and/or external stakeholders could help better understand the dynamics and regulations of the industry. Some potential research questions for future research are presented in Table 9.
Table 9. Suggestions for future research questions

- How do MNEs design and implement sufficient consumption strategies? How do they overcome potential challenges?
- How does national culture influence the implementation of sufficient consumption strategies?
- How does organizational culture influence the implementation of sufficient consumption?
- How do different stakeholders perceive sufficient consumption strategies?
- How are sufficient consumption strategies implemented in different foreign subsidiaries?
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