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The improvement of B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities

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Ruta Velykytė. VERSLAS-VERSLUI RINKODAROS KOMUNIKACIJOS PRAKTIKOS TOBULINIMAS ĮMONIŲ TVARUMO VEIKLOJE: Marketingo ir tarptautinės komercijos, Vadybos baigiamasis darbas / Darbo vadovė Prof. Valérie Swaen, Doc. Dr. Aušra Pažėraitė / Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Ekonomikos ir vadybos fakultetas, Liuvono katalikiškasis universitetas, Liuvono vadybos mokykla, Magistrantūros studijos. – Kaunas, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2023. – 99 p.

SANTRAUKA

Nagrinėjama **problema** – kaip tobulinti verslas-verslui rinkodaros komunikacijos praktikas įmonių tvarumo veikloje. Tyrimo **objektas** – verslas-verslui rinkodaros komunikacijos praktikas, o **tikslas** – pasiūlyti geriausias rinkodaros komunikacijos praktikas įmonių tvarumo veikloje verslas-verslui sektoriuje. Šiam tikslui pasiekti tyrimas apima teorinius ir empirinius tyrimus ir siūlo rekomendacijas dėl tobulinimo.

Remiantis mokslinės literatūros analize, suformuluoti du pagrindiniai ir devyni daliniai hipotetiniai teiginiai. **HT1**: Pranešimų turinio tobulinimas daro teigiamą įtaką verslas-verslui rinkodaros komunikacijos praktikoms. **HT2**: Pranešimo intencijos tobulinimas daro teigiamą įtaką verslas-verslui rinkodaros komunikacijos praktikoms.

Metodologija apima mokslinės literatūros analizę, kokybinį lyginamąjį atvejo tyrimą ir pusiau struktūruotus atvirus ekspertų interviu.

Tyrimo **rezultatai** rodo nevienareikšmišką pirmojo hipotetinio teiginio patvirtinimą, tačiau antrajam hipotetiniam teiginiui pritarta. Tyrimas atitinka ankstesnę mokslinę literatūrą, nors pastebėta nedidelių skirtumų.

Išvados: Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais, siūloma keletas praktinių išvadų. Šiose rekomendacijose daugiausia dėmesio skiriama pranešimų turiniui ir intencijai tobulinti. Pagrindinės idėjos apima dėmesio sutelkimą į tvarumo priežasčių ir paties verslo suderinimą, minčių lyderystę ir švietimą.

Šis darbas yra tiriamasis magistro baigiamasis darbas.

Raktažodžiai: pranešimo intencija, pranešimo turinys, tvarumas Lietuvoje, tvarumo komunikacija, verslas-verslui rinkodaros komunikacija, YouTube vaizdo įrašai.

Ruta Velykytė. THE IMPROVEMENT OF B2B MARKETING COMMUNICATION PRACTICES FOR CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY ACTIVITIES: Final Master Thesis in Marketing and International Commerce, Management / Supervisors Prof. Valérie Swaen, Assoc. Prof. Aušra Pažėraitė / Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Economics and Management, Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain School of Management, Graduate studies. – Kaunas, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2023. – 99 p.

SUMMARY

This paper addresses the research **problem** – how to improve B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities. The **object** of the study is B2B marketing communication practices, and the **aim** is to propose the best marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities in the B2B sector. To achieve this goal, the research encompasses theoretical and empirical investigations and proposes recommendations for improvement.

Based on concepts derived during the scientific literature analysis, the study formulates two primary hypothetical statements with a total of nine sub- hypothetical statements. **HS1:** Message content improvement has a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices. **HS2:** Message intent improvement has a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices. The **methodology** includes scientific literature analysis, qualitative comparative case study and semi-structured open-ended expert interviews.

The **results** of the study indicate mixed support for the first hypothetical statement, with some sub-hypotheses being supported, partially supported, or rejected. However, the second hypothetical statement and its sub-hypotheses received overall support. The research aligns with prior scientific literature, although minor differences were observed.

Conclusions: Based on the research findings, several practical implications are proposed. These recommendations focus on message content and intent improvement to create a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices. Key ideas include focus on alignment between sustainability causes and the business itself, thought leadership and education.

This paper is research-oriented final master thesis.

Keywords: B2B marketing communication, message content, message intent, sustainability communication, sustainability in Lithuania, YouTube videos.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance and previous research. In the current market environment, sustainability considerations are becoming important at an increasing pace. Companies are expected to not only be sustainable themselves, but to also take into account sustainability practices of their partners, such as suppliers, in business decisions. However, B2B buyers are facing challenges in determining the actual sustainability of their partners (Kapitan et al., 2019). Corporate sustainability activities benefit society if they are an essential part of the company's operations strategy – they cannot be only a marketing stunt. To avoid accusations of greenwashing, sustainability must be fully integrated into all operational processes of the businesses (Catellani, 2011). However, in order to fully realize the strategic advantages of CSR, it is crucial for managers to possess a thorough comprehension of the fundamental aspects of CSR communication, including what messages to convey, where to convey them, and the factors that influence the positive effects of communication with stakeholders (Du et al., 2010). According to Hänninen and Karjaluoto (2017), the relationship between value and loyalty in business relationships can be influenced by marketing communication, which can shape customer perceptions and increase customer-perceived value and loyalty. Marketing communication has been found to have a mediating role in the attitude-behaviour linkage and can build favourable customer attitudes that lead to further information seeking and influence behaviour (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017).

The issue highlighted by Du, et al. (2010) is that designing an effective CSR communication strategy poses a significant challenge for companies. Specifically, the challenge lies in reducing stakeholder scepticism and communicating positive corporate motives in relation to the company's CSR activities. Currently, the focus of scientific literature in sustainability communication is on the B2C sector (Gelderman et al., 2021). Findings related to the topic within B2B marketing are still limited (Voola et al., 2022). Research that addresses this gap is relevant, as sustainability is becoming increasingly vital for business decisions.

This paper addresses the **research problem** formulated in question form – how to improve B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities.

The object of the study: B2B marketing communication practices.

The aim of the study is to propose the best marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities in the B2B sector.

In order to achieve the set goal, the following **objectives** are raised:

1. To perform theoretical research and derive the concepts of B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities.
2. To perform empirical research and evaluate the applicability of the concepts of B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities.
3. To propose recommendations on how to improve B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities.

The logic of the paper. The work follows a logical flow to investigate the topic of sustainability in marketing communication practices. The key logic of the paper can be summarized as follows:

1. **Theoretical literature analysis:** The paper begins by establishing key concepts and definitions related to sustainability and marketing communication practices. It reviews existing literature on marketing communication practices relevant to sustainability and B2B, and synthesizes the findings.
2. **Formulation of hypothetical statements and research design:** Building upon the literature analysis, the paper formulates hypothetical and sub-hypothetical statements. Based on these statements, an empirical research design is developed to gather data and test them.
3. **Comparative case study and expert interviews:** The paper conducts a comparative case study to gather data from real-life examples and examines the practices of different companies in terms of sustainability in marketing communication. Additionally, semi-structured open-ended interviews are conducted with experts in the field to gain further insights.
4. **Analysis of results and discussion of implications:** The paper analyzes the findings from the comparative case study and expert interviews. The results are interpreted and discussed in light of the research questions and hypothetical statements. The implications of the findings are explored, considering their significance for B2B marketing communication practices on sustainability.

5. Conclusions and recommendations: Based on the analysis and discussion, the paper draws conclusions regarding the effectiveness and impact of sustainability-oriented marketing communication practices. It provides recommendations for businesses and marketers on how to improve their sustainability initiatives and communication strategies.

Overall, the paper progresses from theoretical analysis to empirical investigation, analysis of results, and finally, draws conclusions and offers practical recommendations based on the findings.

Research methods. Scientific literature analysis was performed seeking to synthesize prior research findings (Snyder, 2019). Qualitative empirical study was carried out and the comparative case study method was used to evaluate the accuracy and applicability of theoretical concepts (Mohajan, 2018). Data collection was also conducted through semi-structured open-ended anonymous expert interviews. Transcribed interviews were explored through content analysis, using coding to systemise insights. The comparative case study method is used to evaluate the accuracy and applicability of theoretical concepts, while expert interviews provide valuable perspectives from industry professionals. By combining these methods, the study aims to propose effective marketing communication practices for sustainability initiatives in the B2B sector.

Literature and sources of information. The study relies on various primary and secondary sources of information to gather data and inform the research. Scientific articles, case studies, interviews, websites, and relevant literature form the primary and secondary sources were utilized. The scientific literature provided insights into prior research findings, while the case studies of YouTube content and interviews collected data on real-life practices within the B2B industry. The case studies involve selected companies that demonstrate a dedication to sustainability and provide relevant content on YouTube. Additionally, primary data is collected through semi-structured expert interviews with professionals in B2B marketing communication and sustainability.

I. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF B2B MARKETING

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

In this chapter, a review of relevant scientific literature is presented. In essence, a literature review is a systematic approach to gathering and synthesizing prior research findings (Snyder, 2019). It is beneficial to research, and therefore begins the main body of this paper. According to Snyder (2019), a well-executed literature review serves as a valuable research method that contributes to the advancement of knowledge and the development of theories. It offers a comprehensive understanding of diverse and interdisciplinary research areas, highlighting both the existing gaps and the existing body of knowledge. Therefore, literature analysis creates a background for the study by showing the overview of knowledge within the field, existing knowledge voids and trends. The literature also informs further research in regards to methodology. The scope of the theoretical study includes frameworks for understanding the key concepts of the research question and their relationships, different marketing communication channels and tactics applicable to B2B sustainability communication, and evaluation criteria for B2B marketing communication in sustainability. The focus of the literature review is on recent (published within the last five years) articles in scientific journals, although older and other relevant material is also included.

Marketing communication is defined as an activity provided by organizations in order to inform, listen and respond (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019). According to Porcu et al. (2019), integrated marketing communication has four dimensions: message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder-centered strategic focus, and organizational alignment.

Brotspies and Weinstein (2017) note that marketers have to consider the differences in B2B segmentation. However, in this paper we will not focus on the distinction between B2B2B and B2B2C companies in order to avoid overarching complexity that does not benefit the formulation of communication practice proposals that are already specific to the topic of sustainability.

Corporate social responsibility is a business philosophy where companies engage in activities that contribute to sustainable development (Youssef et al., 2018). Green marketing is a practice of environmental management that seeks to minimize or avoid harmful effects on the environment and has a goal is to offer eco-friendly products or services at a suitable price, location, and time, without restrictions on business transaction types (Gelderman et al., 2021).

A considerable number of companies already choose to reject potential partners who do not meet sustainability standards; therefore, B2B companies cannot afford any ambiguity in their sustainability activities and positioning (Kapitan et al., 2019). To address this issue, Kapitan et al. (2019) developed a scale to determine the sustainability positioning of B2B companies: (1) sustainability credibility, (2) concern for environmental impact, (3) a careful consideration of stakeholders, (4) resource efficiency, and (5) a holistic philosophy. These factors can help marketers communicate about sustainable activities of a company.

According to Gelderman et al. (2021), green marketing components are “green corporate image, green product price, green product quality and salesperson's green expertise”. This shows that companies should be aware of the influence of their marketing activities on their partners, cannot rely solely on online tools to communicate, and can benefit from making sustainable practices known.

Balmer and Greyser (2006) explain the 6 Cs as the ways how the mindset and actions of individuals within an organization should be influenced by the philosophy of corporate-level marketing. The elements are character, communication, constituencies, covenant, conceptualizations, and culture (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). For this paper, the communication aspect is highly relevant as it encompasses what the company says it is, which outbound communications channels it chooses to use, and what synchronized campaigns (such as advertising, public relations and visual branding) are employed.

There are four language types that guide responsible communication: words, online, visuals, and actual language (Vanderlinden, 2019). There would need to be coherence among these concepts used by a company to ensure a positive effect. There is a different perspective, however. According to Christensen, Morsing, and Thyssen (2015), although the increasing emphasis on coherence between corporate communication and action is justifiable in light of the numerous scandals and frauds that have occurred in recent times, this ideal cannot exist in isolation. Consistency and inconsistency work in tandem in propelling organizations towards better practices. Top managers frequently communicate to stakeholders, not about projects or ideals already achieved, but about aspirations, convictions, and prospects for the future. In these instances, discrepancies between organizational communication and actuality may play a vital role in catalysing organizational and social transformation (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2015). Therefore, companies do not need to appear perfect in order to positively contribute to ecological and social change. Catellani's (2011) analysis brings into focus the shortcomings of

short-term communication strategies that rely on transmission and persuasion when it comes to addressing sustainability issues. By highlighting the need for a long-term approach that is both adaptable and consistent in its messaging, Catellani (2011) emphasizes the importance of sustained efforts in creating awareness and promoting engagement with sustainability issues. Effective communication is critical for achieving these goals and can play a significant role in driving meaningful change. Furthermore, this recommendation for a long-term communication strategy acknowledges the complex and evolving nature of sustainability issues, which require ongoing efforts to address and resolve. This perspective on communication with stakeholders underlines how important it is to focus on issues in order to drive change in society instead of just showcasing the good works of the company itself.

Krings, Palmer, and Inversini (2021) state that digital technologies have gained significant importance in business development, particularly at the intersection of B2B marketing and sales, due to their ability to improve buyer-vendor relationships, which are considered the most valuable resource. This, in turn, can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage and help companies pursue profitable opportunities. The ultimate goal of using advanced technologies in B2B marketing is to optimize processes, build trustworthy relationships, retrieve relevant information, and generate new leads and opportunities (Krings et al., 2021). This suggests that it is worth checking channels such as companies' websites or social media to glean insights into good communication practices within the industry.

A study of social responsibility communication in Canadian corporate websites reveals a shift away from previous patterns in non-financial communication that were solely focused on environmental causes, community support, or a combination of the two (Baronet & Tremblay, 2015). The study is based on large companies that do not lack resources to develop a good communication strategy. Therefore, their example can be taken into account by others, less advanced in the area or smaller players in the industry, which seek to select the best topics to prioritize in messages conveyed online. According to Catellani's (2011) study of frequently used rhetoric, in the context of corporate communication through company websites, the utilization of a structured list format, including bullet points, periods, or small paragraphs, facilitates the presentation of a cohesive and continuous narrative. This format enables the effective representation of a company's sustainability efforts with consistency and coherence (Catellani, 2011). This is a practice that both content writers and designers of a website can take into account. As information relevant in B2B marketing is intricate, content creation has to be adjusted to reflect it (Valos et. al., 2018). Yaghtin et al. (2020) explain that the provision

of helpful and pertinent information addresses the needs and queries of B2B buyers and prospects. This, in turn, fosters stronger customer relationships and positively influences customer loyalty. Also, utilising content marketing can help educate the target audience both about solutions offered by the business and social or ecological causes that it contributes to. There is also flexibility in the approach to content marketing. The content being shared may not directly need to relate to the products or services offered by a company (Yaghtin et al., 2020).

Valos et. al. (2018) suggest the utilization of videos showing internal staff expertise or animations, as well as how-to guides on a scale of complexity based on the audience's experience level. The accessibility of audio-visual content on YouTube to users worldwide makes it highly shareable and capable of going viral (Ros-Gálvez et al., 2021). Also, B2B digital content and online conversations have impact on purchasing decisions (Yaghtin et al., 2020). Consequently, businesses have the opportunity to globally promote themselves, benefit from a sales perspective and advocate for sustainability in a highly competitive attention economy.

A review by Vanderlinden (2019) highlights some points about communication for sustainability. Transparency, commitment and active communication are key elements as greenwashing can have far-reaching consequences for companies, from value dissonance to obstructed progress in the green economy and erosion of client trust. Power and trust are essential concepts in marketing, applicable both within the field and beyond, and they have long served as foundational elements in B2B research (Hofacker et al., 2020). Power, being inherently relational, and trust share this relational nature. Therefore, in the context of communication on sustainability, the importance of these factors is even more substantial. Thought leadership in B2B social media marketing is significant for building trust and commitment (Neuhaus, Millemann, & Nijssen, 2022). By offering valuable information, companies can cultivate awareness and loyalty among their target audience and through the publication of relevant and engaging content, business organisations can establish trust and demonstrate thought leadership (Yaghtin et al., 2020). Therefore, B2B companies should focus on establishing themselves as thought leaders in their industry to effectively utilize social networks as part of their marketing mix. An example could be LinkedIn – a professional social media platform online or YouTube – a widespread audio-visual content sharing portal; although, other channels could be used as well depending on where stakeholders as the target audience are active. Advocates of thought leadership suggest that B2B marketers should focus on nurturing online communities to disseminate relevant and useful content that provides superior insights. By embracing this customer-centric mindset, marketers can gain a significant

competitive advantage through content marketing (Yaghtin et al., 2020). However, online communities are underutilized by marketers in the B2B environment, and Valos et. al. (2018) suggest a few practices that can be followed for best results: making use of data to craft informed answers and strategies, incorporating other direct marketing and sales activities with community relationships, having and rewarding brand advocates, adding an easy way to reach out to an expert / salesperson, showing testimonials / industry awards, using advertisement to trigger access to further information, messaging in an authentic function oriented tone, teaching moderators how to tell apart community types, adapting activities for different stakeholders and having different chat rooms decision-makers based on their needs. Adding the dimension of sustainability to these concepts could help create communities online which are joined by industry participants who share similar values and goals.

Catellani (2011) suggests that to mitigate criticisms due to simplistic narratives and limited character roles, businesses employing storytelling in their communication should endeavour to construct more intricate and comprehensive narrative worlds. This may involve incorporating greater complexity and inclusivity in the narrative structure (Catellani, 2011). By adopting this approach, businesses can enhance their storytelling abilities and effectively convey their message to their audience. Through this, business organisations can present themselves from a unique angle and thus stand out from competition.

Businesses see an increasing need to communicate about their sustainability activities and seek information on the best ways to do it. The research community is quite actively investigating sustainability communication practices in the B2C sector. However, as the same in B2B is still lagging behind, it is worth looking at literature focusing on B2C, evaluating to what extent those findings are applicable to B2B, and using them to draw inspiration for potential suggestions in practical application.

Both B2C and B2B marketing employ common marketing strategies such as targeting, segmentation, and positioning, but there are also significant differences that have consequences for communication tactics (Valos et. al., 2018). According to Routray (2020), when it comes to engaging with business customers, a distinct approach is required compared to reaching out to the average consumer. The sales cycle in the business-to-business (B2B) context is typically lengthier and more complex. B2B business owners encounter unique challenges that differ from those faced by businesses catering directly to individual customers (Routray, 2020). Valos et. al. (2018) distinguish a number of differences, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Marketing communication difference in B2C and B2B

Implications for B2B marketing communications:	Marketing communications in B2B compared to B2C:
Number of decision-makers and/or purchase influences	Greater emphasis on certain promotional tools (richer and personalized communication media such as sales, telemarketing, direct marketing)
More direct and intense customer relationships	
Slower decision-making cycle	
More functional rational or utilitarian decision-making criteria	Positioning and communication messages are more likely to be functional and/or rational
High-value exchange	
Products are more complex	
Customers are more knowledgeable	

Source: Valos et. al. (2018).

This shows that marketing communication tactics used for B2B have to be carefully selected and adapted if they were to take inspiration from B2C practices. Part of the consideration would be the size, location and industry of B2B organisation as that will affect the structure and complexity of decision making, and also the level of knowledgeable on marketing or sustainability topics.

Pomering (2017) provides a sustainability oriented theoretical perspective on the marketing mix by extending the conceptualization to include considerations relevant to contemporary practice. The 4 Ps have been adjusted to 10 Ps: product, price, promotion, place, people, processes, physical evidence, promise, principles, and partnership (Pomering, 2017). This theoretical rationale can be applied to business strategy both in B2C and B2B as various stakeholders benefit from value creation and are increasingly aware of the necessity of sustainability practices.

Kowalska (2020) offers a collection of sustainable communication best practices, which comprise advocating for sustainable consumption while communicating with customers, ensuring both transparency and two-way communication with clients, and providing regular updates to stakeholders on the company's commitment to socioecological activities to bolster trust and credibility. According to Greg Hoffman, the former CMO of Nike, there are three

levels of communication that a brand must focus on: "on the ground", "overground", and "underground". He argues that a brand must strike the right balance between meeting business objectives and connecting with its audience on an emotional level by investing in digital marketing, storytelling and relationship marketing (Markowicz, 2023). This perspective is relevant to B2B in a few ways. First, "on the ground" marketing is based on communication about the product, mostly from the functional perspective, and this is what organizations have to know to determine the fit of the offered solution (for example, new eco-friendly materials or tools to reduce emissions during production) to their business needs. Second, the "overground" story explains what is important to a company (in the context of this paper, that could be sustainable development goals) and why, and this gives an advantage for partnerships where aligned values matter. Thirdly, "underground" relationship marketing is already a popular practice between organizations, and practices such as co-creation can help companies achieve higher social impact. Therefore, this three-step system can also be applied when analysing which methods work best in sustainability communication.

In the context of business-to-consumer cases, corporate eco-labels were perceived by individuals as superior indicators of product and source quality, whereas government labels were deemed to possess greater credibility and trustworthiness (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014). As a consequence, the introduction of company certifications through marketing methods raises questions about the potential variations in customer perceptions in the business-to-business context, relative upon the type of certification. As companies increasingly seek to communicate their commitment to sustainability and responsible business practices, certifications have emerged as a powerful tool to signal credibility to customers and stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of certification-based marketing strategies may be influenced by the characteristics of the certification, as well as the attitudes and preferences of the target audience. Therefore, while there are benefits to obtaining a certification such as improving the company's processes in order to qualify, for B2B communication relying on a label alone to carry a message is insufficient. It is, however, complementary.

Catellani (2009) proposes how Floch and Pinson's (1990) framework of the four positions of consumer goods valuation can be used to identify four potential positions for constructing the sustainability value of a practice in the internal corporate discourse. The author suggests a methodology for analysing how sustainability value is constructed in corporate communication. It is worth considering how the four approaches (utopian-existential, playful, rational / practical, constellation and combination) would benefit communication with

individuals not within the organization but outside of it, and in the context of this paper – with clients, suppliers and other partners.

In general, when companies communicate about corporate social responsibility (CSR), they tend to highlight their own participation in different social causes, rather than the causes themselves (Du et al., 2010). This is not necessarily a bad approach, but it depends on a few factors, such as how, when, why and to whom the message is conveyed. Therefore, to determine if the marketing communication approach is good, or, in other words, facilitates the generation of positive CSR attributions, it has to be evaluated against a set of criteria. Du et al. (2010) present a framework based on the following factors: initiative, issue, importance, commitment, impact, motives and fit. Although this methodology was created with various stakeholders in mind instead of just decision makers in the business-to-business context, it can still be used as a stepping stone for research into business-to-business sustainability communication practices and to provide insights for further studies.

Communication quality indicators, which include information quality, suitable channels, and delivery of adequate, timely, accurate, complete, and credible information, are essential for effective marketing communication that meets customer expectations and preferences (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017).

Literature suggests two groups of nine factors that can be studied in detail in further research. Table 2 provides an overview of them.

Table 2

Key concepts of marketing communication messages

Message content	Message intent
Importance	Education
Commitment	Promotion
Impact	Leadership
Motives	Standing apart
Fit	

Source: composed by the author based on literature review (2023)

These key concepts suggest how to communicate effectively about the company's sustainability values, activities, solutions and initiatives. They also narrow down the scope of B2B marketing communication practices for further research.

II. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the empirical research methodology is presented, which includes the formulation of hypothetical statements, the methodology for the comparative case study, and the methodology for the expert interviews. The chapter begins with an introduction that provides an overview of the research approach. Subsequently, the hypothetical statements are discussed in section 2.2, outlining the key assertions that guide the empirical investigation. Section 2.3 focuses on the methodology employed for the comparative case study, describing the procedures for data collection and analysis. Section 2.4 then delves into the methodology used for conducting expert interviews, highlighting the strategies implemented to gather relevant insights from knowledgeable participants. The chapter proceeds with a discussion ethical considerations pertaining to the research in section 2.5, followed by limitations of the study addressed in section 2.6. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the empirical research methodology.

2.1. Overview of the research approach

The focus of this study is to investigate and improve B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities. The purpose of this research is to address the research problem of enhancing B2B marketing communication strategies in the context of sustainability. The study aims to propose the most effective marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability initiatives within the B2B sector.

Therefore, in order to achieve research objectives, two main hypothetical statements and nine sub-hypothetical statements were formulated for the study. These statements were derived from a thorough analysis of the existing literature in the field. To evaluate and validate these statements, two primary research methods were employed: comparative case studies and expert interviews.

The comparative case studies involved an in-depth analysis of selected companies' marketing communication practices related to sustainability. These case studies provided valuable insights into the strategies employed by organizations in the B2B sector and their applicability. Additionally, expert interviews were conducted with professionals who held key positions in their respective organizations and had expertise in B2B marketing communication and sustainability. These interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of the research topic and provided valuable perspectives from industry experts.

By combining the findings from the comparative case studies and expert interviews, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities. The results provides basis for recommendations and insights for improving marketing communication strategies in the B2B sector, with a specific focus on sustainability initiatives.

2.2. Hypothetical statements

In order to assess the practicality and applicability of concepts, hypothetical statements were developed by drawing upon the insights gathered from a comprehensive review of scientific literature. These hypothetical statements served as a basis for conducting comparative case studies and expert interviews, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the concepts in question. By employing this approach, the study aimed to bridge the gap between theory and real-world application, providing valuable insights into the practical implications of the examined concepts. The logic of hypothetical statements and relationship of key concepts is provided in Figure 1 below.

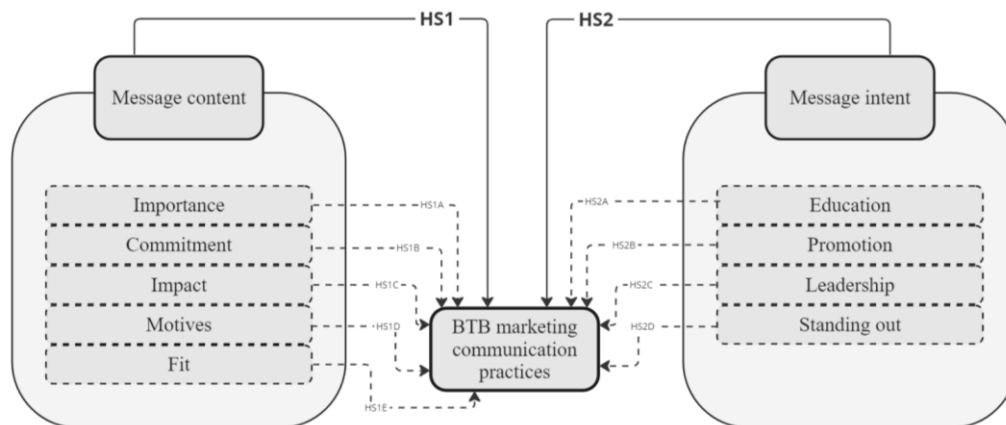


Fig. 1. Hypothetical statements framework

Source: composed by the author based on scientific literature review (2023)

The study comprises two primary hypothetical statements accompanied by nine sub-hypothetical statements, which are outlined as follows:

- **HS1: Message content** improvement has a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices.
 - **HS1A:** Emphasis on issue **importance** through a lack of self-serving motives has a positive influence on issue-focused message content.

- **HS1B:** Display of **commitment** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.
- **HS1C:** Emphasis on **impact** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.
- **HS1D:** Acknowledgement of both business and society benefitting **motives** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.
- **HS1E:** Communication of **fit** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.
- **HS2: Message intent** improvement has a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices.
 - **HS2A:** Emphasis on **education** has a positive influence on message intent.
 - **HS2B:** Emphasis on **promotion** has a positive influence on message intent.
 - **HS2C:** Emphasis on **leadership** has a positive influence on message intent.
 - **HS2D:** Emphasis on **standing apart** has a positive influence on message intent.

2.3. Methodology for the comparative case study

The selection of a research method is crucial for effectively addressing research questions and achieving meaningful conclusions. In this study, the comparative case study method was chosen based on its ability to systematically compare and analyse a limited number of cases in order to identify causal relationships and draw meaningful conclusions. The comparative method, as commonly understood within the discipline, involves a systematic comparison of cases, allowing researchers to investigate and compare various aspects of the cases (Collier, 1993). This methodological approach provides several benefits and offers relevance to the current research inquiry.

Firstly, the comparative case study method is considered one of the fundamental scientific methods for establishing general empirical propositions (Lijphart, 1971). It is recognized as a specific method rather than a vague term, and it contributes to the development of scientific knowledge alongside other core methods such as experimental, statistical, and case study methods. By employing the comparative method, researchers can systematically examine

and compare different cases, enabling them to identify patterns, commonalities, and differences among them (Collier, 1993).

Comparison serves as a fundamental instrument for analysis, enhancing our ability to accurately describe phenomena and develop concepts (Collier, 1993). Through the comparative case study method, researchers can highlight intriguing similarities and differences among cases, providing insights into the subject under investigation. The use of multiple case studies within the comparative framework offers robustness and reliability in research. By including a small number of cases, researchers can explore theoretical development and research inquiries from different perspectives, leading to more comprehensive and well-rounded conclusions (Mohajan, 2018). Drawing on diverse empirical evidence, multiple case studies contribute to the formation of more persuasive theories, as they provide a broader exploration of the research topic (Gustafsson, 2017).

Moreover, the comparative case study method is particularly relevant when inquiries focus on understanding the processes or outcomes of an intervention in terms of "how" and "why" (Goodrick, 2014). In this study, the research problem is formulated in a question format that aligns with the method's suitability for investigating these types of questions. The comparative case study method allows for an in-depth exploration of the cases, facilitating the examination of the intervention's effects and the underlying mechanisms (Mohajan, 2018).

Additionally, the method of multiple case study with comparative analysis is suitable for evaluating hypothetical statements and theories. Theory-testing case studies involve assessing the accuracy and applicability of individual or competing theories by examining their validity and scope conditions (Mohajan, 2018). By applying the comparative case study method, researchers can evaluate hypothetical statements related to the audio-visual materials and supplementary text under investigation, contributing to the refinement and validation of theories.

In conclusion, the comparative case study method was selected as the research design for this study due to its ability to systematically compare and analyse a limited number of cases. This method offers various benefits, including the enhancement of our understanding and description of phenomena, the exploration of novel hypotheses, and the construction of theories. Most importantly, the comparative case study method is particularly relevant when evaluating whether hypothetical statements can be supported or rejected. By utilizing this method, the

researcher was able to examine multiple cases of audio-visual materials and supplementary text, evaluating their relationship and addressing the research questions effectively.

2.3.1. Data Collection Procedures

The comparative case study part of the paper relied on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data refers to information derived from surveys and datasets that were originally collected for purposes other than the current research (Vezzoni, 2015). Šerić and Ljubica (2018) define secondary data as previously collected data that can be organized or unorganized. This can be valuable for formulating hypothetical statements, research design and interview questions to gather primary data.

Secondary data, such as industry reports, has informed the selection of companies whose video communication examples were analysed. Primary data, however, had a key role as companies' YouTube channel contents and featured videos (channel videos played by default at the time of study) were collected and analysed directly for the paper.

The choice of YouTube as the communication channel for the study was deliberate. This is because while social media may not be the primary tool for B2B communication, it still holds value and is utilized. However, it is not without its limitations. According to Schurmans (2020), the environmental impact of global digital systems in 2019 accounted for approximately 4% of worldwide CO₂ emissions. Additionally, the study conducted by The Shift Project (2019), revealed that online video playback alone contributed to nearly 1% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Hence, it is crucial to optimize the use of video content to ensure that resources invested in it are not wasted.

Upon visiting a business's YouTube channel, the featured video or default video that plays automatically is the most salient aspect for viewers. Channel managers typically designate the featured video player to display the content that they wish their customers to view as the initial point of engagement. Therefore, this featured video content has been selected for review in this study. Featured videos selected were visible on the home pages of companies' YouTube channels at the time of study. Original video upload dates varied and thus were not taken into account.

The researcher carefully watched each featured video multiple times to ensure accurate capture of the required information and impressions. During the viewing process, the researcher

considered relevant details about the companies, their YouTube channels, and their marketing communication practices related to sustainability.

To assess the applied practices in the featured videos, both their moving-picture and supplementary text-form content were thoroughly evaluated. The following parameters were recorded for analysis:

- Company name
- Featured YouTube video number
- Featured YouTube video URL
- Featured YouTube video title
- Featured YouTube video duration
- Hashtags in the featured YouTube video description
- URL in the featured YouTube video description
- Featured YouTube video content description
- Initiative discussed in the message conveyed by the video
- Sustainability topics mentioned in the featured YouTube video
- Alignment of the featured YouTube video with the questions outlined in detail within Table 3
- Distinctive elements observed in the featured YouTube video
- YouTube channel URL
- Channel description
- Total number of YouTube videos on the channel
- Current frequency of uploads on YouTube
- YouTube content themes
- YouTube content types

By systematically analysing these parameters, the researcher aimed to gain insights into the communication practices employed by the companies in their YouTube videos and identify key sustainability-related aspects highlighted in their content.

2.3.2. Sample Design and Selection

According to Hänninen and Karjaluoto (2017), while personal selling, customer relationship marketing, trade shows, and public relations remain the most commonly used tools in B2B marketing, social media is important as a sources of information. The three-level system

of communication (Markowicz, 2023) also informs the selection of material for the empirical study. As relationship marketing activities in B2B are difficult to analyse from an outside perspective without access to internal information of the company, this case study focuses on digital marketing and storytelling examples. Consequently, the case study compares and analyses content on social media, YouTube in particular. It is a marketing communication platform which allows sharing of content and engagement with audiences (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020). This channel affords convenient accessibility to data and offers valuable insights into the intended messages that companies seek to communicate to their partners and customers.

Analysed videos include examples from three content classes: task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and advertising-oriented. According to Yaghtin et al. (2020), task-oriented and emotion-oriented content classes are the most valuable and/or interesting ones among the four content classes. However, advertising-oriented was also included as the primary objective of this content class is to directly promote corporate brands or products, making it closely aligned with traditional advertising methods. More specifically, video content on YouTube was selected for analysis based on the following criteria: posted on YouTube on the company's channel, in English, can be record of an advertisement or a piece of content marketing.

According to Catellani (2011), there is an imperative need for coherence between articulated speeches and actual practices, as well as among different sets of communicated messages. Therefore, the companies selected for case study have to not only publish relevant content types via YouTube, but also have industry acknowledgement for their sustainability activities.

Corporate Knights is a media and research company that promotes sustainable business practices and helps companies integrate sustainability into their operations (Corporate Knights, n.d.). The institution endeavours to stimulate corporate entities to inculcate sustainable business practices and facilitate the progression towards a more sustainable global economy. They provide research, data, and consulting services, and are known for producing influential sustainability rankings. Furthermore, Corporate Knights' own commitment to sustainability is reflected in its status as a certified B Corporation, which signifies its dedication to balancing profit with social and environmental impact (B Lab, n.d.). The 19th edition of the ranking of the 100 most sustainable corporations in the world by Corporate Knights is founded upon a meticulous evaluation of more than 6,000 publicly traded enterprises that generate a revenue

exceeding US\$1 billion (Corporate Knights, 2023). Therefore, the companies selected for the comparative study were picked from “Corporate Knights Global 100” list.

Ten companies in total have been selected so that meaningful insights can be derived and allow for comparative analysis. In order to identify patterns, trends, similarities, and differences of marketing communication practices for hypothetical statement testing, the companies were chosen based on the following criteria. First, they had to be operating internationally in the business-to-business sector. Second, they had to be large companies with proven and industry-acknowledged efforts in sustainability related activities. Third, they had to demonstrate marketing communication activity on sustainability topics via the YouTube channel in English language and have a featured video. The scope of analysed companies is as follows.

- **Corporate Knights Global 100 ranking.** The companies are ranked in the "2023/2022 Corporate Knights Global 100" list based on sustainability criteria. The ranking positions indicate the companies' commitment and performance in sustainability practices. The lower the number, the better position. The rankings of selected companies vary from the 1st position to the 29th.
- **Employees.** The employee counts reflect the size and workforce of each company, and therefore, selected companies range from large to very large enterprises. The companies have a range of employee counts, varying from around 2,900 to approximately 162,000.
- **Headquarters.** The headquarters represent the central operational locations of the respective companies. The selected companies are headquartered in different locations around the world, including Canada, France, Finland, Denmark, Spain, the US, Bermuda, and Ireland. Notably, the distribution is in between Europe and North America.
- **Operation locations.** The companies have a diverse operational presence, spanning multiple regions and continents, and the areas highlight the global reach and market presence of the companies. They operate in various countries and regions, such as Africa, Asia-Pacific, Australia, Canada, China, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Singapore, South America, Taiwan, the Middle East, the UK, the US, and more.
- **Revenue.** The revenue data reflects the financial performance and scale of the companies in the specified year. Last year's information is the most relevant, and

so companies' revenue figures for 2022 range from approximately \$4.5 billion to around \$34.2 billion.

- **Industry.** The industry categorizations reflect the primary sectors in which the companies operate. The selected companies operate in a few different industries, including construction, power, energy and utilities, alternative energy, technology and communications, and industrial goods and machinery. Technology and communications, and industrial goods and machinery industries both have two companies, and alternative energy has three.
- **Products/services.** Each company has a distinct business focus and specialization within its respective industry. Core activities and areas of expertise of the selected companies are in design and engineering consulting, energy management and automation, oil refining and marketing, wind, hydroelectric and solar energy, enterprise cloud computing, elevators and escalators manufacturing.

In the following sections, the ten selected companies will be briefly introduced. Basic company information is crucial to understand prior to comparative analysis as it establishes a foundation for interpretation of their communication practices within a clear context and allows for meaningful comparisons. By outlining industries and offerings, insights into core activities are gained. Information on industries served and geographic presence helps evaluate competitive positions and identify potential synergies. Details like employee count and headquarters provide insights into size and capabilities. A comprehensive overview sets the stage for accurate analysis and conclusions.

2.3.2.1. Stantec Inc.

Stantec Inc. (Stantec) is a provider of engineering consulting services in the construction industry. With a workforce of approximately 26,000 employees, the company is headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and operates in multiple countries including Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, China, Taiwan, and the UK (Stantec Inc., 2023).

Stantec offers a comprehensive range of services to its clients, including architectural, construction management, and environmental services (Stantec Inc., 2022). The company's diverse service portfolio encompasses architecture and interior design, building engineering, community design services, geomatics, geotechnical engineering, and landscape architecture. Additionally, Stantec provides specialized services in oil and gas engineering, procurement,

power engineering, program and project management, transportation infrastructure engineering, and water and wastewater engineering (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-i).

The company caters to a wide range of industries, serving clients in civic and cultural, education, environment, health, industrial, mining, oil and gas, power, residential, retail, hospitality, science and technology, sports and recreation, transportation, urban places, water power and dams, as well as workplace and office sectors (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-i).

Stantec has established a strong reputation for its commitment to sustainability and responsible business practices. In the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" rankings, Stantec secured the 7th position, a significant improvement from its 17th ranking in the previous year (Corporate Knights, 2023). It holds the distinction of being recognized as the number one ranked most sustainable engineering firm in the world. This recognition underscores Stantec's dedication to environmentally conscious operations and sustainable development.

In the fiscal year 2022, Stantec reported a revenue of \$4.46 billion, reflecting its strong market presence and successful project delivery (Google Finance, n.d.-i).

2.3.2.2. Schneider Electric SE

Schneider Electric SE (Schneider Electric) is an energy management and automation company operating in the power industry (Schneider Electric SE, 2023b). With a workforce of approximately 162,339 employees, the company is headquartered in Rueil-Malmaison, France, and operates globally across Africa, Europe, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, South America, and North America.

Schneider Electric specializes in developing technologies and solutions for electricity distribution (Schneider Electric SE, 2023a). The company offers a wide range of products and systems, including automation and control products, low voltage products and systems, solar and energy storage solutions, medium voltage distribution and grid automation solutions, as well as critical power, cooling, and racks for various applications. In addition to its product offerings, Schneider Electric provides energy and sustainability services, field and automation services, cloud services, consulting, and training services (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-g).

Catering to a wide range of industries such as banking and finance, food and beverage, healthcare, life sciences, marine, metals, minerals and cement, mining, oil and gas, retail, automotive, and mobility, Schneider Electric's solutions address diverse sectoral needs (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-g).

Demonstrating its commitment to sustainability, Schneider Electric has actively pursued sustainable practices (Corporate Knights, 2023). In the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" rankings, the company secured the 7th position, highlighting its dedication to sustainable business operations. Despite a slight decline from its 4th position in the previous year, Schneider Electric continues to be recognized as one of the most sustainable companies globally.

In the fiscal year 2022, Schneider Electric reported a revenue of \$34.18 billion, highlighting its presence and success in the power industry (Google Finance, n.d.-g).

2.3.2.3. Neste Oyj

Neste Corp (Neste) is a company that refines oil and does marketing in the energy and utilities industry. The company is a leading provider of renewable traffic fuels, with a strong commitment to sustainability and renewable solutions. Neste is headquartered in Finland's city Espoo, and has a workforce of 5,824 employees. With operations in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Northwest Russia, and Singapore, Neste has established a strong regional presence. Additionally, the company exports oil and renewable fuels to global markets such as the United States, Sweden, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-e).

Neste offers a wide range of products, including gasoline, diesel fuel, aviation fuel, heating oil, light and heavy fuel oil, base oils, gasoline components, specialty fuels, solvents, liquid petroleum gas, bitumen, renewable diesel, and renewable aviation fuel (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-e). The company specializes in the production and sale of these petroleum and renewable products. Neste also engages in direct sales and marketing activities of petroleum products, primarily focusing on the Baltic region (Neste Oyj, 2023).

The company serves various industries, including oil companies themselves and those that are involved in the marketing of oil, fuels, lubricants, and other specialized products. Neste's high-quality products cater to the needs of these industries (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-e).

Neste's dedication to sustainability is exemplified by its ranking in the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" list, where it secured the 29th position (Corporate Knights, 2023). Although it experienced a slight decline from its 24th position in the previous year, Neste remains committed to being one of the most sustainable companies globally.

In terms of financial performance, Neste reported a revenue of \$25.71 billion in 2022, highlighting its significant presence in the industry (Google Finance, n.d.-e).

2.3.2.4. Vestas Wind Systems A/S

Vestas Wind Systems A/S (Vestas) is a renewable energy company operating in the alternative energy industry. With its headquarters located in Aarhus, Denmark, Vestas operates globally and serves customers across the world. The company has manufacturing and testing facilities in North America, Latin America, Europe, and Asia, enabling it to meet the diverse needs of its global clientele. Around 28,438 employees contribute to the company's operations (Vestas Wind Systems A/S, 2023a).

The company specializes in the design, manufacturing, installation, and servicing of onshore and offshore power converters, wind turbines, blades, and towers. With a focused catalogue of solutions, Vestas offers various services ranging from parts and repair to preventive inspections and advanced repairs. The company's service offerings include data-driven consultancy, fleet optimization, blade maintenance and inspection, power generator repairs, and gearbox exchange (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-j).

Vestas serves a wide range of industries and customers, including utilities and power companies, independent power producers, government and public entities, commercial and industrial consumers, project developers and EPC contractors, as well as cooperative societies and community groups (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-j).

Vestas has consistently prioritized sustainability and environmental stewardship, earning recognition for its efforts. In the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" rankings, Vestas secured the 2nd position, highlighting its commitment to sustainable business practices (Corporate Knights, 2023). Although it experienced a slight decline from its 1st position in the previous year, Vestas remains at the peak of the most sustainable companies worldwide (Vestas Wind Systems A/S, 2023b).

In terms of financial performance, Vestas reported a revenue of \$14.49 billion in 2022, demonstrating its significant presence and success within the renewable energy industry (Google Finance, n.d.-j).

2.3.2.5. Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy SA

Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy SA (Siemens Gamesa) is a supplier of wind power solutions in the alternative energy industry. The company is headquartered in Zamudio, Vizcaya, Spain, and has a workforce of 27,382 dedicated employees (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-h). As a subsidiary of Siemens Energy AG, the company specializes in designing, manufacturing,

and selling both onshore and offshore wind turbines. They are committed to providing sustainable energy solutions to meet the growing global demand for renewable power (Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy SA, n.d.).

Siemens Gamesa also offers comprehensive services for wind farms, including management, monitoring, and maintenance. Their services encompass various areas such as diagnostic services, energy thrust, multi-brand support, and offshore logistics (Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy SA, 2022). The company leverages digital tools to remotely predict, detect, and address issues, ensuring the efficient operation and performance of wind turbines (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-h).

With a global presence, Siemens Gamesa operates in Europe, the Americas, Asia Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa. Their customer base spans a wide range of industries, including utilities and power companies, independent power producers, government and public entities, commercial and industrial consumers, project developers and EPC contractors, as well as cooperative societies and community groups.

Siemens Gamesa's attention to sustainability has earned them recognition in the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" rankings, where they secured the 8th position among the world's most sustainable companies (Corporate Knights, 2023).

In 2022, Siemens Gamesa generated a revenue of \$9.81 billion, showcasing its significant market presence and financial performance (Google Finance, n.d.-h).

2.3.2.6. Salesforce Inc.

Salesforce Inc. is a company in the technology and communications industry. Headquartered in San Francisco, California, Salesforce operates globally with a business presence across the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. With a workforce of around 73, 541 employees, the company demonstrates its significant scale and influence in the technology industry (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-f).

As a provider of enterprise cloud computing solutions, Salesforce offers a range of services that empower businesses to connect, engage, sell, service, and collaborate with their customers. The company delivers its cloud computing solutions as a service through major internet browsers and leading mobile devices. Salesforce stands out in the industry by enabling third parties to develop additional functionality and new applications that run on its platform,

fostering innovation and customization. The company also offers emissions analytics, showcasing its commitment to environmental sustainability (Salesforce Inc., 2023b).

With a diverse customer base spanning industries such as communications, consumer goods, financial services, government, healthcare and life sciences, manufacturing, media, nonprofit, and retail, Salesforce serves a wide range of sectors with its cloud computing solutions (Salesforce Inc., 2023a).

Recognized for its commitment to sustainability, Salesforce achieved a ranking of 27 in the "2022 Corporate Knights Global 100" list, which highlights the most sustainable corporations (Corporate Knights, 2022). This acknowledgment further underscores Salesforce's dedication to environmental and social responsibility.

In terms of financial performance, Salesforce generated a revenue of \$31.35 billion in 2022 (Google Finance, n.d.-f). This notable achievement reflects the company's strong market presence and customer adoption of its cloud computing solutions.

2.3.2.7. Brookfield Renewable Partners L.P.

Brookfield Renewable Partners L.P., a subsidiary of Brookfield Asset Management Inc, is a renewable power company operating in the alternative energy industry (Brookfield Renewable Partners L.P., 2022). Headquartered in Hamilton, Bermuda, Brookfield Renewable Partners L.P. operates with a workforce of approximately 2,875 employees. This dedicated team plays a vital role in managing and optimizing the company's renewable power generation assets.

The company specializes in owning, operating, and investing in renewable power generation facilities worldwide. With a diverse portfolio, Brookfield Renewable focuses on wind, hydroelectric, and solar facilities, as well as distributed generation and storage facilities (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-a). This broad range of renewable technologies enables the company to harness clean energy sources and contribute to a sustainable future.

Brookfield Renewable serves a wide range of clients, including public power authorities, load-serving utilities, and industrial users. Its operations span across various countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia, highlighting the company's global presence and commitment to expanding renewable energy adoption internationally (Brookfield Renewable Partners L.P., 2023).

Brookfield Renewable's commitment to sustainability is recognized by its ranking of 4 in the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" list (Corporate Knights, 2023). This

acknowledgment reflects the company's strong environmental and social performance, underscoring its dedication to responsible and sustainable business practices.

As far as financial performance goes, Brookfield Renewable generated a revenue of \$4.74 billion in 2022 (Google Finance, n.d.-a). This demonstrates the company's robust operational capabilities and its ability to generate substantial revenue from renewable energy projects.

2.3.2.8. Dassault Systèmes SE

Dassault Systèmes SE, a subsidiary of Groupe Industriel Marcel Dassault SA, is a technology and communications company specializing in 3D experience platforms, software, and services (Dassault Systèmes SE, 2022). With a workforce of approximately 24,753 employees, Dassault benefits from a dedicated team that drives innovation and delivers exceptional customer experiences.

As a provider, Dassault offers a range of consulting services, including design, deployment, support, training, engineering services, and sustainability solutions. Dassault serves as a strategic partner, empowering businesses to leverage its 3D experience platform for enhanced innovation, collaboration, and productivity. The company provides licenses, subscription options, and support services to ensure seamless integration and efficient utilization of its software solutions (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-b).

According to the 2021 Annual Financial Report (2022), these services are tailored to meet the needs of various industries, including aerospace and defense, transportation and mobility, marine and offshore, industrial equipment, high-tech, infrastructure, energy and materials, retail, life sciences, utilities, and business services.

Headquartered in Velizy-Villacoublay, Ile-De-France, France, Dassault operates through representative offices across the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific region (Dassault Systèmes SE, 2022). This extensive global presence enables the company to serve clients worldwide and cater to diverse market demands.

Dassault's commitment to sustainability is evident in its ranking of 10 in the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" list, although the company fell down from its 9th place position in 2022 (Corporate Knights, 2023). Despite the change in ranking, the company is still within the top 10 on the rating as one of the most sustainable companies in the world.

In 2022, Dassault Systèmes generated a revenue of \$5.67 billion, highlighting its financial strength and market position within the technology and communications industry (Google Finance, n.d.-b).

2.3.2.9. Johnson Controls International PLC

Johnson Controls International Plc (Johnson Controls) is a global technology and multi-industrial company operating in the industrial goods and machinery sector. The company is large in size with around 102,000 employees (Johnson Controls International PLC, 2023a).

Johnson Controls specializes in engineering, developing, manufacturing, and installing a wide range of building products and systems. The company's offerings encompass HVAC equipment, fire suppression systems, distributed energy storage solutions, fire detection systems, industrial refrigeration solutions, building automation and controls, digital and sustainability solutions, residential and smart home security systems, and retail solutions, among others. The company goes beyond providing products and systems by offering technical assistance, energy management advice, and data-driven solutions. Johnson Controls leverages its expertise to support customers in optimizing their building operations, enhancing energy efficiency, and improving overall performance (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-c).

Headquartered in Cork, Ireland, Johnson Controls operates across the world, serving customers across various industries employees (Johnson Controls International PLC, 2023b). The company's extensive network of offices allows it to effectively sell its equipment and offer services worldwide, ensuring a strong market presence and customer support. With a comprehensive portfolio, Johnson Controls caters to the diverse needs of both residential and non-residential building markets.

The 17th position in the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" list shows a decline from the 12th rank in 2022. However, Johnson Controls' is still a world leader in commitment to sustainability (Corporate Knights, 2023).

In 2022, Johnson Controls generated a revenue of \$25.30 billion, which shows its financial strength and market reach within its industry (Google Finance, n.d.-c).

2.3.2.10. Kone Oyj

Kone Corporation (Kone) is a manufacturer in the industrial goods and machinery industry, specializing in elevators and escalators. The company has a dedicated workforce of approximately 63,277 employees (Kone Oyj, 2023a).

With a primary focus on vertical transportation solutions, Kone offers a diverse range of products, including elevators, escalators, automatic building doors, and monitoring and access control systems. Their offerings go beyond installation, encompassing modernization and carbon-neutral maintenance solutions that enhance building value and efficiency (Kone Oyj, 2023b). Kone also provides comprehensive services throughout the lifecycle of a building, covering design, construction, maintenance, and modernization. Additionally, they supply spare parts for elevators, escalators, and other related equipment.

Kone serves a wide array of industries and sectors, such as hotels, leisure facilities, public spaces, residential and office buildings, specialized structures, airports, railway stations, shopping centres, medical facilities, supermarkets, and department stores (GlobalData Plc, n.d.-d). This diverse customer base reflects Kone's ability to cater to the unique requirements of various environments and facilities. Headquartered in Espoo, Helsinki, Finland, Kone operates globally, with a presence in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas. This extensive reach enables them to serve customers worldwide and maintain a strong market position.

Kone's commitment to sustainability is celebrated in its ranking of 19 in the "2023 Corporate Knights Global 100" list (Corporate Knights, 2023). This recognition emphasizes their dedication to environmental responsibility and sustainable business practices.

In 2022, Kone showed financial strength and market success in the sector by generating a revenue of \$10.91 billion (Google Finance, n.d.-d).

2.3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

In order to determine the best practices currently used to communicate about sustainability activities in the B2B sector, a selection of content case examples are analysed based on the relevant elements discovered during the literature review. Relationships between gathered data and theoretical concepts were found and assessed through interpretation and narrative, visual analysis with comparison. Du et al.'s (2010) framework was used as the basis to formulate some of the evaluation questions (Table 3).

The table focuses on analysing the content of messages related to sustainability initiatives. It examines different aspects of the message content and categorizes them based on the nature of the message.

Table 3

Key questions for message content evaluation

Message Content		
What is the initiative in the message about?		
Is the message predominantly about a product / company / company's involvement in sustainability causes or a sustainability issue itself?	If sustainability issue:	Does the message emphasize the importance of the sustainability issue by demonstrating a lack of self-serving motives?
	If product / company / company's involvement:	What is the company's commitment to the message?
		Does the message focus on the input of the company or the impact of the initiative?
		Does the message acknowledge both business and society benefitting motives ?
		Does the message communicate fit by showing a logical connection between the sustainability issue and a company's business?

Source: author-composed, adapted from Du et al. (2010) and formulated as questions (2023)

The first column, "What is the initiative in the message about?" asks for the main focus or topic of the message. It aims to identify whether the message primarily revolves around a sustainability issue itself or if it is more centered on a product, company, or the company's involvement in sustainability causes.

If the message is about a sustainability issue, the second column titled "Does the message emphasize the importance of the sustainability issue by demonstrating a lack of self-serving motives?" examines whether the message highlights the significance of the sustainability issue by avoiding self-serving motives. It looks for indications that the company is addressing topics that are not directly related to their business operations, showcasing a genuine concern for the sustainability issue.

If the message is about a product, company, or the company's involvement, the subsequent column explores different aspects. The cell "What is the company's commitment to

the message?" evaluates the company's dedication to the message by considering factors such as association durability, input amount, and consistency.

The cell "Does the message focus on the input of the company or the impact of the initiative?" examines whether the message emphasizes the actions or contributions made by the company or if it highlights the tangible benefits that the intended beneficiaries of the sustainability cause have already received or are expected to receive in the future.

The cell "Does the message acknowledge both business and society benefitting motives?" assesses whether the message acknowledges the mutual benefits for both the company and society. It looks for indications that the message communicates how both the business and society can benefit from the sustainability initiative.

Lastly, the cell "Does the message communicate fit by showing a logical connection between the sustainability issue and a company's business?" analyses whether the message establishes a logical connection between the sustainability issue and the company's business. It examines whether the message effectively communicates how the sustainability issue aligns with and relates to the company's core business activities.

Overall, this table provides a structured framework to evaluate and categorize different aspects of message content in relation to sustainability initiatives. It helps gain insights into the messaging strategies employed by companies and their approach to sustainability communication.

Trends and quality of communication in case studies were determined based gathered data, criteria in Table 3, and how they corresponded to the nine key concepts from Table 2.

2.4. Methodology for the expert interviews

Data collection plays a critical role in research as it aims to enhance comprehension of a theoretical framework by providing valuable insights (Etikan et al., 2016). Qualitative interviews have a long history of utilization and offer insights into the subjective experiences of the interviewees (Roberts, 2020).

Therefore, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with experts in B2B and sustainability communication using a flexible interview guide. These interviews had a predetermined set of concepts to be discussed, but specific questions and the order of asking them varied based on the interviewee's responses and the flow of the conversation. Therefore,

interviews benefitted from the balance between having a structure and also allowing for flexibility and in-depth exploration of viewpoints and experiences.

In these interviews, the researcher had some questions prepared in advance but there was also room for experts to provide detailed and nuanced responses in order to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and insights. Some of the ready-made questions were skipped due to answers already provided that matched the topic or when it was discovered through conversation that they were either not relevant to the interviewee's organization or did not match their expertise.

Before interviews, participants were contacted through email and were provided with information about the study. This included the researcher's background, research object and goal, areas of interest to explore, sample questions, potential participant's relevance for the study, participation benefits, interview format, anonymity and data use.

In order to offer convenience and garner more agreements to take part in the research, potential interviewees were offered the opportunity to share their insights by writing via email, by scheduling a videoconference on Teams or by another online method of their choice. In-person interviews could not be conducted due to the physical distance between countries. All of the willing participants chose to communicate through a virtual meeting on the Teams application, and each call took between 30 and 40 minutes. Everyone agreed to allow a voice recording of the conversation. None of the participants expressed willingness to be identified in the study, so their names and other personal identifiable information are kept anonymous.

Open-ended questions were used in these interviews, which means that participants were encouraged to provide detailed and subjective responses in their own words. This helped the experts to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences more freely, providing rich qualitative data.

2.4.1. Data Collection Procedures

The interviews conducted for this thesis paper followed a semi-structured and open-ended approach, allowing for flexibility and exploration. While a set of pre-determined questions was provided to the participating experts, adjustments were made based on the specific circumstances of each company. Additionally, certain questions were omitted during the course of the conversation when they became irrelevant due to information provided in response to previous inquiries. Apart from addressing the predetermined questions, experts

were encouraged to offer supplementary information, provide more detailed insights, and expand on relevant points through follow-up inquiries. At times, experts voluntarily shared additional information before it was specifically addressed. Towards the end of each interview, participants were invited to share any important aspects they deemed significant but had not been covered by the questions asked. The total number of questions and responses varied based on the flow of conversation with each interviewee. Presented below are examples of the questions employed to initiate and guide the interviews.

- How does your organization currently communicate its sustainability activities to other businesses?
- How does your organization integrate sustainability into its overall marketing communication strategy?
- What are the main challenges your organization faces when communicating its sustainability activities to other businesses?
- What do you think are the most important elements of an effective sustainability communication strategy for the B2B sector?
- How does your organization ensure that its sustainability communication aligns with its overall sustainability strategy and goals?
- What advice would you give to other businesses looking to improve their marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities in the B2B sector?

The transcriptions for the interviews were generated using the Happy Scribe's automatic transcription tool, whenever applicable. However, for interviews conducted in the Lithuanian language, manual transcription was predominantly employed to ensure accuracy and precision.

2.4.2. Sample Design and Selection

Purposive sampling, also known as purposeful, selective sampling or judgement sampling, has a rich history of development, and opinions about its simplicity or complexity vary. The rationale behind purposive sampling is to ensure a close alignment between the sample and the research aims and objectives, thereby enhancing the rigor of the study and the credibility of the data and findings (Campbell et al., 2020). Purposive sampling is a research method that falls under the category of non-probability sampling techniques (Etikan et al., 2016). According to research literature, it is a deliberate and non-random technique used in qualitative research to select participants based on specific qualities or characteristics they

possess. The aim is to identify and choose individuals or groups who have knowledge, experience, and expertise related to the research topic. This sampling method prioritizes the selection of information-rich cases to maximize the utilization of available resources. The selection criteria include not only knowledge and experience but also factors such as availability, willingness to participate, and the ability to articulate and reflect on their experiences and opinions. By focusing on individuals with specific characteristics, purposive sampling aims to gather data from participants who are best suited to contribute to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016).

Therefore, the participants for the expert interviews were selected using a purposive sampling method. The selection criteria focused on identifying professionals who held important positions in their respective organizations and were responsible for strategic leadership and management in the areas of communication, sustainability, brand, and marketing. These professionals played a crucial role in developing and implementing effective strategies to enhance their organization's reputation, engage stakeholders, promote sustainability practices, and drive business growth.

The researcher, being familiar with the Lithuanian environment, invited professionals from companies operating in Lithuania as well as internationally in the Nordic-Baltic regions to participate in the study. This approach allowed for a diverse range of perspectives and insights from professionals with a deep understanding of the industry, market trends, and stakeholder expectations regarding sustainability.

In total, four experts were interviewed, each representing a large company that actively contributed to the sustainability movement among local businesses. The selected participants provided valuable insights based on their knowledge, expertise, and hands-on experience in managing communication, sustainability, brand, and marketing strategies within their organizations.

2.4.3. Data Analysis Techniques

Content analysis using coding was applied to analyse data from expert interviews in a systematic and rigorous manner. A coding scheme was developed based on predefined categories representing key aspects of the research topic. The transcripts were carefully reviewed, and responses were assigned relevant codes using NVivo computer software program. The coding process underwent iterative refinement to ensure consistency. The coded data were then analysed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. This approach allowed

for meaningful insights and conclusions to be drawn from the expert interviews, contributing to the research objectives. Coding sheets have not been included in the Appendices section as the interviewed experts were promised anonymity and the number of transcription quotes would make it easy to deduct their identities from the context.

As experts participating in interviews were from companies operating in Lithuania and other countries in the Nordic-Baltic region, some of the interview time was spent on understanding the relevance of sustainability and marketing communication on sustainability in these geographical areas, not just the global context from their perspective. Interviewees provided examples of different approaches applicable to Lithuania and others in the Nordic-Baltic region. The content of the interviews was analysed using three codes to systemise information for this section: “relevance”, “Lithuania”, and “Nordic-Baltic region”.

In order to show the context and companies’ approach to marketing communication for sustainability activities, interviewed experts mentioned various strategic elements. This information covered perspectives that their businesses take regarding sustainability and the preparation needed for beneficial and successful communication. Interviewed participants also provided insights into the challenges they see, and proposed some key ideas as advice for other companies that are just starting out on their sustainability journey. Content analysis for this section utilised the following codes: “strategy”, “challenges”, and “advice”.

Part of the interviews was dedicated to gathering information on the communication channels used by companies, particularly in the context of B2B interactions. The discussion included channel types, which of them is a priority, and how they are utilised. As case studies were also conducted for this paper, focusing on the analysis of video content on the YouTube platform, during the interviews, the relevance of social media and video formats in practical applications was discussed, providing additional insights into the topic and its relevance. The analysis of the interview data involved the use of eight codes to categorize and analyse the content related to communication channels. These codes included “blogs”, “direct”, “events”, “media”, “own channels”, “purchased”, “reports”, and “social media”.

As interviewed experts provided the above information to establish the context, relevance and credibility of their contributions to this study on B2B marketing communication for sustainability activities, the focus of the conversation was shifted to gain further insights for hypothetical statements evaluation. For analysis, responses were coded accordingly to match hypothetical statements. Codes “commitment”, “fit”, “impact”, “importance”, and “motives”

were selected for message content. For message intent, codes “education”, “promotion”, “standing apart”, and “thought leadership” were used.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of utmost importance when conducting research, as they ensure the protection and well-being of participants and uphold the principles of integrity and respect. In this study, which employed comparative case study and anonymous expert interviews as research methods, several ethical considerations were taken into account.

Firstly, the research followed ethical guidelines for informed consent. Participants involved in the anonymous expert interviews were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring their understanding and agreement to take part in the research, have their interviews recorded, and remain anonymous.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. To protect the identities of the expert interview participants, their responses were anonymized and coded during the data analysis process. Any identifying information was kept strictly confidential and accessible only to the researchers involved in the study.

Furthermore, steps were taken to ensure data protection and privacy. Data collected through the comparative case study and expert interviews were securely stored and accessible only for this study. Adequate measures were implemented to safeguard the data from unauthorized access or disclosure. This includes protecting storage devices with passwords and conducting online interviews away from potential onlookers.

The research also adhered to ethical guidelines regarding the use of data. The findings and insights derived from the comparative case study and expert interviews were reported in a manner that maintained the confidentiality of individual participants and organizations. Care was taken to present the information in an aggregated and anonymous manner to ensure that no identifiable information was disclosed.

Moreover, the study upheld ethical principles of integrity and rigor. The research design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures were conducted with transparency and accuracy. The researcher took responsibility for ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings, adhering to best practices in qualitative research and employing appropriate analytical techniques.

Overall, ethical considerations played a vital role in the methodology chapter of this study. The research followed ethical guidelines regarding informed consent, confidentiality, data protection, and privacy. By upholding these ethical principles, the study aimed to maintain the trust and welfare of the participants, ensuring the integrity and validity of the research findings.

2.6. Limitations of the Study

The study utilizing comparative case study and anonymous expert interviews as research methods has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

Firstly, conducting a comparative case study inherently involves examining a limited number of cases. This limitation arises due to the extensive time and effort required to thoroughly analyse each case (Gustafsson, 2017). As a result, the researcher may not have been able to observe every aspect of the cases in the same depth, potentially leading to a less comprehensive understanding of certain variables.

Additionally, the comparative method itself presents challenges due to the multitude of variables involved. Comparing different cases requires careful consideration of various factors that may influence the outcomes being studied (Lijphart, 1971). The complexity of these variables and their potential interplay can introduce limitations in terms of drawing definitive conclusions or generalizing the findings.

Another limitation relates to the anonymous expert interviews. While efforts were made to secure the participation of experts, it is important to acknowledge that not all potential participants accepted the interview requests. The non-participation of some individuals introduces a limitation to the study, as their perspectives and insights may have contributed valuable information. However, the analysis was conducted based on the available sample of willing participants, providing insights within the scope of the research objectives.

Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings may be limited to the specific context and sample of cases studied. Comparative case studies and expert interviews inherently focus on specific settings or individuals, and the findings may not be directly applicable to other contexts or populations.

Although the research investigated ways for enhancing B2B marketing communication strategies for corporate sustainability initiatives, it does not extensively delve

into the practical obstacles and considerations that arise when implementing these recommendations within actual business environments.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that no research study is without limitations. Despite efforts to mitigate potential biases and enhance the validity of the research, limitations exist due to the inherent constraints of the chosen methods and the specific circumstances of the study.

By acknowledging these limitations, research ensures transparency and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the study's scope and potential implications.

2.7. Summary of the methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach, specifically using a comparative case study and anonymous expert interviews, to explore and understand the research object and situation. Various methods of data collection and analysis were utilized, including purposive sampling, semi-structured open-ended interviews, case studies, and comparative analysis.

The selection of research methods was justified based on the nature of the research hypotheses. Comparative case study allowed for the examination of multiple cases of audio-visual materials, supplementary text, and channel information on YouTube. The selection of featured videos from different companies enabled the analysis of content relevant to communication. The chosen companies demonstrated a commitment to sustainability and operated internationally in the B2B sector, ensuring the relevance of their practices to the research objectives.

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with experts in B2B and sustainability communication. The interviews followed a flexible guide, allowing for in-depth exploration of viewpoints and experiences. The participants, selected through purposive sampling, held important positions in their respective organizations, responsible for strategic leadership and management in communication, sustainability, brand, and marketing. This ensured a diverse range of perspectives and insights from professionals with a deep understanding of the industry and stakeholder expectations.

Ethical considerations were given priority throughout the research process. Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study, including its purpose, areas of interest, interview format, anonymity, and data use. Convenience was offered by allowing participants to choose their preferred mode of communication, resulting in virtual

interviews conducted via Teams. Strict confidentiality was maintained, with participants expressing their willingness to remain anonymous.

Data analysis techniques involved content analysis using coding. A coding scheme was developed based on predefined categories representing key aspects of the research topic. The transcriptions from expert interviews, generated using the Happy Scribe's automatic transcription tool when applicable, were carefully reviewed. Relevant responses were assigned codes using NVivo computer software for systematic analysis. The coded data were analysed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships, contributing to meaningful insights and conclusions.

Overall, the methodology chosen for this study allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the research object and situation, addressing research hypotheses and assumptions through comparative case study and expert interviews. The ethical considerations, data analysis techniques and considerations of limitations further enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Comparative case study analysis results

Based on the analysis of the data gathered from companies' YouTube channels and featured videos on their main pages, the following trends can be observed in the communication of companies on YouTube. Appendix 2 provides a detailed analysis of companies' communication on YouTube.

3.1.1. Companies' YouTube channels

The channel description space on YouTube serves as a platform for companies to address visitors and convey their message or information. In the analysis of the analyzed companies, it was observed that all of them utilized this feature to some extent. The majority of the companies chose to provide a brief introduction to their organization and also included mentions of sustainability-related topics.

The level of activity on YouTube varied among the companies, as evidenced by the total number of videos uploaded per channel, ranging from 35 to 8700. It was noted that technology and communications companies tended to have a higher number of uploads, typically exceeding one or two thousand videos. However, there were some outliers that deviated from this trend. The frequency of uploads also varied among the companies, but generally correlated with the total number of videos. Most companies demonstrated consistent communication by uploading content at least once a month.

The content themes and types displayed in the uploaded videos were found to be quite similar across different channels. The common themes included sustainability, the company itself, its products and services, employees and career-related topics. Community and holiday-related topics were relatively less frequent. The videos encompassed various formats such as tips, interviews, presentations, advertisements, webinars, event recordings, and case studies. They were created with an informational, educational, inspirational, descriptive, and sometimes interactive or entertaining approach. These general similarities in content themes and types facilitate relevant and valid comparisons of companies' marketing communication, providing a foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions and insights from the comparative study.

It is important to acknowledge that the featured videos of the analyzed companies do not exist in isolation but rather within the broader context of their overall YouTube presence. Therefore, this overview of the channel descriptions and content themes provides valuable

context that can assist with the evaluation of the featured videos. It is also noteworthy that the analyzed companies generally communicated on both the functional aspects of their business and sustainability topics. Thus, their featured videos, being the focal point of their YouTube channels, can provide relevant insights for the research conducted in this paper.

3.1.2. Featured video titles

The way featured videos are named suggests a clear emphasis on sustainability, renewable energy, and making a positive impact across different areas of life and business. Most of the titles chosen for the videos convey a sense of purpose and alignment with broader environmental and social goals.

The majority of the video titles revolve around themes related to sustainability and renewable energy, indicating that these topics are central to the companies' messaging and branding. This reflects a conscious effort by these companies to position themselves as agents of change and advocates for a more sustainable future.

While some companies prioritize self-introduction and highlighting their own identity in the video titles, they appear to be in the minority. These companies may place more importance on establishing their brand presence and conveying their unique offerings rather than explicitly addressing environmental or social issues. However, it's worth noting that even these companies may still integrate sustainability and responsible practices within their operations, even if it's not explicitly emphasized in their video titles.

Overall, the prevalent focus on sustainability and renewable energy in the video titles indicates a broader trend of companies choosing to align their messaging with environmental and social goals.

3.1.3. Featured video durations

The durations of the videos exhibit significant variation, with the shortest video lasting exactly 1 minute and the longest video extending to nearly 34 minutes. This wide range suggests that the companies have adopted different strategies when it comes to video content creation. The shorter videos accommodate concise advertisements or promotional clips, designed to capture viewers' attention quickly and convey key messages in a brief timeframe. On the other hand, the longer videos, exceeding the half-hour mark, indicate a company's focus on more extensive content, such as online events and in-depth discussions.

Interestingly, among the companies mentioned, the two representing the technology and communications industry showcase contrasting approaches in terms of video duration. One company opts for a concise 1-minute video, while the other presents a significantly longer video lasting over 33 minutes. This divergence highlights the flexibility and validity of both shorter and longer-form videos as effective means of communication for companies in this industry.

The remaining companies, excluding the technology and communications companies, demonstrate a relatively similar range of featured video durations. Their videos fall within the range of 1 minute 30 seconds to 2 minutes 35 seconds, which aligns with common marketing practices. These durations are typically chosen to strike a balance between delivering sufficient content and maintaining viewers' attention.

In summary, the diverse durations of the videos reflect a spectrum of possibilities, with companies employing different strategies based on their specific goals and target audience. The contrasting approaches within the technology and communications industry further emphasize the flexibility in video duration selection. The majority of companies, excluding the aforementioned outliers, adhere to the common marketing practice of featuring videos within a specific time range, ensuring an optimal balance between information delivery and viewer engagement. This shows that the safest choice for businesses is to feature a very short video, but in some cases it might also be beneficial to stand out with long form communication content.

3.1.4. Hashtags in the featured video descriptions

In analyzing the hashtags mentioned in the video descriptions, it becomes apparent that only a small number of videos have these specific keywords included. These keywords serve as indicators of the themes, initiatives, or businesses covered in their respective videos. Among the keywords identified, three are related to environmental topics, namely "#TeamEarth," "#climatechange," and "#climatefirst." These keywords suggest a focus on sustainability, environmental consciousness, and addressing climate-related issues.

Additionally, two videos feature unique hashtags incorporating company names, such as "#Salesforce" and "#stantec." Including company-specific hashtags in the video descriptions can serve multiple purposes. Firstly, it helps to build brand recognition and association, as viewers can easily identify the company behind the video content. Secondly, it enables companies to track and engage with online discussions or conversations related to their videos, thus increasing their online visibility and audience engagement.

The presence of these specific keywords in a few videos demonstrates a deliberate effort by these companies to align their video content with specific themes, initiatives, or brand positioning. By incorporating keywords that resonate with their target audience, companies can attract viewers who are interested in those particular topics and enhance their brand identity in relevant areas.

An interesting observation is that among the companies that included hashtags in their video descriptions, the majority opted to include two hashtags rather than just one. It allows for greater flexibility in reaching diverse groups of viewers who may have varying interests or preferences. Moreover, adding multiple hashtags can also serve as a means to strengthen the connection between the video content and the company's brand identity. The decision to include two hashtags instead of one may reflect a desire to strike a balance between being specific and having relevance in a broader sense.

Overall, analyzed companies do not show a strong preference for adding hashtag type keywords to their featured YouTube video descriptions. Only less than a third opted to include them. Among them, the choice seems to be adding one hashtag with the name of the organization and a second one which relates to a sustainability initiative highlighted in the video message.

3.1.5. URLs in the featured video descriptions

Upon analyzing the video descriptions, it is evident that a majority of the featured videos include URLs, which serve as direct links to various online destinations. These URLs lead viewers to official company websites, offering access to homepages, about sections, and additional information about featured initiatives. Furthermore, some URLs direct users to subscription landing pages or social media profiles associated with the respective companies.

Based on the presence of URLs in the video descriptions, companies can be categorized into three distinct groups. The first group comprises companies that opted not to include any web addresses in their descriptions. The second group consists of companies that provided a single URL, directing viewers to a specific online destination – their website. Finally, the third group includes companies that added a list of multiple URLs, offering viewers a range of online resources to explore.

Interestingly, the analysis reveals that all three practices – no URL, one URL, and multiple URLs – are similarly common among the featured videos. It is worth noting that

companies in the technology and communications industry tend to have a higher prevalence of multiple web addresses in their video descriptions. In contrast, alternative energy companies appear to forego the inclusion of any URLs altogether.

The varying approaches to incorporating URLs in the video descriptions suggest that companies can adopt different strategies to engage viewers and drive traffic to specific online platforms. While some companies may prioritize a single, targeted destination, others need to provide a more comprehensive selection of online resources for viewers to explore. Ultimately, the choice lies with communication or marketing managers and might be dependent on factors such as the industry that the company operates in.

3.1.6. Featured video contents

Videos employ a range of presentation styles to effectively convey their messages. These styles include incorporating stock image and video edits, utilizing voiceovers, adopting movie-teaser formats with clear calls to action, adopting a TV-show style with expert insights and collaborations with artists, providing informational overviews, creating emotion-inducing narratives and compositions, and employing various visual designs from green themes to futuristic aesthetics.

The use of what appears to be stock images and videos is prevalent across most companies' featured videos, indicating a common practice in content creation. However, some approaches are more successful in capturing and retaining viewers' attention. Companies in the technology and communications industry demonstrate a greater awareness of the value that higher production quality can bring and invest more resources in creating compelling content. Notably, these companies also leverage the presence of famous personalities from other industries as ambassadors for their messages, which helps further engage audiences.

In the messages, some companies position themselves as active participants or leaders and trailblazers within the sustainability movement, emphasizing their commitment to addressing sustainability challenges. Others, while implying involvement in sustainability-related activities, focus more on their professionalism and business perspective. Interestingly, some companies explicitly state that their purpose is not solely focused on saving the world.

Overall, the analysis reveals different approaches in the presentation of relationships between companies and sustainability challenges throughout video content. The choice of which is better ultimately lies based on a particular company's mission and strategy. Video

content can be improved by employing captivating presentation styles, investing in production quality, and considering strategic collaboration with influential figures to enhance the impact and effectiveness of the message.

3.1.7. Initiatives covered in the featured videos

After analyzing the content of featured videos, several trends stand out in regards to initiatives and solutions which companies choose to present.

First, it is working together for the sake of communities. There is emphasis on the importance of collective action and collaboration among businesses to create a positive impact on living spaces and people. Videos invite companies to not only pursue their own success but also contribute to the well-being and development of the communities they operate in. These initiatives promote the idea that businesses can thrive while also making a positive difference in society.

Second, it is the theme uniting initiatives that aim to bring together nature, humans, and innovation. Videos emphasize the need for innovative solutions that harmonize with nature and benefit both humans and the environment. It underscores the potential of technology and innovation to address environmental challenges and create sustainable outcomes.

Third, it is the focus on energy as a human right and as a matter of transition towards renewables. Videos highlight the importance of equitable and inclusive energy systems that ensure reliable, affordable, and clean energy for all individuals. Also, they show contributions to shift from traditional, fossil fuel-based energy sources to renewable sources. The shift towards renewable energy is shown to be driven by the need to mitigate climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and achieve long-term sustainability.

And last, it is solutions which help clients achieve their business and sustainability objectives. Among them, prominently acknowledged are net zero goals and protection of assets from climate change impacts.

Overall, the majority of initiatives and solutions addressed in featured videos lean towards the topic of ecological challenges of sustainability. They also correlate to the type of business that each analyzed company does.

3.1.8. Sustainability topics mentioned in the featured videos

Some companies opted to explicitly voice sustainability related topics while others only implied them through context and visual material. Sustainability related keywords were synthesized to reveal words that were most prominently use by analyzed companies. They can be seen in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. Sustainability related keywords in YouTube featured videos

Source: composed by the author based on comparative case study results (2023)

Sustainable and renewable energy were mentioned in the most videos, followed by keywords such as communities, water, resources, climate and others. The focus on energy reflects the fact that many of selected companies provide environmental solutions as part of their business. However, it can be noted that around half of videos focused on one sustainability topic, and the other half included multiple of them.

This analysis suggests that sustainability leaders chose to emphasize those topics in their communications, which relate to the solutions they offer. However, there is no clear conclusion on whether it is a better practice to focus the message on one keyword or to address a few.

3.1.9. Message contents in the featured videos

The analysis of the featured videos involves the application of a framework developed by Du et al. (2010). This framework provides a structured approach to categorize the videos and the associated companies based on the main focus of the message conveyed in the videos. The categorization process aims to determine whether the message predominantly centers around a specific product or service, the company itself, the company's involvement in

sustainability causes, or the sustainability issue itself. By applying this framework, the videos and companies are classified into two distinct groups for further analysis.

The first group analyzed in this section consists of three videos, representing both the technology and communications industry, as well as one video from an energy-related company. In these featured videos, the primary focus is on addressing a specific sustainability issue rather than highlighting the company itself. The aim is to draw attention to the positive impact that businesses can have in addressing sustainability challenges.

Although the expertise and solutions of the companies are subtly implied throughout the entire duration of these videos, the main emphasis lies in vocalizing the relevance of sustainability challenges and encouraging viewers to take action. The messages conveyed in these videos prioritize the broader sustainability issue rather than promoting the company's products or services directly.

However, it is important to note that despite the focus on sustainability issues, the topics covered in these videos are still related to the companies' businesses. This implies that while the positive impact of sustainability is highlighted, the importance of these issues is not necessarily emphasized by explicitly showcasing the companies' lack of self-serving motives. This approach, although recognized in the literature, appears to be less commonly applied in practice.

Overall, the analysis of the first group of videos reveals a notable trend of addressing specific sustainability issues and promoting the positive impact that businesses can have. While the messages imply the company's expertise and solutions, the primary focus remains on the broader sustainability challenges. However, it is evident that these sustainability issues are linked to the companies' respective industries and business interests.

The second group of videos analyzed in this section consists of the remaining videos where the message predominantly revolves around the company itself, its products, services, operations, or its involvement in sustainability causes. These videos were subjected to evaluation based on four key criteria: commitment, impact, motives, and fit. The assessment process aims to determine the predominant approach demonstrated by the companies.

The companies included in the analysis are specifically chosen based on their dedication to sustainability. This determination is made by examining their sustainability reports and checking the acknowledgement of industry experts, which provide evidence of the

longevity of their association with sustainability, the amount of effort invested, and the consistency of their actions. Consequently, this section of the review focuses precisely on assessing the extent of commitment conveyed in messages within featured videos. However, none of the videos present statements that address all three aspects of commitment. The analysis reveals a divide, with some videos completely lacking any mention of factual evidence to support and validate their commitment, while others only addressed one or two aspects. Among the examples observed, those demonstrating a sustained commitment over time are the most prevalent. It appears that companies striving to position themselves as industry leaders are more inclined to express their commitment to the message by providing concrete and factual information.

In terms of the focus of the message, whether on the company's input or the impact of the sustainability initiative, the videos do not demonstrate a clear-cut alignment with either side. Instead, most videos communicate about both aspects – the company's activities or offered solutions, as well as the societal benefits that can be derived from them. However, the tangible benefits mentioned in the videos are often presented in abstract terms, lacking specific details. As a result, it can be concluded that companies still predominantly prioritize communicating their input rather than emphasizing the actual impact of their initiatives.

Regarding the messages in the featured videos acknowledging motives that contribute to both business and society, it can be observed that all of the analyzed companies addressed this aspect to some extent. They recognized and communicated the dual motives, highlighting how their actions can benefit both their business interests and the larger society. While the degree of acknowledgement may vary, the presence of this dual motive is evident across all the videos.

Furthermore, all of the analyzed videos demonstrated a clear fit between the message conveyed and the logical connections between sustainability challenges and the companies' business practices. Whether through explicit mentions or implicit implications, the videos effectively linked the sustainability issues at hand with the organizations' activities and offerings. This indicates a strong tendency within the industry to align video content with the organization's actual practices and demonstrate the relevance of their sustainability initiatives.

Overall, the analysis of the second group reveals that companies aiming to establish themselves as leaders in their industry are more likely to demonstrate their dedication to the message. Also, while companies address both their input and the societal impact of their

sustainability efforts, there is a stronger emphasis on communicating their input. Additionally, companies tend to acknowledge and communicate dual motives that contribute to both business interests and societal well-being. Lastly, the videos exhibit a notable alignment between the message and the logical connections between sustainability challenges and the companies' business practices. Practical examples show the tendency for the theories from the framework by Du et al. (2010) to be only partially applied in companies' featured videos on YouTube.

The comparative case study aimed to determine the most valid concepts for improving B2B marketing communication. The research resulted in the development of a comprehensive model (Figure 3).

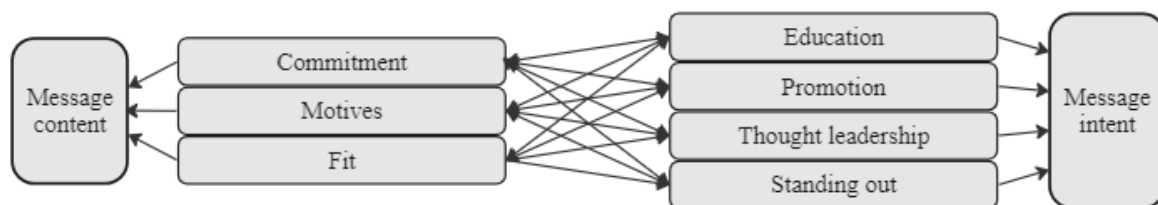


Fig. 3. **B2B marketing communication improvement concepts**

Source: composed by the author based on comparative case study results (2023)

It is divided into two main groups: concepts related to good practices for message content and concepts related to message intent. The model illustrates the interrelationships between these concepts and how they mutually influence each other.

In general, most of the findings from the comparative case study align with the implications put forth by other authors in scientific literature as only two concepts were unsupported.

3.2. Expert interview analysis results

3.2.1. Relevance of sustainability and marketing communication in the Nordic-Baltic region

The analysis of the interview data reveals several key ideas and trends regarding the relevance of sustainability and marketing communication in the Nordic-Baltic region, with a specific focus on Lithuania. The interviews shed light on the regional perspective on sustainability and the various approaches and practices adopted in these geographical areas.

One prominent trend highlighted by the interviewees is the increasing significance of sustainability in both global and regional contexts. The interviewees emphasize that sustainability is no longer merely a trend or a fashionable concept but rather a necessity driven by regulations and the need for businesses to consider their impact on the environment and society. This shift towards sustainability is seen as inevitable and affects businesses of all sizes. The interviews indicate that larger companies are often more proactive in embracing sustainability due to being at the forefront of regulatory compliance, while smaller and medium-sized companies (SMEs) still need to work on catching up and adapting to meet the changing requirements.

The interviews also suggest that there is a growing awareness and understanding of sustainability among consumers and businesses in Lithuania; however, while Scandinavian countries, such as Denmark or Sweden, are considered more advanced and critical in their approach to sustainability, Lithuania is still in the process of catching up. According to Expert 4 (personal communication), "Sustainability is not what you communicate, sustainability is who you are. I think that is something that is still very much missing in Lithuania." While there is an increasing number of environmentally conscious and sustainability-minded individuals, the majority of society and businesses are still in the early stages of comprehending the concept and its implications. The interviewees noted that the influx of regulations from the European Union has started to raise awareness and prompt businesses to take action. However, there is a need for further education and understanding, as many companies are still in the process of grasping what is expected of them beyond preparing reports and are now considering their internal processes and practices.

Furthermore, the interviews underline that sustainability is not limited to the environmental aspect but extends to social and governance factors (ESG). Companies are now expected to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability not only through communication but also by implementing internal rules, screening suppliers and partners, and complying with various criteria. The emergence of new professions, such as sustainability managers and experts, indicates the increasing demand for specialized knowledge in this field. However, a prominent view in Lithuania regarding sustainability is still limited to a few areas, mostly environmental.

In terms of marketing communication, the interviews highlight the importance of authenticity and transparency. The practice of greenwashing, where companies falsely portray

themselves as sustainable, is criticized by the interviewees. According to Expert 1 (personal communication), "Greenwashing may have been a reputational risk at first, but now we know that regulations are coming, and those risks are expanding." They stress the need for genuine sustainability efforts and caution against using sustainability as a marketing tool without substantive actions to support it. Consumers and partners are increasingly seeking assurances regarding a company's sustainability practices and values, and companies are adapting their communication strategies accordingly.

Overall, the interview data highlights the growing relevance of sustainability and the need for effective marketing communication in the Nordic-Baltic region, with Lithuania in focus. It emphasizes the transition from sustainability being perceived as a trend to becoming a regulatory requirement and a fundamental aspect of successful and responsible business practices. The findings suggest that there is a gradual shift in attitudes and practices, but more awareness, education, and implementation are needed to fully embrace sustainability in the region.

3.2.2. Strategic elements and challenges in marketing communication for sustainability

In this section, the analysis of the interview data focused on examining strategic elements and challenges related to marketing communication for sustainability. This section aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the approaches and strategies adopted by companies in integrating sustainability into their communication efforts, as well as the challenges they face in implementing sustainable communication practices. Additionally, valuable advice offered by the interviewees to companies embarking on their sustainability journey will be discussed. By delving into these aspects, this analysis contributes to a comprehensive exploration of the role of marketing communication in promoting sustainability and overcoming associated hurdles.

First, strategies and approaches towards sustainability. The interview data revealed that companies integrate sustainability into their business processes, from risk assessment to operational activities and customer interactions. According to Expert 4 (personal communication), "Either you will have a sustainability strategy, or you will disappear. But those who will realise this first, will have a competitive advantage." Sustainability is seen as an essential aspect of daily operations, and companies strive to communicate it effectively. This involves having dedicated teams, setting goals, developing plans, and selecting appropriate communication channels. Companies also recognize the importance of targeting specific

audiences, such as employees, private clients, businesses, and the general public. Moreover, the analysis highlighted the significance of having sustainability experts who coordinate and integrate sustainability practices throughout the organization. Expert 3 (personal communication) said that "We incorporate that message into everything that we do". This holistic approach to sustainability is seen as crucial for the success of marketing communication efforts.

Second, challenges in implementing sustainable communication. The interviewees acknowledged several challenges associated with sustainable communication. One major challenge mentioned was the need for internal alignment and understanding. It was emphasized that sustainable communication should start from within the organization, with the management and the entire team embracing the idea and its importance. Clear understanding and belief in the concept are essential before external communication efforts can be effective. The integration of sustainability into the overall company strategy, including financial aspects, was emphasized as critical. The experts admitted that the topic is still not considered very interesting or exciting, especially among SMEs, media, and Lithuania in general. Regarding their company's methods of conveying sustainability-related messages in an engaging way, Expert 1 (personal communication) said that "We are constantly looking for the key". It was also acknowledged that communicating sustainability requires expertise and careful consideration of the company's unique angle within the broader sustainability landscape.

Third, advice and key ideas for companies starting on the sustainability journey. The interviewees provided valuable advice for companies beginning their sustainability journey. They suggested starting with a self-assessment to understand the impact the company has on various sustainability dimensions, such as environmental, social, and governance factors. It was advised to identify the areas where the company's influence is most significant and focus on those aspects. According to Expert 1 (personal communication), "It's about talking through the prism of your own company, and your own activities, and looking at the impact you are having." Companies should choose sustainability angles that align with their core business and expertise, enabling them to communicate more authentically and provide greater value to their audience. Internal education and engagement were highlighted as crucial steps, ensuring that employees understand the why and how behind sustainability efforts. Only after internal alignment should companies proceed to inform clients, partners, and the public. However, the advice also cautioned against excessive self-promotion. Expert 3 (personal communication) advised to

"Keep the balance and not do too much bragging". It is recommended to maintain a well-adjusted approach in external communication.

Generally speaking, the analysis revealed that companies approach marketing communication for sustainability as an integral part of their operations. They emphasize internal alignment, develop comprehensive strategies, and target specific audiences. The challenges of internal alignment, finding a unique angle, and effectively communicating sustainability were acknowledged, and practical advice was provided for companies starting their sustainability journey. By understanding and implementing these strategic elements, companies can enhance their marketing communication for sustainability and contribute to a more sustainable future.

3.2.3. Communication channels in B2B interactions and the role of social media

In this part of the chapter, the analysis of the interview data focused on gathering insights into the communication channels used by companies in B2B interactions and the role of social media, particularly in relation to video content on the YouTube platform. The content of interviews was reviewed and interpreted based on sustainability communication examples given for various channels.

The analysis of the interview data revealed that blogs play a significant role as a communication channel in B2B interactions. Companies utilize blogs as a platform to share valuable insights, industry expertise, and relevant information with their target audience. By publishing articles or posts on their websites, companies can educate their clients and partners, promote best practices, and address specific areas of interest or improvement. Blogs were found to be effective in facilitating learning, fostering knowledge exchange, and establishing thought leadership within the industry.

Direct communication emerged as a prominent channel utilized by companies in their B2B interactions. Through personalized emails, newsletters, messages, and meetings, companies engage in one-on-one communication with their clients and partners. This approach allows for tailored distribution of information, enabling companies to address specific client needs, provide updates, and respond to queries promptly. The direct communication channel was found to be particularly effective in sales pitches, where companies can highlight their sustainability efforts and alleviate client concerns directly.

The analysis highlighted the significance of events as a communication channel in B2B interactions. Whether conducted online, in a hybrid format, or in person, events provide

valuable opportunities for companies to interact with their clients and partners. Events serve as platforms for companies to present their initiatives, engage in direct conversations, and share best practices. They facilitate networking and collaboration, enabling stakeholders to exchange ideas, build relationships, and collectively work towards sustainable practices. Events were found to be effective in showcasing a company's commitment to sustainability, fostering engagement with relevant stakeholders, and displaying thought leadership.

Social media platforms, including YouTube, were identified as relevant communication channels in the B2B context. LinkedIn was predominantly mentioned as a primary choice. The analysis revealed that companies recognize the benefits of social media for disseminating information and reaching a wider audience. Social media platforms allow companies to educate, promote, and connect with audiences regarding their sustainability initiatives and product or solution offerings. Expert 2 (personal communication) explained how their company utilises video content: "It is possible to attend live webinars and ask questions there. At the same time, we post all recordings on our YouTube channel. If you could not attend, you can watch it anytime." Therefore, YouTube emerged as a platform for companies to leverage video along with other activities.

The analysis revealed that media and newspapers such as Verslo Žinios still have a prominent position as communication channels in B2B interactions. According to Expert 1 (personal communication), Verslo Žinios is a popular news portal among business decision-makers, and their company uses it: "We have a whole separate project, a content project, where we have activated the theme itself, but at the same time we gave a call-to-action." Companies recognize the value of media coverage and press releases in reaching a wider audience and enhancing their brand visibility. By securing media placements, companies can showcase their sustainability initiatives, share success stories, and position themselves as industry leaders. Media coverage also helps build credibility and trust among clients and partners. The analysis suggests that while digital channels have gained prominence, traditional media and newspapers continue to play a complementary role in the overall communication strategy of companies.

The analysis highlighted the utilization of purchased or paid channels as a communication strategy in some B2B interactions. Companies at times invest in advertising and sponsored content to promote their products or to share information in content marketing projects. The analysis suggests that while organic channels remain more important, purchased

or paid channels can complement the overall communication efforts of companies and provide a wider reach.

The analysis indicated the significance of reports as a communication channel in B2B interactions. Companies often publish sustainability reports or corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports to transparently communicate their sustainability initiatives, performance, and goals. Some reports are also published to provide research data about the industry rather than company information. In this case, the insights are also relevant to the media, for example, content for sharing, and archive event records.

Overall, the analysis of the interview data highlighted the diverse range of communication channels employed by companies in B2B interactions. While traditional B2B communication approaches were prominent, research results provide insights into the relevance of social media and its links with content from events. Understanding the strengths and unique benefits of each channel can empower companies to strategically leverage them for enhancing business relationships, promoting sustainability initiatives, and driving collective progress towards sustainable practices in the B2B sector.

3.2.4. Insights for message content and intent

3.2.4.1. Commitment

The experts emphasized the importance of providing proof of a company's dedication to a sustainability message. However, they indicated that specific factors such as association durability, input amount, and consistency might be difficult to communicate due to lacking measurement standards in the industry. By integrating sustainability into all business processes, from risk assessment to operational efficiency, companies can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.

Experts highlight that merely presenting a green image without actual commitment is insufficient. It is crucial for companies to ensure that they are genuinely acting in a sustainable manner and being transparent about their efforts. This means going beyond setting goals and actually achieving them, showing tangible results that indicate progress towards sustainability objectives.

To communicate the company's commitment to sustainability effectively, experts recommend adopting a strategic approach. They advise aligning the sustainability message with the company's operations and thoroughly understanding the impact the company has on various

sustainability goals. By identifying the most significant areas of influence, companies can focus their efforts and address those challenges proactively.

When responding to client proposals or active inquiries, companies should have a specific information block ready to share. Regarding their company, according to Expert 3 (personal communication), "We have tangible kind of information which we use when it is needed." This block can clearly outline the company's sustainability journey, the strategic directions they are focusing on, and how they aim to achieve their goals. Additionally, providing broader information on sustainability efforts is valuable for addressing specific questions or concerns.

Furthermore, experts note that the product itself should embody sustainability, ideally having sustainability built into its design. However, effective communication is still necessary to educate consumers about the value and significance of the sustainable features or choices offered by the product. This communication can take the form of various campaigns, including visual, digital, or banner campaigns, with the goal of ensuring consumers understand the benefits of choosing sustainable options.

Experts also emphasize the role of specific proposals in contributing to clients' sustainability transformations. For example, equipment rental is highlighted as a more sustainable alternative for businesses that would otherwise purchase a large quantity of equipment. By promoting these sustainable options, companies can showcase their commitment to sustainability and provide value to their clients.

One of the challenges in communicating a company's commitment to sustainability is demonstrating the added value effectively. It can be difficult to quantify certain aspects, such as emissions impact or reuse benefits, with a universally accepted measurement. However, companies can work towards developing clear and concrete calculations of these factors, as well as other relevant metrics, to provide a more accurate representation of their sustainability efforts.

In terms of communication strategy, experts suggest starting internally by informing and engaging employees about the company's sustainability initiatives. Once internal stakeholders are informed and on board, the focus can shift to informing clients and external partners. Publicly sharing sustainability achievements should be done with balance, avoiding excessive self-promotion. Consistent and meaningful communication over time will allow the

company's commitment to sustainability to be noticed and appreciated by its main audience, including employees, clients, and partners.

3.2.4.2. Education

Based on the data from the interviews, several ideas and trends can be identified regarding communication on sustainability with the intention to educate. Experts focused heavily on the need for education and advise the following approaches.

The interviews emphasized the significance of education in promoting sustainability. According to Expert 1 (personal communication), "To catalyse sustainability, to implement that change, education is very important." The level of knowledge among the public is considered relatively low, and there is a need to educate both employees within organizations and the wider society. Education is seen as a catalyst for change and the implementation of sustainable practices.

Experts' organizations have developed informational materials, such as blogs and self-assessment tools, to assist businesses in understanding sustainability concepts and identifying areas for improvement. These resources offer links to further reading and provide practical advice based on the accumulated knowledge and expertise of the organization.

Different communication methods are recommended for engaging various target groups. Larger clients may benefit from direct meetings where specific initiatives and best practices can be shared. Medium-sized and small businesses may be reached through webinars tailored to their needs, allowing them to learn from successful experiences and gain practical insights. Digital channels like YouTube are utilized to serve an educational and marketing purpose, reaching diverse audiences and showcasing the breadth of sustainable offerings.

Experts emphasized the need for clear and concise communication, focusing on practical aspects and solutions rather than overwhelming the audience with complex information. Expert 2 (personal communication) spoke about their company, "We are not only sharing what we have already done, but we are also sharing our good practices to help others structure their own strategies, or to find their own ways to start their sustainability journey." Concrete examples and practical advice are preferred, as they provide guidance on how to implement sustainable practices effectively.

It is highlighted that employee engagement and internal education are crucial for successful sustainability communication. Organizations should inform and involve their

employees in sustainability efforts, creating a sense of ownership and understanding the importance of the initiatives. Employees can then become ambassadors and convey the sustainability message to clients and external partners.

It is recommended to find sustainability angles that are relevant to the company's industry and business context. Rather than attempting to cover every aspect of sustainability, organizations should focus on areas that align with their expertise and business operations. By doing so, they can communicate more naturally and effectively, providing meaningful information that resonates with their target audience.

Collaboration and gamification elements are mentioned as effective approaches to sustainability education. For instance, banks have dedicated spaces and personnel for financial education initiatives, incorporating gamification to engage and educate their customers. While larger organizations may have more resources for such initiatives, any company can find ways to collaborate and contribute to society within their own field of expertise.

Experts stress the importance of education in every sector, particularly for responsible businesses. Each sector should engage in educating its stakeholders about sustainability practices relevant to their industry. By focusing on their specific area of expertise, companies can provide more meaningful and impactful education for their audience and society as a whole.

Overall, the analysis highlights the importance of education, clear communication, practical advice, internal engagement, and tailored approaches to effectively communicate sustainability and promote a broader understanding of sustainable practices among various stakeholders.

3.2.4.3. Fit

Experts participating in interviews advised on establishing a logical connection between sustainability issues and a company's business in marketing communication messages. Here is an analysis of fit related ideas and trends discussed in the interviews.

Alignment is one of the overall prominent themes apparent from the interviews. For example, Expert 1 (personal communication) suggested that companies "Should strive for coherence in their communications where sustainable activity or ideology is concerned." By doing so, companies can create a unified and consistent brand image that reflects their commitment to sustainability.

Sustainability encompasses various dimensions, including environmental, financial, and social aspects. Experts recommend that companies identify their unique angle or expertise within sustainability and focus on communicating that particular aspect. By narrowing down their focus, companies can present themselves as experts in that specific area, making their sustainability messaging more compelling and authentic.

It is important for companies to avoid artificial or superficial approaches to sustainability communication. Merely adopting sustainability as a marketing trend without a genuine connection to their business can come across as insincere and uninteresting. Instead, companies should link sustainability with their core business activities, demonstrating how their operations naturally align with sustainable practices. This approach adds depth and authenticity to the communication.

To effectively communicate sustainability, experts suggest using real-life examples and specific instances from the company's operations. By showcasing how sustainability is integrated into their business practices, companies can make their messaging more relatable and understandable to their target audience. Concrete examples help to illustrate the tangible benefits of sustainable choices and initiatives.

Experts stress the importance of avoiding greenwashing, which refers to making false or misleading claims about sustainability efforts. Companies should genuinely incorporate sustainability into their operations and practices, rather than engaging in superficial actions to fulfil external expectations. By ensuring that sustainability is deeply embedded within their business processes, companies can establish trust and credibility with their audience.

Each company should identify its own unique angle of sustainability based on its industry and expertise. By focusing on sustainability aspects directly related to their business, companies can leverage their knowledge and resources to make a meaningful impact. This approach not only benefits the company but also contributes to the betterment of society by addressing sustainability issues within their specific domain.

In conclusion, based on the interviews with experts, it is advisable for marketing communication messages to establish a logical connection between sustainability issues and a company's business. By doing so, companies can demonstrate their expertise, provide authentic examples, and avoid artificiality or greenwashing. By linking sustainability to their core business activities, companies can effectively communicate their commitment to sustainability and engage their audience in a more compelling and meaningful way.

3.2.4.4. Impact

Interviewed experts advised on how to communicate a company's commitment to sustainability and whether to emphasize the actions or contributions made by the company or the tangible benefits received or expected by the beneficiaries of the sustainability cause.

The interviews highlighted the importance of integrating sustainability into all business processes, from risk assessment to operational activities and customer interactions. The concept of sustainability is seen as an integral part of business operations, with a focus on operational sustainability and the company's dedication to sustainable development.

Experts suggested that companies should communicate their sustainability message by emphasizing both their actions and contributions as well as the tangible benefits derived from their sustainability initiatives. The company is viewed as a tool for driving societal and business transformation towards sustainability. This means that the company's services and offerings should align with sustainability goals and demonstrate how they contribute to positive change.

In terms of communication, experts recommend starting with an internal focus by informing and educating employees about the company's sustainability efforts and why they are important. Once the employees are aligned, the company can then proceed to inform clients and external partners about its sustainability initiatives. The communication should be tailored to the specific relevance of sustainability to the company's industry and business activities.

When communicating the sustainability message, experts emphasized the need to educate consumers about sustainable products and services. Whether through visual campaigns, digital marketing, or other means, the company should educate consumers about the value and significance of sustainable choices. For example, the use of refurbished equipment and rental services can be highlighted as sustainable alternatives to purchasing new equipment. By providing clear and concrete information supported by achievements and measurable results, the company can effectively communicate its sustainability efforts.

One challenge highlighted in the interviews is the difficulty in demonstrating the added value of sustainability initiatives. Expert 3 (personal communication) shared how their company communicates sustainability related input and impact: "When it is possible, we also communicate impact, but it is not always 100% possible to measure that." While environmental impact can be measured to some extent, there is a lack of standardized metrics for quantifying the impact of certain equipment usage or reuse, for example. However, experts emphasize the

importance of continually striving to measure and communicate the environmental impact and sustainability achievements whenever possible.

Overall, the experts advise companies to showcase their dedication to sustainability by highlighting the impact on beneficiaries and demonstrating that the company is actively addressing the issue. Communicating the company's commitment to sustainability involves creating awareness, emphasizing the company's responsibility, and showcasing that sustainability is a core consideration in business operations.

3.2.4.5. Importance

Based on the data from interviews, it is evident that experts underline the necessity of alignment between sustainability issues that are communicated and a company's business strategy. Experts did not encourage the view that it is helpful to demonstrate a lack of self-serving motives by talking about issues that do not match the business. Several key points can be observed to support this idea.

The interviews reveal that when it comes to discussing sustainability, businesses differ in their level of knowledge and depth of engagement. Some companies have already delved deeply into sustainability, while others view it as an inevitable aspect that comes with regulations. Additionally, there are companies that express a genuine desire to ideologically transform the environment in which they operate. This variation underscores the need for businesses to align sustainability issues with their specific industry and business strategy.

Experts emphasize that businesses and the wider community require concrete and practical solutions. According to Expert 1 (personal communication), "The emotional aspect is already clear to the business community. It is obvious, so no need to repeat that there is only one planet. If melting glaciers and such are shown, the effect would probably be opposite from intended and cause a negative reaction." Mere discussions about saving the planet without offering practical guidance or tangible steps are deemed insufficient. Companies are seeking specific recommendations or actionable advice on how to integrate sustainability into their operations. This indicates that sustainability communications should focus on providing practical insights and solutions to address relevant environmental challenges.

It is acknowledged that sustainability appeals to mass audiences, especially younger generations. However, an emotional approach alone is not enough for B2B audiences, and sometimes it is unnecessary or may give an unintended negative result. While emotional

messages may attract attention, they need to be supplemented with practical and logical reasons for businesses to adopt sustainable practices. The key is to present sustainability as a natural and logical choice that benefits the business, aligning with its goals and ensuring long-term viability.

Greenwashing, the act of making misleading or unsubstantiated claims about a company's environmental practices, is viewed negatively by experts. To avoid greenwashing, companies should integrate sustainability into their core operations and communicate about it in a genuine and authentic manner. It is important to choose sustainability initiatives that are relevant to the business and demonstrate expertise in those areas. This approach enhances credibility and ensures that sustainability efforts are not perceived as mere token gestures.

Experts suggest that when communicating sustainability, it is crucial to provide context and explain the larger purpose behind specific actions. Whether it is a small step or a major initiative, placing it in the context of a broader strategy or goal helps to justify the efforts. While direct communication channels, such as events or direct communication with stakeholders, allow for a more comprehensive explanation, it is important to consider that media outlets may filter and condense messages. Therefore, companies need to strategically convey their sustainability initiatives to ensure the intended message is effectively communicated.

Businesses are encouraged to identify sustainability themes that are closely related to their operations and expertise. This approach enables companies to communicate about sustainability in a more natural and engaging manner. By focusing on sustainability aspects that align with their core business, companies can become experts in those areas, offer valuable insights, and resonate better with their target audience. This individualized approach allows each company to contribute meaningfully to society while ensuring the message is relevant and impactful.

In summary, the data from the interviews highlights the importance of aligning sustainability issues with a company's business strategy. Experts emphasize the need for practicality, authenticity, context, and finding relevant points of integration. By integrating sustainability into their core operations and effectively communicating about it, businesses can enhance their credibility, engage their audience, and contribute to a more sustainable future.

3.2.4.6. Motives

Interviews revealed several key ideas and trends regarding the communication of sustainability by companies. Experts advise that the communication message should acknowledge the mutual benefits for both the company and society. The interviews emphasize the importance of integrating sustainability into the core operations and practices of the company rather than treating it as a superficial aspect. By linking sustainability with the company's business and demonstrating a genuine commitment to sustainability, the communication message can be more effective and engaging.

The interviews highlighted that companies should focus on their "big story," which encompasses the overall vision and purpose of the company in relation to sustainability. This includes specific services and products that contribute to accelerating sustainability. It is essential to communicate the larger context and purpose of any small steps taken towards sustainability, as it helps stakeholders understand the significance of these actions.

While direct communication channels such as events or direct interactions allow for easier articulation of the sustainability message, it is acknowledged that the media plays a filtering role in shaping public perception. Despite this, companies should maintain transparency and ensure that their sustainability messages are clear, concrete, and based on specific achievements and measurable results.

The data suggests that companies tend to integrate sustainability into their marketing communication through a product-centric approach. They educate consumers about the sustainable features of their products and emphasize the value and benefits of choosing these options. For instance, rental services are highlighted as a sustainable alternative for businesses needing large amounts of equipment, as it offers various positive aspects compared to owning equipment. This approach aims to educate consumers about the value and relevance of sustainability in their decision-making processes.

The interviews also highlighted regional differences in consumer awareness and acceptance of sustainability. Scandinavian consumers are generally more advanced in their understanding and demand for sustainability, while in other regions like Lithuania, there is still room for educating and leading the market in sustainability initiatives.

Experts stress the importance of aligning sustainability communication with the company's core values and operations. Expert 3 (personal communication) suggests, "Kind of link it with what you are doing and show, okay, this is sustainability, and we care for this because

that is our business, and for us it is natural to of care for this angle of sustainability." By demonstrating that sustainability is an integral part of the company's business practices, it becomes a natural aspect of the company's identity rather than a mere response to external pressures. This approach helps prevent greenwashing and ensures that sustainability efforts are authentic and relevant to the company's operations.

Overall, the analysis of the interviews suggests that companies should acknowledge the mutual benefits for both the company and society when communicating sustainability. By integrating sustainability into their core operations, demonstrating a genuine commitment to sustainability, and emphasizing the alignment between sustainability and their business practices, companies can effectively communicate their sustainability message and avoid being perceived as greenwashing.

3.2.4.7. Promotion

Although the intent to educate was heavily emphasised by experts, promotional aim was not ignored. Interviewees suggested several ideas and trends for effectively communicating sustainability initiatives, promoting businesses, and sustainable products. Here is an analysis and advice on how to approach communication in this context.

The interviews highlighted that sustainability is integrated into various business processes, from risk assessment to operational activities and customer interactions. Experts advise emphasizing this integration when communicating with stakeholders. Show how sustainability is ingrained in every aspect of the business, demonstrating a holistic commitment.

Experts mentioned the importance of showcasing special projects and services related to sustainability. According to Expert 2 (personal communication), "If we are talking about some kind of sustainability integration, it is naturally tied to certain products." These initiatives can serve as examples of the company's dedication to sustainability and innovation. Communicate the value and significance of these projects to engage stakeholders.

One effective approach mentioned is providing incentives and favourable conditions to customers. Consider offering special deals or rewards that encourage sustainable choices and make sustainability financially beneficial for customers. Highlight the advantages of sustainable products or services to attract interest.

Experts stress the importance of educating stakeholders and sharing knowledge about sustainability. Develop tools, such as self-assessment instruments or online resources, that help

businesses evaluate their sustainability practices and identify areas for improvement. Offer guidance, practical advice, and resources to support stakeholders' learning and progress.

Use targeted media channels, such as specialized business publications or online platforms, to reach decision-makers and business communities. Collaborate with relevant media outlets to publish content and call-to-action messages that educate and inspire readers to learn more about sustainability.

Stakeholders, including businesses and consumers, seek practical information and concrete steps they can take to contribute to sustainability. According to Expert 1 (personal communication), businesses are interested in hearing about sustainability solutions that can be provided to them: "They want specifics, they want practical considerations, practical things, the what and the how. Specifically, what can we offer or what advice can we give on where to start." A didactic tone is better avoided, and focus placed on providing practical insights, specific recommendations, and actionable strategies. Showcasing products, services, success stories and real-life examples can be effective in illustrating the impact of sustainability initiatives.

Tailor communication efforts to address specific needs and interests of different stakeholders. Recognize that larger corporations may have a deeper understanding of sustainability, allowing for more advanced discussions. However, when engaging with smaller businesses and consumers, simplify the message and highlight how sustainability relates to their daily lives and immediate concerns.

Collaborate with media outlets and establish partnerships with organizations that align with sustainability goals. Consider sponsoring relevant projects or content to increase visibility and credibility in the sustainability space. Such collaborations can create opportunities to communicate sustainability initiatives effectively.

Leverage various digital channels, such as social media, websites, and YouTube, to educate, raise awareness, and promote sustainability initiatives. Use these platforms to share educational content, product information, success stories, and engaging campaigns. Demonstrate the breadth of sustainable offerings and the value they provide.

Highlight the sustainability journey of the company, including goals, achievements, and ongoing efforts. Communicate tangible results and metrics that demonstrate progress towards sustainability objectives. Transparency and evidence-based communication help build trust and credibility.

A key idea is that effective communication about sustainability requires understanding the audience, tailoring the message to their needs, and providing tangible actions and benefits. By adopting a strategic and informative approach, businesses can promote their sustainability initiatives, products, and services while fostering a broader commitment to sustainability among stakeholders.

3.2.4.8. Standing apart

Based on the data from the interviews, it is evident that sustainability communication in Lithuania is often unengaging and boring. The interviewees expressed the need to find unique angles and ways to make sustainability more appealing to stand out from the competition. They highlighted the importance of engaging and captivating audiences through interesting narratives.

One issue mentioned by the interviewees is the difficulty of generating interest and finding intriguing ways to communicate within the topic of sustainability. As said by Expert 1 (personal communication), "The main challenge is to make it interesting, to find interesting angles." They emphasized the need to move beyond standard templates and practices that are prevalent in the industry. To overcome this challenge, experts suggest actively seeking out fresh perspectives and innovative approaches to sustainability, which can pique the audience's curiosity and match the company's strategy.

Another observation made by the interviewees is the relatively low involvement of the media in sustainability-related matters. While organizations may be interested in the topic, mainstream media often lacks active engagement. Therefore, experts recommend organizations taking the initiative to create and share content that goes beyond the traditional educational tone. Instead, they should focus on generating thought-provoking discussions and showcasing sustainability as an integral part of their business values and operations. Paid content marketing projects on business-oriented newspapers is another method.

Moreover, interview participants mentioned the importance of linking sustainability with the organization's core activities and demonstrating a natural alignment. By showcasing how sustainability is ingrained in the company's mission and daily operations, organizations can present their sustainability story in an interesting and compelling manner. This approach helps create a narrative that resonates with the audience, as it showcases the genuine commitment and relevance of sustainability to the organization's overall business strategy.

To effectively communicate sustainability in a way that stands out from the competition, experts advise incorporating unique perspectives, presenting captivating narratives, and highlighting the natural connection between sustainability and the organization's core activities. By avoiding repetitive and didactic approaches, organizations can capture the audience's attention and generate interest in their sustainability initiatives. Additionally, organizations should proactively seek out fresh angles and innovative ideas within the sustainability space to maintain a competitive edge and foster engagement with their target audience.

3.2.4.9. Thought leadership

Interviews were conducted with experts from companies that take on the stewardship role regarding sustainability in their sectors. Naturally, the data shows that it is evident that there is a need for companies to communicate about sustainability in a way that distinguishes them from their competition and establishes thought leadership. The interview participants expressed the challenge of finding interesting angles and avoiding repetitive or standardized content. They highlighted the importance of engaging the media and initiating discussions to generate attention and interest in sustainability.

Experts advised companies to adopt thought leadership strategies to communicate effectively about sustainability. Thought leadership entails positioning oneself as an authority and influencer in a particular domain. Expert 3 (personal communication) spoke about the research their company does across Europe, and that sustainability is integrated in those reports: "That data is very insightful and valuable. So we are sharing it with the society, with our partners, clients." It is crucial to leverage the company's impact and the services it provides to demonstrate expertise and showcase its commitment to sustainability. By linking sustainability with the company's core business and values, a compelling narrative can be created to engage the audience.

One of the key recommendations is to focus on education and disseminate information widely. This involves utilizing various communication channels, including press releases, annual reports, social media, and direct interactions with clients. Companies should develop content projects and share relevant insights and best practices with their audience. By providing valuable knowledge and guidance, companies can catalyze change and encourage others to embark on their sustainability journeys.

Furthermore, experts emphasize the significance of tailored communication approaches. Each company should identify its unique angle of sustainability and emphasize it in their messaging. Sustainability encompasses diverse aspects, such as environmental impact, financial considerations, human rights, and workplace diversity. By narrowing down their focus and becoming experts in a specific area, companies can effectively convey their sustainability efforts and provide relevant value to their audience.

Thought leadership can also be established through collaborations with external experts and industry leaders. By providing a platform for these individuals to share their insights, companies can showcase their commitment to sustainability and engage their audience in meaningful discussions. Additionally, direct meetings and roundtable discussions with clients offer opportunities to share experiences and practices, aiding other organizations in structuring their own sustainability strategies.

To effectively communicate sustainability and create thought leadership, it is essential to personalize the communication. Expert 4 (personal communication) mentioned how their company incorporates the social media influencer approach: "To do things differently, we are trying to personalise communication. For example, so that there are posts not only from the company account, but also from our so-called opinion makers. We have them; the head of sustainability speaks a lot on LinkedIn." Other ways, such as live streaming events and discussions on social media platforms allow for real-time engagement with the audience. Collaborating with opinion leaders and leveraging their influence can generate more interest and impact than relying solely on the company's brand.

Overall, the experts suggest adopting an approach that showcases the benefits and convenience of sustainability rather than solely focusing on criticism or admonishment. By demonstrating how sustainability can be accessible, enjoyable, and aligned with people's values, companies can effectively promote their initiatives and overcome resistance from individuals who may be sceptical or resistant to change.

In conclusion, effective communication about sustainability requires companies to find their unique angle, leverage their expertise, and demonstrate thought leadership. By engaging with the media, initiating discussions, disseminating valuable information, and personalizing their messaging, companies can promote sustainability in a compelling and influential manner, setting themselves apart from the competition and driving positive change in society.

To conclude the chapter, it can be said that the analysis of expert interviews largely aligns with the findings from the comparative case study. However, there is a notable difference between the two in terms of the input-impact aspect. Consequently, while there are one or two differing aspects, the overall alignment of the research results in this paper with the implications presented by other authors in scientific literature remains consistent.

3.3. Admissibility of the hypothetical statements

Hypothetical statements were developed based on a review of scientific literature. These statements were then evaluated using the results of a comparative case study and semi-structured open-ended anonymous expert interviews. The combined findings from these methods were used to assess the validity of the two hypothetical statements and nine sub-hypothetical statements.

HS1: Message content improvement has a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices.

- The first hypothetical statement is **partially supported**.
- The sub-hypothetical statements relevant to HS1 exhibit a range of outcomes, including some that are supported, partially supported, or rejected.

HS1A: Emphasis on issue **importance** through a lack of self-serving motives has a positive influence on issue-focused message content.

- The first sub-hypothetical statement is **rejected**.
- The analysis of issue-focused videos highlights a consistent trend in addressing specific sustainability issues and emphasizing the positive impact businesses can make. While the messaging implies expertise and solutions, the primary focus remains on broader sustainability challenges. However, it is evident that these issues are connected to the companies' industries and business interests.
- Similarly, experts emphasize the significance of aligning business, communication, and chosen sustainability priorities. They caution against discussing sustainability topics that are too disconnected from core business operations and the major impact a company has on relevant ESG factors.

HS1B: Display of **commitment** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.

- The second sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.

- The examined companies demonstrate their long-term commitment to sustainability through sustainability reports and other channels, showcasing the effort and consistency of their actions. Although most analysed videos do not explicitly mention this commitment, it is observed that companies aiming to establish themselves as industry leaders are more likely to express their dedication by providing tangible and factual evidence.
- Interview participants also concur on the significance of demonstrating a company's commitment in sustainability communication. However, they acknowledge the challenges posed by current technical limitations, suggesting that industry players should collaborate to overcome this obstacle.

HS1C: Emphasis on **impact** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.

- The third sub-hypothetical statement is **partially supported**.
- Based on the findings of the case study research, it is evident that companies continue to prioritize conveying their efforts rather than highlighting the concrete impact of their initiatives on beneficiaries.
- During the interviews, participants acknowledged that, in theory, emphasizing impact is more effective in communication. However, they also recognized the challenges of measuring impact, leading them to believe that focusing on input is preferable to no communication at all. The examples provided by experts from their own companies also centered around highlighting input. Interestingly, some experts even proposed that in certain situations, input can align with or be considered equivalent to impact.

HS1D: Acknowledgement of both business and society benefitting **motives** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.

- The fourth sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- The videos analysed consistently demonstrate a dual motive, although the extent of acknowledgment may differ.
- The interview participants emphasized the importance of integrating sustainability with the company's core business and showcasing authentic motivation.

HS1E: Communication of **fit** has a positive influence on company-focused message content.

- The fifth sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- The videos, whether explicitly or implicitly, successfully established a connection between the sustainability issues discussed and the organizations' operations and products.
- During the interviews, experts consistently emphasized the importance of aligning sustainability objectives and communication with business model and strategies. This aspect was repeatedly highlighted as one of the key factors in their discussions.

HS2: **Message intent** improvement has a positive influence on BTB marketing communication practices.

- The second hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- All four relevant sub-hypothetical statements were also supported.

HS2A: Emphasis on **education** has a positive influence on message intent.

- The sixth sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- Each of the examined companies had educational videos available on their channels, and the majority of the featured videos included informative content related to the companies' activities, initiatives, or sustainability challenges.
- Experts specializing in sustainability and communication emphasized the importance of educational initiatives in Lithuania, not only for small and medium-sized businesses but also for large corporations and even employees of companies that are already focused on sustainability.

HS2B: Emphasis on **promotion** has a positive influence on message intent.

- The seventh sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- The videos examined in the analysis consistently demonstrated a common theme of promoting a company, product, service, or initiative.
- Additionally, the participants in the interviews emphasized the importance of integrating sustainability communication with information about the company's

products, promoting the company itself, and fostering broader interest in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) matters.

HS2C: Emphasis on **leadership** has a positive influence on message intent.

- The eighth sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- The majority of the videos analysed either explicitly mentioned keywords associated with industry and movement leadership or indirectly implied it through their focus on change and the future.
- During the interviews, the participants also emphasized the concept of thought leadership and provided examples of how their respective companies lead the way in driving change.

HS2D: Emphasis on **standing apart** has a positive influence on message intent.

- The ninth sub-hypothetical statement is **supported**.
- Companies that had a higher number of uploads on YouTube and/or operated in the technology and communications industry stood out among the analyzed companies. These companies had the most unique featured videos, characterized by better production quality and distinctive elements. This indicates that those with greater expertise in utilizing the platform chose to showcase content that is more visually appealing and engaging.
- During the interviews, the experts also raised concerns about the prevalence of boring and generic sustainability communication approaches among many businesses. They recommended exploring unique and authentic angles to approach the topic, in order to capture audience attention, differentiate themselves from others and have higher impact.

The research findings indicate mixed results regarding the admissibility of the hypothetical statements. While the first hypothetical statement (HS1) is partially supported, with some sub-hypothetical statements being rejected, others are supported. The second hypothetical statement (HS2) and its relevant sub-hypothetical statements are all supported. The expert interviews and comparative case study generally support each other, although they differ in terms of one aspect. Despite these differences, the research results in this paper largely align with the implications discussed in scientific literature, with only one or two differing aspects.

3.4. Reliability of empirical research results

The reliability of the empirical research results in this study can be considered strong based on several factors. First, the research design incorporated two qualitative methods, including a comparative case study and anonymous expert interviews, which allowed for a detailed understanding of the research object and situation. The use of multiple data collection and analysis methods, such as purposive sampling, semi-structured open-ended interviews, case studies, and comparative analysis, added depth and rigor to the research process.

The selection of research methods was justified based on the research hypotheses and objectives, and research methodology theory, ensuring the relevance of the findings. The comparative case study approach facilitated the examination of various cases and materials related to communication in the B2B sector, specifically focusing on companies committed to sustainability. This selection criteria helped align the research with the desired outcomes.

The interviews conducted with experts in B2B and sustainability communication followed a semi-structured and flexible format, allowing for in-depth exploration of viewpoints and experiences. The participants were carefully selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that they held important positions in their organizations and possessed valuable insights into the industry. This diversity of perspectives enhanced the credibility and richness of the research findings.

Ethical considerations were given priority throughout the research process, with participants provided with comprehensive information and the option to remain anonymous. By maintaining strict confidentiality and respecting participants' preferences, the research upheld ethical standards.

Data analysis of interviews involved content analysis using coding, with a coding scheme developed based on predefined categories. The systematic analysis of transcriptions from expert interviews using computer software (NVivo) contributed to the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships in the data. This rigorous analysis process enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Overall, the combination of appropriate research methods, diverse participant selection, ethical considerations, and systematic data analysis techniques strengthens the reliability of the empirical research results. The study's limitations, such as the specific focus on B2B sustainability communication, should be acknowledged but do not significantly undermine the overall reliability of the findings.

3.5. Directions for further research

Areas for future research in the field of marketing communication practices for sustainability can encompass various avenues, including investigations into the use of digital marketing platforms such as LinkedIn, websites, and content marketing initiatives. Additionally, exploring the role of sustainability communication during B2B events, direct communication, sales processes, and relationship marketing can provide valuable insights. It would be beneficial to conduct studies that specifically examine the differences in marketing communication practices for sustainability between large corporations and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Furthermore, there is a need to explore the potential impacts and changes on marketing communication practices for sustainability arising from the implementation of the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive. These areas present promising opportunities for further research, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective marketing communication strategies for sustainability in various contexts and shedding light on the evolving landscape shaped by regulatory frameworks.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aims to improve B2B marketing communication practices for corporate sustainability activities. The study is important due to the increasing relevance of sustainability considerations in the current market environment, with companies expected to integrate sustainable practices into their operations and decision-making regarding business partners. The effective communication of corporate social responsibility activities is crucial for companies, as it influences stakeholder perceptions and behaviours. However, existing research primarily focuses on sustainability communication in the B2C sector, creating a gap in understanding within B2B marketing. This paper provides novel insights to advance the knowledge regarding B2B marketing communication on sustainability. Some other novelty elements of the thesis are the combination of samples for empirical research. One, cases from YouTube, which is a controversial channel due to video playback related emissions. Two, expert interviews with industry leaders in Lithuania, where sustainability awareness and understanding is still developing.

Scientific literature analysis provided a theoretical background for the study by establishing examples of good B2B marketing communication practices. There was a range of different aspects of effective marketing practices with a focus on sustainability, spanning core business activities, communication strategies, channels, and specific tactics of implementation. Furthermore, certain trends could be observed regarding messages themselves. Nine key concepts of message content and intent provided guidance on effectively communicating a company's sustainability values, activities, solutions, and initiatives, while also narrowing down the scope for empirical research.

The methodology employed a comparative case study approach and anonymous expert interviews. The case study method allowed for the systematic analysis of multiple cases, comparing audio-visual materials and supplementary text. Secondary data, such as industry reports, informed the selection of ten international sustainable companies, while primary data involved analysing the featured videos from their YouTube channels. The videos were categorized and analysed using a framework of predetermined criteria. Expert interviews were conducted with four professionals in leadership roles related to communication and sustainability, working in sustainable companies in Lithuania. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, providing qualitative insights. Limitations included the nature of

selected research methods, possible subjectivity, potential non-participation in interviews, and the specific focus of the study.

The empirical research aimed to assess the validity of hypothetical statements related to message content improvement and message intent improvement in BTB marketing communication. The findings revealed mixed support for the first hypothetical statement, with some sub-hypotheses being supported, partially supported, or rejected. While the emphasis on issue importance was rejected, other aspects such as commitment display, acknowledgment of motives, and communication of fit were supported. The second hypothetical statement and its sub-hypotheses received overall support, indicating that emphasis on education, promotion, leadership, and standing apart positively influenced message intent in BTB marketing communication. The research findings generally aligned with the implications discussed in scientific literature, with minor differences in certain aspects.

Based on the results obtained during the research, there are several recommendations for the practical application of the study results and managerial implications in areas related to the research problem:

1. Message Content Improvement:

- Emphasize the importance of addressing specific sustainability issues and promoting positive impacts in communication efforts.
- Align sustainability priorities with the company's business objectives to ensure relevance and authenticity.
- Demonstrate commitment through tangible evidence of sustainability practices and efforts.

2. Message Intent Improvement:

- Incorporate educational elements in communication to enhance message intent.
- Promote the company, its products, services, and initiatives while integrating sustainability communication.
- Emphasize thought leadership and highlight examples of how the company leads the change.
- Stand apart from competitors by creating unique and engaging content that showcases expertise and distinctive elements.

3. Align Business and Society Benefitting Motives:

- Integrate sustainability with the core business strategy and operations.
- Highlight the dual motive of benefiting both the business and society in communication efforts.

4. Communication of Fit:

- Establish a clear connection between sustainability issues and the organization's operations and products.
- Align sustainability objectives and communication with the company's business model and strategies.

5. Measurement of Impact and Input:

- Strive to emphasize the tangible impact of sustainability initiatives on beneficiaries whenever possible.
- Solve the challenges of measuring impact and consider highlighting input as a meaningful communication approach.

6. Emphasis on Education:

- Invest in educational initiatives related to sustainability, targeting not only small and medium-sized businesses but also large corporations and employees.

7. Promote Sustainability:

- Integrate sustainability communication with information about the company's products and promote the company itself.
- Foster broader interest in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) matters.

8. Leadership and Standing Apart:

- Emphasize industry and movement leadership in communication efforts, showcasing the company's role in driving change.
- Differentiate from competitors by creating visually appealing and engaging content, particularly on platforms like YouTube.
- Explore unique and authentic angles to approach sustainability communication, avoiding generic and boring approaches.

By implementing these recommendations, organizations can enhance their sustainability communication practices, align their business objectives with sustainability priorities, and effectively engage stakeholders in environmental and social initiatives.

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