



UNIVERSIDADE
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THE COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION OF
SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY IN
FRANCE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA-A CASE STUDY OF THE
ABOCA BRAND

Internship Report presented to Universidade Católica
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in
Communication, Marketing, Advertising

By

Irene Merendelli

Faculty of Human Sciences

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Under the supervision of Professor

Anna Carolina Boechat

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Abstract

The current internship report is a result of a curricular internship at Aboca. This research aimed to analyze the sustainability communication strategies used by Aboca and its main competitors on social media, and also to measure the impact of these strategies on consumer engagement and perception. The relevance of this problem is linked to the fact that sustainability has become an important issue among consumers and professionals, but it is still not so deeply studied and through a social media communication perspective.

For the aim of the study a mixed approach was used combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methodology guided the majority of the analysis and consisted in a descriptive, comparative, and thematic analysis of the contents published on social media by Aboca and its main competitors.

Results showed that having different social media accounts represents a competitive advantage for brands, promoting a higher engagement rate than competitors. Also, the use of videos (e.g. Reels on Instagram) are associated with a higher number of likes than images. The combination of informational, emotional, and promotional tones, in particular the use of the emotional one, seems to represent a competitive advantage.

It became clear that the frequency of sustainability messages published by Aboca on social media is higher than its competitors. Regarding the tone, Aboca employs an informational and promotional tone for its messages, generally aligned with the tone of competitors, but less emotional. Concerning the type of sustainable content, Aboca publishes mostly images which deal with not wasting water and generally promoting the reduction of the environmental footprint through good practices. Also, the engagement level of sustainability-related posts from Aboca is lower than the one of its competitors.

Despite the fact that sustainability seems to be a competitive advantage, once there is more engagement in these posts than the other ones, sustainability is not enough to be an advantage for Aboca in terms of engagement. Indeed, other factors seem more relevant, such as the number of social media platforms, and number of followers, for example.

Keywords: Healthcare industry, Communication, Sustainability, Social media.

Resumo

O atual relatório de estágio é o resultado de um estágio curricular na [empresa] Aboca. Esta investigação teve como objetivo analisar as estratégias de comunicação de sustentabilidade utilizadas pela Aboca e seus principais concorrentes nas redes sociais, e também medir o impacto destas estratégias no envolvimento e na percepção dos consumidores. A relevância deste problema está ligada ao facto de que a sustentabilidade se tornou uma questão importante entre consumidores e profissionais, mas ainda não é tão profundamente estudada sob a perspetiva da comunicação nas redes sociais.

Para o objetivo deste estudo, foi utilizada uma abordagem mista, combinando métodos qualitativos e quantitativos. A metodologia qualitativa orientou a maior parte da análise e consistiu numa análise descritiva, comparativa e temática dos conteúdos publicados nas redes sociais pela Aboca e os seus principais concorrentes.

Os resultados mostraram que ter diferentes perfis nas redes sociais representa uma vantagem competitiva para as marcas, promovendo um nível de envolvimento mais alto do que os concorrentes. Além disto, o uso de vídeos (por exemplo, Reels no Instagram) está associado a um maior número de ‘gostos’ do que de imagens. A combinação de tons informativos, emocionais e promocionais, em particular o uso do tom emocional, parece representar uma vantagem competitiva.

Ficou claro que a frequência de mensagens de sustentabilidade publicadas pela Aboca nas redes sociais é maior do que a dos seus concorrentes. Em relação ao tom, a Aboca emprega um tom informativo e promocional nas suas mensagens, geralmente alinhado com o tom dos concorrentes, mas menos emocional. Quanto ao tipo de conteúdo sustentável, a Aboca publica principalmente imagens que tratam de não desperdiçar água e, geralmente, promovem a redução da pegada ambiental por meio de boas práticas. Além disto, o nível de envolvimento dos posts relacionados com a sustentabilidade da Aboca é menor do que o dos seus concorrentes.

Apesar da sustentabilidade aparentar ser uma vantagem competitiva, uma vez que há mais envolvimento nestas publicações do que nas outras, a sustentabilidade não é suficiente para ser uma vantagem para a Aboca em termos de envolvimento. De facto, outros fatores parecem mais relevantes, como o número de plataformas de redes sociais e o número de seguidores, por exemplo.

Palavras-chave: Setor de saúde, Comunicação, Sustentabilidade, Mídias Redes sociais.

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This internship report closes a cycle of two years full of work and dedication. It is a privilege for me to know that I did not walk this path alone and that I can now share the feeling of mission accomplishment with those who have accompanied me.

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Table of contents:

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	8

Chapter 1 Sustainability

1 When the concept emerged - historical perspective	11
1.1 Sustainability definitions and frameworks.....	13
1.2 The relationship between sustainability and CSR.....	19
1.3 CSR definitions and frameworks.....	21
1.4 Brand Activism, Brand Advocacy and CSR.....	28

Chapter 2 Sustainability in the Healthcare Industry

2.1 Background and significance of sustainability in the health sector.....	30
2.2 One Health and Planetary Health frameworks and definitions.....	35
2.3 European Regulations in the Health Sector.....	37
2.4 Healthcare Industry and CSR.....	40
2.5 Emerging challenges in achieving sustainability in the health sector.....	45

Chapter 3 Competitiveness

3.1 Competitiveness definitions and measures.....	47
3.2 Relationship between competitiveness and sustainability.....	52
3.3 Competitiveness in Healthcare.....	57
3.4 Competition, co-competition, and cooperation.....	59

Chapter 4 Descriptive Narrative.....	63
---	-----------

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1 Methodology.....	67
5.1.1 Research Objectives.....	70
5.1.2 Research Questions.....	70
5.2 Data Collection Methods.....	71
5.3 Data Presentation: Aboca and its competitors	72
5.3.1 Aboca Online Communication channels.....	77
5.3.2 Comparative Analysis: Aboca vs competitor's use of social media.....	82
5.3.3 Thematic analysis: Social media content.....	84
5.3.4 Sentiment analysis: Engagement.....	95
5.4 Data analysis and discussion.....	115

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Conclusion.....	119
6.2 Limitations and Future Directions.....	120

CHAPTER 7

Bibliography.....	121
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1- Aboca vs competitors use of social media	82
Table 2- Type of content published on each social media by each company.....	96
Table 3- Aboca and competitor's frequency, content type, tone, and average engagement on social media.....	113

Introduction

The current report on the impact of social media on sustainability communication, applied to the healthcare industry, is the completion of a curricular internship at Aboca. The company office in Paris is composed of three parts: 1) The Back Office department team that manages inventory, and processing sales orders; 2) The Commercial department that takes responsibility for the financial management of projects; and 3) The Marketing department that handles the consumers who experience/enjoy the rewards. I worked in the Marketing department. Therefore I decided for this research to focus more on this department.

Throughout this internship period, it was evident that sustainability played an important role inside the company. It determined and influenced the company's campaigns and strategies. In the Marketing Department, all the communication and marketing strategies were designed to spread the message that Aboca is a 100% natural healthcare company. In this sense and trying to give a contemporary edge to the research, I decided to look at the communication strategies on social media implemented during this current year.

In essence, I aimed to understand which communication strategies are best suited for engaging with consumers on social media and which role plays sustainability in this context. In this sense, and trying to ensure the feasibility of the study, my research object is healthcare companies' communication strategies. Therefore, my research questions will be: How do the frequency, tone, and content of sustainability messages differ between Aboca and its competitors? What is the consumer engagement level (likes, shares, comments, etc.) with sustainability-related posts from Aboca compared to its competitors?

As consumers become increasingly aware of environmental and social issues, companies are intensifying their efforts to communicate their sustainability initiatives. Social media has become a key platform for these communications, offering direct engagement with consumers. However, the effectiveness of these sustainability messages in influencing consumer perception and behavior remains to be seen in different aspects. Thus, the research problem that will guide this scientific project is to understand how effective the sustainability communication strategies employed by Aboca and its competitors on social media are in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Understanding the effectiveness of sustainability communication strategies employed by Aboca and its competitors on social media is important for several reasons. First of all, with growing awareness of environmental and social issues, many consumers are prioritizing sustainability in their purchasing decisions (Senal, Fire, 2012). Effective communication can significantly influence consumer choices, leading them to prefer brands that align with their value (Oancea, 2015). Secondly, authentic and effective communication of sustainability initiatives can build trust and foster brand loyalty. Consumers are more likely to support brands that they perceive as genuinely committed to sustainability (Rastogi, et al., 2024).

I will dedicate the first chapter of this report to contextualising the concept of sustainability. I will begin by highlighting some of the main definitions and frameworks of sustainability, and then, using several authors, I will explore the existing literature in this area. I try to identify the connections between sustainability, CSR Brand Advocacy, and Brand Activism. I will dedicate the second chapter to specific aspects of sustainability related to the healthcare industry, such as One Health and Planetary Health definitions and frameworks, European Regulations in the healthcare industry, and the relationship with CSR.

In the third Chapter, I present the concept of competitiveness in general and then relate to the healthcare industry and sustainability. I will try to reflect a wide range of opinions that will contribute to an in-depth knowledge of the study already existing in this area and outline action trends for the future.

The descriptive narrative chapter describes the Aboca mission, vision, values, and products. It will also tell my role as an intern, describing the activities done and implemented throughout the internship.

The last chapter applies a mixed methods research design to present and analyse social media posts on different platforms of different companies and brands in the healthcare industry.

My research will be conducted based on Greene's (2007) research design. In this sense, I will now present the research objectives that will serve as the guidelines for my report.

These are the following:

1. To analyse the sustainability communication strategies used by Aboca and its main competitors on social media.
2. To measure the impact of these strategies on consumer engagement and perception.

In this report, I have decided to use the qualitative method since this approach meets my ambition of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Taking advantage of the internship at Aboca, it will be possible for me, as a participant observer, to explore and understand the functioning of the marketing department and all the strategies designed.

In the end, I propose to reflect on the future of healthcare companies. Aware that the digital era has profoundly changed the way businesses operate, I will try to analyse the steps that have been taken by companies and the challenges they face. Moving away from an alarmist position, I intend to explore alternative paths so that this sector can better adapt to current demands and consolidate its place in the market by reformulating its business model.

My ambition is to contribute to the academic knowledge in a little-explored area of research, the impact of sustainability communication strategies in the healthcare industry. Even though there was an increase in research about sustainability in general terms, the truth is that there is still very little available literature regarding this specific sector. In this sense, I hope to have opened the way for Future studies that will complement and strengthen the academic contribution in this marketing and communication area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 1 - SUSTAINABILITY

1. *When the concept emerged - a historical perspective*

The word sustainability originates from the Latin word “*sustinere*” (Sakalasoorya, 2021). The term in itself may imply continuing, upholding, supporting, or maintaining (Harper, Douglas, 2023). Therefore, sustainability is the capacity to endure for an extended length of time.

The concept is quite old as communities have always been concerned on the topic and on how the environment could have supported them in the long term. The use of natural resources has been regulated in the past by numerous traditional communities, indigenous peoples, and ancient cultures (Gadgil, Berkes, 1991). In 1713 a German author, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, published his book *Silvicultura oeconomica* in which he advocated the conservation, growing, and use of wood in a continuing, stable, and sustained manner. This was the first documented use of the German term for sustainability, *Nachhaltigkeit* (Schmithüsen, 2013).

The theme assumed a central role when, in 1972, the first conference in Stockholm was held and the relationship between economic development and natural degradation was discussed and analysed (United Nations, 1972). In the same year the Club of Rome published the report *The Limits to Growth* written by a group of scientists, led by Dennis and Donella Meadows of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’ (MIT) (Ulrich, 2007). In the report the authors used the word sustainable to describe the desirable “state of global equilibrium” (Ulrich, 2007).

In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) created a report called ‘Our Common Future’. The report is a document which aims to support countries to a more conscient use of natural resources. Here the term is considered in its impact on future generations which are involved in the process and which should necessarily have a long term perspective: “*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 16). Through this definition, the WCED underlines not only the importance of environmental issues but also the responsibilities of today’s generation to preserve the resources for future generations. The WCED conceptualised sustainability from a systems perspective. This means that, in

conditions of resource constraints, the industry must develop, use, and dispose of natural resources to protect the regenerative health of the planet and equitably distribute the wealth generated in order to meet the needs of future generations (Bansal, DesJardine, 2014).

Another important step in the recent history of sustainability was the Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, known under the name of 'Earth Summit'. During the event, the *Rio Declaration* was produced consisting of 27 principles intended to guide and commit 175 countries to future sustainable development (United Nations, 1992). As an example of the guidelines defined, the first principle stated that sustainable development primarily concerns human beings, who are entitled to live healthy and productive lives in harmony with nature (UN Documentation Centre, Rio Declaration, Article 1, 1992). The countries that joined the Rio Conference set together objectives and policies in a document called 'Agenda 21', where 21 represents the number of the century (*L'Agenda 21 | Ministero Dell'Ambiente E Della Sicurezza Energetica*, Retrieved 29 May 2024). Agenda 21 is still a key document today, from which many community policies derive.

In 1999, Kofi Annan launched the 'Global Compact', which is a non-binding United Nations pact, created to encourage companies and businesses around the world to adopt sustainable policies that comply with corporate social responsibility, and to make public the results of the actions undertaken (United Nations Global Compact, 2024).

"I propose that you, the business leaders gathered in Davos, and We, the United Nations, initiate a Global Compact of shared principles and values, which will give a human face to the global market" (Kofi Annan, 1999). This statement represents thus an invitation to be united in sharing the same perspectives about how to lead the global market responsibly.

At the turn of the century, world leaders gathered to develop goals, known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Garren, 2018). Among the MDGs goals, there was also ensuring environmental sustainability (United Nations, 2000). In 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). One clue result was the creation of sustainability indicators to assess progress and the integration and implementation of the three E's of sustainability (Garren, 2018).

Later on, in 2015, the United Nations announced the *"2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"* which stated that *"This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity"* (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, they created 17 Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets which aim to “*balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental*” (United Nations, 2015).

In the same year, the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change, was adopted (UNFCCC, 2015).

1.1 Sustainability definitions and frameworks

The 1990s saw the emergence of numerous definitions of sustainability, which led to a scenario where the term has multiple meanings for different groups of people (Johnston et al., 2007). Over the years, sustainability and sustainable development have become more and more relevant concepts and goals both in science and society (Harrington, 2016).

For this reason, many different definitions of sustainability have been elaborated. However, it is important to distinguish between “sustainability” and “sustainable development” because, even if the two concepts intersect, they are not the same.

Hodge (1997) defines sustainability as the driving force or agenda that guides a development process towards achieving a level of development that is sustainable.

Instead, sustainable development is a goal or a target that is achieved by following a set of sustainability principles or guidelines (Diesendorf, 2000).

Some definitions focus on the environmental dimension. For example, the Oxford Dictionary of English defines sustainability as: “*the property of being environmentally sustainable; the degree to which a process or enterprise can be maintained or continued while avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources*” (Halliday, Mike, 2016). In this definition, sustainability is seen as the ability of a company to carry on its processes without compromising the exhaustion of natural resources.

This way of perceiving sustainability as the method that guides the use of today’s resources in an efficient manner to ensure that resources are available and sufficient to meet today’s needs and the needs of future generations has been underlined by many authors of the literature on sustainability.

In particular, Grant (2010) defines sustainability as the ability to make responsible decisions in using and allocating resources to economic and non-economic activities to achieve certain desired social, economic, and environmental outcomes (Ozili, 2022). According to the author, sustainability happens in a *steady-state economy* which means an economy that considers the limitedness of natural resources, in opposition to the current

world economy which is based on perpetual economic growth, disregarding Earth's carrying capacity (Grant, 2010).

Sustainability emphasises not only an efficient distribution of resources over time but also a fair distribution of resources and opportunities both among the present generation and between present and future generations, and economic activities commensurate with its economic life support system (Türker, 2009). Indeed, the majority of definitions of sustainability, include considerations for economic growth and social justice: "*In general, sustainability is understood as a form of intergenerational ethics in which the environmental and economic actions taken by present persons do not diminish the opportunities of future persons to enjoy similar levels of wealth, utility, or welfare*" (Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 24 February 2024).

In this sense, sustainability is seen as a generational moral duty to keep attention to their environmental and economic actions to prevent and maintain the same status for future generations.

Other studies define sustainability concerning other contexts or fields, for example, business sustainability (Bansal, DesJardine, 2014), career sustainability (Tordera et al., 2020), urban sustainability (James, 2015), product sustainability (Dyllick, Rost, 2017) and fiscal sustainability (Byrne, Fiess, and MacDonald, 2011).

The conception that private companies should take care of society's needs is not new (Holmes, 1976). Corporations impact on the natural environment, their own workforces, and society at large and so affect the sustainability of the planet and society (Diesendorf, 2000). Their social impacts are both direct (e.g. those following from the locations of their offices and factories) and indirect (e.g. by creating models of consumption which are copied in the community at large) (Diesendorf, 2000).

When applied to an organisational setting, the concept of sustainability is known as Corporate Sustainability (CS). CS is considered an emerging management theory that presents an alternative to the traditional model of the maximisation of growth and profit (Vardari et al., 2020). In addition, research demonstrates a positive relationship between corporate reputation and sustainability (Peloza, Loock, Cerruti, Muyot, 2012).

According to the authors, sustainability is a relevant component in the decision-making processes of many businesses (Peloza, Loock, Cerruti, Muyot, 2012).

However, Valente (2012) states that a new paradigm over the current corporate sustainability strategies and implementations has not yet emerged. The academic community is highlighting the need to improve corporate sustainability in theoretical, methodologic, and operational terms (de Oliveira et al., 2023).

It is also important to underline that academic research around CS differs from the practice of firms (Montiel, Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Corporations play a fundamental role in the sustainability field. Therefore, creating a sustainable society must involve changes to corporations as well to other social institutions (Diesendorf, 2000).

Despite the fact that more and more companies understand, at least in theory, the need for this change, they seem to find difficulties in putting the theory into practice.

According to Polman (2014), the current corporate sustainability movement is unsustainable. This is because companies erroneously see sustainability as a change management initiative (Polman, 2014). Instead, sustainability should be seen as a way to create value for all the stakeholders with profits being considered as a consequence of the creation of value (Polman, 2014).

In general terms, corporate sustainability is a business approach that creates long-term value for businesses and creates the continuity of companies by evaluating opportunities arising from economic, social, and environmental developments and managing risks (Stringer, 2009). CS may also be characterised as the implementation of sustainable development at the corporate level, with a focus on the company's long-term social performance as well as its short-term environmental and economic concerns (Steurer et al., 2005).

The same perspective on CS is shared by other authors such as Vardari and Gashi (2020), along with the social concerns. According to the authors, Corporate Sustainability is the inclusion of economic, environmental, and social elements in corporate activities and decision-making processes with corporate governance principles and management of risks in order to create long-term value in enterprises (Vardari et al., 2020). The result is an interconnected relationship between the organisational capabilities that impact its strategic dimension and the socio-environmental systems that aid its operational dimension (Mohammadi et al., 2018).

Corporate sustainability can be improved through the implementation of corporate, social, economic, and environmental sustainability dimensions that can contribute to sustainable development through a wide range of tools for a company (Lozano, 2012).

The most famous model that can be applied to CS is the “Triple Bottom Line”. The term was coined in 1994 by John Elkington, founder of a British consultancy called “SustainAbility”.

He first explained the concept in the California Management Review in which he states that *“business is now developing new “win-win-win” strategies to simultaneously benefit the company, its customers, and the environment”* (Elkington, 1994, pag. 90).

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) consists of three Ps: Profit, People, and Planet. *“It aims to measure the financial, social, and environmental performance of the corporation over a while. Only a company that produces a TBL is taking account of the full cost involved in doing business”*(The Economist, 2009). The coining of the “Triple Bottom Line” of economic, social, and environmental performance expands the traditional definition of ‘bottom line’ so that there is not just one bottom line (profit), but also two more (people and planet). The proposed triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit considers the social and environmental impacts of a business in its pursuit of profits (Elkington, 1998). More recent studies have presented a fourth dimension of sustainability, which is the governance dimension (van Zeijl-Rozema et al. 2008; Stojanović, Ateljević, and Stević, 2016). The governance dimension includes the political power to carry out policies and actions for sustainable development (Ozili, 2022).

Nowadays, the concept of sustainability has become nearly meaningless due to the way it has permeated language. Despite being popular, the term is often used with no clear definition (Princen, 2005). However, it still represents a relevant component for businesses. As Dyllick & Hockerts (2002) state: *“Sustainability has become a mantra for the 21st century”*. From this statement, it is clear the relevance that has sustainability: it permeates the language like a mantra, which is, for definition *“a statement or slogan repeated frequently”* (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

Moreover, Lubin and Esty (2010) define sustainability as *“an emerging megatrend”* underlining, again, the popularity of the term. However, today sustainability is not only a popular expression but also an essential component used by different sets of stakeholders such as investors, customers, and policymakers to achieve the business goal (Sheth, Sethia,

Srinivas, 2011). For this reason, companies around the world are becoming more and more aware of the business relevance of sustainability (Berns et al. 2009; Franklin 2008; McKinsey Global Survey 2010; WEF 2010).

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the business case for sustainability (BCS) received more and more attention from the corporate sector, its stakeholders, the academic community, and consultancies (Salzmann, Ionescu, Steger, 2005). Szekely and Knirsch (2005) defined business sustainability as maintaining and enhancing economic growth, shareholder value, prestige, corporate reputation, customer relationships, and product and service quality, while also adopting ethical business practices, creating sustainable jobs, building value for all stakeholders, and addressing the needs of the underserved. In this view, sustainability can be defined as a business goal that requires actions that make a positive impact environmentally, socially, and economically (Sheth, Sethia, Srinivas, 2011).

The term sustainability is defined in many different ways (Hoffman, Bazerman, 2007) and has often focused on environmental concerns (Sheth, Sethia, Srinivas, 2011).

Marketing tactics employ the term "*sustainable*" in a strategic way to promote environmentally friendly products. Indeed, some authors believe that sustainability is now a normative term that denotes environmental consciousness and is used to "greenwash" business strategies and goods (Petra Dolata, 2021). As a consequence, green marketing is often perceived as ineffective and unsuccessful (Peattie and Crane, 2005; Bonini and Oppenheim, 2008) by consumers.

However, the term sustainability refers also to the capability of a possible positive evolution of society toward a more equitable and wealthy world in which the natural environment and our cultural accomplishments are preserved for generations to come (Dyllick, Hockerts, 2002).

In order to preserve the natural environment, there is clear evidence of the need to change the way we consume, which is not sustainable. Many people from the scientific research community, as well as others, have argued convincingly and forcefully that current levels of consumption of natural resources and practices are unsustainable (Lim, 2017). However, according to Gordon, Carrigan, and Hastings (2011) and Peattie and Collins (2009), sustainable consumption is an oxymoron because to "consume" something means to use it up or destroy it and so the complete opposite of sustainability (Lim, 2017). Despite this, it is generally agreed that changes in consumption are necessary. Sustainable consumption

plays a fundamental role in the path towards sustainable development (Kotler, 2011; Peattie, 2001).

According to Lim (2017), scholars still lack understanding of how to encourage more sustainable patterns of consumption, especially for the society at large. Lawler III and Worley (2011) observed that sustainability had become a major issue for business and that the success of an organization depends not only on financial performance but also on the organization's impact on the natural and social environment. This aspect of organizational activity they referred to as "sustainable effectiveness" (Sheehy, Farneti, 2021).

In a recent survey of 766 CEOs conducted by Accenture and United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), 93% of the CEOs surveyed believe that sustainability will be critical to the future success of their businesses, and 91% report that their company will employ new technologies (e.g., renewable energy) to address sustainability issues over the next five years (Accenture & UNGC, 2010) (Flammer, 2013).

In an article published by Forbes, it is stated: "*Operating sustainably is the new way of doing business*" (Kandiah, 2023). Therefore, today there is evidence of a strong interrelation between sustainability and business practices. Indeed, 75% of board members worldwide agreed that a coherent environmental, social, and governance (ESG) strategy helps create sustainable organizational value and stronger financial outcomes, according to a 2023 survey from the Nasdaq Center for Board Excellence and WTW (Pratt, 2024). Moreover, on the first of January 2024, the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) went into effect. Thanks to this directive, EU and non-EU companies are invited to file annual sustainability reports along with their financial statements, following the existing European Sustainability Reporting Standards (Pratt, 2024).

Companies that want to deliver measurable social and business benefits need to be able to keep track of their progress but there is not yet a universal system for doing this (Pfitzer, Bockstette, Stamp, 2013). However, according to Vardari and other authors, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) represents one of the most complete and recognized worldwide systems to measure sustainability (Vardari et al., 2020).

The sustainability performance indicators proposed by GRI are divided into 3 main categories: economic, social, and environmental (Vardari et al., 2020). Over the past ten years, an increasing number of instruments, approaches, protocols, standards, and so forth

have acquired global recognition to pursue and oversee industrial sustainable practices (Arena et al., 2009). These include initiatives like ISO 14001, life cycle assessment (LCA) (e.g., Rebitzer et al., 2004; US EPA, 2006), cleaner production (e.g., UNEP, 2007), factor X (e.g., Robèrt et al., 2002), ecological footprinting (e.g., Wackernagel et al., 2002), green engineering (Anastas, Zimmerman, 2003), the natural step framework (e.g. Hawken, 1995), and product stewardship (i.e., EPA-based tools), among others.

In the early 2000s, the concepts associated with responsibility and sustainability research began to be used interchangeably and were accidentally seen as the same (Bansal, Tima & Song, Hee-Chan, 2017). However, it is important to distinguish between sustainability and responsibility. Indeed, according to some authors such as Bansal & DesJardine (2014), there is a relevant difference between the two terms. The authors criticise the models of The Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1994) and Creating Shared Value (Porter, Kramer, 2011) because of the confusion they bring to the two terms. According to them, sustainability differs from responsibility regarding the trade-offs it requires across time, that are missing in the responsibility (Bansal, DesJardine, 2014).

According to Beckmann and Pies (2008) in order to be effective sustainability lacks a fourth dimension, the moral one. The moral dimension of institutional legitimacy relies on the necessity for companies to have the support of internal stakeholders (Beckmann, Pies, 2008). Corporate citizenship and ordo-responsibility, contribute to strengthening the moral dimension of sustainability (Beckmann, Pies, 2008). Indeed, a number of empirical studies have demonstrated that corporate activism and dedication have a favourable impact on marketing outcomes and provide a competitive advantage for the company in terms of consumer intent to buy, brand equity, and reputation (Shetty, Venkataramaiah, Anand, 2019).

1.2 *The relationship between sustainability and CSR*

As for sustainability and responsibility, the same ambiguity emerged between the concepts of corporate sustainability (CS) and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Van Marrewijk (2003) states: "*Many consider corporate sustainability and CSR as synonyms*". Yet the two terms have distinct meanings and it has become increasingly evident that there is a great need for clarification and related precision (Sheehy, Farneti, 2021). The concepts of sustainability and CSR are used interchangeably in academic

literature to refer to environmental and social management issues, while there is no clear-cut difference between the two. Although there are some distinctions between CSR and sustainability, Montiel (2008) asserts that the ideas and metrics around both seem to be moving in the same direction.

There are subtle distinctions between CSR and sustainability, regardless of the assertions of some academics that CSR and sustainability are inextricably linked, or even interchangeable, in the context of business sustainability (Millar, 2013; Montiel, 2008). Although they use different frameworks, Montiel (2008) states that recent research demonstrates the convergence of sustainability and CSR because both include concerns for environmental and social issues.

The Triple Bottom Line view of sustainability, which takes into account social, economic, and environmental factors, and CSR are conceptually very similar. To achieve long-term sustainability and CSR, a corporation must coordinate the fundamental components of the Triple Bottom Line (Montiel, 2008). Moreover, researchers studying business sustainability CSR use comparable frameworks to assess social and environmental performance. According to Ingram (2013), business sustainability refers to a company's capacity to endure into the future and eventually outlive its current owners, whereas CSR refers to conducting business in ways that help society and the environment rather than harm them.

Over the last few years, CSR and sustainability have combined to reach a company's long-term goals by looking at both the natural and the social environment (Hildebrand, Sen, and Bhattacharya, 2011). The majority of responsibility authors argue that CSR represents the set of organizational activities that are good for society and the firm (McWilliams, Siegel, 2001). This trend has guided corporations to reach a more strategic vision of CSR (Lantos, 2001; Porter and Kramer, 2002; Hildebrand, Sen, and Bhattacharya, 2011). This new way of perceiving the business with sustainability opened the path to other related concepts over the years. One, in particular, is *Creating Shared Value*. The concept of *Creating Shared Value* underlines the idea that not all profit is equal: "*Profits involving a social purpose represent a higher form of capitalism, one that creates a positive cycle of company and community prosperity*" (Porter, Kramer, 2011).

Michael Porter and Mark Kramer have changed how companies approach philanthropy and CSR. Their 2011 paper introduced the concept of *Creating Shared Value* which includes

policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of an organization while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates. Typically, these new conceptions build on what went before but call for greater integration and an expansion of the potential of business to make positive impacts.

The difference between CSV and CSR is that CSV actions are not only able to bring value to society by committing to the communities they belong to, but they can obtain relevant economic benefits that strengthen their capacity and competitiveness (Spitzeck, Chapman, 2012). Indeed, in CSV theory there is the absence of a relationship with the community which can be caused by the company's interest in only pursuing short-term benefits without a serious aim of innovation and strategy (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

According to Porter and Kramer (2011), there are three different ways of reaching CSV to improve competitiveness. The first is to redefine products and markets, companies should observe the social needs of their products or services. The second is through redefining productivity in the value chain. This can be achieved by reducing externalities.

Firms can reduce their internal operational costs by reducing the social cost of the whole community that they belong to. The last way of reaching CSV is through enabling local cluster development (Porter, Kramer, 2011). However, some scholars argue that the concept of CSV is not as relevant and innovative as it seems to be. In particular, Andrew Crane, Guido Palazzo, Laura J. Spence, and Dirk Matten (2014) criticized the CSV concept. According to the authors, CSV is presented as a new contribution by Porter and Kramer but its main bases have a strong similarity to existing concepts of CSR, stakeholder management, and social innovation (Crane, Andrew & Palazzo, Guido & Spence, Laura & Matten, Dirk., 2014). They argue that the CSV concept resembles Emerson's idea of *'blended value'* which affirms that companies seek simultaneously to pursue profit and social and environmental targets (Emerson, 2003). Despite that, the concept of CSV is still relevant today in the discourse around sustainability and CSR.

1.3 *CSR definitions and frameworks*

CSR has always been considered a relevant topic both in academia and in the field (Fukukawa, Balmer, Gray, 2007; Porter, Kramer 2011; Szmigin, Rutherford, 2013).

In the 1920s and early 1930s, business managers began to understand the importance of a balance between the maximization of profits with the requests of their clients, their labor force, and the community (Carroll, 2008).

This resulted in managers being perceived as trustworthy by the different sets of stakeholders, with a positive consequence in terms of social and economic responsibilities being adopted by corporations (Carroll 2008; Heald, 1970).

Later on, during the 1940s, companies started to be seen as institutions with social responsibilities and a broader discussion of such responsibilities began taking place (Heald, 1970). Some first examples of the debate on the social responsibilities of corporations can be found in *The Functions of the Executive* by Barnard (1938) and *The Social Control of Business* by Clark (1939). However, the modern definition of CSR and the academic research around it starts with the book by Howard Bowen (1953), *Social Responsibilities of the Business Men*. In the book, the author describes the obligations of businessmen to pursue policies, make decisions, or follow lines of action that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society. This was the first academic work conducted explicitly on the concept of social responsibility, making Bowen the “*Father of Corporate Social Responsibility*” (Carroll, 1999). After Bowen, the debate grew among academics around the relationship between corporate behavior and its response to the social context of the time. However, not all the authors had the same perspective regarding the concept of being socially responsible. For example, Friedman wrote about the Social Responsibility of a businessman which, according to the author, is only to increase its profits:

“There is one and only one social responsibility of business - to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits” (Friedman, 1962). He perceived CSR actions as a waste of the company’s resources that would result in unuseful spending of money for the general social interest (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, Davídsdóttir, 2019).

Later on this definition, the Brundtland Report (1987) was elaborated, but also other related theories already mentioned above such as The Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1994) and Creating Shared Value (Porter, Kramer, 2011). However, the focus on CSR has dominated business literature since 1960, the concept is still controversial (Holmes, 1976). According to the classic view of the literature on business responsibility, the primary objective of a business organization is the pursuit of profit (Holmes, 1976). This view was particularly promoted by Adam Smith (1776) and his theory of the “*invisible hand*”.

According to Holmes (1976), there are also other perspectives on the responsibility of the business, such as the *managerial view*. In the *managerial view* business managers are responsible for the interests of many different groups like employees, customers, suppliers and communities rather than just the shareholders (Holmes, 1976). Indeed, the traditional corporate paradigm has long been focused on shareholders (Chang, 2016).

A more recent position regarding business responsibility was promoted by Nader and Galbraith in 1973. According to the authors, companies should operate for the public interest and consider the big power they can exercise for the good of society at large (Holmes, 1976).

CSR can also assume a strategic perspective regarding the interests of stakeholders inside a company. Stakeholders can be defined as “*any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives*” (Freeman, McVea, 2001, pag.2). The first author who stressed attention regarding the importance of stakeholders was Freeman who is considered the “father of stakeholder theory” (Laplume et al., 2008). In his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1994), Freeman points out the groups that are the stakeholders of a corporation and suggests methods by which management can give the right consideration to the interests of those groups (Freeman – Stakeholder Management’s Blog, n.d.). A definition of strategic CSR concerning stakeholder theory was given in 2015 by David Chandler. In his book, *Corporate Social Responsibility- A Strategic Perspective* (2015), he defines a view of the corporation and its role in society that assumes that while firms have a responsibility (founded in self-interest) to accommodate, whenever possible, the needs and concerns of their broad range of stakeholders, each stakeholder group has an obligation (founded in self-preservation and social progress) to shape a firm's behavior through expectations that it conveys via meaningful action. This theory holds that each firm's stakeholders have an equal, if not greater, responsibility to hold the firm accountable for its actions.

This stakeholder responsibility is equal, if not more important, to the responsibility of the firm. Strategic CSR can be also defined as “*any ‘responsible’ activity that allows a firm to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, regardless of motive*” (McWilliams, Siegel, 2010, p. 1480). The primary objective of strategic CSR is to gain an advantage in the ethical market by focusing mainly on consumers (Kuokkanen, Sun, William, 2020).

In contrast to strategic CSR, which is more micro-focused and supports social or

environmental causes that coincide with its plan, there is the theory of transformative CSR. Transformative CSR is more concerned with understanding the relationships between society and ecosystems, the macro-level system, and adjusting its approach to maximize the benefits for this wider ecological and human system. It involves dismantling organizational divisions and figuring out how to integrate across the whole company.

In short, it is about Creating Integrated Value, which assists a business in integrating value chain links (using life-cycle thinking), management systems (using best governance practices), and materiality analysis to respond to stakeholder expectations (Visser, 2015). Thomas M. Jones (1980) was the first author to consider CSR as a decision-making process that influences corporate behavior. Jones' (1980) contribution opened the path to a new area of debate around CSR which concentrated more on its operationalization than on the theory itself. This led to the creation of new frameworks, models, and methods aimed at evaluating CSR from an operational perspective (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, Davídsdóttir, 2019).

One of the most relevant frameworks elaborated on the definition of CSR comes from Archie Carroll in 1991. He developed a pyramid model with four layers that represented the different aspects of CSR. The four layers represent Economic, Legal, Ethical, and Philanthropic Responsibilities. Economic Responsibilities, regarding a company's principal duty to earn profits and deliver returns to shareholders, are at the base of the pyramid. This covers tasks like creating products and services, increasing sales, and cutting expenses to maintain the company's financial stability. Legal Responsibilities represent the company's obligations to serve local, national, and international rules and regulations, and make up the next layer of the pyramid.

Companies have to make sure that their activities are carried out in compliance with the relevant laws and regulations by operating within the legal framework that governs their operations. Beyond merely following the law, Ethical Responsibilities entail operating a business in a way that is morally and ethically based. These obligations come before legal obligations. Ethical Responsibilities include things like truthfulness, equity, moral rectitude, and human rights observance. It is required of businesses to act morally when interacting with suppliers, consumers, workers, and other stakeholders.

Philanthropic responsibilities, or voluntary efforts undertaken by businesses to improve the well-being of society, are at the summit of the pyramid. This encompasses gifts to

charities, projects for community development, conservation of the environment, and other corporate contributions. Though they are neither required by law nor necessary for a company to survive, philanthropic endeavors are seen as optional, but they do show a firm's dedication to societal improvement beyond its primary financial goals.

Carroll's CSR Pyramid highlights that companies have a variety of duties to perform in addition to pursuing profits and offers a framework to understand the numerous features of Corporate Social Responsibility. Companies can aim to be socially responsible and fulfill their corporate goals while simultaneously addressing economic, legal, ethical, and charitable concerns. Businesses nowadays must adapt to a significant shift in society by producing long-term value for a variety of stakeholders, including suppliers, consumers, and employees, as well as giving equal weight to social, environmental, and economic development (Pfajfar, Shoham, Malecka, Zalaznik, 2022).

Regarding the impact that CSR has on consumers' choices and perceptions, empirical results demonstrate that CSR through CCI (Consumer–Company Identification) has an indirect positive influence on consumer purchase intention and recommended intention (Deng, Xu, 2015). C–C congruence is a fundamental part that connects CSR strategies and consumer evaluation of a company and its products. Research has supported its role in developing loyalty and purchase intention (Kuokkanen, Sun, 2018).

However, in academia, the research on the impact of CSR on consumers has not reached the same conclusions. Academics such as Barone et al. (2000) and Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) find that consumers would pay more for products that are produced by corporations that have carried out social responsibilities actions and on the contrary pay less for products produced by corporations that are not socially responsible (Deng, Xu, 2015). Creyer and Ross (1996) believe that people will punish unethical behavior but not necessarily return for ethical behavior. Peloza and Shang (2011) review the literature on the relationship between CSR and consumer responses, concluding that the relationship between them is not simply directive, which means that some variables mediate (Deng, Xu, 2015). There is a strong interconnection between the impact CSR has on consumers and companies. Consumers are a stakeholder group that companies may emphasize, and companies can require consumers to share some responsibilities to promote comprehensive responsibility (Kuokkanen, Sun, 2018). Vitell (2015) called this *Consumer Social Responsibility* (CnSR). Different stakeholder groups may interest consumers: suppliers,

customers, local communities, and the natural environment.

To create a positive impact on consumer perceptions a firm must align its business strategy with the CSR strategy and be coherent in the use of the latest. Otherwise, signs of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) could lead consumers to discomfort.

On the contrary, CSR fits with business, creates a perception of comfort for consumers, and avoids dissonance (Kuokkanen, Sun, 2018). Moreover, CSR can provide relational, reputational, and financial benefits for the companies that implement it (Fombrun, Gardberg, Barnett, 2000). One possible reason is that consumers' awareness of companies' CSR engagement influences their attitudes about firms and indirectly affects their performance (Barone et al., 2007; Chabowski et al., 2011; Schramm-Klein et al., 2016). Moreover, consumers are prepared to pay premium prices for products from socially responsible companies (Ellen et al., 2006; Sen et al., 2006). Following van Marrewijk (2003), CSR can be defined as "*company activities demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concerns*" (Pfajfar, Shoham, Małecka, Zalaznik, 2022). This sentence demonstrates how companies passed from being restricted to the creation of economic profits in the 1950s and 1960s to the belief that business exists to serve society as highlighted in the 1970s and later on in the 2010s.

The purpose of firms' reality has changed, corporations should generate shared value (Agudelo et al., 2019, p. 16). For example, Prudential's CSR program in 2019 claims that "*We invested in creating long-term partnerships that strengthen communities, help tackle social challenges, and solve complex problems*" (Barnett et al., 2020, p. 938).

Environmental sustainability-focused CSR projects can aid in reducing pollution, mitigating climate change, preserving natural resources, and safeguarding biodiversity. Businesses can contribute to a cleaner and healthier environment for current and future generations by implementing waste reduction measures, investing in renewable energy, or adopting eco-friendly practices. For example, since 2020, the Bosch Group with its more than 400 locations worldwide has been climate neutral. In addition, they've committed to reducing upstream/downstream supply chain emissions by 15% by 2030 (Colson, 2023).

All things considered above, CSR can be a potent tool that helps companies generate long-term benefits for themselves and share value for society. Businesses may help create a more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive society by incorporating social, environmental, and ethical factors into their company plans and operations.

Nowadays CSR is becoming a more and more fundamental aspect for employees, clients, and investors. The role of CSR has changed and is now seen as a way to address complex social and environmental causes. Companies are expected to help create solutions for global issues including social injustice, inequality, and climate change. While the original focus of CSR was on social responsibility (e.g., paying fair wages to employees, community-based programs), a recent development is the inclusion of environmental responsibility (e.g., the reduction of CO2 emissions) (Flammer, 2013).

The "*environmental CSR*" is becoming an integral part of CSR and plays an increasingly important role in the corporate landscape (Flammer, 2013). According to Yale University, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) is fast becoming an essential metric employed by investors to assess potential investments (The Yale Ledger, 2022). They want to invest in enterprises that are responsible for society and the environment. In the same way, consumers want to see companies caring for society and the environment or, at least, diminishing their impact.

According to a survey conducted by Aflac, an American insurance company, 70% of Americans believe that companies should make efforts to make the world a better place while 77% of consumers will be more inclined to purchase from companies with responsible policies. More importantly, 25% of consumers and 22% of investors have zero tolerance for companies with problematic ethics and practices.

According to Harvard Business School, 93% of employees surveyed believe that businesses must demonstrate responsible leadership. Close to 70% of employees said that they will not work for a company that does not have a strong purpose and 60% would even accept a lower salary for a position at a purpose-driven company (The Yale Ledger, 2022). Consequently, businesses are under pressure from society at large to reconsider their methods and enhance their interactions with both the environment and people.

The growing number of companies demanding to become certified B Corps is clear evidence of this expanding trend. Companies that want to be certified as B Corps must adhere to strict guidelines and make sure they keep up their efforts for several years.

US entrepreneurs created the B Corp label in 2006. Recently, this label, which first gained influence in the US, has begun to gain influence in Europe (Thierry, Siegel, 2020). Companies that are B Corp certified use this label as a means to signify their commitment in creating a positive impact on their environment, whether social, societal, or

environmental (Grimes, Gehman, and Cao, 2018).

The certification process includes measurement and evaluation along multiple dimensions, and B Lab (the organization behind the B Corp brand) provides feedback to help social enterprises improve their prosocial impact (Sharma, Beveridge, and Haigh, 2018).

The future of CSR will also have to take into consideration the latest technological advances and their role as part of new business frameworks and strategies (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, Davídsdóttir, 2019). For example, the new digitalization systems and devices, as well as the embodiment of Artificial Intelligence into the business environment are relevant challenges for the CSR debate.

1.4 Brand activism, brand advocacy and CSR

Nowadays, it seems that implementing CSR initiatives is not enough. The latter is really characterised as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for market competition (Cammarota, D'Arco, Marino, Resciniti, 2023). As a result, companies began putting more of an emphasis on public relations rather than CSR (Bhagwat et al., 2020).

A public stance is increasingly demanded and expected by stakeholders, especially customers, employees, and investors, who assign a primary role to brands (Maks-Solomon, Drewry, 2020). A new consumer-brand connection is emerging in which customers assess businesses based on their social and political positions (Bhagwat et al., 2020).

This phenomenon is sometimes referred to in literature as Brand Activism, but because researchers have just recently started to look into it, the concept is still ambiguous and dispersed. Brand Activism (BA) is the way businesses answer this urgent appeal to go beyond profit maximization that results from using social issues as a marketing advertising tool (Edelman, 2019).

According to Sarkar and Kotler's definition (2018), BA is the collection of corporate initiatives aimed at advancing, impeding, or directing social, political, economic, and/or environmental inertia or changes with the goal of advancing societal improvement. BA could be seen as the result of business actions that advance social good beyond that which is required by law, which is meant to be a public display of support or opposition to socio political problems (Kang, Germann, Grewal, 2016).

The primary cause of the increased prevalence of BA in recent years is the rising expectations of customers, who, in contrast to previous years, are starting to inquire not

just about what is being offered but also about who is selling it (Nguyen, Le, Truong, Vu, 2022). Global research by Accenture (2019) indicates that 62% of consumers want businesses to speak out on social issues and if they don't, they may pay a price for that.

In addition, 53% of consumers are likely to complain if they are dissatisfied with the brand's words or actions, and 47% will switch to other brands and 17% may never come back. For this reason, some brands have started to pay more attention to meeting consumers' expectations, strengthening the consumer-brand relationships through alignment with their values (Confetto, Palazzo, Ferri, Normando, 2023).

Given that a brand's worth is mostly derived from relationships with consumers, which are based on consumer engagement, a brand's support of activist causes can aid businesses in becoming more relevant to consumers and fortifying their relationship with them (Key, Keel, Czaplewski, Olson, 2021). When a customer connects with a company, that connection could motivate them to spread the word about the business and act as an ambassador. The degree to which a person actively supports and promotes one brand, while disregarding those of other businesses in the same product category, is known as brand advocacy (Šerić, Gil-Saura, 2019).

Historically, advocacy has been defined as the act of publicly representing an individual, organisation, or idea with the goal of influencing specific audiences to view the individual, the organisation, or the idea favourably or accept the point of view (Edgett, 2002).

In the context of marketing, the idea of brand advocacy has been thoroughly investigated. Regarding CSR and the relationships between consumers and brands, research demonstrates that brand advocacy is impacted by CSR efforts (Xie, Bagozzi, Grønhaug, 2019). If customers think that a firm is doing good work with its CSR, they are more likely to act philanthropically and participate in advocacy behaviour (Aljarah, Alrawashdeh, 2020). Engaging in socially responsible activities can help a company build its brand, improve connections with stakeholders, and influence stakeholders' advocacy behaviours.

Consumers usually give companies credit for their CSR involvement in the form of positive word-of-mouth, loyalty, and trust (Vo, Xiao, Ho, 2017). On the other hand, unethical actions may damage a business's reputation (Mishra, Ghosh, Sharma, 2021). Businesses heavily advertise their CSR initiatives in an effort to improve their brand image and reputation (Fatma, Rahman, 2017). However, to prevent customers from suspecting that the company is engaging in untrue CSR activities, these acts must be genuine and

consistent with the company's core values, this is referred to as "CSR authenticity" (Khan, Fatma, 2023).

The evaluation of something as sincere, truthful, and real is known as authenticity (Moulard, Raggio, Folse, 2020). According to some research, CSR authenticity can help build a moral, durable, and reliable reputation, which in turn can increase perceived brand advocacy (Khan, Fatma, 2023). Moreover, effective CSR messaging can increase customer awareness. Kemp et al. (2012) found out that when customers are emotionally connected with and support a brand, CSR leads to brand advocacy in the healthcare sector.

According to recent studies, relationship marketing strategies are connecting CSR and consumer ethics and moral identity more and more (Vitell et al., 2016).

In order to improve their reputation and brand image, businesses frequently go above and beyond to promote their CSR. According to some authors, both cognitive and emotional processes are critical for understanding the impact of firm CSR initiatives on consumer brand advocacy towards corporate brands (Xie, Bagozzi, Grønhaug, 2019).

One of the first academics to emphasise the importance of considering both cognitive and emotional processes was Dedeke (2015), who asserted that both processes had a significant role in shaping moral judgement. Malhotra and Agarwal (2017) claim that the impact of companies' ethical relationship marketing techniques on consumer moral identity, self-brand overlap, moral emotions, moral judgement, and ultimately customer-brand relationships is an area of consumer-brand interactions that has received little investigation.

CHAPTER 2 SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

1.1 Background and significance of sustainability in the health sector

Sustainability used to be mostly associated with environmental degradation (Marimuthu, Paulose, 2016). Nowadays, the importance of sustainability has changed and is now connected to other factors including healthcare of the workers, patients, and community well-being. Healthcare is the fastest-growing service in both developed and developing countries (Dey, Hariharan, Brookes, 2006).

One of the most important and contentious issues in the national and local arenas is public healthcare, which has a significant impact on economies across the countries (Buffoli et al.,

2013). In addition, the costs of the present healthcare system are rising, according to recent statistics. Given the size and influence of the healthcare sector relative to a nation's GDP (Gross Domestic Product), the potential contribution of sustainable achievement to environmental sustainability is clear (Gelderman et al., 2017; Chiarini et al., 2017). The health sector can be defined as: "*All organizations, institutions, and resources that are devoted to producing health actions*" (World Health Organization, 2000). Any effort whose main goal is to promote health is considered a health action, regardless of whether it is an inter-sectoral project, public health service, or personal health care (World Health Organization, 2000).

The main objective of the healthcare industry is to offer services to people that help to improve the quality and health of their daily lives (Faezipour, Ferreira, 2013). However, healthcare needs to be sustainable because it faces increasing demands and diminishing resources (Faezipour, Ferreira, 2013). The health sector, whose goal is to protect and promote health, has a significant role to play in resolving the climate issue because it is the largest health threat of the twenty-first century. Despite this, compared to other industries, the healthcare sector was comparatively slow to identify its role in the climate problem, although awareness and acknowledgment of the issue are growing (Decaudaveine, Charter, 2024).

According to research conducted by Health Care Without Harm in 2019, the health industry would be the world's fifth-largest emitter of gas emissions if it were a country. The research demonstrates that the healthcare's climate footprint is equivalent to 4.4% of global net emissions (*Health Care Climate Footprint Report*, 2019). Moreover, the top three emitters are the United States, China, and collectively the countries of the European Union. Over the last ten years, healthcare organizations around the world started to analyze the ecological impacts of their apparatus and operations. Many of these organizations have recognized the role they play in several major environmental and public health challenges and have begun to reduce their impacts (Vatovec, Senior, Bell, 2013). From this awareness, a definition of a sustainable healthcare system started to emerge.

Sustainable healthcare delivers healthcare that does not damage the environment (either now or in the future), is economical, and has a positive social impact. According to the definition of the World Health Organization, a sustainable health system is: "*a health*

system that improves, maintains or restores health, while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and leveraging opportunities to restore and improve it, to the benefit of the health and well-being of current and future generations”(World Health Organization, 2017). The Alliance for Natural Health, defines a sustainable healthcare system as *“A complex system of interacting approaches to the restoration, management, and optimization of human health that has an ecological base, that is environmentally, economically and socially viable indefinitely, that functions harmoniously both with the human body and the non-human environment, and which does not result in unfair or disproportionate impacts on any significant contributory element of the healthcare system”* (Alliance for Natural Health, 2006).

Despite a substantial body of literature proposing ways to improve sustainability in healthcare systems, there is little agreement on effective techniques for putting the suggested sustainability measures into practice (Mosca, van der Wees, Mot, Wammes, Jeurissen, 2017). Indeed, although healthcare systems work to safeguard and enhance public health, they may also have negative consequences on the environment and the well-being of people (Buffoli, et al., 2013). Sustainability is therefore a key goal in the quickly evolving healthcare landscape (Molero et al., 2021).

Healthcare businesses across the globe seek increased quality, decreased operational expenses, and boosted consumer confidence. For this reason, maintaining a sustainable approach to customer and employee care also becomes essential to establishing fundamental capabilities (Marimuthu, Paulose, 2016). According to Tudor (2007), if sustainability were implemented, healthcare operations would improve financially and in terms of quality. Healthcare professionals have also come to understand the value of providing patients with high-quality care, and they work to balance patient requirements and resource availability as part of sustainable practices (Faezipour, Ferreira, 2013). In addition, environmental changes like pollution, global warming, and the depletion of natural resources (including water and energy) ultimately push the healthcare sector to figure out how to operate using sustainability-based principles. Many healthcare companies have now created an e-health or health information strategy, using advanced technology to treat and service patients well (Coiera, Hovenga, 2007). Information technology is crucial for guiding health organizations toward sustainability since it may

boost productivity, develop sustainable tools, and rethink products as services (integrating systems and lifestyle, for example, by reminding people when vaccinations are needed) (Coiera, Hovenga, 2007). Within this context, corporate sustainability is becoming more and more important in a lot of healthcare companies. Furthermore, many nations are now forced to concentrate on sustainability as a way to save operational costs due to the rising cost of healthcare (Hudson, Vissing, 2013). The healthcare sector needs to transition to a more sustainable model and implement the principles of the circular economy: *“The results show that a mixture of factors, internal and external to the system, combined with a slow-moving organizational structure, give reasons to believe that the current regulatory system for pharmaceuticals is not sustainable in the future”*(National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Minds Open, 2014). This means finding new and sustainable ways to use resources and bringing about the decarbonization of the industry.

According to Robert Metzke, SVP and Global Head of Sustainability at Philips, *“The healthcare sector in itself is emitting more CO₂ than airlines and shipping lines and we often don't talk about it”*. Moreover, Metzke states *“We cannot talk about the future of healthcare without talking about sustainable healthcare systems. Healthcare is a key priority for everybody, our healthcare systems need to become sustainable”* (Daunton, 2023). The "environmental nonmaleficence" principle requires that healthcare maintain sustainable practices and avoid harm to both humans and the natural world (Jameton, Pierce, 2001). Physicians and other healthcare professionals feel the pressure of global environmental concerns and the consequent need to wonder how this commitment to care for patients will place long-term difficulties on the sustainability of healthcare (Jameton, Pierce, 2001). In particular, the pharmaceutical industry has attracted the attention of both the academic world and practitioners due to its importance and its relationship with health, which is fundamental to human existence (Milanesi et al., 2020).

The pharmaceutical sector has unique features such as a wide range of stakeholders involved, demand and supply have distinct characteristics, governments play a key role and there is a high level of regulation (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). Moreover, as a consequence of a population in which the average age is getting older and older over the years and improved healthcare systems, there is a demand for a pharmaceutical industry that is more conscious of the necessity to pursue sustainable practices while delivering a

broader range of pharmaceutical products (Milanesi et al., 2020). Indeed, because the pharmaceutical industry's products and services focus on health and human well-being, companies in this sector may be more concerned about issues of sustainability (Veleva et al., 2003). The landscape of sustainability as one measure of corporate impact on the pharmaceutical industry is changing as the landscape of the sector activity and results change (Deutsch, 2007). Corporate reporting has also begun a shift from a focus on sustainability alone to a focus on CSR (Schneider et al., 2010). As CSR emerges, perhaps the pharmaceuticals will begin to measure and report their impact on society and the earth (Schneider et al., 2010). In the shift toward CSR, the pharmaceutical sector is using sustainability as one tool to assist in protecting the corporate reputation and brand value (Deutsch, 2007). However, carbon emissions in this sector are even higher than those of the automotive sector. Belkhir and Elmeligi (2019) demonstrate that through an empirical analysis of 15 of the leading pharmaceutical companies in the United States of America (see Figure 4 below).

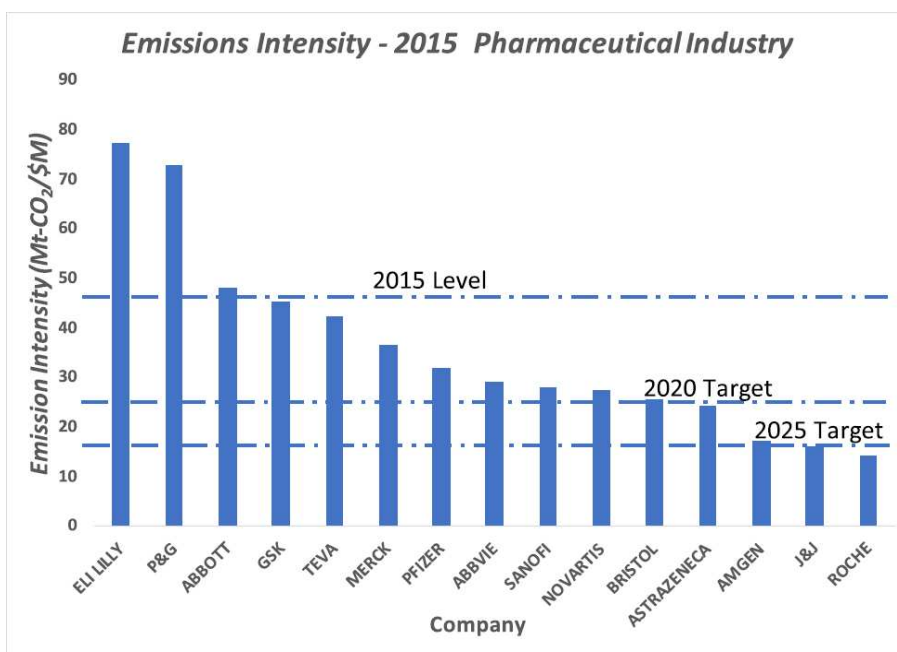


Figure 4: Emission intensities for the Group of 15 companies in 2015, shown with the emission intensity of the pharmaceutical sector in 2015, along with the projected levels in 2020 and 2025 that need to be achieved by the sector as a whole to achieve the US target reductions of 25% by 2025 compared to 2005 levels.

(Source: ET Index Research.)

1.2 *One Health* and *Planetary Health* frameworks and definitions

Historically, the Environmental Kuznets Curve was the dominant theoretical model explaining the relationship between economic development and environmental degradation (Dinda, 2004). This model assumed that as incomes rise, as well as environmental degradation, however, once incomes grew sufficiently, people would advocate for greater environmental regulation and therefore limit further damage to the environment (Dinda, 2004). A sustainable health system aims to reframe medical practices and the health sector to address human health in the context of *Planetary Health*, in which earth systems and humans are reciprocal.

The term *Planetary Health* was first introduced in 2014 in the medical journal *The Lancet*. However, the groundwork for the field was laid by a diverse range of disciplines, including population health, medicine, and environmental sciences, as well as movements such as the continuous process of surveillance. Against this background, the question is whether the current regulatory system is towards ecology and human rights (Mogo, 2023). *Planetary Health* is defined as “*the achievement of the highest attainable standard of health, well-being, and equity worldwide through judicious attention to human systems—political, economic, and social—that shape the future of humanity and the Earth’s natural systems that define the safe environmental limits within which humanity can flourish*” (Whitmee et al., pag. 1978, 2015). In 2012, Raworth proposed a systems framework for guiding sustainable human development called the “doughnut model”. In the doughnut model proposed by Raworth (2017), policies promoting human development must safely and justly operate within the space contained by the outer and inner circles that define the doughnut. Planetary health and the doughnut framework allow us to connect these impacts of economic development on natural systems health and human health in far more complex ways than Kuznets curve.

The idea that human, animal, and environmental health are all interconnected is known as *One Health*, and it has been becoming popular in recent years (Kazim, 2023). The concept of *One Health* is a fundamental aspect of life on Earth that has been frequently found and further investigated throughout the history of humanity (Evans, Leighton, 2014). Human health and welfare have always been closely related to those of animals and the earth they both share. *One Health's* core principles, which are human-animal interconnectedness and

reverence for the land and water, are deeply rooted in the cultures and spiritual beliefs of numerous ancient civilizations (Evans, Leighton, 2014). For example, Hippocrates (460–367 BCE), wrote certain texts that already contained the idea of *One Health*. He noted the connection between environmental cleanliness and public health in "*On Airs, Waters, and Places*". Additionally, he is credited for creating the principle "*Primum Non-Nocere*", which states "*above all, do no harm*", and to which all medical professionals agree (Wear, 2008). Later in 1772, Claude Bourgelat founded the first veterinary faculty in Lyons, France, establishing formal education in animal health and its relationship to human health throughout Europe (Laberge, 1992). Schwabe wrote the handbook *Veterinary Medicine and Human Health* in 1964, which advocated for the management of veterinary and public health issues to integrate the fields of environmental, human, and animal health (Schwabe, 1969). He discussed the significance of "*one medicine*" in his work.

The Wildlife Conservation Society coined the term "*One World One Health*" in 2004 to refer to the comprehensive strategy that aims to safeguard public health by better understanding the connections between the health of ecosystems, people, and animals (Laprise, 2023). At the "*One Planet, One Health, One Future*" conference in 2019, 200 participants from 47 countries' governments, universities, policymakers, and civil society organizations agreed on the 10 Berlin Principles, which called on people to act at all levels to address global health issues (Gruetzmacher et al. 2021).

According to Kazim (2023), the idea of *One Health* was first proposed in the early 20th century when it was realized that infectious diseases may spread from animals to people. But the concept of *One Health* wasn't created until the 1990s, which is when it was formally defined. Nowadays, the *One Health* concept is particularly unique because it emphasizes ecological processes and environmental aspects as major determinants of both human and animal health (Evans, Leighton, 2014).

In reaction to the rapidly increasing environmental changes over the past 100 years and the concurrently exponential rise of the world's population, the *One Health* concepts of today represent a reconceptualization of health management (Evans, Leighton, 2014).

There is no single, internationally agreed-upon definition of *One Health*, although several have been suggested (Mackenzie, Jeggo, 2019). The US Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention and the One Health Commission define it as: “*a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach—working at the local, regional, national, and global levels—with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment*”(One Health Basics | One Health | CDC, n.d.). Another definition was elaborated by the One Health Global Network: “*One Health recognizes that the health of humans, animals, and ecosystems are interconnected. It involves applying a coordinated, collaborative, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to address potential or existing risks that originate at the animal-human-ecosystems interface*” (What Is One Health? - One Health Global Network, n.d.). An easier description of these two definitions is given by the One Health Institute of the University of California at Davis: “*One Health is an approach to ensure the well-being of people, animals, and the environment through collaborative problem solving—locally, nationally, and globally*” (One Health | UC Davis, 2024).

Connected to the concept of *One Health* there is the *Circular Health* concept, proposed by Ilaria Capua, Senior Fellow of Global Health at Johns Hopkins University, in his book titled “Le parole della salute circolare” (2019). The book was published by Aboca Edizioni, a publishing house run by the company Aboca. As the author explains, everything is interconnected, and the crisis (environmental, health, water, demographic, economic) converges: therefore the approach to health must include other disciplines, economics, finance, communication, engineering, transport, equity social and gender, everything. Circular health means dealing with signs of imbalance, with the urgency that the situation requires (Zucconi, 2023).

1.3 European Regulations in the Health Sector

Among the most powerful stakeholders involved in the pharmaceutical sector are governments (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). Governments are really the main clients of pharmaceutical products in the majority of nations, and they have the responsibility of creating, overseeing, and enforcing laws pertaining to the pharmaceutical sector (West, Dobson, 2011). National governments need to ensure that public health policy goals—such as patient access to safe and effective medications and high-quality care—are met. In addition, they need to control healthcare costs and support healthcare initiatives that don't hinder the growth of the pharmaceutical industry (Ecorys, 2009, I).

The high level of regulation seeks to accomplish a variety of goals, including fostering innovation, maintaining high standards for public health, controlling public spending, and ensuring a healthy marketplace (Ecorys, 2009, II). As part of its commitment to updating the EU's CSR strategy, the European Commission started working with businesses and other interested parties to create codes of good practices for self- and co-regulation exercises, such as sector codes of conduct on pertinent societal issues. This process should increase the efficacy of CSR (European Commission, 2011).

Moreover, the European Commission (2013) states that one instrument in the battle against corruption in the health industry is self-regulation. While the EU is in charge of trade, competition, and competitiveness, the EU member states are primarily in charge of regulating healthcare, including pharmaceutical financing and reimbursement practices. Because of this, regulations vary based on a number of factors, including market features, culture, and embedded healthcare systems, as well as State norms and decision-making structures (Ecorys, 2009, II).

The European pharmaceutical industry is an important contributor to the economy of the EU. It manages vast amounts of resources, combines high levels of innovation and production value, and holds a great deal of responsibility due to its impact on disease prevention and human health (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The European Union has emerged as the world's leading manufacturer and exporter of pharmaceuticals since 2002 (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). Two years later, Germany was the top producer, followed by Italy, the UK, and France (Epfia, 2013). In 2009, the biggest producers were France, Germany, Italy, and the UK (Ecorys, 2009 Vol I). The pharmaceutical sector in Europe spent over EUR 29,000 million on R&D in 2011 (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). Pharmacies and biotechnology account for 17.7% of global company R&D spending, according to the 2012 EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The EU government spends around half of its budget on healthcare (European Commission, Eurostat, 2020). With over 15,000 hospitals across the EU (Health Care Without Harm, EUKI Anaesthetic Gases Project, 2018), the healthcare sector in Europe has a significant impact on the supply and demand for healthcare products and can promote the transition to safer, more innovative, and commercially more viable products and services.

In an effort to foster cooperation between interested member states and other pertinent

stakeholders, the European Commission has launched a volunteer-based Ethics Platform (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The primary goal of the platform is to put forth some fundamental guidelines for ethics and transparency in the pharmaceutical industry (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) is the umbrella organization for the European pharmaceutical sector (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The national industry associations of 31 European nations that produce pharmaceuticals make up its membership (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The main goals of EFPIA are to support the technological and economic advancement of the European pharmaceutical industry, aid in the global release of health-improving medications, and foster competition among pharmaceutical firms (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015).

The Institute of Medicine and Berwick and Hackbarth identified six domains of healthcare waste: inadequate care delivery, inadequate care coordination, overtreatment or low-value care, inadequate pricing, fraud and abuse, and administrative complexity (Chevalier, Léviton, Garel, 2009). These domains should be the primary focus of governments and the healthcare industry. Hospitals and healthcare stakeholders are the focus of several initiatives already undertaken by the European Commission, such as "Towards Zero Carbon Hospitals with Renewable Energy Systems" (European Commission, 2020). The objective is to lower CO₂ emissions from Europe's 15,000 hospitals by giving them the necessary resources to become more sustainable (Molero et al., 2021). The European system for the production, authorization, and marketing of medicinal products is strongly regulated. In 2014 the RIVM, the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, published a report analyzing the sustainability of the European Union (EU) regulatory system for pharmaceuticals. According to RIVM, an authorized pharmaceutical product is subject to an ongoing surveillance process while it is on the market. In light of this, the subject of whether the current medical product regulatory framework will remain viable in the future has gained attention. The RIVM examined possible weaknesses in the current regulatory framework, concentrating on the issues of cost, availability of (new) pharmaceuticals, safety and efficacy, and innovation (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Minds Open, 2014). The EU is currently in the proposal stage for a new EcoDesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), which will introduce a digital product passport for regulated products and enhance transparency in the supply chain. The

primary objective of the Digital Product Passport (DPP) is to facilitate sustainable production, promote digital transformation, reveal new business prospects, assist consumers in making sustainable choices, and aid authorities in ensuring legal compliance. These fundamental goals emphasize the importance of the DPP in driving circularity and fostering a sustainable business ecosystem (Zakrisson, 2023). Environmental sustainability has gained attention from politicians in France, especially in the healthcare industry (Decaudaveine, Charter, 2024). The roadmap for an ecological healthcare system outlines aims for a carbon-neutral healthcare sector by 2050 as part of the government's initiative to make France a "Green Nation" (*France Nation Verte: Ecological Plan - Climate Change Laws of the World*, 2022). In the document "Planification écologique du système de santé" (Ecological planning of the health system), the French government lists the following goals: accelerate and promote the transition to sustainable purchasing, particularly for healthcare products, by 2030 and train on and raise awareness of the climate crisis, healthcare's impact on the environment, eco-design of care, and medico-social issues among all healthcare professionals and stakeholders. In addition, the *Haute Autorité de Santé* (HAS), the French National Health Authority, discussed in its most recent roadmap how to incorporate environmental factors into HTAs, however, work is still in progress. According to the assessment of Shift Project experts, the level of emissions from the health system corresponds to the equivalent of 50 million tonnes of CO₂, or more than 8% of France's carbon footprint (Haute Autorité de santé, 2023). Moreover, the findings of the Shift Project show that medicines and medical devices represent 54% of health system emissions (Haute Autorité de santé, 2023).

1.4 Healthcare Industry and CSR

Global corporations have a wide range of interests, therefore their obligation extends beyond only following the law. For example, a company focused on sustainable development is conscious of its social responsibility to various stakeholders (Salvioni and Bosetti, 2006). In this case, voluntary guidelines that stress the values and guiding principles as the basis of CSR (formally codified in a code of ethics or conduct) can aid in the spread of an ethical culture within the organization.

CSR in the healthcare industry refers to the moral duty hospitals and other institutions have to address issues including providing high-quality healthcare to all those who are eligible

for it (Brandão, Rego, Duarte, Nunes, 2012). Healthcare firms face a number of issues these days, including technological advancements, economic and financial crises, sustainability, and societal pressures. Furthermore, they must use the few resources that have been allotted to them to deliver patient care that is both high-quality and affordable (Fottler, 2002).

For these reasons, CSR has become an important topic (Tomaselli et al, 2015). Therefore, companies in the health sector should focus especially on CSR and how visible and approachable it is for its stakeholders. As a result, CSR is essential for modern businesses (Tomaselli et al, 2016). The potential for CSR to enhance the credibility, image, and reputation of healthcare businesses is another reason why it is so important (Tomaselli et al, 2016). In the context of health care, social sustainability refers to the system's capacity to enhance community well-being and quality of life (Mehra, Sharma, 2021). It might be challenging to uphold social responsibility because the main objective of most healthcare systems may conflict with the needs of certain stakeholders (Brandão, Rego, Duarte, Nunes, 2012). However, many hospitals, both for-profit and non-profit, have implemented the concept of social responsibility through clear management decision-making, which can lead to some challenges in the management of healthcare companies (Brandão, Rego, Duarte, Nunes, 2012). The necessity of hospitals taking on active social duty is emphasized by the existence of a right to health care as a positive social right. It suggests that organizations support the common good by using their resources or expertise. Examples of this type of social responsibility include the adoption of moral behavior guidelines, affirmative action programs in the workplace that reverse discrimination against minority groups, and proactive advocacy for the environment. According to the notion of social responsibility, a healthcare organization must also strive to earn the respect of its clients, staff, and the general public in addition to investing its money in high-quality services, affordable costs, and cutting-edge technology (Boatright, 2003).

There is a rising belief that providing healthcare should be guided by universal ethical standards that respect every human being and their fundamental rights, just like other facets of social life (Pratley, 1995). For example, the public's access to pharmaceutical products demonstrates the high level of social responsibility that pharmaceutical corporations uphold (Dănescu, Popa, 2020). According to Brandao (2013), the idea of

social responsibility suggests that healthcare providers, other stakeholders, and the larger social matrix all have a common understanding of what the common good is. As many healthcare practices are already socially responsible, Russo (2016) contends that comprehending CSR in the industry necessitates realizing that *"moving from a series of socially responsible behaviors to a socially responsible organization entails a more consolidated awareness of the health sector's mission and the needs of its participants"* (p. 323). Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the social behaviors necessary for a healthcare organization to operate and the actions that support the structural development and upkeep of CSR (Janssen et al., 2022). This means that CSR in the healthcare industry should not only consider its effects on society and its members on a social and ethical level but should do so first (Russo, 2016). According to Russo (2016), *"shared governance, personal and professional responsibility, a holistic approach in medicine and cooperation for the corporate good as well as for the health of the patient"* (p. 332) are the main strategies used by CSR in the healthcare industry to meet the needs of its important stakeholders both now and in the future. The findings of research by Demir and Min (2019) demonstrate that pharmaceutical businesses prioritize important CSR procedures. However, a study of a number of well-known European pharmaceutical businesses reveals that they report on important CSR topics with a lack of transparency (*Branding the Cure Report*, 2014). The execution of CSR initiatives is influenced by comparable considerations for health firms.

In particular, these businesses usually participate in CSR due to their significant impact on the health and welfare of society (Liopa, Geitona, Latsou, 2023). Health technology firms aim to adopt CSR efforts to cultivate a positive corporate image, enhance their relationships with stakeholders, draw and retain talent, and gain a competitive advantage over competitors (Alexander, 2009). In addition, they make public their financial, social, and environmental policies and hazards in an effort to increase openness and public perception. Both are crucial parts of a more comprehensive strategy for implementing CSR (Min, Desmoulins-Lebeault, Esposito, 2017).

Various stakeholders within the healthcare company have varying relations and implications on CSR. These stakeholders include patients, physicians, administrative staff, nurses, suppliers, and policymakers (Matysiewicz, Sztangret, 2017). They have distinct

effects on healthcare organizations that are not the same as those on business organizations (Matysiewicz, Sztangret, 2017). The multiplicity of roles and autonomies among physicians, patients, and society is the foundation of CSR, which therefore becomes a tool to promote this relationship between the stakeholders (Matysiewicz, Sztangret, 2017). CSR protects the rights of the patient against potential doctor abuse, the doctor from improper external instructions (society), and the general welfare of legislators who would rather not pay for expensive medical operations in order to maintain their financial stability (Matysiewicz, Sztangret, 2017). The common good of the healthcare provider should take priority over the competing interests of managers, doctors, patients, shareholders, and other stakeholders (Russo, 2016). In the healthcare sector, the establishment of more ecologically friendly healthcare has gained popularity (Mehra, Sharma, 2021). But unlike many other industries, the healthcare sector adheres to environmental sustainability (Marimuthu et al., 2016). The adoption of circular practices, integrated healthcare facility design, less medical waste and more effective waste management, and sustainable procurement have all resulted from this approach (Mehra, Sharma, 2021).

In particular, circular practices in healthcare include the recycling, repair, re-use, remanufacturing, and refurbishment of medical products (Jameton et al., 2002; Vogt et al., 2014), resource efficiency using electric vehicles for transportation to reduce carbon emissions associated with this industry (Mackenzie, 2011), and preservation of natural resources, including water conservation (McGain et al., 2014; Marimuthu et al., 2016).

As a result, it has prompted efforts to prolong the life of products (Ertz et al., 2019), treat products like services (Giusti et al., 2020; Marimuthu et al., 2016), share products (Elabed et al., 2019), and reduce waste, including wasteful product design. Furthermore, evidence-based design elements such as LEED Healthcare, the Green Guide for Healthcare, and other resources are available to provide direction on minimizing and completely deleting adverse environmental effects from healthcare facilities (Stevanovic et al., 2017). Some of the main evaluation systems regarding healthcare structures sustainability are BREEAM and ITACA about environmental sustainability and the Joint Commission International Standard, which regards an economical and medical perspective (Buffoli et al., 2013). Political and governing organizations are crucial to the advancement of CSR (West, 2012).

According to Moon and Vogel (2008), there are three domains where regulatory bodies have inadvertently or intentionally created CSR drivers (West, 2012). First, voluntary CSR efforts are frequently less adopted in areas where the government takes on a more important role. Conversely, CSR is seen as a counterbalance when the government takes a more reclusive position (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). The development of both national and international CSR activities is encouraged by inadequate or nonexistent rules (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008). The process of deregulation in certain countries and the inability to regulate in others are the results of globalization. One way to balance the power of multinational corporations and government regulation of them could be through the creation of a global civil regulation (Moon and Vogel, 2008, p. 309). Third, while international organizations like the UN, World Bank, and OECD as well as some governments promote CSR policies in various ways (such as through the promotion of voluntary codes or social reporting regulations), there isn't much concrete legislation that strictly mandates and enforces CSR engagement (West, 2012). Due to the voluntary nature of CSR, the extent of each company's CSR efforts is determined by them separately. They can be categorized based on whether their targets are the environment, the workforce, or the local community (Volodina et al., 2009). Pharmaceutical businesses currently exhibit social responsibility in the following ways: donations and sponsorships to provide humanitarian relief to developing countries, research promotion through the creation of private research foundations and institutes and award grants and scholarships to aspiring scientists, the implementation of eco-friendly technologies, and forming committees for voluntary political action to promote the human rights (Volodina et al., 2009).

Thus far, it seems that the pharmaceutical industry lacks a cohesive strategy for corporate social responsibility (CSR) due to a lack of consensus among pertinent stakeholders and the industry regarding the extent of socially responsible actions implemented by pharmaceutical businesses (Esteban, 2008; Weyzig, 2004). Due to the absence of a unified CSR concept, individual companies' CSR initiatives are sometimes sporadic and uneven, making it more difficult to assess the industry's overall CSR impact on the environment and community (Esteban, 2008).

1.5 *Emerging challenges in achieving sustainability in the health sector*

Increasing demands, rising costs for medication and medical technology, rising patient expectations, and scarce resources are some of the issues facing healthcare systems that have an impact on their sustainability (Coiera, Hovenga, 2007). Understanding the complexity of healthcare systems is another difficulty (Fiksel, 2006).

Pharmaceutical companies are being accounted as more responsible towards sustainability (Bravo, et al., 2013). As the industry experiences increasing pressure from regulation markets for the demand for more sustainable products, the need to become more sustainable increases and the responsibility of its activities should be expanded from the production site to the whole product chain (Jorgensen, 2008; Linton et al., 2007). Pharmaceutical companies are using the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as a way to implement and measure their level of sustainability (Bravo, et al., 2013). The GRI guidelines have been developed and revised through a process involving various stakeholders (GRI, 2011). There is a need for the industry to consider how climate disasters will impact the ability to deliver high-quality surgical care. Surgical programs should adopt sustainability practices in delivering care by reusing equipment when possible, advocating for *Planetary Health* policies, supporting research on sustainable surgical practices, and advocating for reducing emissions in the healthcare system (Roa et al., 2020). Firms in the pharmaceutical industry are now expected to be responsible for economic, societal, and environmental needs (Bravo, et al., 2013).

Pharmaceutical CSR strategy may be impacted by the unique characteristics of this type of company. CSR holds significant importance in the pharmaceutical industry because of the numerous ethical dilemmas it faces and the susceptibility of its products to human health (Salvioni, Gennari, Astori, 2015). This calls for reducing the impact of the healthcare industry through decarbonization. (Silverman, 2019; Veidis et al., 2019). Physicians should include *Planetary Health* principles as part of their education. Furthermore, public health education should include courses that prepare trainees for addressing climate change (Silverman, 2019). Allied health professionals should pledge their commitment to *Planetary Health*, analogous to pledges of the Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians (Wabnitz et al., 2020).

The Sustainability Report from 2009 for the pharmaceutical industry revealed that companies in the pharmaceutical sector place varying importance on sustainability reporting transparency and that environmental performance was the most underreported section (Bravo, et al., 2013). One research revealed that by 2025, the overall pharma sector would need to decrease its emissions impact by about 59% from 2015 levels to adhere to the commitments defined by the Paris Agreement (Belkhir, 2019). In light of this, reducing the impact on the environment is one of the main challenges that the healthcare industry should face to achieve sustainability. During the Paris Climate Conference, in 2015, The Health Care Climate Challenge was introduced as an effort of Health Care Without Harm. Its goal is to inspire healthcare facilities worldwide to take the lead in mitigating climate change. Another challenge in achieving sustainability in the healthcare sector is paying more attention to advancing innovation (Doyle et al., 2013; McGain, Naylor, 2014). Moreover, there is an emerging need to maintain the practice of sustainability in healthcare and raise staff engagement, and awareness of sustainability issues. In order to do this, programs including training, inspiration, and the creation of educational materials or resources must be expanded consistently (Dunphy, 2014).

According to McGain and Naylor (2014), for enhancing sustainability in hospitals social and psychological research among healthcare professionals should be conducted to better understand the customs and mindset that are to be improved. To help the healthcare organization meet the problems of sustainability, there should be more collaboration across other disciplines, including non-medical specialists like engineers and architects (Ramirez, West, Costell, 2013). Also, healthcare organizations have to increase their cooperation with pertinent associations and non-governmental groups (McGain, Naylor, 2014).

The United States Green Building Council, the Green Guide for Healthcare, Practice Green Health, the American Society for Healthcare Engineering, the Global Health and Safety Initiative, and Healthcare Without Harm are some of the top resources in the global healthcare sustainability movement. According to Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) hospitals, health centers, and public health workers are first responders to the health effects of climate change.

CHAPTER 3 COMPETITIVENESS

3.1 *Competitiveness definitions and measures*

Nowadays the markets have become extremely dynamic, particularly as a result of the revolutionary advancements in information and communication technology (Thoben et al., 2001). As a result, businesses must constantly adapt their production methods and product offerings (Thoben et al., 2001).

Numerous developments in the fields of economics, politics, society, and technology have created a complicated and risky business environment. Businesses that are able to adapt to changing market conditions, customer demands, and technological advancements first have a competitive advantage. For this reason, businesses must quickly change their goods and services to avoid falling short of customer demands (Thoben et al., 2001).

Competitiveness derives from the Latin word, *competer*, which means involvement in business conflict for markets (Bhawsar, Chattopadhyay, 2015).

However, it is thanks to Porter's book, *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, that the concept of competition and competitiveness was endorsed. Recognizing that an organization seeks competitive advantage and that competitive advantage is essential to corporate performance is a crucial first step in any study of "competition" (Porter, 1985). According to the author, there are only two ways to get a competitive advantage once this has been acknowledged: low cost or differentiation (Porter, 1985).

Moreover, he states that competitiveness is the culmination of all the institutions, policies, and elements that affect a nation's or an organization's degree of productivity (Porter, 2008). Adam Torok defines the concept of competitiveness at the micro level as the ability to secure a place in market competition and the capacity to deal with rival businesses, as well as national economies from a macroeconomic perspective (Torok, 1996).

Historically, the roots of competitiveness study lie in the international economic theories of Adam Smith and his followers (Bhawsar, Chattopadhyay, 2015). Competitiveness is an all-round concept whose comprehension derives from economics, management, history, politics, and culture (Waheeduzzaman, 1996). It has been described as a complex, multidimensional, and relative concept, the relevance of which changes with time and context (Chaudhuri, Ray, 1997; Flanagan et al., 2007). The concept has two dimensions, micro, and macro (Siggel, 2007; Waheeduzzaman, 2011). The macro dimension deals with competition among nations, while the micro dimension primarily involves competition

among the firms within a nation (Bhawsar, Chattopadhyay, 2015). Competitiveness can be defined as the ability, method, or exceptional resource that enables a business to provide clients with greater value and benefits than its competitors can (Baniata et al., 2014). In general terms, competitiveness is divided in relation to three levels: organizational competitiveness (firm-level competitiveness), sector/industry competitiveness, and country/nation competitiveness (Stefan, Popa, Dobrin, 2016). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Secretariat proposes the following definition of competitiveness: *"the capacity of organizations, industries, regions, and states in competition to provide in a sustainable way, a high efficiency of recovery factors of production and a higher income from labor exploitation"* (OECD, 1996, p. 20).

The concept of a nation's or country's competitiveness is commonly used, and occasionally abused, but it still lacks a broadly acknowledged definition (Stefan, Popa, Dobrin, 2016).

If the definition of a competitive corporation or organization is well established, the same cannot be said for the concept of a competitive nation or country (Stefan, Popa, Dobrin, 2016). The ability of a nation or country to manufacture and distribute goods and services that can compete on the global market while also raising the real income and living standards of its population is referred to as its competitiveness (Blaine, 1993). Furthermore, the competitiveness of a nation or country depends on its industry and, eventually, on the competitiveness of its firms (Banwet, Momaya, Shee, 2003). According to Porter (1998), firms compete in global markets, not countries.

The idea of competitiveness is more easily defined and commonly acknowledged at the firm level, where it primarily refers to an organization's capacity to expand, generate profit, and compete in the free market (Stefan, Popa, Dobrin, 2016).

A company's competitive advantage can be defined as its ability to outperform rivals by leveraging its core competencies to create greater values, such as low prices or distinctive advantages that meet customer needs and increase customer satisfaction (Baniata et al., 2014). According to Chikan (2008), a firm's competitiveness is determined by its capacity to profitably accomplish its dual aim of satisfying customers' needs and operating sustainably. Realizing this potential will require providing products and services that consumers find more valuable than those of rival companies.

Competitiveness, according to Cetindamar and Kilitcioglu (2013), is a capability that must be realized in a firm's daily operations. A corporation is considered competitive if it

consistently produces goods and services that are competitive in the market, in addition to having a long-term aggregate profit rate that stays within rivals in the same industry and a growing or stable market share (Szentes, 2005). Firm-level competitiveness is also defined as the firm's ability to design and produce market products superior to those offered by competitors, considering the price and non-price qualities (D'Cruz, 1992).

McFetridge (1995) defined a competitive industry as one that consists of enterprises that are either internationally or interregionally competitive. He states that, if a business is reliably profitable in an open market, it is competitive both nationally and internationally. According to Momaya (1998), industry competitiveness is the degree to which an industry gratifies the needs of customers, with a peculiar combination of products/services, price, quality and innovation, and the needs of various stakeholders, like providing a safe workplace to workers. Recent tendencies have been pushing organizations to rethink their role in society and making organizations reflect that profit may not be the only and foremost important business performance criteria (Morioka et al., 2017).

In the short term, a company's competitiveness derives from the price/performance attributes of current products (Prahalad, Hamel, 1990). However, in the long term, the real competitive advantage relies on the management's ability to secure corporatwide technologies and production skills into competencies that empower individual businesses to adapt quickly to changing opportunities (Prahalad, Hamel, 1990). Competitiveness can also be defined as the ability to conquer new markets, outplay other actors in the market, attract investment, and grow (Falciola et al., 2020).

At the firm level, the concept of competitiveness is more clearly definable and generally widely accepted, relying mainly on the company's ability to compete in the free market, grow, and be profitable (Stefan et al., 2016). In this sense, firm-level competitiveness could be defined as *"its ability to provide in relation to its competitors, products of value (quality) higher costs equal or of equal value at lower costs or a combination of these advantages and to achieve long-term economic performance"* (Nicolescu et al., 2011, p. 141).

Competitiveness is considered in the specialized literature as one of the essential dimensions of business performance (Popa, Stefan, 2015). According to Porter (1985), the attractiveness of the industry determines business performance, the business's competitive

position within the industry, and its ability to maintain its competitive advantage, which is the crucial driver of business success or failure.

Among the definitions specifically focused on corporate competitiveness, Erzsebet Czako's is by far the most widely accepted. It states that corporate competitiveness is the corporation's capacity to offer products and services to customers on a long-term basis while adhering to social responsibility standards and that consumers are willing to pay for these goods and services rather than those of competitors, provided that the business makes a profit (Nagy, Darabos, Labas, 2016). To be competitive, the company must be able to adapt to changes in the external environment, internally inside the organization, and in the marketplace by consistently outperforming its rivals and satisfying market competition requirements (Czako, 2005).

The competitiveness of firms, industries, countries, etc., can be seen at a specific time (statically), through aspects such as market share, profitability, and position in international trade, or in the long term (dynamically) (Ioncić et al., 2008). A similar approach, explored by Radu-Gherase (2009) analyzes competitiveness from a dynamic perspective, stating that competitiveness is both a result and a cause. In other words, the future level of an organization's competitiveness depends (among other factors) on its current level (Stefan et al., 2016). Using a cost-leadership approach is another way to achieve a competitive advantage (Walley, 1998). When a business uses this approach, it will produce goods that are comparable to those of its rivals, but with less costs and more efficiency than other businesses (Walley, 1998). As opposed to competing with one another, which is the Total Quality Management (TQM) method supported by Deming (1995), the various departments within the value chain and the various enterprises within the value network will work together (Deming, 1995). Since there can only be one cost leader in any given market, any other businesses gain a competitive advantage by taking a different approach (Walley, 1998). In this case, a business will be attempting to maintain costs that are comparable to those of the competitors while offering a product that customers will value more and be prepared to pay more for (Walley, 1998).

Businesses can compete based on both prices and goods, but their main source of advantage consists of using one strategy over the other (Walley, 1998). Although a lot of TQM focuses on obtaining a competitive advantage through cost leadership, Zairi (1996) refers to differentiated advantage when he spoke about market-driven competition. Once

this is acknowledged, the idea of the "extended product" can be used to explain differential advantage in further detail (Walley, 1998). Such product expansions may be viewed as a way to increase competitiveness by setting one's products apart from those of rivals (Thoben et al., 2001).

Similar to the agreement on conceptualization, the evaluation of competitiveness faces challenges due to the inclusion of multiple disciplines and techniques (Bhawsar, Chattopadhyay, 2015). The measurement method differs depending on the analytical unit, such as the company, sector, or nation (Bhawsar, Chattopadhyay, 2015). As broad indices of competitiveness, researchers have commonly chosen productivity, product quality, trade balance, technological indicators, market share, profitability, growth rate, etc. (Bhawsar, Chattopadhyay, 2015).

The "3P Framework" developed by Buckley, Christopher, and Prescott (1988), divides this variety of metrics into three categories: competitive performance, competitive potential, and competitive process. Only the competitiveness measurement can be completed with the inclusion of the 3P measures. McFetridge (1995) recommended per capita income, export mix, and current account balance as measurement indicators at the national level. The recommended metrics at the industry level are productivity growth and total factor productivity. Market share, cost, profitability, and productivity are the metrics recommended at the company level.

A valuable resource for comparing national competitiveness is the GCR. Since 1979, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has published GCR. The global competitiveness index (GCI), which measures the macroeconomic and microeconomic underpinnings of national competitiveness, is used in the report. Twelve pillars make up the three primary sub-indices of the GCI. The World Competitiveness Yearbook (WCY), published by the International Institute of Management Development (IMD), rates countries according to a number of parameters including 20 sub-components divided into four primary factors.

In the conventional method of measuring competitiveness, which relies mainly on financial analysis, the primary indicators are ratio indicators (profitability, liquidity, indebtedness, productivity, etc.), difference indicators (profit increase/decrease, turnover increase/decrease, etc.), and absolute indicators (net profit/loss per period, turnover amount, etc.) (Wagner, 2009). The current trend is the application of a wide range of indicators from different areas inside the organization that fall under the purview of both

qualitative and quantitative approaches (used for verbal assessment measurement and numerical scale measurement, respectively), or a combination of both methods (Hakes, 2007). Businesses that collaborate through strategic partnerships may be able to measure their competitive power more accurately, which would strengthen their position in the market (Kožená, Chládek, 2012). One method used to evaluate businesses is benchmarking. Benchmarking is a technique for measuring competitive advantage based on comparing certain indicators of the real company with the best local and international businesses in the industry (Camp, 1989). It is a systematic and rigorous procedure that is essential to the survival of the organization in the face of global competition (Watson, 2008). In contrast to other approaches, this one also makes use of non-financial indicators. It is possible to further categorize benchmarking into two types: internal, which compares the various components of the organization, and external, which compares the business to its competitors (Kožená, Chládek, 2012). Another indicator method for evaluating the performance of a company is the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan, Norton, 2005). It evaluates the competitiveness of the company, as it stands today, while also establishing a link between the strategic management of the business and the individual indicators. Thus, the primary objective of BSC is to translate the company's plans and aspirations into specific objectives, tasks, activities, and measurements (Quadrat-Ullah, 2009). Although it is not a widely used technique in businesses, measuring competitiveness is a crucial component of how a company will evolve in the future as a tool for strategic management, monitoring, and motivation to maximize the organization's real performance (Kožená, Chládek, 2012).

3.2 Relationship between competitiveness and sustainability

Nowadays, pursuing sustainability has become a crucial strategic goal for organizations seeking resilience and long-term success (Muharman, 2024). Given the growing interest in the environment, the environmental advantage is one of the more significant and contemporary competitive advantages (Baniata et al., 2014).

The relationship between a financially successful firm and its environmental practices has been a prominent subject in corporate environmental management literature (Schaltegger, Synnestvedt, 2002). While some authors think that protecting the environment mostly increases a company's expenses, others think that doing so typically pays off and boosts the bottom line of the business (Schaltegger, Synnestvedt, 2002). Studies indicate that a

company's financial performance and reputation can both benefit from sustainable business practices (Wilner, Meehan III, 2015).

Initial discussions on the contribution of sustainability to competitive advantage were conducted by Hart (1995), under the proposal of a natural-resource-based view of the firm (Morioka et al., 2017). In more recent years, it has become evident the relevance of the application of sustainability principles is a differentiator when building investment portfolios since stakeholders think that a company's accredited CSR policies improve its economic and financial performance (Lopez et al., 2007). In his paper titled "*Explaining the Business Case for Sustainability*", Winston (2018) argues that running a sustainable firm is both a moral decision and an economic one. A company's ability to compete in the international market can be enhanced by sustainable business practices (Winston, 2018). Winston points out the fact that unsustainable organizations may also incur costs and risks. For example, they are more susceptible to operational risks like supply chain interruptions and natural disasters. Moreover, unsustainable organizations are more vulnerable to reputational risk, which can result in a decline in sales and customer confidence (Winston, 2018). There is also a greater risk associated with regulation: government regulation can drive up expenses and drive down earnings for unsustainable enterprises (Winston, 2018). Furthermore, corporate management ensures long-term profitability for shareholders by using both sustainability and economic factors (Michael, Gross, 2004). However, according to Schaltegger and Synnestvedt (2002), no intrinsic or created law inevitably connects economic and environmental performance. The relationship is only applicable in certain situations where environmental and health standards offer businesses significant financial incentives to continuously improve their business operations (Ameer, Othman, 2012).

The correlation between environmental effort and profit may vary based on several factors such as a nation's legal framework, cultural context, consumer behavior, industry or company size under analysis, duration of the study, etc. (Schaltegger, Synnestvedt, 2002). In general terms, businesses that adopt sustainable strategies should have a competitive advantage over businesses that don't (Adam, Zutshi, 2004).

Parallel to other drivers (compliance, economic performance, social and environmental responsibility, innovation, risk and quality management, and reputation), competitive advantage has been shown as an important motivation for more integration of corporate

sustainability into business (Engert et al., 2016). At the enterprise level, it is seen that corporate sustainability is highly correlated with competition, innovation, and marketing components. In this respect, any company can gain a competitive advantage over corporate sustainability (Öznel Köse, Aytakin, 2012). Businesses that prioritize environmental conservation and moral company conduct are seen by consumers as excellent corporate citizens who may set themselves apart from competitors (Cacioppe et al. 2007). However, stakeholder influence capability and situational contingencies imply that the relationship between social responsibility and corporate financial performance differs from company to company (Barnett, 2007).

Customers' demands for sustainable development have led to the consideration of the results of the economic and social activities as well as the financial activities of the enterprises. Consequently, the social and environmental activities of businesses' benefits, products, and purchasing processes began to affect the preferences of customers (Senal, Fire, 2012). Suppose an enterprise gives equal importance to environmental (planet) social (people) and financial (profit) elements in its operations. In that case, it can create more value in the long term than an enterprise that focuses only on profit (Çalışkan, 2012). It may face less risk and obtain competitive advantages (Çalışkan, 2012). Min et al. (2017) investigate the connection between pharmaceutical business performance and corporate social responsibility. Their findings demonstrate that the adoption of responsible social conduct positively impacts pharmaceutical businesses' profitability.

Kotler (2011) asserts that companies that prioritize corporate sustainability can enhance their performance by adopting a long-term approach to their operations, instead of a short-term one. Bekmezci (2014) shares the same idea. The author states that CS guarantees the company's continued existence by controlling risks that endanger the entity's existence. Moreover, the benefits of CS include strengthening an organization's brand position, boosting sales and market share, improving the reputation and impact of the tripartite organization, drawing in qualified talent, enhancing the capacity to motivate and retain staff, cutting operating expenses, and enabling investors to make informed investment decisions in opposition to the company (Lee, 2006). Better investor relations are typically found in sustainable firms and companies (Muharman, 2024). When discussing their sustainability strategies and performance with investors, sustainable organizations typically communicate more openly and transparently (Lenox & Meehan III,

2014). As a result, investors view a company more favorably when it employs sustainable business methods (Muharman, 2024). For this reason, a company's competitiveness in the global market can be increased with the support of sustainable business (Muharman, 2024). However, integrating sustainability is a planned strategy for differentiation and competitive advantage for businesses such as Kopi Kenangan, rather than just a reaction to investor expectations (Lenox, Meehan III, 2014).

According to some authors, sustainability has become the “*sweet spot*” for business, “*the place where the pursuit of profit blends seamlessly with the pursuit of the common good*”(Savitz, Weber, 2007). The best companies around the world are trying to identify and move into their “*sweet spots*” (Savitz, Weber, 2007). As the authors explain, every action you take in business has two components: an impact on profits and an impact on the world. This can be represented by a four-celled matrix with two axes, which represent profitability and social benefit (see Figure 8).

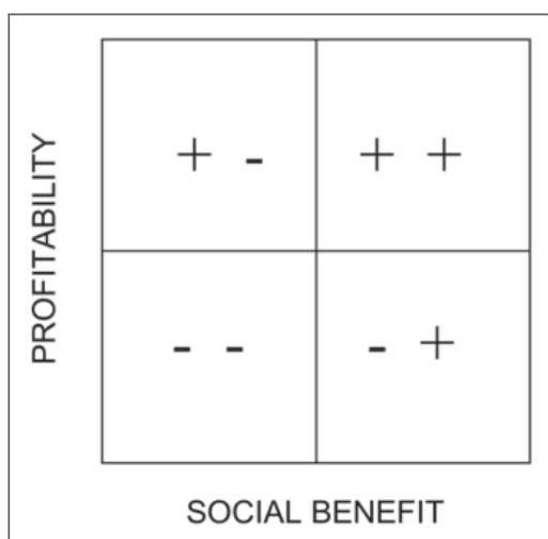


Figure 8: The Sustainability Map (Savitz, Weber, 2007).

According to John Prestbo, president of Dow Jones Indexes, “*Companies pursuing growth in the triple-bottom-line tend to display superior stock market performance with favorable risk-return profiles*”. Moreover, “*sustainability becomes a proxy for enlightened and disciplined management—which just happens to be the most important factor that investors do and should consider in deciding where to buy a stock*”(PwC, 2003).

The concept of sustainable competitiveness is another way to address competitiveness from a time perspective (Stefan et al., 2016). At the country level, it is defined as “*the set*

of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country while ensuring the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 54). While transposing to the business level, corporate sustainability could accordingly mean *“meeting the needs of a firm’s direct and indirect stakeholders without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well”* (Dyllick, Hockerts, 2002, p. 131). Recent research suggests a significant and positive relationship between sustainability innovations and a firm’s competitiveness (Bacinello et al., 2019; Qiu et al., 2019; Suat and San, 2019). For example, it has been found that countries and businesses are showing an increasing tendency toward sustainability (Dey et al., 2019; Eurostat, 2020), and it is argued that this is happening because sustainability is associated with higher profitability, efficiency, and competitiveness (Cherrafi et al., 2018).

Previous studies have suggested that stricter sustainability regulations can positively affect a firm’s competitiveness and performance by driving innovation activities in firms (Porter, 1995; Zefeng et al., 2018). Hence, this understanding might give an idea of how regulations can stimulate sustainability innovation in firms (Hojnik, Ruzzier, 2016) and how the private sector can contribute to solving sustainability challenges.

Among businesses, a growing number of voluntary initiatives and companies have begun developing and using environmental sustainability indicators (Veleva, Ellenbecker, 2000). Such indicators might be used to improve a company’s public image and thus create a competitive advantage through product/service differentiation (Porter, 1998).

For this reason, sustainability has become one of the main focus of companies’ strategic agendas. Veronika Tarnovskaya (2023) conducted an analysis of the literature concerning the impact of corporate sustainability on financial performance and found that 78% of studies in top-tier journals showed a positive relationship between corporate sustainability and a firm’s financial performance (Alshehhi et al., 2018). In particular, in one of the studies, it is stated that the impact of sustainability practices on firm performance is growing over time and is expected to grow further in the coming years (Govindan et al., 2020, p. 13).

Following this line of thinking, it is easy to demonstrate that sustainability initiatives may provide a critical source of competitive advantage for diverse types of firms (Tarnovskaya, 2023). According to Wagner (2011), environmental and economic performance are affected when environmental and sustainable factors are integrated with general

management. This concept is comparable to that of Pivato et al. (2008), who highlighted the significance of mediating variables in the investigation of the relationship between corporate performance and social responsibility. The same idea is shared by Bansal (2005) who stated that successful CS implementation by businesses has three significant outcomes: environmental integrity, social equality, and economic welfare. According to Roberts and Dowling (2002), businesses that have a positive reputation in their communities are more likely to be able to maintain their superior performance over other businesses since such businesses find it much harder to replicate their intangible advantages.

Four areas of benefits: cost reduction, competitive advantage, legitimacy, reputation development, and win-win outcomes are identified by Kurucz et al. (2008) for businesses that participate in CSR initiatives. Ameer and Othman (2012) evaluated and assigned a sustainability rating of 0 to 4 to the top 100 worldwide corporations with sustainability practices at the international level, each of these findings offers solid proof that corporate sustainability policies and financial performance are correlated. Taking into account all that has been said so far, business sustainable competitiveness may be summed up as a company's ability to utilize all of its resources in a way that maximizes productivity, profitability, effectiveness, and sustainability over the long term (Herciu, Ogrean, 2018).

3.3 Competitiveness in Healthcare

Competitiveness, as well as competition, are universal concepts for any market of goods and services (Rivers, Glover, 2008). The term competition in the healthcare sector is a state and process of relations between the subjects of production and consumption of medical services within the framework of a specific civilized form of competition between medical workers (doctors) to achieve the highest degree of satisfaction with the patient's target needs (Safonov, et al., 2022). Competitiveness refers to the ability of a healthcare institution to compete in the healthcare market in terms of such parameters as the professional level of medical staff, quality of medical services, cost of medical services, features of service provision, ability to meet the requirements of consumers (patients) to the maximum extent possible, ability to introduce medical and technological innovations in the process of service provision (Safonov, et al., 2022). The quality of medical services, based on the high professional level of medical staff and the ability of the healthcare

institution to introduce medical and technological innovations in the process of their provision is the main competitive advantage of any healthcare institution.

At the same time, the healthcare sector imposes specific restrictions on forming a competitive environment in the medical services market (Rivers, Glover, 2008). According to Rivers and Glover (2008), the competitive environment in the healthcare sector is a complex economic category characterized by the interaction of the state, public and private healthcare institutions, and external and internal factors that influence the conditions of economic activity in the healthcare sector, which determine the appropriate level of economic competition and the importance of individual business entities on the overall market situation. It may be noted that, unlike goods, the competitiveness of which is easy to assess directly, the competitiveness of medical services is usually assessed indirectly (Mark, Coffey, 2001; Miller, 1996).

Competitiveness management of a healthcare institution is considered one of the aspects of management aimed at the formation, development, and implementation of competitive advantages and ensuring the viability of a healthcare institution as a subject of economic competition (Safonov et al., 2022). It requires a set of measures aimed at systematic improvement of 4P marketing. Managing the competitiveness of a healthcare institution requires the following actions:

1. Diagnosis of the external competitive environment.
2. Assessment of the level of competitiveness of the healthcare institution in the market.
3. Development of a clear competitiveness management strategy based on the results of diagnostics and assessment.
4. Implementation of the formed strategy.
5. Continuous monitoring of the strategy implementation.
6. Improving the competitive advantages of the health care institution.

Thus, the creation and improvement of competitive advantages of health care institutions (which is the task of competitiveness management), the formation and development of competitiveness of medical services and medical labor is an effective tool for qualitative changes in industrial relations in health care itself and, most importantly, an absolutely necessary condition for the formation of modern marketing relations between the consumer (patient) and the doctor (Safonov et al., 2022).

Novartis, a large multinational pharmaceutical company, has been at the forefront of international efforts to develop and use environmental sustainability indicators through its participation in the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the Global Environmental Management Initiative (GEMI), and a benchmarking study of several pharmaceutical companies (Novartis, 2002).

3.4 Competition, cooptation and cooperation

Interactions between two or more individuals working toward a common objective with interdependent outcomes are called cooperation and competition (Pepitone, 1985). When there is a goal that not every participant can attain equally, competitive conduct arises, instead cooperative behaviour arises when everyone shares a goal and, ideally, amplifies the efforts of all participating (Deutsch, 2006). According to Deutsch's (1949) social psychological theory of cooperation and competition, people's beliefs about how their goals are related to one another play a major role in determining which action is more likely to be encouraged.

In order to gain a competitive advantage, businesses that have historically been rivals are collaborating more and more (Rademakers, McKnight, 1998). As a result, competition comes from the idea of negative goal correlation, according to which one can only succeed if all others fail to do so (Katz et al., 2021). On the other hand, cooperation arises from the conviction that there is a positive goal correlation, meaning that a goal can only be accomplished if all individuals reach it (Johnson et al., 1981).

Cooperation provides several benefits, such as increased value, safe relationships, enhanced output and quality, easier access to raw materials, and lower risk (Meyer, 1995). Although the ultimate goal of these partnerships is to increase profits for the participating companies, it's crucial to remember that better goods and services for customers should also result from them (Walley, 2007). As businesses compete for market share by pursuing mutually incompatible viewpoints, competition arises (Porter, 1980).

When two companies have mutually incompatible views, they are unable to attain the same kind of superiority in the same domain, such as going after an exclusive contract with the same client (Gnyawali, Charleton, 2018). Resources and technology can also be the subject of competition (Markman, Buchholtz, 2009). On the other hand, incompatible market positions form the foundation of competition theory since resources are created to satisfy

market demands and comprehension of market-oriented behaviors is essential to competition (Chen, 1996). The frequency and competitiveness of corporate activities and responses are indicators of competition (Young, Smith, Grimm, 2000). Firms that possess considerable differences in markets, resources, and technology are likely to engage in intense competition aimed at enhancing or maintaining their competitive advantage (Gnyawali, Charleton, 2018). In general, businesses are more likely to take notice of rivals who have similar interests to them (Chen, 1996) or who have similar markets (Gimeno et al., 1999).

According to Gulati, cooperation is defined as "*voluntary arrangements between firms involving exchange, sharing, or co-development of products, technologies, or services*" (Gulati, 1998, p. 293). Businesses collaborate for a number of reasons, including access to complementary expertise, learning, and new technical development (Gnyawali, 2011). Large-scale, resource-intensive, and risky projects can be pursued through cooperation that may not be possible for a single firm to undertake on its own (Singh, 1998). Partnerships enable the transfer of skills and resources between businesses (Gnyawali, Madhavan, 2001).

According to Hunt (1995), businesses using relationship-marketing techniques must "cooperate to compete" meaning that often, in order to be a successful competitor, a business must also be a successful cooperator. Jorde and Teece (1990) offer additional evidence for this notion, indicating that this occurrence implies significant consequences for public policy and corporate strategy. Nonetheless, observers have seen that businesses nowadays frequently collaborate and compete at the same time. Song (2003) views the coexistence of competition and collaboration as a new choice in a firm's strategic portfolio and a crucial component of creating successful supply chains in the early twenty-first century (Wheatley, 1998). For this reason, coopetition is viewed by many as a novel approach to business (Kotzab, Teller, 2003). It's unknown where the word "coopetition" came from (Walley, 2007). Although Ray Noorda, the founder, and CEO of Novell, is suggested to have first used the term in the 1980s (Dowling et al., 1996; Bagshaw, Bagshaw, 2001; Dagnino, Padula, 2002). However, Albert (1999) asserts that the phrase was coined by him, in 1991.

Coopetition can be defined as the combination of competition and cooperation among businesses with the aim of creating value (Gnyawali, Madhavan, 2006). The nature of the

connection (or alliance) is particularly complex when undertaking competition and collaboration simultaneously, requiring enterprises to take on opposing responsibilities (Walley, 2007). According to Bengtsson and Kock cooperation is “*a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors, regardless of whether they are involved in horizontal or vertical relationships, simultaneously involved in cooperative and competitive interactions*” (Bengtsson, Kock, 2014, p. 180). It is a hybrid activity built upon what is typically thought of as the opposed and incompatible pursuits of competition and collaboration (Walley, 2007). A similar perspective is shared by Crick (2023) who states that cooperation is the interaction of cooperation and competition, where businesses work with their competitors in the same industry to achieve mutually beneficial goals, like acquiring new resources and coming up with better strategies to increase consumer satisfaction. Cooperation as an interdependence, is the state in which two or more businesses collaborate and compete with one another at the same time (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996). In many high-tech industries today, including electronics, automotive, and medical devices, this kind of business connection is widespread (Chen, 2020).

According to the literature, it allows businesses to pursue disruptive innovations and advanced technological development (Gnyawali, Park, 2011; Ansari, Garud, & Kumaraswamy, 2016). However, there is a lack of information in the literature about the manifestation and effects of simultaneous competition and cooperation (Gnyawali, Charleton, 2018). While rival businesses always try to outperform one another, cooperating businesses are driven to collaborate to generate greater benefits (Gnyawali, Charleton, 2018). Indeed, as competition rises, suspicion is likely to grow, but collaboration also becomes more important when there is a greater possibility for gain (Gnyawali, Charleton, 2018).

Cooperative partnerships vary greatly from one another due to their unique characteristics. The competitive/cooperative balance present in cooperative interactions serves as the foundation for Bengtsson and Kock's (2000) typology of cooperative partnerships. According to the authors, a relationship is considered "cooperative dominant" when there is more cooperation than competition, "equal relationship" when there is roughly equal cooperation and competition, and "competitive dominant" when there is more competition than cooperation (Bengtsson, Kock's, 2000). Reciprocal cooperation is the phrase used to describe the relationship between two businesses that are on an equal footing and

cooperate (Walley, 2007). Nonetheless, the firms are engaged in "multipolar competition" when other network actors, such as a parent company, determine cooperation and rivalry between two enterprises (Walley, 2007).

A third type of competitive relationship typology was proposed by Dowling et al. (1996). According to the authors, when a connection between two firms is classified as "buyer-seller in direct competition," there is direct competition between the firms in one or more areas of their business activities. Simultaneously, one or both companies may also provide a product (or service) to the other. If a connection between two firms is classified as "buyer-seller in indirect competition," one or both of the firms may provide the other with a good or service, but they are also engaged in rivalry unrelated to their goods and services (Walley, 2007). Lawsuits could be one way that this competition is expressed.

Coopetition, however, is viewed by others as merely another term for collusion. For example, Anon (1996) refers to coopetition as "market-rigging", an interventionist move to safeguard businesses' interests amid trying times for trading conditions.

According to Walley (2007) collusion is a possibility in cooperative and competitive partnerships, but the impact on the customer must be taken into consideration when determining if collusion has occurred. In this case, collusion occurs when businesses collaborate, even when it's as part of a cooperative partnership, and the customer suffers as a result (Walley, 2007). Nonetheless, a partnership is not collusive when businesses collaborate for the benefit of the customer as well as for their own mutual gain (Walley, 2007). If companies have historically sought to gain a competitive advantage, nowadays they should build a *coopetitive advantage*, according to Dagnino and Padula (2002), because of the rise of coopetition. Crick states that "*it is of interest to explore whether the competitive business environment has any impact on the performance outcomes of coopetition activities*" (Crick, 2019, p. 523).

According to a growing body of research, these B2B marketing networks are expected to boost business performance because of underlying mechanisms like cost savings, increased productivity and efficiency, and customer value generation (Crick et al., 2024).

Chapter 4 Descriptive Narrative

The Internship was carried out in Aboca for the duration of four months from the 23rd of July 2023 until the 24th of November 2023 and the schedule was from 9 am to 17 pm.

The Internship was done in Paris, France. The office of Aboca in Paris was divided into a marketing department, a back office, and a commercial. I was placed in the marketing department composed of two other colleagues, one who specialized in trade marketing and the other was Hermione N'Gabié, the Country Marketing Specialist, who was my supervisor during the internship and the person to whom I reported. However, we worked every day remotely with the headquarters located in Italy.

My main tasks included market analysis and tracking brand performances, supporting the definition of communication and advertising strategies, responsible for merchandising projects inside the pharmacies. I will now detail each of them further.

- **Market analysis and track of brand performance**

At the beginning of my Internship, my Supervisor taught me how to use IQVIA. IQVIA is an AI healthcare online tool that allows the company to have all the sell-out data of both Aboca and its competitors for each market, brand, and product divided per month. I was responsible for downloading this data, putting it together, and analyzing it through Excel (see an example in Figure 1).

RANKING MAT 2023	LABO	PRODUIT	MAT Oct 2023 VCA PPUB (Euros)	MAT OCTOBER 2023 var% VCA PPUB €	Market Share 2023	PM MAT OCTOBER 2023
1	PF MEDIC.	OMACOR	2.646.425 €	-11,0%	12,3%	20,8 €
2	PERRIGO	ARTERIN	2.009.615 €	-42,8%	9,4%	35,0 €
3	ABOCA	METARECOD	1.413.434 €	2157,9%	6,6%	27,6 €
4	SANTE VERTE	LEVU.RIZ RGE SANTE	1.155.563 €	-1,8%	5,4%	21,3 €
5	ARKOPHARMA	OMEGA3 ARKOG	1.005.623 €	21,5%	4,7%	11,3 €
6	GROUPE PILEJE	OMEGABIANE	931.186 €	15,4%	4,3%	24,7 €
7	ARKOPHARMA	LEVU.RIZ RGE ARKOG	721.946 €	-51,1%	3,4%	15,0 €
9	ARAGAN	CIRCACTIFS	598.162 €	9,0%	2,8%	14,8 €
10	EUROGENERICS	EST.ETHYLOM3 EG	594.865 €	11,8%	2,8%	15,8 €
11	MONIN CHANTEAUD	TEMPEROL	568.254 €	-5,9%	2,7%	27,9 €
12	SOLGAR	OMEGA 3 SOLGAR	503.616 €	28,3%	2,3%	46,5 €

Figure 1: Excel file with sell-out data of Metarecod produced by Aboca and its competitors. Source: IQVIA

<https://www.iqvia.com/>

After this analysis, I used this data to create graphs and tables which were useful for preparing slides and presentations on PowerPoint to be presented to the board and the pharmaceutical sales representative (see Figure 2 below).



Figure 2: slide for an internal presentation of Aboca. Source: Aboca internal data taken from IQVIA.

Moreover, it was often asked to create a comparison table in Excel to analyze Aboca's competitors about a particular product or market, such as Grintuss. In the table, I had to compare these criteria: pack size, daily dosage and mode of use, packaging lasting time, pack price, price per day, indication, claim on the pack, active and other ingredients, and target. Apart from these criteria, I was also responsible for analyzing marketing levers and investments of the most interesting competitors of a specific market (for example sore throat).

- **Supporting the definition of communication and advertising strategies**

After collecting all of the information mentioned above, I had to put it into a PowerPoint presentation. The presentations helped to support the internal communication of the company. This is because we had a lot of internal meetings with the board and seminars both online and in presence during which we presented these data to the sales agents. I had

the opportunity to participate in this kind of seminar in Paris, Sevilla, and Bordeaux (see Figure 3 below).



Figure 3: Aboca sales meeting in Sevilla.

The seminars were the occasion for the marketing and commercial department to make a point with the sales agents.

Regarding the external communication and advertising strategies, we were dependent, as a marketing team in France, on the communication department in Italy, with which we worked closely remotely every day to define the best strategies for the French market.

I was responsible for creating new ideas for these strategies and I created this and followed the project of an influencer campaign on Instagram which took place this year 2024, in June and July.

Another main task, I was responsible for during my Internship, was the realization of communications support for the sales agents regarding different products. The support consisted of a portfolio in which the product they were aiming to sell was advertised. All the documents were in French so I have also had to do translation work.

- **Responsible for merchandising projects inside the pharmacies**

To advertise the products also in the point of sales, the pharmacy, it was necessary to create a dedicated merchandising. This was one of my everyday tasks during the Internship. I had to develop the idea of the possible merchandising support which was validated or not by my Supervisor. After having created the idea, we worked together with the graphic department (located in Italy) to develop the image and the text of the merchandising which then was printed and produced in Italy and sent to France to be distributed in the pharmacies. Some examples of merchandising are counter display, floor display, and jumbo box.



Figure 4: Aboca counter display.

To be able to create the best merchandising ideas, I have also been on a pharmacy tour with the sales agent. During the tours, I observed how the space of the pharmacies was organized, how the competitors exposed their products, and so on. This was an important

opportunity to better know the field of healthcare and to have experience in the field that would have not been possible with just staying inside the office.

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1 Methodology

As consumers become increasingly aware of environmental and social issues, companies are intensifying their efforts to communicate their sustainability initiatives. Social media has become a key platform for these communications, offering direct engagement with consumers. However, the effectiveness of these sustainability messages in influencing consumer perception and behaviour remains to be seen in different aspects. Thus, the research problem that will guide this scientific project is to understand if sustainability represents a key topic in the communication strategies employed by Aboca and its competitors on social media and how effective is this topic in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours.

Understanding the effectiveness of sustainability communication strategies employed by Aboca and its competitors on social media is important for several reasons. First of all, with growing awareness of environmental and social issues, many consumers are prioritising sustainability in their purchasing decisions (Senal, Fire, 2012). Effective communication can significantly influence consumer choices, leading them to prefer brands that align with their value (Oancea, 2015). Secondly, authentic and effective communication of sustainability initiatives can build trust and foster brand loyalty. Consumers are more likely to support brands that they perceive as genuinely committed to sustainability (Rastogi, et al., 2024).

Therefore, in a competitive market, how a brand communicates its sustainability efforts on social media can be a key differentiator (Saxton, et al., 2019). By analyzing competitors' strategies, Aboca can identify gaps or opportunities to stand out and strengthen its market position. Moreover, companies that effectively communicate their sustainability efforts can position themselves as leaders in the industry, setting trends and influencing the direction of market practices.

Furthermore, sustainability communication directly impacts how a brand is perceived by the public. Positive perceptions can enhance the brand's image, while ineffective or perceived greenwashing can harm it. Understanding communication effectiveness can help a company respond better to potential criticisms or crises related to sustainability, maintaining or restoring its reputation. Today's consumers expect transparency and accountability from brands, especially concerning sustainability. Analyzing the effectiveness of communication helps ensure that a brand meets these expectations.

Effective communication strategies on social media can increase consumer engagement, leading to stronger relationships with the brand. Engaged consumers are more likely to become advocates, sharing positive messages within their networks (Xie, Bagozzi, Grønhaug, 2019). Understanding what works and what doesn't allows brands like Aboca to make informed decisions about future sustainability campaigns. This can optimize resource allocation and improve overall communication strategies.

By studying competitors, Aboca can benchmark its performance and continuously improve its communication efforts, ensuring they remain relevant and impactful. Effective communication strategies not only promote a brand but also educate consumers about broader sustainability issues, contributing to a more informed and responsible society. By mastering sustainability communication, Aboca can influence industry standards and contribute to advancing global sustainability goals, beyond just its commercial interests. In summary, understanding the effectiveness of sustainability communication strategies is crucial for Aboca to enhance its brand value, align with consumer expectations, gain a competitive edge, and contribute to broader societal and environmental goals.

The Aboca brand and its competitors were chosen as the study object for the single case analysis. The choice is justified by the fact that Aboca is well-known in the healthcare industry, has a strong social responsibility record, and is dedicated to producing sustainable products. Aboca is a well-known pharmaceutical and food supplement brand deeply committed to environmental sustainability, but it does more than that. Along with taking definite stands on moral and social concerns, the brand demonstrated its involvement in politics and society. Aboca has launched several campaigns throughout the years to raise awareness of sustainability and to safeguard the environment. This dedication has made it possible for the company to win numerous awards.

The case study analysis is based on the research method conducted by Yin (1994), as a wide research technique that addresses circumstances where there are "more variables of interest than data points available" (p. 13). as being based on several sources of evidence and necessitates the convergence of data into a triangular manner, which gains from the earlier development of theoretical claims for direct the gathering and processing of data. Yin (1994) asserts that a case study can incorporate a single study as well as several studies. Specifically, you can use a one-case study for the examination of a particular case when that case is highly important to support or contradict a particular viewpoint or because it embodies one extraordinary, singular, or extreme circumstance (Gustafsson, 2017).

In this regard, it was decided to analyze a brand in the healthcare industry as one of the most polluting sectors. According to a paper by Health Care Without Harm, in association with Arup, titled *"How the Health Sector Contributes to the Global Climate Crisis and Opportunities for Action"* (HCWH, 2019), if the global healthcare sector were a nation, it would rank fifth in the world for greenhouse gas emissions.

The research adopts a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This approach has been chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of sustainability communication strategies on social media. The qualitative aspects, such as content analysis, allow for an in-depth exploration of the themes, strategies, and narratives used by Aboca and its competitors in their sustainability communications. This provides a rich, detailed understanding of the context and the nuances in messaging. Quantitative methods, like engagement metrics analysis, enable the measurement of the impact of these messages in a structured and statistically valid manner. Quantitative data, such as the number of likes and comments offers a clear picture of consumer engagement and perception.

A mixed methods approach allows the research to cover both the "how" and the "why" aspects. For example, qualitative data explains why certain communication strategies might resonate more with audiences, while quantitative data shows how effective these strategies are in terms of measurable outcomes (e.g., consumer engagement). By triangulating data from different sources, the research can validate findings, increasing the reliability and depth of the analysis. This approach is well-suited for exploratory research

questions (like understanding the themes in sustainability communications) and explanatory questions (such as measuring the impact on consumer behavior).

The mixed methods approach allows the researcher to adapt to emerging findings. For instance, if the qualitative analysis reveals unexpected themes, these can be further explored or quantified in the quantitative phase. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides actionable insights that are directly relevant to Aboca and its competitors. While qualitative data can suggest strategic adjustments, quantitative data can justify these changes with hard evidence.

This approach mirrors real-world decision-making processes, where businesses often rely on a mix of insights (e.g., consumer feedback) and data (e.g., market analysis) to guide their strategies. Jennifer C. Greene was chosen as the author of reference for the methodology of this study. She has written extensively on mixed methods research, emphasizing its potential to enhance the validity of research findings by addressing both the process and outcomes of social phenomena. Her book *"Mixed Methods in Social Inquiry"* (2007) is highly regarded. Greene's approach to mixed methods is particularly useful in research that involves understanding complex social behaviors, such as how sustainability communications influence consumer perceptions and behaviors.

5.1.1 Research Objectives

Based on the previous framework, the research objectives are summarized as follows:

- To analyze the sustainability communication strategies used by Aboca and its main competitors on social media.
- To measure the impact of these strategies on consumer engagement and perception.

5.1.2 Research Questions

In order to reinforce the research problem, two questions were defined:

RQ1: How do the frequency, tone, and content of sustainability messages differ between Aboca and its competitors?

RQ2: What is the consumer engagement level (likes, shares, comments, etc.) with sustainability-related posts from Aboca compared to its competitors.

5.2 Data Collection Methods

As previously mentioned, the methodology of the study is based on a content analysis of Aboca's social media presence and its main competitors. For the aim of the study, only the French accounts and profiles were considered. The focus of the study was the sustainability communication strategies on social media, in particular Instagram and Facebook where sustainability messages are frequently shared. The analysis of sustainability communication on social media by Aboca and its competitors was conducted through the use of the tools NotJustAnalytics for Instagram and FanpageKarma for Facebook. NotJustAnalytics and Fanpage Karma are both popular tools for social media analysis, each offering distinct features that cater to different needs. NotJustAnalytics specializes in Instagram analytics, providing in-depth insights into Instagram profiles, such as follower growth, engagement rates, best posting times, hashtag analysis, and follower demographics. Provides real-time updates on follower changes, likes, comments, and engagement rates, which is useful for tracking the immediate impact of posts or campaigns. It allows users to analyze and compare competitors' profiles, helping to understand their strategy, content performance, and audience engagement. Moreover, it offers a detailed analysis of which hashtags are performing well and which types of content (like stories, reels, or feed posts) are driving the most engagement. Fanpage Karma instead, supports a wide range of social media platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and TikTok), making it ideal for brands with a multi-channel presence. It provides a comprehensive dashboard that consolidates data from all social media channels, offering a holistic view of your social media performance. It offers a wide range of metrics, including growth rates, engagement metrics, and content analysis. Moreover, it allows for extensive competitor benchmarking and industry analysis, offering insights into what your competitors are doing, their strengths, and areas where you can improve. Fanpage Karma includes sentiment analysis tools that help gauge the public perception and sentiment around your brand or content.

The period starting from June 2024 to August 2024 was chosen as the time frame to be taken into consideration for the study. This 2-month time frame made it possible to cover a significant period of company activities and to collect a significant sample of posts published on the platform. The posts were categorized based on themes, tone, frequency,

and other relevant characteristics (e.g., visual elements, hashtags, messaging style). To quantify the reach and interaction level of these posts measure engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and views were employed.

5.3 Data Presentation: Aboca and its competitors

In order to start the methodological process, it seemed pertinent to evaluate Aboca and its competitors, to have an overall overview of the company and the context of the market in which it is inserted. To reach this goal, a descriptive analysis is implemented. Descriptive analysis *“is the process of using current and historical data to identify trends and relationships. It describes trends and relationships but doesn't dig deeper”* (Harvard Business School Online, 2021). Moreover, it *“helps determine relationships between variables”* (Harvard Business School Online, 2021). For this reason, this type of analysis was chosen to compare the relationships between Aboca and its competitors using financial data from the company.

Aboca is a company operating in the healthcare sector with a strong focus on sustainability and the naturalness of its products. The company was born in Italy in 1978, but today its products are distributed all around Europe and the world. Its slogan- and its mission- is: *‘Aboca, for the health of today and tomorrow’*. This statement means that they don't only care about the well-being of humans of today but they keep in mind a more future perspective. To do so they aim to take care of the environment while producing and distributing their products. This is demonstrated also by their B corp certification. The Benefit Corporation is a new juridic form of enterprise first introduced in 2016 in the United States and after in Italy. This certification verifies and ensures that a company operates according to the highest standards of social and environmental performance (*Sostenibilità: Il Nostro Impegno Quotidiano - Aboca, 2023*). Moreover, to evaluate the company's contribution, Aboca measured itself with the SDGs Action Manager, an online platform born from the collaboration of the US non-profit B Lab with the United Nations Global Compact Network. From the analysis carried out, Aboca excels in achieving the following SDGs: health and well-being, responsible consumption and production, and life on the earth.

Furthermore, every year they measure their contribution to each of these objectives by preparing an Impact Report, through which they define their annual improvement plan.

On the first page of the Impact Report of 2022, there is a letter written by Massimo Mercati, CEO of Aboca. In the letter, he explains the concept of 'One Health'. According to him, this means that *“true health cannot exist without sustainability, because our health is closely connected to that of the Planet”*. He also explained that in the last year, they have chosen to join the Regenerative Society Foundation. It is a non-profit founded in Parma in 2020 by Italian entrepreneurs who brought together live interest in the Benefit Society model, the approach “One Health” and environmental sustainability. He said that the company is also among the selected supporters of the National Biodiversity Future Center, one of the centers created by the PNRR to finance research and solutions to preserve biodiversity. They are working in close collaboration with the center on projects of a different nature, from cultural dissemination to clinical and agricultural research (*Sostenibilità: Il Nostro Impegno Quotidiano - Aboca, 2023b*).

Citing from the official website of the company: *“In a period like nowadays where the word ‘sustainability’ risk to be often trivialized it becomes fundamental to plan a future with models and actions that are aware that it does not exist a single benefit that can be distinguished and separate from the well-being of society”* (*Sostenibilità: Il Nostro Impegno Quotidiano - Aboca, 2023*).

Founded in 1978 by Valentino Mercati, Aboca has always stood out for its innovative approach: finding the answers to needs related to human health in nature, respecting his organisms and the environment, developing sustainable agricultural models, and investing in scientific research. Thanks to his experience in the field and a course of study that led him to thoroughly investigate the relationship between man and nature, Massimo Mercati has extended the systemic vision of life to the dimension of business understood as a social organization.

Thus conceived, the business becomes a life project in which two morals can no longer be distinguished, one for work and the other for private life. But for this to be possible, the entrepreneur will have to identify the underlying values of his organization and share them, so that they establish themselves as concrete points of reference, capable of truly guiding the actions of all those who are part of it. For the author, the concept of 'value' must be rethought.

Faced with the crisis we are experiencing - which is climatic, environmental, social, and economic - it is easy rhetoric to talk about 'sustainability' but often those who do so have not refocused on the keywords: the starting point for reflecting on business and transformation that should concern it starts from the analysis of the concept of value, of negative and positive externalities, because the reductionist vision, the one that isolates every single element, does not allow us to embrace all the factors and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) does not reflect value is not enough".

'The Company as a Living System' is the title of the book written by Massimo Mercati. Considering the company as a living system allows us to reinterpret the corporate reality in depth. It is a vision that makes the company strongly interdependent on the context in which it operates, a community among communities that can no longer exist in a self-referential way and becomes a creator of value only when it fully carries out its economic-social function. A value that is not limited to the realization of profit, but extends to the impact on the environment and society through the cultural growth of all members of the company, united by the idea of working together in the direction of the common good.

This is the proposal that Massimo Mercati is carrying out through the family company. "By following spiritual values," said Adriano Olivetti, "material goods will arise by themselves." (*L'impresa Come Sistema Vivente - Massimo Mercati - Aboca Edizioni*, 2021) The values generated by the company are reflected also in the stakeholders. Aboca has created various channels of dialogue over the years with clients and all health professionals, taking into consideration their expectations and combining them with its strategy.

The competitors of Aboca in the French market vary according to the product/brand that can be taken into consideration since the lines of product of Aboca are huge and different according to the different health needs. The most relevant product in terms of sell-out and sell-in, which Aboca distributes in the French market, is Grintuss. For this reason, the market of Grintuss was chosen as the sample of analysis for the aim of the study and the

selection of the most important competitors of Aboca. Grintuss is a 100% natural medical device that was launched by the company in 2014 in France for the treatment of coughs.

MAT SEPTEMBER 2023: 201M€ (+14,4 %) – 38M unités (+4,8 %) - Prix Moyen: 5,2 €

Depuis son lancement sur le marché en 2014, **Grintuss** a gravi les échelons, jusqu'à atteindre la 3^{ème} place de marché en début d'année 2023, devenant progressivement une des gammes leaders du marché de la toux.



Aboca GROUP

Source données : IQVIA Pharmacy Sell-out EUR/PUB MAT/09/2023 (Absolute)

Source: official presentation slide from the marketing department of Aboca.

According to the sell-out data directly provided by the company, Grintuss is the third leader in the French sore throat market (see figure above). The data provided regards the MAT (Moving Annual Total), which is the last 12 months of revenue/sales.

The graph shows that Grintuss has 8,2% of the market share, with an average price of 9,1€. Moreover, the total of sell-out at MAT September 2023 is 16.390.999 €.

The numbers at the bottom of the slide show the total revenue of the cough market regarding medical devices in France, which is 200 million euros. From the graph, we can see that the first two leaders in the market are Helicidine and Phytosil. Helicidine is produced by the company Therabel, while Phytosil is produced by Sanofi. Positioned just under Grintuss on the graph there are Toplexil, which is again produced by Sanofi, Humex, and Phytosun Arom Toux which are correspondingly produced by Uрго and Perrigo. Other leaders in the market that are not in the graph but are still relevant are the companies Bouchara Recordati, Cooper, Boiron, and Ursa. All of these companies were chosen as the

sample of analysis of this study, because of their relevance in terms of sell-out revenue in the French market of medical devices.

Therabel is a privately held pharmaceutical company that was founded in 1945 and has its roots in Europe¹. This company has successfully expanded throughout the globe through both organic growth and acquisitions. Its mission is to become one of Europe's top partnership-driven pharmaceutical firms by building on the foundations set more than 50 years ago and staying committed to its human-scale organization, philosophy, ethics, and independence.

Sanofi was founded in France 50 years ago and it is nowadays a global healthcare company. Its mission is “to chase the miracles of science to improve people’s lives”.²

Urgo is a healthcare French family-owned group that has a global presence distributed in 20 countries³. Within URGO Group, they specialize in the medical treatment of wounds (Urgo Medical division) and consumer health (Urgo Consumer Healthcare division) and they own different brands.

Perrigo was founded 130 years ago in Michigan and it has become one of the largest over-the-counter self-care companies selling products globally in 25 countries⁴. Also, Cooper has a global presence and a long history which dates more than 100 years ago according to their official website⁵. Its mission is to help people improve their health and well-being using effective self-care solutions.

Bouchara Recordati is a global pharmaceutical group founded in Italy in 1926, listed on the Italian stock exchange, with over 4,450 employees⁶. Recordati also provides prescription and self-medication treatments across a range of therapeutic areas.

The history of Boiron begins in 1932 in France⁷ and its main focus is on homeopathy.

¹ <https://therabel.com/about-us/overview/>

² <https://www.sanofi.com/en/our-company>

³ <https://urgo-group.fr/en/urgo-group/our-story/>

⁴ <https://www.perrigouk.co.uk/>

⁵ <https://www.cooperconsumerhealth.eu/>

⁶ <https://recordati.com/company-our-story/>

⁷ <https://www.boiron.it/>

Finally, Upsa was founded in 1935 in Agen, France. Nowadays it is an international brand and, according to the website, 478,5 million euros was their turnover in 2023⁸.

5.3.1 Aboca Online Communication Channels

As the primary focus of its communication strategy, Aboca emphasizes sustainability. Employing several communication channels, the brand exhibits its dedication by providing a reason to buy its products and fostering a sense of community around it. People choose Aboca not just because of the products' attributes, but also because they identify with the brand's values, philosophy, and way of life.

The official website provides an overview of the brand, its products, and its main activities. In particular, the site is organized into these sections:

- Company: in this section, there is a description of the company, its history, and its values.
- Products: here there are all the products divided by health needs or lines.
- Culture: in this section, Aboca presents its publishing house Aboca Edizioni, its Museum, its magazine, and its events.
- Sustainability: in this section, Aboca presents its Impact Reports and its efforts towards being a sustainable company.

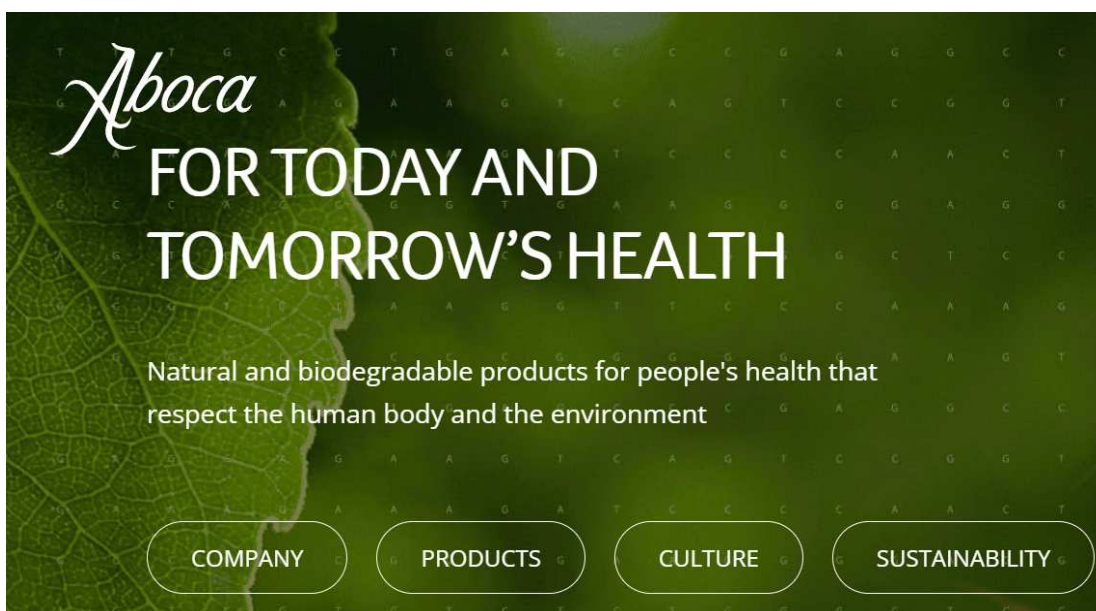


Figure 4.1: Homepage Official Website Aboca International. Source: <https://www.aboca.com/>

⁸ <https://www.upsa.com/>

From the homepage of the Aboca website, it is also possible to see the theme that the brand cares most about, respect for the human body and the environment.

Aboca's communication extends not only through its website, but also on various social media channels where the brand is present such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube. The Aboca profile on Instagram was created in 2014 and to date (17 August 2024) there are 150 posts published on the page with a following of 4.484 users. The mission is reiterated in the profile description corporate, also present on the website: *“For today's and tomorrow's health, natural and biodegradable products for people's health that respect the human body and the environment”*.



Figure 4.2: Instagram account Aboca France. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/abocaftr/>

The profile appears to be very active regarding publishing posts and above all for his consistency. Aboca has committed to publishing one post almost every day. Through photographs, stories, and videos in the form of “Reels” the page generates a good number of “likes”, and many comments from users, and as regards the “Reels” many people view them. Aboca uses his Instagram account to share a variety of content. They are present within the profile images and videos of landscapes and nature, brand products, and posts regarding sustainability initiatives. Through a simple but specific, clear, and authentic Aboca's tone seeks to engage and educate its audience.

As for Facebook, it does not have a specific account for the country, France, but just the Italian version. The Italian page likes 387.244 and has 399.239 users (to date 17 August 2024). The Facebook profile appears to be as active as the Instagram one, with an average publication of around 1 post every day. Also within this social network, the company mission and the vision are reiterated.



Figure 4.3: Aboca Facebook profile. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/AbocaIT/>

On Facebook, Aboca has a relatively high number of "likes" on its posts, and the same goes for the level of interaction with the content by users of the platform. Comments from users on Facebook profiles of the brand are almost completely absent. The content strategy on Facebook is in line with those on Instagram. There is content here about landscapes, inspirational stories, product promotion, and announcements of sustainability initiatives. Compared to Instagram the text that accompanies the photo and video content is longer. However, the tone used coincides with and is also characterized on Facebook by clarity, authenticity, and educational content.

Aboca also has a YouTube French channel which was created in March 2020. It has 82 subscribers and 11 videos published (to date 18 August 2024).

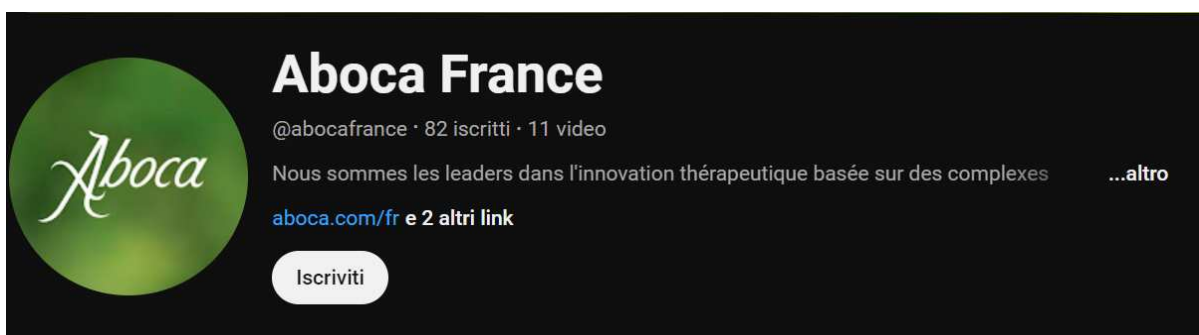


Figure 4.4: YouTube channel Aboca France. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/@abocafrance/featured>

The videos are divided into two sections titled “company” and “product”. The first section of the videos deals with the company’s values related to sustainability and innovation. The second one is mainly focused on advertising the products.

Aboca also has a TikTok profile but it is only in Italian and not in French.

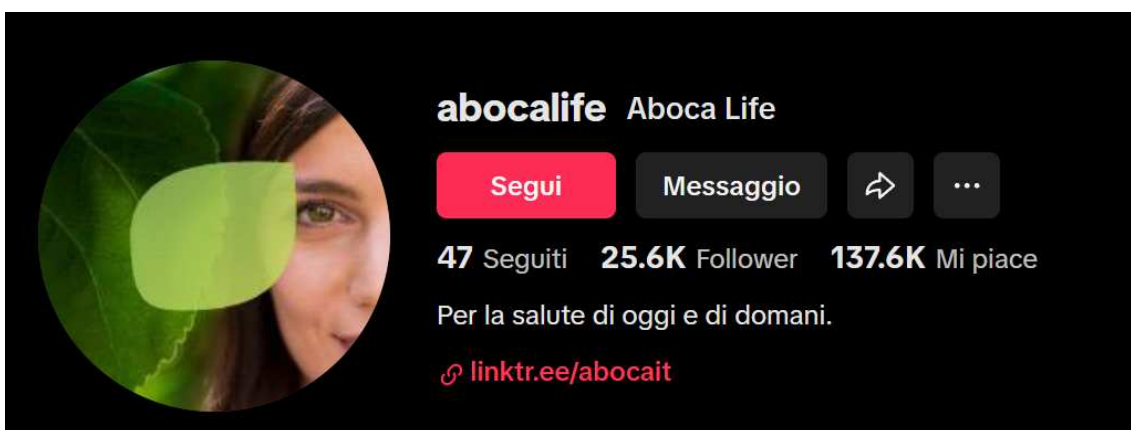


Figure 4.5: TikTok profile Aboca. Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/@abocalife>

On TikTok, Aboca has 25.600 followers, 137.600 likes, and 47 followings (to date 18 August 2024). On Tik Tok Aboca shares videos about general tips for being healthy and for preventing health problems such as heavy legs. The content they result in is aligned with those of other platforms, thus dealing with issues relating to sustainability, and nature. However, while the brand maintained its focus on sustainability, at the same time, unlike other social networks, they also shared lighter and funnier content, often with a touch of humour.

The brand is also present on the LinkedIn platform with a number of followers of 2K (to date 18 August 2024). this is because, in addition to job advertisements, Aboca as in other social media publishes content to entertain its audience.



Figure 4.6: LinkedIn Aboca France. Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/aboca-france/>

In fact, they present company-related content, such as Aboca news, corporate partnerships or initiatives in which he took part, and obviously content related to sustainability. The tone used is always clear and specific, but aimed at a public more interested in the company also from an economic-business point of view. Even on this social platform, the frequency of publication is not regular, but it is there a good degree of user participation, compared for example to the Facebook profile, with a good number of "recommended", comments and "post diffusions".

As regards the content published within the various platforms, as it's easy to understand, Aboca doesn't behave like a typical brand of medical products. Their publications clearly show that their products are just a marginal element compared to the stories they tell. The true protagonists of their profile are stories of nature and activism. Aboca's vision is further disseminated through excellent video quality, which aims to highlight the charitable initiatives promoted by the brand.

Through materials shared on various channels, the brand seeks to educate the public both regarding environmental protection and the most relevant social issues. From this preliminary analysis it therefore clearly emerges that the contents published by Aboca are essentially characterized by a strong emphasis on current issues, both social and environmental, highlighting the beauty of nature. fundamental is the fact that Aboca's communication focuses not so much on the product itself, but rather on the brand's mission, constantly reiterated in all channels in which it is present. Shared content doesn't

focus on specific characteristics of their products, but is dedicated to telling stories to inform and entertain the public.

5.3.2 Comparative Analysis: Aboca vs competitor's use of social media

The foundation of Qualitative Comparative Analysis, or QCA, is the idea that causality in social reality is complex, meaning that various combinations of causal conditions can result in an outcome and that a condition's effect depends on how it is combined with other conditions (Fischer, 2011). Charles Ragin (1987) first presented it as a technique for the methodical comparison of typically a medium number of cases (Fischer, 2011).

Qualitative Comparative Analysis enables us to analyse individual cases and their contexts in considerable depth, which frequently produces reliable representations of reality because numerous sources of information can be covered in much more detail.

For this reason, this type of analysis was chosen for the study with the objective of comparing the different use of social media channels by the different competitors.

The comparison of social media is important to reach research goals 1 which is to analyse the sustainability communication strategies used by Aboca and its main competitors on social media and 2 which is to measure the impact of these strategies on consumer engagement and perception.

It is important to underline that not all the main competitors of Aboca use the same social media for their communication strategies, as summarized in Table 1 below.







	Instagram	Facebook	Linkedin	Website	Other channels
ABOCA					Youtube
THERABEL					None
SANOFI					TikTok, Youtube
BOUCHARA RECORDATI					None
URGO					None
COOPER					None
BOIRON					None

PERRIGO					None
UPSA					None

Table 1: Aboca vs competitors social media. The red square stands for the lack of an account.

Therabel, the first competitor of Aboca in the sore throat market, does not use either Instagram or Facebook but just LinkedIn and the website. Sanofi, the leader in the global pharmaceutical market, has reached all the online communication channels including Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, an official website but also TikTok. As for Therabel, Bouchara Recordati focused its strategy mainly on LinkedIn and its official website. The same can be said for Cooper and Upsa. The companies Urgo and Boiron decided as Aboca to focus mainly on Instagram and also use LinkedIn and the website.

For this reason, it was not possible to analyze the content for the same type of social media for all competitors. The main focus of the study was on Instagram from June until August. From the 19th of June until the 14th of August, Aboca on his Instagram page published 12 posts with a total number of 26.683 likes and 76 comments. The Engagement rate of Aboca for the period taken into consideration is 54,15%. Engagement rate is a metric used to measure user engagement with the content published on the platform. It is calculated by dividing the total number of likes and comments by the total number of followers.

Data & formato	Post	Interazioni
14/08/2024 10:00:29 		♥ 21 💬 0
08/08/2024 12:00:10 		♥ 2.554 💬 8
07/08/2024 10:01:06 		♥ 602 💬 2

Source: NotJustAnalytics <https://app.notjustanalytics.com/it/analysis/abocafir>

Of these 12 posts, 9 were dedicated to promoting the products, and the others were dedicated to presenting the culture and the values of the company. The posts with the most likes and comments belong to this second category. In particular, the post that had more likes and comments was one image with a book saying “Reading is good for the health”. The post deals with explaining what Aboca Edizioni, the publishing house of Aboca, and its mission are. It is stated in the post that Aboca Edizioni stimulates reflection on issues such as health, the common good, sustainable development, agriculture, new business and development models, science, and rights, but also art and literature. Always related to the reading, the second post with more likes and comments is the picture of the ancient library of Aboca.



Source: NotJustAnalytics <https://app.notjustanalytics.com/it/analysis/abocaf>

In third place, in terms of a number of likes and comments, there is a post specifically related to environmental sustainability (see Figure below).



Source: Aboca Instagram profile. <https://www.instagram.com/abocaf/>

The post published on the 8 of August had 2.554 likes and 8 comments. The image represents an insect with the claim “There is life on our fields”. In the description of the post it is stated that: *“Thanks to the management of the Aboca agricultural system, the land from which the raw material for our products comes has not only maintained its biodiversity but has even improved it over time. In particular, a significant presence of microorganisms was noted. Good news for us and for the Planet, which earned us the maximum score (100 out of 100) for Biodiversity Alliance certification. Link in bio.”* Therefore, it represents a clear example of the sustainability communication strategy of Aboca and also an appreciation of its followers for this type of content. The comments support the post idea, as this one made by a follower: *“Préservez nos terres, stop aux néocorthinoïdes, aux pesticides en tout genre, laissons la terre se régénérer d'elle-même et elle nous apportera ses bienfaits”* (Let's preserve our land, stop neocorthinoids, pesticides of all kinds, let the earth regenerate itself and it will bring us its benefits). In general, the posts showing the products have fewer likes and comments than the ones dealing with themes directly connected to the company's values, such as sustainability.

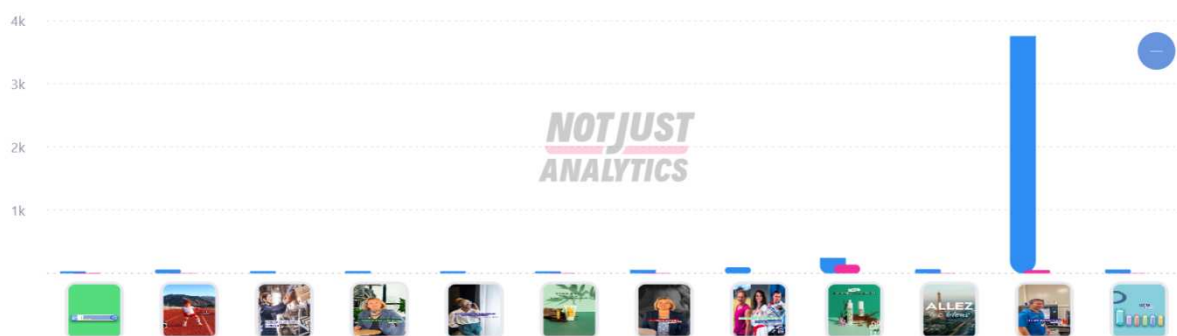
Boiron's profile on Instagram, has 20K followers, 408 average likes per post, and 19 average comments per post (to date 19/08/2024).



Source: Boiron's Instagram profile. <https://www.instagram.com/boiron/>

The Engagement rate of Boiron for the period taken into consideration is 2,13%. The rate is low in comparison with Aboca. As for Aboca, the last 12 posts published, during the period taken into consideration, were analyzed.

In this case, the exact period of analysis is from the 24th of July until the 16th of August. The total number of likes of the posts is 4.521 and the comments are 208. The post that reached the most number of likes and comments was a Reel published on the 25th of July. The Reel shows a technician of Boiron using the latest technology, a 3D machine. The Reel has reached a total number of views of 309.138. In general, in comparison to Aboca, there are more Reel videos than posts with images. The graph below shows an overview of the posts and the number of likes (in blue) and comments (in pink).



Source: NotJustAnalytics. <https://app.notjustanalytics.com/it/analysis/boiron>

In terms of content, the majority of the posts deal with homeopathy with a link to the Olympics, that happened this August 2024 in Paris, and the sport. On the 13th of August, Boiron also published a post specifically related to environmental sustainability (see Figure below). The theme of the post is the packing of the products to be delivered from the online shop. According to the post, Boiron has been putting efforts into reducing the carbon footprint when delivering its products.



Source: Boiron's Instagram profile. <https://www.instagram.com/boiron/>

However, the post had only 36 likes and zero comments. This demonstrates that, in comparison to Aboca's audience on Instagram, there is not much interest in environmental sustainability. Another reason could be the non efficiency in their communication strategy regarding this topic.

Sanofi French's profile on Instagram has 11.300 followers, 362 likes on average, and 3 comments (to date 19 August 2024). The Engagement Rate is 3,21%. It is higher than Boiron but still lower than Aboca.



Source: Sanofi's French Instagram profile. <https://www.instagram.com/sanofi/>



Source: NotJustAnalytics <https://app.notjustanalytics.com/it/analysis/sanofi>

The last 12 posts of Sanofi go from 29 July 2024 to 14th August 2024. As for Boiron, half of the posts are Reel videos.



Source: Sanofi's French Instagram profile. <https://www.instagram.com/sanofi/>

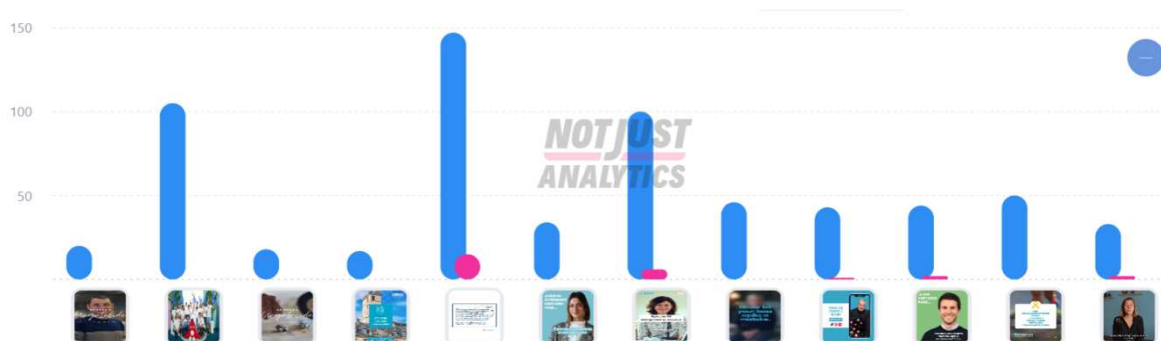
The post with more likes during this period was the one with an image of the stadium where it was celebrated at the end of the Olympic games in Paris (see Figure above). The post had 823 likes and 4 comments. In general, the main focus of all the posts published by Sanofi during the period considered is almost exclusively related to the Olympic games. The contents are related to the sport, the athletes, and the commitment of Sanofi's volunteers during this time. There is no content specifically connected to sustainability.

The last competitor of Aboca, which was possible to analyze through Instagram, and using the tool NotjustAnalytics, is Urgo. Urgo has the lowest Engagement Rate, 1,91%.



Source: NotJustAnalytics https://app.notjustanalytics.com/it/analysis/urgo_group

Urgo's Instagram account has 3.163 followers, 58 likes (average per post), and 2 comments (average per post).



Source: NotJustAnalytics https://app.notjustanalytics.com/it/analysis/urgo_group

In the period selected for the research (from June 2024 until August 2024), Urgo published only 2 posts in August 2024. One is a carousel of images and the other is a Reel video. The images are related to the Olympic games in Paris and had 105 likes and zero comments. While the video reached 297 views (to date 20/08/2024) and 20 likes. The video narrates the story of one of the employees through a short film. So in this case there is no content directly related to sustainability.



Source: Instagram Urgo profile. https://www.instagram.com/urgo_group/

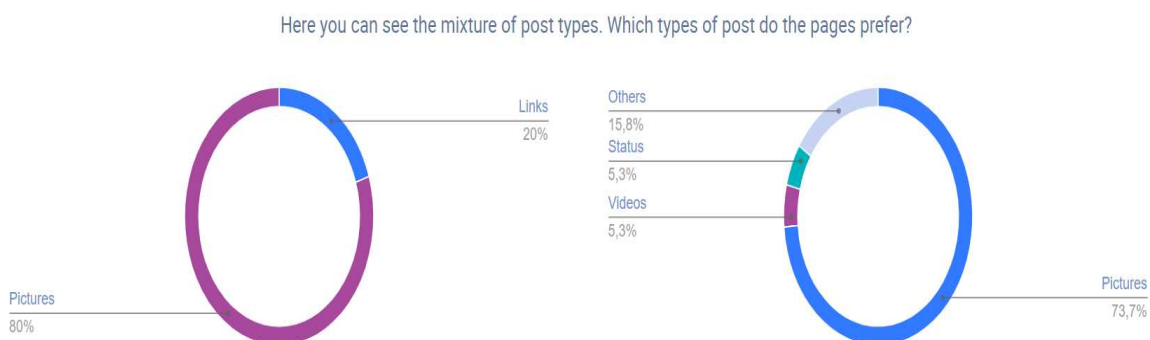
However, in the bio description of the Instagram account it is written: Global French healthcare group in #woundcare & #selfcare. For our patients, for our territories, for our planet. This statement relates to the three pillars of the Triple Bottom Line: People, Planet, and Profit (Elkington, 1994).

Considering Facebook, as mentioned before (Table 1), only Perrigo and Sanofi have a French profile. For this reason, FanPageKarma was used as a tool to compare the two accounts during the same period that was considered for the other competitors on Instagram.



Source: FanPageKarma <https://www.fanpagekarma.com>

In the Figure above it is shown a comparison between the two Facebook accounts in terms of fans, weekly growth of number of fans, daily amount of interactions, and amount of interactions per post and fan.



Source: FanPageKarma <https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

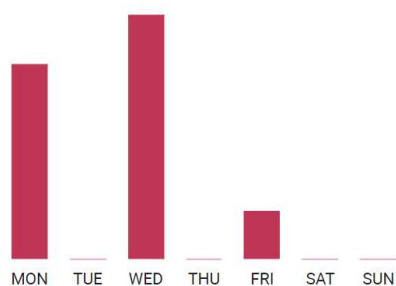
The graphs above show the type of content published on Perrigo's Facebook account on the left and on the right Sanofi's. It can be seen that Perrigo uses almost only pictures and links as a type of content while Sanofi prefers also other types of posts such as videos.



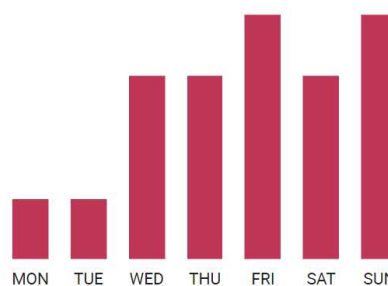
Source: FanPageKarma. Engagement Matrix of type of content. <https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

The Engagement Matrix above has four areas. The aim is to get the dots in the upper right area, where engagement is high and you post often. Post types in the upper left area could be used more often, and post types in the lower right area might need to be improved content-wise.

When does this fan page usually post? What about the weekend? Here is the distribution of posts per weekday in the selected period.



"Perrigo Company plc posts to seldom to identify a preferred day."



"Sanofi seems to prefer Friday but is more successful on another day."

Source: FanPageKarma <https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

The word cloud below summarizes the most used topics and phrases that appear in the posts by Perrigo on Facebook. It emerges that the most used words are: Selfcare, Perrigo, and Health. However, these are also the words with the lowest engagement as demonstrated by the use of the color red (see the legend under the word cloud). The word with the highest engagement is "colleagues". It is important to underline that the word sustainability does not emerge directly in the word cloud.

Solutions Europe society Today great leaders Social play
 OTCs recently Health Industry Lives purpose encourage
 Trusted Hospital proud Check initiatives wellbeing
 importance opportunities consumers including
 colleagues National celebrated Join Source
 Cluster recognise Individuals Perrigo team
 congratulating https://careers.perrigo.com power Day
 supporting doses Michele Country office annually
 Make fun Accessible products deliver healthcare
selfcare

size = frequency
 green = high engagement
 red = low engagement

Source: FanPageKarma <https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

Concerning Sanofi's Facebook account, the most frequent words used are Games, Paris, Olympic, and Sanofi. This can be understood by the size of these words (see figure below).

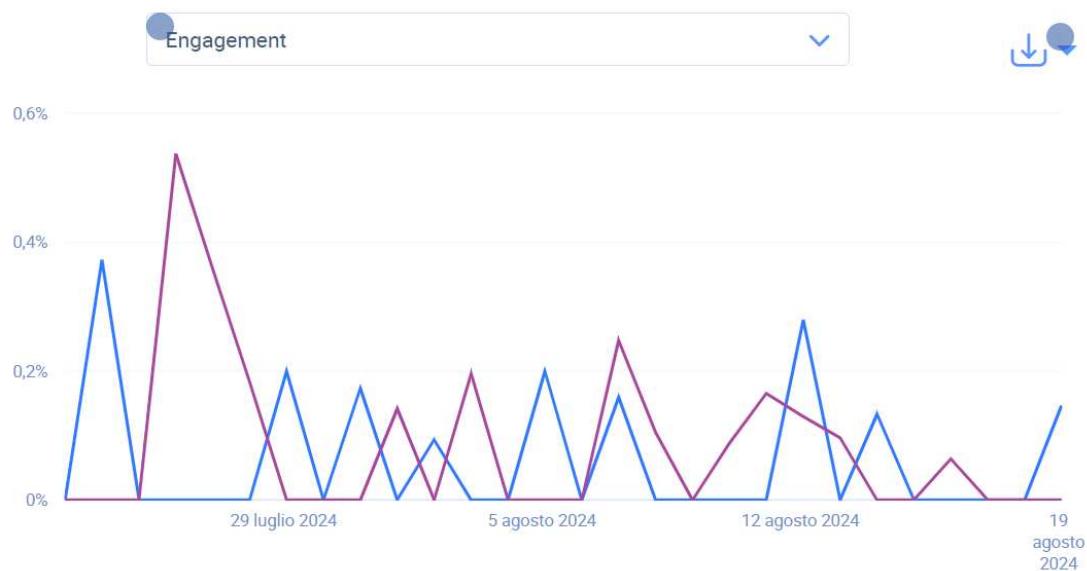
proud theyve silver exploring life settled mat valerianeayayi
 danydann97 athletes inspiration kicked Buchard
 paris2024 Amandine amazing Team Sanofians sports
 tuned UNESCO volunteers Maison begin Metal science
 determination spirit Games side meeting exhibition
 igniting Paris stay world weeks left buchardamandine52
 Olympic winning waiting Congrats favorite resilience blast
 stopped Time Sanofi moments fearless Atelier

size = frequency
 green = high engagement
 red = low engagement

Source: FanPageKarma <https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

In contrast to Perrigo's word cloud, the most frequent words used by Sanofi are also the ones with the highest engagement (coloured in green). As for Perrigo, the word sustainability does not emerge directly in the word cloud.

In terms of engagement, Sanofi appears to have a higher rate than Perrigo in the period of July-August 2024 (see graph below).



Source: FanPageKarma. Perrigo is the blue line and Sanofi is the violet one. <https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

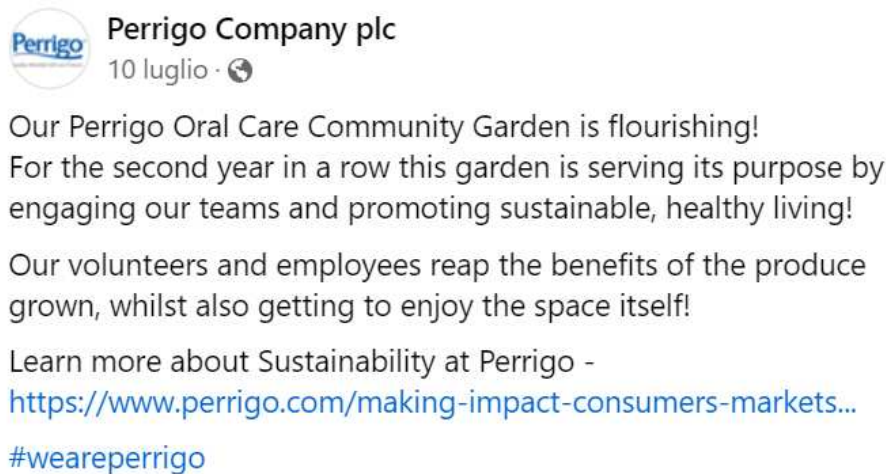
In the word cloud, elaborated by the platform FanpageKarma, the word sustainability does not emerge. However, thanks to a more in-depth analysis of the contents published by Perrigo during the period under study, the majority of the posts were related to sustainability and CSR topics. An example is shown in the picture below, which is a post published by the company on the 3rd of July.



Source: Perrigo Facebook profile. <https://www.facebook.com/PerrigoCompanyPlc/>

The post had 12 likes, 3 shares, and no comments.

Another example of a sustainability-related post published by Perrigo is the one below, which dates from July 10, 2024.



Source: Perrigo Facebook profile. <https://www.facebook.com/PerrigoCompanyPlc/>

The post shows Perrigo’s employees working as gardeners. This demonstrates a concrete action undertaken by the company to encourage its employees to care about the environment where they live. Moreover, there is a direct link to the website of Perrigo in the section on sustainability. It had 20 likes, zero comments, and zero shares. However this number could appear as low, it represents the average of likes and comments of the account.

Sanofi’s Facebook account is almost identical to Instagram’s in terms of the content that they publish. The topics of the posts during the period of June 2024-August 2024 are related to the sport and the Olympic games in Paris.

5.3.3 Thematic analysis: Social media content

Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a flexible and useful research tool, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because of these benefits, it is going to be implemented here with the objective of understanding the different themes across different social media channels published by the different competitors.

Table 2 below summarizes the type of content published on each social media by each company in the period under study, from June 2024 to August 2024.

Company	Facebook	Instagram	Linkedin	Other channels
Aboca	None (for France)	Product advertisement, sustainability-related content.	Job postings, company culture, sustainability-related content.	YouTube: Product advertisement, sustainability-related content. Website: Direct reference to sustainability commitment from the homepage.
Therabel	None	None	No posts or images were published.	Website: No reference at all to sustainability. https://www.therabel.fr/
Sanofi	Olympic Games	Olympic Games	Olympic Games	TikTok: Olympic Games. Website: They have a section about sustainability. Focus on the Olympics. https://www.sanofi.fr/fr
Bouchara Recordati	None	None	Job postings, company events, CEO interviews.	Website: They have a section about sustainability. https://recordati.com/
Urgo	None	Olympic Games, videos about the story of Urgo's employees.	Job postings, press releases, CEO interviews.	Website: <i>"To make a difference, every day our companies seek to make a positive impact on our patients, teams, regions, and planet"</i> https://urgo-group.fr/
Cooper	None	None	Company events and initiatives, job postings.	Website: Few references about

				sustainability. More focused on presenting the brands. https://www.cooper.fr/
Boiron	None	Product advertisement, sustainability-related content, health tips.	Interviews related to homoeopathy and sustainability content.	Website: Not focused on sustainability content but more on products. https://www.boiron.fr/
Perrigo	Employees' pictures and storytelling, job posting, and CSR-related posts.	None	Sustainability initiatives, company news/awards.	Website: On the homepage, it is written: “committed to CSR”. https://www.perrigo.fr/
Upsa	None	None	Company events, company news, and partnerships.	Website: Focus on sustainability from the homepage. https://www.upsa.com/

Table 2: Type of content published on each social media by each company.

As summarized in Table 2, the content published by Aboca on Instagram is mainly focused on advertising the products and sustainability. One example of a product advertisement is shown in this post in the figure below. The post was published on the 28th of August 2024. The post shows the packaging of the product Immunomix with a natural background, that refers to trees and plants to underline the naturality of the product. Above the packaging, there is the slogan “Pour aider vos défenses” (“To support your immune defenses”) and next to it “100% natural formula”. The caption of the post invites the reader to try the product (“Essayez Immunomix Advanced”). Moreover, it indicates what the product is made of (“avec Échinacée et Sureau”) the use, and the type of targets (“Sirop pour adultes et enfants à partir de 2 ans, et gélules pour adultes”).

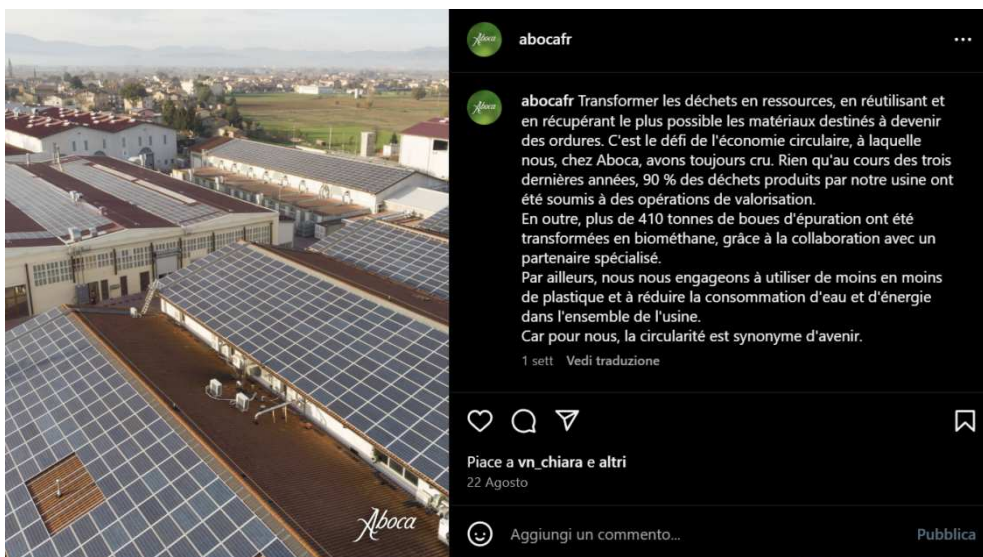


Source: Aboca French Instagram profile https://www.instagram.com/p/C_NMQOc1xsf/

An example of sustainability-related content on Aboca’s Instagram account is the one in the figure below. The post shows an image of the factories in Italy where the products are made. The caption of the post states *“Transform waste into resources, reusing and recovering materials destined to become trash as much as possible. This is the challenge of the circular economy, in which we, at Aboca, have always believed. Over the last three years alone, 90% of the waste produced by our factory has been subjected to recovery operations.*

In addition, more than 410 tonnes of sewage sludge were transformed into biomethane, thanks to collaboration with a specialist partner. Furthermore, we are committed to using less and less plastic and reducing water and energy consumption throughout the factory. Because for us, circularity is synonymous with the future”(translation from French).

From this caption, it is clear the investment that Aboca makes to reduce its environmental footprint.



Source: Aboca French Instagram profile <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-90CKqIDea/>

On LinkedIn, Aboca publishes job postings but also, as for Instagram, sustainability-related content. For example, the last post on LinkedIn is the same as the one analysed in the figure above. Another example is the one in the figure below.



Source: Aboca LinkedIn account. <https://www.linkedin.com/company/aboca-france/posts/?feedView=all>

The image of the post shows water drops with the following statement: “*Plus des recettes, plus d'attention à l'eau que nous utilisons*” (“*More receipts. more attention to the water we use*”). This statement underlines the attention of Aboca to not waste water when

producing its products. This is the reason why this post is related to environmental sustainability principles.

On YouTube, Aboca advertises its products (see figure below) and publishes videos also related to sustainability. An example is the video below which advertises Neobianacid, a product for stomach pains. The video shows a woman taking Neobianacid and the background voice describes what the product is made for and underlines the fact that it is 100% natural with the image passing by of a flower.



Source: Youtube Aboca <https://www.youtube.com/@abocafrance/featured>

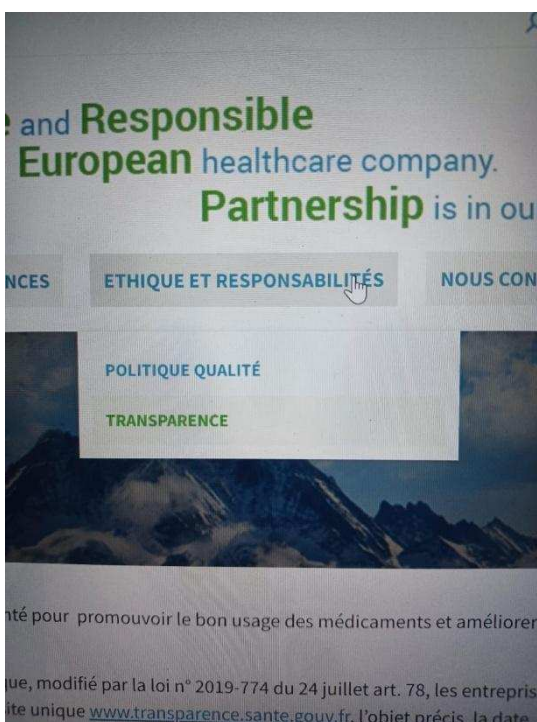
Therabel, which has only a LinkedIn account as social media, has not published any type of posts. However, the company has an official website.



Source: <https://www.therabel.fr/>

On the website, there is no evidence of sustainability engagement. Indeed, even in the section called “Ethique et responsabilités” (“Ethics and responsibilities”), which could

allude to CSR engagement and responsibilities, they talk instead about “political quality” and “transparency” (see figure below).

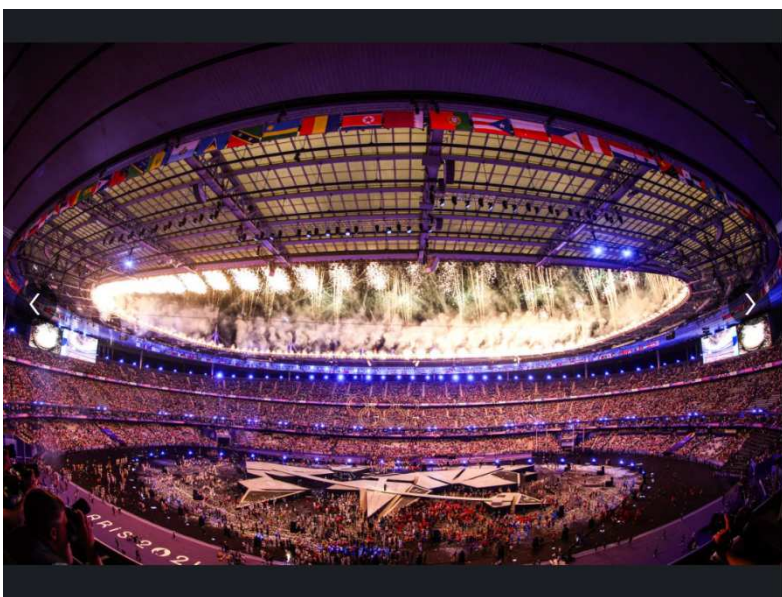


Source: <https://www.therabel.fr/>

Sanofi in all its social media accounts has been focused on content related to the Olympic Games which had been held in Paris during the period under study. Examples of this kind of post on different social media platforms are shown here in the figures below.



Source: Sanofi Instagram account https://www.instagram.com/p/C-i4cZMt9VL/?img_index=1



Sanofi
4,087,186 follower
25 •

We did it! We can't believe the Olympic Games Paris 2024 have come to a close. 🥳

Our Team Sanofi dazzled us by winning 4 medals during the Games! We could not be prouder of them 🏆🥇

THANK YOU to the 1,000+ Sanofians who volunteered during the Games. Their dedication truly made this event magical. 🙏

Along with our Team Sanofi athletes, we've shown the world how **#WeNeverSettle** 🙌


But the Games aren't over yet! 🏆 We can't ... altro

Mostra traduzione

👍❤️👍 3,824 31 commenti • 107 diffusioni post

Consiglia Commenta Diffondi il post Invia

Source: Sanofi LinkedIn Account <https://www.linkedin.com/company/sanofi/posts/?feedView=all>



Trova contenuti correlati 🔍 Segnala

sanofi sanofi · 8-20 Segui

It's been over a week since 1,000 of our Sanofi volunteers completed their mission at the Olympic Games Paris... altro

🎵 son original - sanofi

📍 Paris

👍 79 💬 0 📄 2 Commenta per 📧 📺 📧 📧 📧 📧

<https://www.tiktok.com/@sanofi/video/740527679286...> Copia link

Commenti (0) Video del creator

Source: Sanofi TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@sanofi/video/7405276792862395680>



Sanofi

3 g · 🌐

...

The past 24 hours have been nothing short of ✨ MAGICAL ✨—and this is just the beginning! Here are the highlights 🌟

🐎 Our iconic Metal Horse from the Olympic Games Paris 2024 Opening Ceremony is now proudly showcased at the mayor's office in Paris.

✨ Our extraordinary Sanofi volunteers have traveled across the globe, ringing in plenty of energy and motivation, for a kick-off at the UNESCO House in Paris! ... Altro...



Source: Facebook Sanofi <https://www.facebook.com/Sanofi/>

The tone of these posts is emotional because we can see in the caption terms such as “magical”, “energy”, “motivation”, “extraordinary Sanofi volunteers” and so on. But it is also promotional because in promoting the Olympics the company is indirectly promoting itself too. This type of engagement in the event seems to be well-received by the social media audience. This can be understood when looking at the comments, especially on LinkedIn, like in the example below.

Chaitanya Billakurthi (He/Him) • 3° e oltre

3 settimane ...

MES PAS-X SERVICE MANAGER at Cognizant

To everyone who contributed to the amazing success of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, congratulations! Team Sanofi's achievement of four medals is a testament to their dedication and hard work. We would like to express our profound gratitude to the over 1,000 volunteers, whose enthusiasm and commitment were crucial to the success of this event. These efforts genuinely embody our **#WeNeverSettle** mentality. My goal is to volunteer in 2024 during the Paralympic Games in Paris. Let's demonstrate to our athletes our steadfast enthusiasm and support.

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/sanofi/posts/?feedView=all>

This comment shows the appreciation towards Sanofi's engagement in the event. Indeed, the comments state *“To everyone who contributed to the amazing success of the 2024*

Olympic Games in Paris, congratulations! Team Sanofi's achievement of four medals is a testament to their dedication and hard work”.

Bouchara Recordati has just a LinkedIn account in which it publishes content about job offerings, CEO interviews, and company events.

An example of a CEO interview is shown in the figure below. In the description of the post it is stated: *“What unites us: meeting each other, understanding how we work, exploring what we can do differently; working together closely as one Recordati, with one culture, one purpose, and with fantastic performance. This month, our CEO Rob Koremans spent time with the team in Spain, celebrating their contribution and growth journey. He shared what unites us around the globe as one Recordati, highlighting how meaningful work inspires and empowers us to create a lasting impact. Click below to hear more”.*



Source: Bouchara LinkedIn account.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/laboratoires-bouchara-recordati/posts/>

In the video, the CEO of Bouchara Recordati explains that the company is driven by its purpose which is unlocking the full potential of life everywhere. The video carries an

inspiring message that encourages viewers to take action and believe in themselves. The video has a dramatic tone, using intensity to engage viewers.

RECORDATI France
3,429 follower
1m • 🌐

Les Laboratoires BOUCHARA-RECORDATI filiale française du Groupe RECORDATI, recherchent dans le cadre d'une alternance un (e) apprenti (e) dans le département des Ressources Humaines.
A pourvoir début septembre 2024 pour 12 mois

Mostra traduzione

CHARGE (E) DE MISSION RH
RECORDATI

LABORATOIRES BOUCHARA RECORDATI
Les Laboratoires BOUCHARA-RECORDATI filiale française du Groupe RECORDATI, recherchent dans le cadre d'une alternance un (e) apprenti (e).

En intégrant notre équipe RH, vous bénéficierez d'un environnement de travail stimulant où vous pourrez développer vos compétences tout en contribuant activement à la réussite de projets stratégiques pour l'entreprise.

Source: Bouchara LinkedIn account.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/laboratoires-bouchara-recordati/posts/>

In the image above we can find an example of a job offer post. The post is formal, with a serious and professional tone.

Instead, the image below shows an example of a company event kind of post. In particular, the post deals with a congress called Albatros in which Bouchara participated. The tone is optimistic, focusing on hope and potential future successes.

RECORDATI France
3,429 follower
2m • 🌐

Nous sommes heureux de participer au Congrès de l'Albatros, qui se déroule du 4 au 6 juin à Paris. Ce congrès est une belle occasion d'échanger avec les professionnels en addictologie sur des sujets cruciaux, tels que la prévention et la prise en soin des patients. Un grand merci au Pr Amine Benyamina pour l'organisation de cette nouvelle édition, toujours aussi enrichissante et inspirante.

18^e Congrès International d'Addictologie de l'ALBATROS
ALBATROS International Congress of Addictology

Ouverture - Introduction

Frédéric Valletoux
Membre délégué en charge de la Santé et de la Prévention

Nicolas Prisse
Président de la MLDECA Paris - France

Amine Benyamina
Président de l'ALBATROS Villejuif - France

#CongresAlbatros #Addictologie #UnlockingTheFullPotentialOfLife

Mostra traduzione

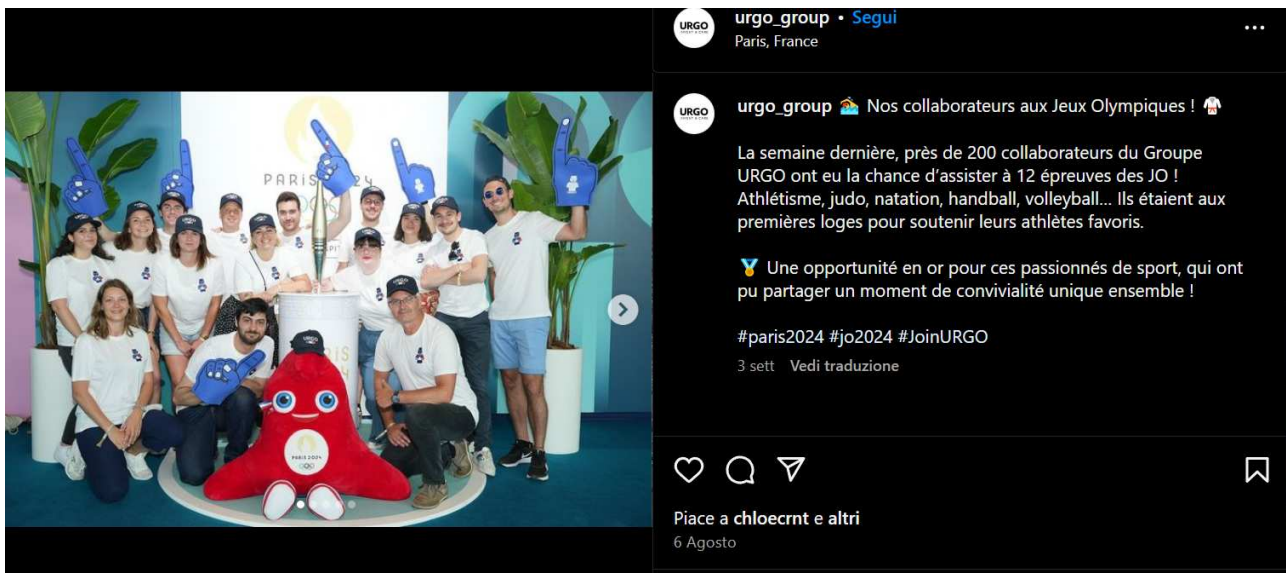
40 5 diffusioni post

Consiglia Commenta Diffondi il post Invia

Source: Bouchara LinkedIn account.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/laboratoires-bouchara-recordati/posts/>

Urgo on Instagram published content about the Olympic Games as Sanofi did, but also videos about the story of Urgo's employees. An example of an Instagram post related to the Olympic Games is shown in the figure below.

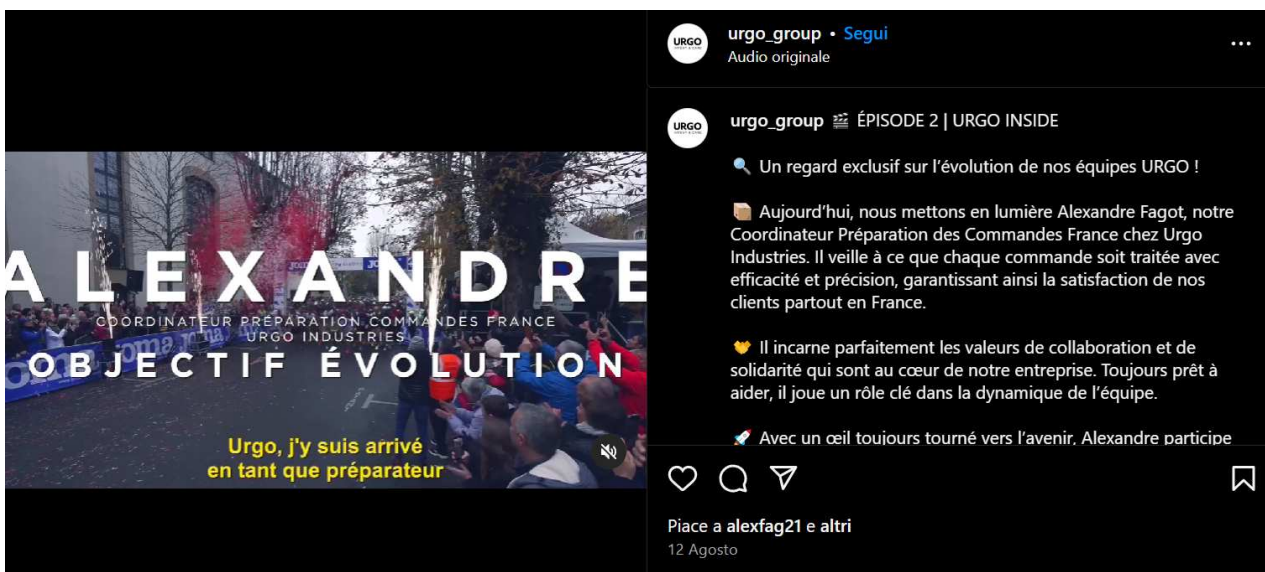


Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C-VVAkDiP8o/?img_index=4

The post is a carousel of images that shows a group of Urgo's employees joining as the audience to the Olympic Games. They are wearing all merchandise with the logo of the brand (t-shirts, gloves, hats). The caption of the text is quite short and it uses a casual and friendly tone. This is demonstrated by the sentence "Ils étaient aux premières loges pour soutenir leurs athlètes favoris", which translated it is "They were in the front row to support their favourite athletes". This sentence displays a friendly and positive image of the employees without being formal. In the caption, there are three hashtags, two related to the Olympics (#paris2024 #jo2024) and one related to the brand (#JoinUrgo). The aim of the post and the message Urgo wants to spread is that if you join the company, you will be able to join also amazing events such as the Olympics with the amazing company of your colleagues.

The other kind of post published by Urgo on Instagram is a storytelling video which tells the story of one of the urgo's employees.

In particular, he is the Order Preparation Coordinator France at Urgo Industries. The video is in the form of a short film.



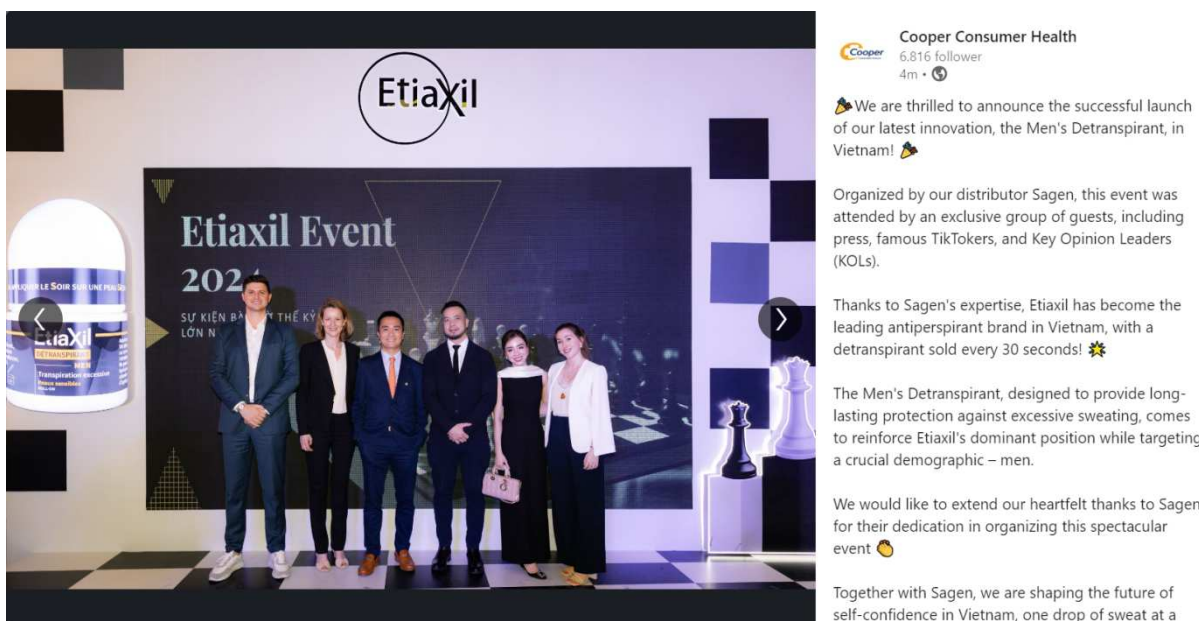
Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-kodnKinhX/>

The video shows the employer running a marathon and saying with a background voice that when he first entered the company he was just a “préparateur” (“order picker”), and then he climbed the hierarchy of the company and became the coordinator. Again, since it is the period of the Olympics, there is a comparison between the sport (running) and the ability to grow inside Urgo which is like running and winning a marathon. This is demonstrated also by the fact that, while he is running is wearing a t-shirt with the Urgo’s logo.

The tone of the video is emotional as it tells the story of an employee in the first person who was able to “win” a more important position inside the company in comparison to when he first entered. Moreover, it is inspirational as it encourages other potential employees to join the company and achieve the same results.

As it is for Therabel, also Cooper has just a LinkedIn account. However, Cooper publishes a lot of posts often related to company events.

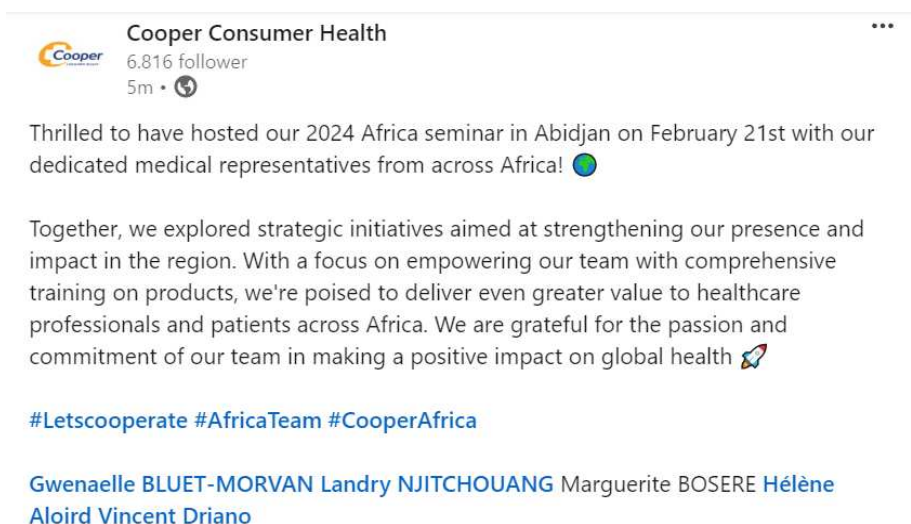
An example of a company promotion of its events is the one in the Figure below. The post is an image of a group of people, probably Cooper’s employees together with Sagen’s employees with which they did a partnership (as it is described in the caption).



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/cooper-consumer-health/posts/?feedView=all>

The post is informational but also promotional of the new launch of their product, the Men's Detranspirant.

Another example is the one in the Figure below. The caption is followed by an image of a big group of African people. The post again wants to advertise a company event, in this case, a seminar that was held in Africa.



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/cooper-consumer-health/posts/?feedView=all>

The post has both an informational and emotional tone. It is emotional because it uses words such as “thrilled”, “grateful”, and “passion”.

Boiron uses its Instagram account to advertise its products, and sustainability-related content and gives health tips. An example of a product advertisement is shown in the figure below.



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C_H8Br1xJk4/?img_index=1

The post shows an image of the packaging of the products (Mag'Nuit and Mag'300+). In contrast to the same kind of post made by Aboca, the caption does not describe the usage or the target of the products but instead, it is used to engage with the reader to join a quiz and a contest. The caption uses an informational and engaging tone to invite the reader to join the contest and to describe how to do this. The post received a lot of comments, which was the requirement to join the contest.

An example of sustainability-related content has already been described above in this study. While, regarding the health tips contents an example is shown here below.



Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C_ANevoIfrA/

The image of the post shows a person swimming and next to it, there is a list of tips for how to start again doing sports after the period of holidays. Between the tips, there is one in particular which is “think about homeopathy” (“Penser à l’homéo”). This is an indirect reference to the products of the company and an invitation to use them to help be in shape and do sports. The post is likely aimed at promoting a lifestyle that aligns with the brand's image.

Perrigo on Facebook published posts about employees' pictures/storytelling, job postings, and CSR-related posts. An example of the first kind of post has been shown in the figure below.



Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=983852527085465&set=a.443128721157851&locale=it_IT

The image shows selfies made by Perrigo employees from different departments with the pharmacist inside the pharmacies. The caption states:


“Our purpose is to Make Lives Better Through Trusted Health and Wellness Solutions, Accessible to All. Recently, colleagues in France brought that to life during their Cohesion Month.

Over 80 office-based colleagues from across HR, Regulatory, Marketing, CS&I, Supply Chain, and Sales got involved and visited over 100 pharmacies being merchandised with our Compeed and Phytosun Aroms point of sale displays.

This was a fantastic way to experience a day in the life of our dedicated Field Sales Team, expand our brand awareness, and meet our valuable customers and shoppers!

Next time you are in your local pharmacy keep an eye out for our Perrigo products!”

The post has an emotional tone because of the picture which shows real-life situations without the use of filters or professional shooting. Moreover, the tone of voice of the caption is engaging because it invites the reader to look at Perrigo products when entering a pharmacy.

 Perrigo Company plc
29 luglio · 🌐

We're proud to play a vital role in the essential Consumer Self-Care Industry that delivers tremendous value to consumers and societies across the globe.

Find out more about us - <https://www.perrigo.com/>
#weareperrigo... Altro...



Source: https://www.facebook.com/PerrigoCompanyPlc/?locale=it_IT

The image above instead shows an example of a CSR related post. Indeed it is written in the caption and in the image that “*The Consumer Self-Care Industry delivers great value for consumers and society*”. This statement describes the basis of the CSR and sustainability values and the position of the company in this industry.

Finally, Upsa, which has no Facebook or Instagram, uses LinkedIn to promote its company events, company news, and partnerships.

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/upsa-france/posts/?feedView=all>

The figure above is an example of a post aiming at promoting a company event and partnership. In this case, the partnership is with the association of pharmacy students.

The event is a congress with 400 students from all over France, as it has been described in the caption. The post aims to show the investment of Upsa in helping the future pharmacist, giving in this way, a positive image of the company.

5.3.4 Sentiment analysis: Engagement

Sentiment analysis “*provides an automatic, fast and efficient tool to identify reviewers’ opinions and sentiments*” (Mao, Liu, Zhang, 2024). Because of these benefits, it is going to be implemented here in order to understand the level of engagement across different social media channels published by the different competitors.

Table 3 below summarizes the frequency, content type, tone, and average engagement for each company on each social media platform based on the analyses above and over the period under study.

Company	Social media	Frequency (posts per month)	Content type	Tone	Average Engagement (likes)	Average Engagement (shares)
Aboca	Instagram	5	Images	informational promotional	30	N/A
Aboca	Linkedin	2	Images	informational promotional	20	5
Therabel	Linkedin	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sanofi	Instagram	18	Reels/Images	emotional promotional	375	N/A
Sanofi	Facebook	11	Reels/Images	emotional promotional	42	8
Sanofi	Linkedin	18	Videos/Images	emotional promotional	1000	17
Bouchara Recordati	Linkedin	5	Videos/Images	promotional inspirational informational	146	108

Urgo	Instagram	2	Videos/Images	emotional inspirational	40	N/A
Urgo	Linkedin	4	Videos/Images	emotional inspirational	100	10
Cooper	Linkedin	7	Images	informational	35	10
Boiron	Instagram	13	Reels/Images	informational promotional	70	N/A
Boiron	Linkedin	6	Videos/Images	informational promotional	73	15
Perrigo	Facebook	17	Videos/Images	emotional promotional	17	1
Perrigo	Linkedin	11	Videos/Images	informational promotional emotional	130	2
Upsa	Linkedin	2	Videos/Images	informational promotional emotional	175	17

Table 3: Aboca and competitor's frequency, content type, tone, and average engagement on social media.

From the table, we can see that the company that publishes more frequent content on social media is Sanofi, especially on Instagram and LinkedIn with 18 posts per month. Followed by Sanofi there is Perrigo which publishes on Facebook an average of 17 posts per month. In third place, there is Boiron with an average of 13 posts per month on Instagram. In order after Boiron, there is Cooper which publishes 7 posts per month on LinkedIn. Bouchara Recordati publishes 5 posts per month on LinkedIn, 2 less than Cooper. Upsa on LinkedIn publishes 2 posts per month. Urgo publishes 4 posts per month on LinkedIn and 2 on Instagram. Finally, Aboca published an average of 5 posts per month on Instagram and 2 on LinkedIn, far less than its competitors.

Regarding the content type, almost all the brands employ a mix of videos and images often in the form of Reels for the videos and Carousel for images.

The tone of the posts has been divided into 3 categories: informational, emotional, and promotional. Most of the companies employ a mix of these two kinds of tones together, for example, emotional/informational or promotional/emotional.

Of all the platforms and companies the one that has the most number of likes is Sanofi on LinkedIn with an average engagement of 1000 likes per post. This could be explained also by the fact that it is the company that publishes more content. Also for Instagram, Sanofi has the majority of likes, 375 likes as the average engagement per post. After Sanofi in second place, there is Upsa which has an average engagement on LinkedIn of 175 likes.

Upsa is followed by Bouchara Recordati which has, on the same platform, LinkedIn, an average of 146 likes. After Bouchara, there is Perrigo on LinkedIn which has 130 likes as an average per post. In the 5th place, there is Urgo which has an average of 100 likes on LinkedIn. Urgo is followed by Boiron which has 70 likes per post on LinkedIn and 73 on Instagram. In the last positions, there are Cooper which has an average of 35 likes per post, and Aboca with 20 likes per post on LinkedIn and 30 likes on Instagram.

It was not possible to analyze the number of shares for Instagram due to the limitations of the platform and the tools used to analyze the data. Regarding LinkedIn, Bouchara Recordati has the highest number of shares on average, 108 per post. After Bouchara we can find Upsa and Sanofi which both have an average of 17 shares per post on LinkedIn. Boiron has an average of 15 shares on the same platform and it is followed by Cooper and Urgo which have 10 shares. In the last positions, there are Aboca with 5 shares and Perrigo with 2 shares on LinkedIn.

In conclusion, the company with the most engagement and the highest frequency of posting is Sanofi in all social media platforms. On the contrary, Aboca is the company with the lowest engagement.

5.4 Data Analysis and Discussion

In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the engagement metrics (likes, shares). A comparative analysis was applied to determine if there are significant differences in engagement levels and consumer perceptions between Aboca and its competitors. A thematic analysis was conducted regarding the content of social media posts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and differences in the sustainability messages. In addition, a sentiment analysis was included to assess the tone and emotional impact of the social media content.

As previously stated, the descriptive analysis was developed with the objective of having an overall overview of the company and the context of the market in which it is inserted.

In order to do so two stages were developed. First, the analysis of a graph, given by the company Aboca, which showed the sell-out data of the sore throat market in France of the month of September 2023. From the graph, it was possible to understand which are the first competitors of Aboca. The main competitors are Therabel, Sanofi, Urgo, Perrigo, Bouchara Recordati, Cooper, Boiron, and Ursa. Following this, an analysis of the websites of these companies was conducted in order to gather information about their histories.

From the overall analysis of these competitors it emerges that they all have a long history when looking at the date of foundations. Moreover, they are all distributed globally. However, no one of them produce 100% natural products like Aboca does and they are not overall sustainability oriented in their production systems.

As previously stated, a comparative analysis was conducted with the objective of comparing the different use of social media channels by the different competitors. In order to do so two stages were developed. First, a table which summarizes which social media channels are used by different competitors. From the table it was possible to understand that Aboca uses different social media platforms to advertise its products and promote its company values. It is present on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Youtube and LinkedIn. However, the Facebook and TikTok accounts are only in Italian and for this reason were not considered for the content and comparative analysis. Sanofi is the only competitor that employs all this social media channel like Aboca. The others seem to select some over the others or not to use them at all. For example, Therabel does not post anything on social media. Some others like Bouchara Recordati use only LinkedIn and some as Urgo has only Instagram.

Following the table, a more in depth analysis of Instagram and Facebook profiles of Aboca and its competitors was conducted through the use of the tools NotJustAnalytics and Fanpage Karma. From this analysis it was possible to understand that Urgo on Instagram has the lowest number of followers (3.165) and Engagement Rate (1,91%) and it is also the one which publishes the posts with less frequency. On the contrary Aboca has the highest Engagement Rate (54,15%) on Instagram. However the number of followers is still low (4.484). The company with the highest number of followers on Instagram is Boiron (20.000), followed by Sanofi (11.300). Thanks to FanPageKarma it was possible to analyze and compare the Facebook profiles of Perrigo and Sanofi. From this analysis it emerges that Perrigo uses almost only pictures and links as a type of content while Sanofi prefers

also other types of posts such as videos. Concerning Sanofi's Facebook account, the most frequent words used are Games, Paris, Olympic, and Sanofi. While for Perrigo the most used words are Selfcare, Perrigo, and Health. In terms of engagement, Sanofi appears to have a higher rate than Perrigo in the period of July-August 2024. From this analysis it can be concluded that the fact of having different social media accounts represents a competitive advantage for Sanofi and Aboca which both have a higher Engagement Rate than competitors.

After the comparative analysis, a thematic analysis was conducted with the objective of understanding the different themes across different social media channels published by the different competitors. In order to do so two stages were developed. First, a table which summarizes the main topics of the posts on each social media published by different competitors. From the analysis of the table it is possible to conclude that the majority of the companies posts on social media aim to promote company's events and partnerships, sometimes directly their products and job postings in the case of LinkedIn. Just some of them include sustainability initiatives or CSR-related posts. Among this category there is Aboca, both on Instagram, LinkedIn and the other channels, but also Boiron on Instagram and LinkedIn and Perrigo on Facebook, LinkedIn and the website. Because of this, Aboca can have an advantage over the competitors since this kind of posts usually has a high engagement from the audience.

The second stage consisted in a more in depth analysis of each post on each social media. The analysis includes the caption of the post and the type of image or video. From this analysis, it can be concluded that Aboca is the only company among its competitors which directly promotes its products on social media through images of the packaging. Moreover, it is the company which publishes more content related to sustainability. On the other hand other competitors, especially Sanofi but also Urgo publish posts mostly related to the Olympic Games in Paris and not directly related to their products or to sustainability. Their focus is instead more on showing the images of their employees. Thanks to this second stage, it was also possible to understand the frequency of posting, the content type, the tone and the average engagement levels. From this analysis, it can be concluded that the posts published by Aboca, both the ones in relation to sustainability and the ones showing the products, are less engaging for the target audience than the ones published by Sanofi and Urgo, for example, related to the Olympic Games.

Through this information, Table 3 was created as the final step of the last type of analysis, the sentiment one. The sentiment analysis was conducted through the creation of a table, which resulted from the information gathered throughout the thematic analysis. From the table, it was possible to understand that the frequency of posting per month of the companies has an average of 8 posts. The company which publishes content with more frequency is Sanofi, while the ones with less frequency are Upsa and Uργο. Sanofi is also the one with the highest engagement as an average of likes while Perrigo on Facebook has the lowest engagement. Also Aboca has a low average number of likes. When it comes to content types, practically all brands use a combination of photos and videos, frequently presented as Carousels for images and Reels for films. For this reason, it can be concluded that the fact that Aboca does not use videos/Reels on Instagram (during the period under study), but just images could be a reason for its low average number of likes and so represents a disadvantage. Three categories have been established for the tone of the posts: informational, emotional, and promotional. The majority of companies use a combination of these two tones, such as promotional and emotive or emotional and informative. The combination of these tones, in particular the use of the emotional one, seems to represent a competitive advantage for the companies. This could instead represent a disadvantage for Aboca which employs more the informational and promotional tone in its posts.

From the overall analyses it can be understood that the main competitors of Aboca are Sanofi, Therabel, Uργο, Perrigo, Bouchara Recordati, Cooper, Boiron, and Upsa. These competitors are all more or less present on social media, some of them in more than one platform and others just in one social media or two. Regarding the themes of the posts, Aboca appears as the one most engaged in the sustainability and products promotion. The competitors prefer other themes such as employees history and company events and partnerships.

Aboca employs almost only images as a type of content while the competitors use a strategic mix of images and videos and often prefer this second category. In terms of average engagement (likes and shares) Sanofi has the highest number and it is also the one which publishes more frequently. On the other hand, Aboca has a low engagement and does not often publish content on social media.

Thanks to the results of this analysis it is possible to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this research.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Conclusion

The research problem of the study was to understand if sustainability represents a key topic in the communication strategies employed by Aboca and its competitors on social media and how effective is this topic in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. The relevance of the problem is linked to the fact that sustainability has become an important topic among consumers and professionals in different fields but it is still not so deeply studied in the field of healthcare. For the aim of the study a mixed approach was used combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methodology guided the majority of the analysis and consisted in a descriptive, comparative and thematic analysis of the contents published on social media by Aboca and its main competitors. The quantitative method is based on the number of followers, likes, shares and frequency of posting of these companies.

In conclusion, Aboca has built a solid following through product-focused and sustainability content, but there is room to develop by expanding the variety of content formats it offers and promoting more interactive engagement.

In order to sustain and enhance its competitive advantage, Aboca should generate more appealing material such as surveys and posts created by users, and augment its use of video across various channels.

By implementing these strategies, Aboca may be able to improve engagement rates while simultaneously building a stronger feeling of community and brand loyalty, which will help it stand out from the competition on social media. Aboca's digital strategy will need to be continuously analyzed and adjusted in order to maintain its growth and relevance in the market, as social media user behavior continues to change.

To address the first research question, “How do the frequency, tone, and content of sustainability messages differ between Aboca and its competitors?”, data showed that the frequency of sustainability messages published by Aboca on social media is higher than its competitors. Regarding the tone, Aboca employs an informational and promotional tone for its messages, generally aligned with the tone of competitors, but less emotional. Concerning the type of sustainable content, Aboca publishes mostly images which deal

with not wasting water and generally promoting the reduction of the environmental footprint through good practices.

The second research question was: “What is the consumer engagement level (likes, shares, comments, etc.) with sustainability-related posts from Aboca compared to its competitors?”

Based on the analysis made above, the engagement level of sustainability-related posts from Aboca is lower than the one of its competitors. Despite the fact that sustainability seems to be a competitive advantage, once there is more engagement in these posts than the other ones, sustainability is not enough to be an advantage for Aboca in terms of engagement. Indeed, other factors seem more relevant (e.g. number of social media platforms, number of followers, etc).

In conclusion, this research offers a thorough evaluation of Aboca's social media performance in comparison to its competitors.

6.2 Research Limitations

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations should be acknowledged, as they may have influenced the depth and scope of the findings. One of the primary limitations of this research was the constraint of time. Given the limited duration allocated for data collection and analysis, it was challenging to conduct a more thorough and longitudinal study of Aboca's social media performance and engagement trends. Social media behaviour and engagement can fluctuate based on several factors, such as seasonal trends, external events, or marketing campaigns. A longer data collection period could have provided a more comprehensive view of engagement patterns over time, allowing for a better understanding of how Aboca and its competitors adapt to these changes.

Another significant limitation was the absence of a robust quantitative approach. While the study provided descriptive insights into engagement metrics (e.g., likes, comments, shares), it relied primarily on qualitative content analysis and comparisons. The inclusion of more quantitative methods, such as statistical analysis or surveys, could have strengthened the findings.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Social media are always changing, and younger people are increasingly using new ones like Threads and TikTok. Future studies can examine how Aboca and its competitors adjust to new platforms and how their approaches to interaction vary depending on the platform. Comparing engagement on more recent vs. more established platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, may provide useful information about the content preferences of each. In addition, since Aboca operates in several nations or areas, a cross-cultural study of social media involvement may be done in the future. Aboca may be able to better target its advertising by having a better understanding of how various cultural contexts affect consumer behavior, preferred content, and interaction tactics on social media. This would be especially important for international brands trying to strike a balance between localized content strategy and a cohesive brand identity.

Chapter 7 Bibliography

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