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"Greenfluencers" As Part Of Sustainable Marketing Strategies And Their Effect On Consumer Reachability

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This thesis investigates how the new concept of Greenfluencers, that come with the emergence of sustainable practices, can be part of established sustainable marketing strategies and how they influence consumer reachability for environmentally friendly purchases. The thesis aims to contributes to the understanding of Greenfluencers by providing valuable insights and fundamental knowledge on the topic and provides recommendations on their utilization. The research adopts a qualitative research approach through interviews with sustainability experts, using a semi-structured set of questions and thematic analysis to identify patterns in the data.

The key findings suggest that Greenfluencers can be a part of sustainable marketing strategies as they have similar characteristics as already established sustainable marketing strategies. They can be of use to reach consumers interested in sustainability, for a company's products or services, by introducing a company to their own platform. Challenges of this method can occur with regulations on the respective marketing, with the right execution of a cooperation, and with the credibility of all parties involved.

Content

Appendices

1   Introduction

Social media influencers have become a well-established medium when it comes to business to consumer (B2C) marketing (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021, p.4). Their impact on consumer behaviour, purchase intention and customer engagement is not to be underestimated (Ao et al., 2023, p.6). Additionally, an equivalently important subject on the topic of marketing nowadays has become sustainability. These two trends in today's marketing seem contradicting at first when being looked at as promotion of consumption whilst the other is promoting sustainability. This niche is filled by the new occurring category of the "Greenfluencer" (Knupfer et al, 2023, p.1).

Traditionally, influencers have been with us starting way earlier than just of social media times. They evolved from being role models, to fashion icons, to bloggers. When social media sides like YouTube and Instagram became more widely established, not only did brands put their advertisements and input there, they also started to cooperate with people that had already gained a substantial platform on those sites to promote their products as well (Watkins, 2021, p.1-3). This concept is even more popular today, since platforms like Tik Tok and its algorithm allow any users content to potentially and rapidly gain widespread attention (DeVito, 2022, p.12), which can make accessing the right target audience easier than ever. For brands this means to ensure that both visibility and association are granted and generated here.

From all meanings of sustainability most people might understand it as the concept of acting generally environmentally cautious. With the world-wide news about global natural disasters, new pro-environment laws being introduced and trends being spread fast, this form of sustainability strikes to be the most common understood one in todays society. Since consumers are highly aware of this trend, they also want to be able to apply it in their purchase behaviour (Nguyen & Johnson, 2020, p.540). When combined now with marketing, sustainable marketing is the most obvious form of marketing, that is not only used and introduced for the sole purpose of profit alone, but also for positively influencing the planet and consumer (Nadanyiova & Sujanska, 2023, p.53). Greenfluencers have become a sub division of influencers whose focus is on the promotion of sustainable and environmentally friendly products and lifestyle (Knupfer et al, 2023, p.2). By doing this they are filling the niche of the contradicting marketing topics. Influencers like @trashisfortossers have built large followings by advocating a sustainable lifestyle and collaborating with fitting brands to help their followers do the same (Schwemmer et al., 2021, p.3).

Since Greenfluencers are one of the newest division of influencers and also on the topic of sustainability, there is a unique opportunity here to determine how these new influencers are adding in or adding onto already established sustainable marketing strategies. Additionally, it is necessary to understand what impact Greenfluencers have on their followers and how this could benefit not only the environment but also companies offering environmentally friendly products and services. Investigating this potential opportunity of a companies marketing is essential since the attention of consumers on sustainability is already being observed. Just like in every area of business, marketing needs to stay on top of the available options, what for the author is investigating the option of the Greenfluencers.

Therefor in this thesis, the author will utilize a qualitative research approach along with expert interviews to explore the topic of Greenfluencers and consumer reachability. P Analysis techniques such as convenience sampling and a thematic analysis will be used to examine the thesis objective.

1.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this thesis is to analyse the new trend of Greenfluencers in sustainable marketing and more precisely how it effects a brands consumer reachability. It aims to increase knowledge on the trend of Greenfluencers and provides recommendations for the utilization of them. This thesis can additionally be used for further studies on the topic.

1.2 Research Questions

In order to archive the aim of the thesis, the main research questions are:

1. How can Greenfluencers be a part of established sustainable marketing strategies?

2. How do Greenfluencers influence consumer reachability for environmentally friendly purchases?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Marketing

The shift in today's marketing approaches goes towards environmental and social sustainability. Sustainable marketing is all about communicating and creating value to products and services, that benefit not only the company but also planet and people. This new way of approaching business, aims to influence both internally and externally of an organisation. This area of marketing follows the objective to influence the behaviour of its target group positively and minimize negative impact. (Martin & Schouten, 2020, p.12)

Additionally, sustainable marketing composes different subsets of marketing under one term. These integrated marketing topics include green marketing, social marketing, and critical marketing. They are cantering different marketing activities like green marketing concentrating on developing and promoting sustainable products and services, social marketing focuses on the promotion of sustainable behaviour of individuals and businesses and critical marketing involves analysing marketing practices through critical thinking, to challenge companies to promote sustainability. (Carrigan et al, 2011, p.1)

2.1.1 Importance of Sustainability

The importance of implementing sustainability can be witnessed in various points. Effects of climate change are not only recorded and documented with scientific evidence, they are brought to the attention of people through the news and tabloids. (Famuyiwa, 2023, p.3) It is communicated that these events and issues are not a distant future anymore. Other sustainable issues, such as economic inequalities, are also brought to people's attention more quickly through social media news outlets. The consequences of not addressing and implementing measures to prevent this could result in people accumulating anger and frustration, which could lead to greater problems such as societal conflicts and eventual economic collapse. (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2020)

Additionally, several governments around the world have already established measures ranging from local regulations, to nationwide laws and policies to achieve change in behavioural and economic activities that impact planet and people. Governments are also setting goals to align their activities in a more sustainable direction. An example would be the climate goals set by the European Union (EU). (Elavarasan & Pugazhendhi, 2022, p.2)

Another point of sustainable importance is, that large companies across various sectors of business have already been taking action. Examples include global companies such as Microsoft or Unilever. Through various initiative programs and business strategy restructuring, they are setting new standards for sustainability and sustainable marketing. (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2020)

2.1.2   Embracing Sustainable Marketing

Luders five-dimensional framework known as the GREEN framework for sustainable marketing, is used to understand, guide and implement sustainable marketing. The frameworks title is an abbreviation for the dimensions: Globalized marketplace of value exchange, responsible environmental practices, equitable sustainable-business-practices, ethical sustainable consumption and necessary quality-of-life & well-being. (Bartholomew et al., 2021, p.159) Often also connected to the topic of business sustainability and its sustainable marketing is Elkington's construct of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), which explains foundation areas when working with sustainability. This model which consists of natural environment, our society and a company's financial performance is often broken down for simplicity purposes into the three Ps of Sustainability, that are also visualised in Figure 1: Profit, People and Planet. (Farooq et al, 2022, p.2023-2024)

Figure 1 The triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997)
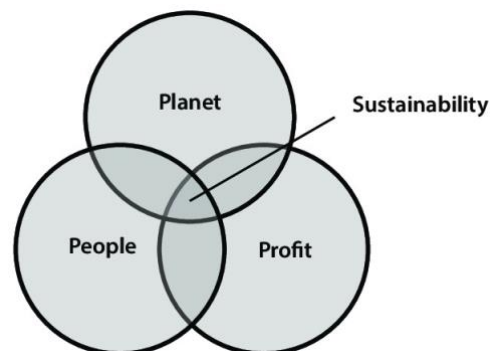
Sustainable marketing integrates green marketing, social marketing, and environmental marketing into a modern approach that combines ethical, eco-friendly practices and social responsibility initiatives. (Krishnan et al., 2022, p.364)

2.1.3   Sustainable Marketing Strategies

With more growing interest of consumer and producer in environmentally friendly products, brands are increasing their focus on sustainable or green marketing strategies, to market and sell these products. Furthermore, these strategies are even more deeply incorporated by numerous companies, for example into production, promotion, and customer interactions. (Butnaru et al., 2023, p.1) To help the development and implementation of sustainable marketing strategies, companies often make use of the green marketing mix framework. It consists of the four components, also called the "Four Ps" of green marketing, which are product, price, place, and promotion. These components are to be considered when integrating a company's strategy in an eco-friendly manner, to minimize unfavourable effects on the environment for all marketing strategies. (Tripathi & Sharma, 2023, p.77)

2.1.4   Characteristics of Sustainable Marketing Strategies

Sustainable marketing strategies shift from aggressive sales techniques towards long-term strategies prioritizing the environment. This shift can also be seen as transitioning from push to pull marketing strategies, which is aligning with the fact that consumers now prioritize and support businesses that engage in sustainable practices. (Krishnan et al., 2022, p.362) Additionally, sustainable marketing strategies are emphasizing the importance of long-term relationships over the short-term sales objectives (Werbach, 2011). Currently marketing departments are prioritized ethical considerations in their strategies, since marketing activities play a crucial role in ensuring sustainable practices. Setting the focus on the well-being of various stakeholders, including the environment, in addition to the regular profit metrics of the business, is also a characteristic of sustainable marketing strategies. (Krishnan et al., 2022, p.363)

Sustainable marketing strategies also involve considering various steps in the process of being created and implemented (e.g. planning, implementation, control, and development of pricing, promotion, and distribution). This shows the adaptability of these strategies, to align marketing with sustainability. (Krishnan et al., 2022, p.364) With sustainable marketing strategies companies must incorporate and embrace innovative approaches across different marketing areas, like redirecting consumers behave to sustainability and innovating product packaging or service (Fang et al, 2022, p.1).

2.2   Social Media Influencer Marketing

2.2.1   Definition of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers (SMIs) are individuals that have gained a large following on social media platforms, like Instagram, Tik Tok, or YouTube and promote products to their audience mostly for compensation. They are a new type of endorser, because they are the ones creating content specifically for their self-gained target audience and followers. They shape behaviour and beliefs, of their own followers over time. Their followers then become customers who are now relying and trusting SMIs product recommendations. As followers see these influencers as endorsers and role models, they seem more authentic and credible to them than traditional advertising, because they relate to them more. (Chaudhry et al, 2023, p.1-2)

2.2.2   Types of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers range from individuals who have already gained an audience through modelling or acting, those who showcase their hobbies online such as fitness, to regular people like students. (Chaudhry et al, 2023, p.2) The way that SMIs are categorized can also be based on their number of followers on at least one platform. Mega-influencers are SMIs, having more than 1 million followers on at least one social media platform. Macro-influencers, have between 40,000 and 1 million followers and micro-influencers with between 1,000 and 40,000 followers. There are also nano-influencers, with only under 1,000 truly engaging followers. Mega-influencers are mostly mainstream celebrities, or at this point already considered as celebrities. (Borges-Tiago et al, 2023, p.4) Another way to categorize SMIs is by their areas of interest or content format. Examples of this type of categorization could include photography, food content, beauty, art, or comedians / comedy. (Mathew, 2018)

Studies, such as those shown in Figure 1, "Distribution of Instagram influencers worldwide in 2022", by category (HypeAuditor, 2023), indicate that the number of influencers in each category or type is not distributed evenly. Music accounts are 8.5% of the share of followers, followed by Beauty at 7.63%, setting them apart from the other categories. However, they are still far behind lifestyle influencers, which make up 14.32% of shares on the social media platform Instagram in 2022.

The category type of lifestyle influencers appears to be dominant across various social media platforms. For instance, TikTok's most followed influencer in 2023 was Khaby Lame, a lifestyle influencer with nearly 162 million followers. (Dencheva, 2023)

Figure 2 Distribution of Instagram influencers worldwide in 2022, by category
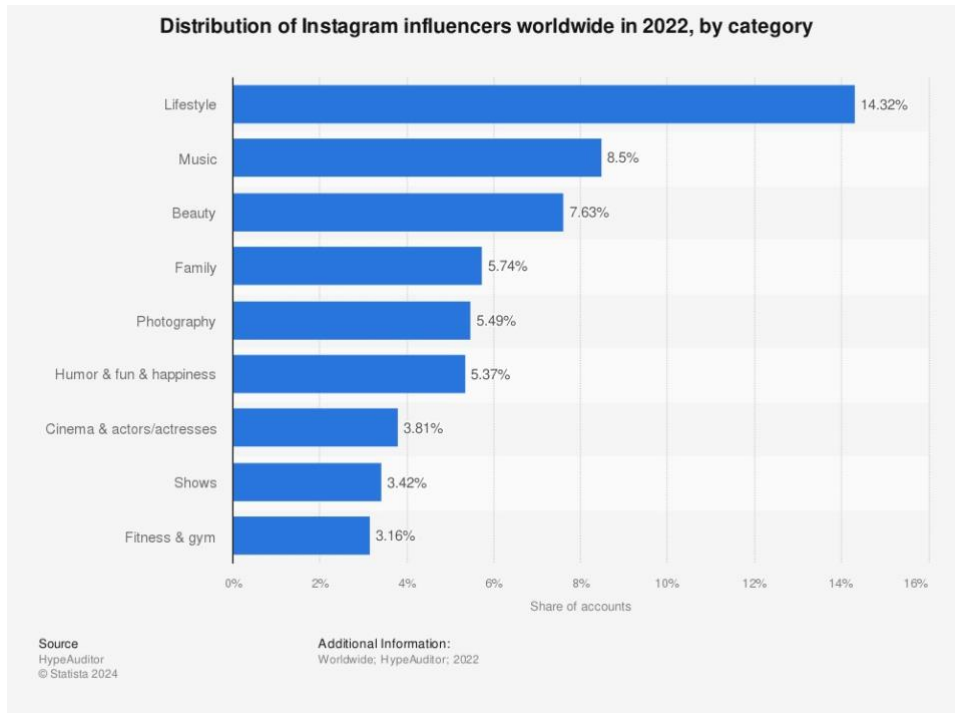
2.2.3 Influencers Impact in Marketing

With influencer marketing gaining popularity, it is advisable to allocate more than 10% of marketing budgets for this marketing strategy. Along with this, social media platforms are adjusting their features, to benefit the influencer marketing. An example of such a feature here would be the "shop" function on Instagram or Tik Tok, to make influencing and marketing on their platform even more attractive. Through this function, users can directly purchase from sponsored posts. Furthermore, brands can leverage influencers to build stronger relationships with their audience by connecting with their customers on a deeper emotional level. (Alvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p.99-104) Besides this, it is suggested, that marketing departments and brands should choose social media influencers based on their attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise instead of just considering their follower numbers and engagement analytics. Not applying this could lead to misleading their followers or being misled themselves, as some influencers may buy followers. The product

itself should remain a priority for a brand, rather than solely focusing on the SMI connection, as it continues to be the primary driver of general purchasing behaviour. (Hew et al., 2023, p. 4)

2.2.4 Influencer-Consumer Relationship

In the influencer-consumer interaction, influencers communicate information to their viewers, which could be personal or about products and brands. The return that influencers expect from this interaction includes views, likes, comments, and shares from their followers. (Belanche et al, 2020, p.39-40) Consumers' liking of an influencer and their willingness to purchase products promoted by the influencer increase in parallel with the influencer's growing number of followers. Despite having a large number of followers on social media, influencers' level of interaction with their followers plays a significant role in determining how much their followers like them. (Ceylan & Hayran, 2023, p.14)

Therefore, a higher rate of influencer-follower engagement leads to higher emotional attachment, more positive attitudes, and loyalty toward the influencer and the promoted products or brands. Consistent interaction also makes followers more loyal to the influencer, leading to longer-lasting relationships. (Chen, 2021, p.4) This way of interacting is what differentiates influencers from regular brands. They have a real-time, two-way communication with consumers. (Ceylan & Hayran, 2023, p.16)

2.2.5 Negative Aspects of Influencer & Critique

There is evidence that consumers consider vital ethical issues when it comes to influencers like their autonomy, transparency, sincerity, truthfulness, caring, professionalism, reciprocity, respect, loyalty, and social responsibility. Autonomy in this context referred to the independence that an influencer has in the market. (Borchers & Enke, 2022, p.1) When collaborating with companies that pay the influencer, this third party may make demands in their contract (Goanta & Ranchordás, 2020, p.10). This act of compensation raises ethical issues from a company's public relations (PR) and journalism standpoint. Payments and contracts interfere in the independence that influencers represent to their followers. This part of the relation between the influencer and the company should be disclosed and held to strict regulations for transparency purposes. (Borchers & Enke, 2022, p.3)
Non-disclosed advertisements still occur, violating regulations and ethically depriving

consumers of their right to be made aware of them being targeted with advertisements. (Boerman et al., 2020, p.344)

Influencers who are seen as role model can also be viewed in a critical light. For example, luxury influencers promote statues and consumption to their followers. Additionally, when influencers are given the title of a role model, it implies that they may take on social responsibilities as an individual. This is epically significant, when it comes to sponsored influencers targeting teens and children. In addition, children and teenager present another dimension of ethical issues when it comes to influencers and sponsored advertisement. A topic example here would also be underaged influencer labor. (Borchers & Enke, 2022, p.3)

The negative impact of utilizing influencers for marketing and commercial purposes goes beyond the influencer themselves or their audience, it is affecting the brands partnering with them as well. Trust violations in sponsored content can reflect poorly not only on the creator but on the endorsing brand as well. These violations can lead to outcomes counter to the intended goals, such as increase negative attitude, loss of trust, and decreased purchase intent towards the brand. (Luoma-aho et al., 2021, p.1)

2.3 Greenfluencers

2.3.1 Definition & Background

Green influencers, better known as Greenfluencers, are a subgroup of influencers who post social media content related to sustainability. Examples include, advertising for sustainable brands and raising awareness about the climate crisis. Their content can vary, ranging from promoting sustainable fashion or sustainable traveling to providing advice on waste use reduction, advocating a vegan lifestyle, or initiating environmental activism. However, the overall topic of their content remains sustainability. (Kupfer et al, 2023, p.2) They are individuals who are highly influential in their networks and make use of this to promote a pro-environmental lifestyle. These types of influencers can have different sized platforms in terms of followers, ranging from micro- to mega influencers. (Cavazos-Arroyo & Melchor-Ascencio, 2023)

This group of influencers is also sometimes categorized as opinion leaders, due to their communication skills and ability to inspire political action, both direct and indirect, in the form of environmental activism. (Knupfer et al, 2023, p.2) Greenfluencers originate from activism

of young people in the 2000s, evidence here for are movements like "Fridays for Future". This modern form of activism is largely conducted and organized through social media platforms. However, generally this concept of activists and movements, can be traced back to the 1970s climate activism. The combination of increased awareness about climate change and the growth of social media has led to generations expressing their frustration through both real life and online activism, with a focus on passing on sustainability topics. (Knupfer et al, 2023, p.2)

2.3.2 Characteristics & Strategic Approach

Notable with Greenfluencers is that they have a bigger impact on what consumers buy on their recommendation if they are less popular and have fewer followers. The same goes for their audience donating to charities after interacting with a post from those smaller types of green influencers. The value that is created with their pro-environment content therefor makes a difference to regular influencer content. (Abell & Pittman, 2021) Greenfluencers need to be credible, which is the groundwork of for their persuasiveness. They can then make statements and recommendations that are perceived as convincing, reliable and validated by their followers due to the Greenfluencers own expertise and experience. (Cavazos-Arroyo & Melchor-Ascencio, 2023)

Green influencers are directly interacting with their audience, networking with like-minded individuals and are dedicated to improving the interpersonal relationships and well-being of their followers. Greenfluencers encourage their followers to peruse a green lifestyle and handle consumption responsible. They do this by highlighting the environmental challenges that come with unsustainable consumption and demonstrate alternatives and solutions. This can come in form of content like "do it yourself" hacks, demonstrating how to reuse and recycle and promoting sustainable products and brands. (Balaji et al, 2022, p.536)

2.3.3 Areas of Greenfluencer Trends

Recent marketing trends indicate that influencers are the counterpart to word-of-mouth campaigns, so that trends corelate with their content. (Avhad et al, 2020) Sustainable fashion and second-hand shopping are two of these trends, driven by the public concern over the fashion industries impact on the environment. The urgency of this topic is highlighted by the news reports like water pollution through textile treatment and dyeing processes. This trend

is prompting fashion brands to adopt greener products and processes. (Choi et al, 2020, p.523)

The topic of plant-based diets and veganism is a trend that can also be observed. The demand for products for these diets is growing, putting the food system on the challenge to deliver sufficient, nutritious food for all within limited natural resources. (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2020) Zero waste living and the reduction of plastic use and pollution adds to these trends. With social media becoming the main outlet for discourses and discussions, all stakeholders are brought into the conversation, driving the trend and leading to regulations and implementations on a country basis like laws on single-use plastics, reusable ware and biodegradable alternatives. (Yu et al, 2021, p.2)

Trends can be also found in areas like sustainable beauty. The motivation behind the demand for green cosmetics is not only the pollution, but also the desire for products that do not harming one's own health. This trend not only includes makeup, but also skincare products, which fall under the overarching desire for internal and external wellbeing. This area of products grew significantly in the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, as health and wellbeing emerged as one of the primary concerns for consumers. (Dini & Laneri, 2021, p.1) Also, services and experiences are included in trends of content and sustainability. Eco-friendly travel is one example here. Acquiring and sharing travel insights and information is mostly done today over social media platforms. For instance, sustainable practices of eco-friendly hotels are being recommended in online messages of the influencing party. (Balaji et al, 2021)

2.3.4   Target Group

Especially younger people benefit from the parasocial relationship that is established with Greenfluencers. This is because, by following and interacting with these creators on social media, they may become more aware of sustainability issues and may be inspired to get involved in environmental activism, even if they have not been interested in these topics before. (Knupfer et al, 2023, p.1) Lifestyle influencers generally reach the larger target audience since they are also reaching people who care additionally about environmental awareness. Sustainable influencers may reach users who are already interested or aware of sustainability, but they do so effectively and more persuasively. (Breves & Liebers, 2022, p.773)

2.4 Green Consumer Behaviour

2.4.1 Definition of a Green Consumer

A green consumer is consumer that is seeking more eco-friendly products and services. The driving force behind this is trying to make more sustainable purchasing choices and becoming more conscious of the impact their buying decisions have on the environment. They are adjusting their behaviour to support environmental causes, and many feel a sense of moral responsibility to purchase green products. However, environmental conscious people are not equal in number to the green consumers, who will make environmentally friendly purchasing choices. (Hovan George & Shaji George, 2022, p.72) There are various different types of green consumers and how they act on their choices. The main categories being:

Behavioural Greens: These consumers only buy products and services that are good for the environment. They try to avoid buying things that harm the environment. They also make an effort to use environmentally friendly practices in their daily lives.

Think Greens: These consumers like to buy environmentally friendly products or services, but if it takes too much time, money, or resources they decide not to.

Potential Greens: Sometimes, people may not care much about being environmentally friendly on their own, but they might start acting that way if they see others doing it or if they are encouraged to do so.

Additionally, there is the category of consumers, who often times avoid any brand that promotes and sells products or perform services with a focus on the environment. This category is called: True Browns.
(Hovan George & Shaji George, 2022, p.71)

These consumers who participate in green consumption can again be divided into three distinct segments:

1. Those who grew up during times when environmental problems were more noticeable and had a direct impact on their lives.

2. People with higher levels of education, as they are more likely to be informed about the environmental issues.

3. Individuals with higher incomes, who are more able to afford and to support environmental causes and choose environmentally friendly products and services.
(Chandani et al., 2020, p.713-714)

2.4.2 Green Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour generally is about how people decide where to spend their money, time, and effort when they are purchasing goods or services. Their choices are influenced by their own behaviour, which also shapes their perception of the product they are considering. (Nasser Alganad et al, 2020, p.1171). Consumers make use of a decision-making process when choosing products or services that will satisfy their needs (Grecu et al., 2020, p.1) The green aspect of the consumer behaviour is planned activities arising from the social and individual needs, that result from the environmental conversation, to make environmentally-friendly choices. (Nasser Alganad et al., 2020, p.1171) The whole of green consumer behaviour can be divided into two main categories:

Reducing energy consumption: This is archived through actions like using less water, electricity or taking public transportation instead of driving a car.

Making environmentally friendly purchases: This is archived through buying products that are energy-efficient or made from sustainable materials.

(Nasser Alganad et al., 2020, p.1169)

2.4.3 What influences Green Consumer Behaviour

Behaviour generally is influenced through personality and environmental factors. (Nasser Alganad et al., 2020, p.1173) Both can be influenced and shaped trough external effects. Main drivers that influence and shape green consumer behaviour are subjective norms, social influence, culture, marketing influence and social media influence. Since consumers are social beings, their behaviour is significantly influenced by the presence, behaviour and expectations of others. (Chen et al., 2022, p.2033) The motivations or psychological drivers to act out and follow green behaviour are additionally differing in gender. Women are responding more to internal motivations, meaning archiving something or acting on values,

while men responding more to external motivations, meaning rewards or outer pressure. (Chandani et al., 2020, p.711)

2.5 Consumer Reachability

A key objective of marketing is to reach the consumer throughout the purchasing process. This includes before, during and after the purchase, to get an idea of the impact and success it had. (Ambarwati et al, 2021, p. 157) Channels to reach the consumers have accumulated over the years. These channels include advertising like direct sales, trade shows or event sponsorship, mass media like television, radio, newspapers, magazines and billboards, as well as direct selling through brochures or in-home visits and personalised email marketing. The newest way of brand communication to reach the end consumer is digital and social media. This new digital era includes websites, social media platforms and general mobile application. (Meltareza & Tawaqal, 2023, p.155) Consumers' review of the way they are reached can significantly impact purchase intentions and a company's sales. (Allard et al, 2020)

Different communication channels should be combined to reach the consumer in order to create a more efficient and personalised experience. The success of the chosen strategy can be observed, for example, by determining if the original strategy's objective has been improved or increased, like an increase in customer engagement. (Czaplewski et al., 2021, p.287) Marketing communication channels play a crucial role in reaching consumers, but the importance of word of mouth and consulting with other consumers through these channels should not be underestimated in the aftermath of consumer reachability. (Allard et al, 2020)

3 Methodology

The aim of the thesis to analyze the new trend of Greenfluencers in sustainable marketing and more precisely how it effects a brands consumer reachability. In this paragraph the author describes the methods used to answer the set research questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Design

The research is conducted as qualitative research. It is considered a humanistic approach, since its analysis and reproduction of the results are presented in the words of the participants (Muzari et al, 2022, p.15). The purpose of qualitative research is to collect and

provide an in-depth understanding of the topic by exploring it through the opinions and experiences of fewer study participants. Case studies are used as research design for qualitative research because they allow for a close look at a specific problem. Events, decisions or people can be the focus of this study design and help gather various views on the situation. (Muzari et al, 2022, p.16)

The chosen research design and approach are suitable for the thesis because they enable a precise and in-depth analysis of the research topic through the participants' perspectives, in their own words. The interview partners in this case are experts in the field of sustainability, in their company. This approach is particularly beneficial for this research given the diverse subareas that must be considered like reviewed in Chapter 2 - Literature Review of the thesis. In terms of case studies, the insights of a few experts from the field are more valuable than gathering numerous participants here. This focused method allows for a thorough and nuanced exploration of the thesis topic.

3.2   Data Collection Technique

The study was conducted by utilizing interviews, which is a common way to gather information in qualitative research. An interview is considered to be a two-person conversation where questions are asked to gather research relevant information. It derives direct and first-hand information from the participant by using an interview guide that was prepared in advance of the interview. There are four different forms in which an interview can be prepared: structured, semi structured, unstructured and the non-directive interviews. (Muzari et al, 2022, p.17)

The semi structured form of an interview is used in the thesis. This interview approach includes open-ended questions covering areas of the research topics. This style allows for a more in-depth discussion between the interviewer and interviewee and helps the interview flow by providing cues on questions if the interviewee has trouble answering. Additionally, it encourages the participant to elaborate on questions during the conversation. (Muzari et al, 2022, p.17)

The chosen data collection method of conducting qualitative research-based interviews, adds onto the benefits of the chosen research design and approach. Qualitative research approaches allow researchers to dig deeper to investigate the research problem and several studies have used this methodology (Shahzad et al, 2024, p.5). First-hand experience and information lead here to a more comprehensive and general understanding of the complex

research question and thesis topic, which helps to a more accurate analysis and results. Especially the utilization of a semi-structured interview conduction in this study encourages participants to elaborate on their responses, leading to a more accurate analysis and insightful results. It additionally provides flexibility and cues for both the interviewer and interviewee, enabling the gathering of additional knowledge on this multi-layered topic.

3.2.1 Sampling Method

For collecting research data through interviews, it is important to not only find the right interview method and questionnaire but also the right participants. This is done by sampling. For the thesis the convenience method for sampling was chosen. Through this sampling technique members of a target population are selected based on practical factors like the willingness to participate or the access the researcher has to these participants. It is a widely established sampling approach since it has been utilized in various other studies. (Shahzad et al, 2024, p.5)

Two participants with specific knowledge were selected for interviews as part of the thesis research. The researcher utilized here established contacts with people from various business sectors. This aligns with the convenience sampling method because the interview data is gathered through valuable insights from members of an expert target population based on the practical factor of convenience. By focusing on experts, the research aims to provide a strong foundation for the analysis and offers in-depth perspectives on the research questions. Working with a small sample size ensures that participants can provide meaningful contributions that go beyond the prepared questionnaire and delve deeper into the given subject areas. The interview questions for the thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2.2 Characterization of Respondents

The interviewees are working currently with the topic of sustainability, but originate from different companies in different divisions. The questions were ordered and preplanned prior to the interview conduction and the questions were the same for both interview participants. The interviews were conducted on the 5th and 6th of April 2024 and lasted on average 25 minutes. The questions were formed based on the authors research observations and research questions. Due to the interview participants native language the interviews were conducted originally in German and were subsequently translated into English, with the participants approval and later inspection. The analysis of the collected data will be based on

direct quotes from the two participants. Participant characteristics derived from the interviews can be found in the following Figure 3.

Figure 3 Characteristics of Interview Respondents. Adapted from the Thesis Interviews

Participant	Interview Respondent 1	Interviews Respondent 2
Gender	Male	Female
Native language	German	German
Academic Background	Trained social insurance employee Further training in sustainability Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Business Psychology	Bachelors' degree in European Business Certified Sustainability Manager
Company	German Statutory Health Insurance	International Consumer Health Company
Position	Sustainability Officer	Former Customer Development Leader for Sustainability and Health Mission, on Europe level (Aim was to make sustainability strategies transparent internally, for interaction with customers and their demand for sustainability)

3.3 Data Analysis

Analyzing describes the process of breaking down given information into separate parts to understand their relationship better. In the case of data analysis this information is additionally organized into themes, patterns and trends to recognize reoccurring behavior. (Muzari et al, 2022, p.19). This all can lead to different methods of analysis, like a thematic analysis, that is used here (Muzari et al, 2022, p.15). Thematic analysis in qualitative research involves interpreting and assigning meaning to data through identifying patterns

and themes. The following steps that have been used for the thesis data analysis that applies existing theory and literature are along newly gathered data to explain their patterns. (Thompson, 2022, p.1410)

Step (1) Transcription and Familiarisation: This step involves the transcription of the data gathering process, whether manual or digital, in order to not only listen or read back on the data, but also to use it for deeper analysis. (Thompson, 2022, p.1412-1413) While the interview was conducted, the communication tool teams already recorded the spoken word and prepared the later utilized transcript simultaneously. Where the transcript had not been fully accurate in the needed parts of the interview, the recording was used to identify the correct expression or missing words.

Step (2) Coding: The step of coding describes the process of using or highlighting words or phrases from the data gathered, often in multiple rounds to find and understand the later identified patterns in the data. (Thompson, 2022, p.1413) Coding in the thesis was conducted by highlighting phrases in the interview transcripts that had similar characteristics to find patterns describing similar experiences and opinions of the participants.

Step (3) Codebook: The step of a codebook functions as a guide for defining and structuring the used codes, to ensure consistency and transparency in communication. (Thompson, 2022, p.1413-1414) For visualization purposes the author included Figure 4 as an example for the described codebook entry (adapted from Thompson, 2022, p.1414).

Figure 4 Code-Book Extract for a Code

Code #1:	
Definition:	
When to use:	
When not to use:	
Example:	

The codebook for the thesis, including twelve codes for the purpose of the thematic data analysis, can be found in Appendix 1.

Step (4) Development of Themes: In the step of developing themes from the gathered data, the researcher establishes relationships between the codes in order to capture the essence of the data. As a result, the themes become more complex. Although there may not always be a direct correlation from code to theme, unused codes remain significant to the overall data set. Additionally, themes can be further categorized into primary and secondary themes. (Thompson, 2022, p.1414-1415) The researcher established the themes for the thesis data analysis by finding similarities in the different codes and grouping them to continue the analysis process.

Step (5) Theorizing: In the step of theorizing, the researchers explain the relationship between themes and the overall dataset but without trying to fit data into existing theoretical frameworks. Additionally, engaging theory with the data simultaneously, helps researchers to rather refine the working theories to better account for the found data. This process can lead to theoretical contributions in research. (Thompson, 2022, p.1415-1416)

Since the interviews were already conducted with questions formed through the authors research observations and research questions, the relationships between the themes and data could be partially assigned primarily to the groups of questions that had been asked. The first two themes relationship is defined mainly through their rather factual nature. The third them in contrast includes more areas of educated speculations and observation. Oppose to both of these theme categories the last theme includes educated outlooks onto the topic of sustainability for companies. A small number of codes in the overall dataset also offered different perspectives onto the already gathered theory of the Chapter 2 - Literature Review, which will be further discussed in the Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Chapter 6 - Recommendations, Limitations and future Research. However, as mentioned primarily the established themes are closely associated since they are the groundwork for achieving the thesis main objective and based on already educated questions.

Step (6) Comparison of Datasets: Comparison of datasets can offer deeper understanding of research findings without the need to quantify qualitative data, by examine themes from different participant groups rather than from each individual. (Thompson, 2022, p.1416) Since the data was gathered from only two participants, there had been no need to utilize the step of Dataset Comparison in the thesis.

Step (7) Data Display: The data display involves visually representing qualitative data in a thematic network analysis to enhance accessibility and illustrate the relationships between data codes and themes. This can be done creatively, since it needs to be fitting to the thematic findings. (Thompson, 2022, p.1416-1418) For this visualization purposes the author included Figure 5 "Developing Themes from Codes – Thematic Network Analysis", for this step of displaying the found data of thesis. (adapted from Thompson, 2022, p.1417).

Figure 5 Developing Themes from Codes – Thematic Network Analysis
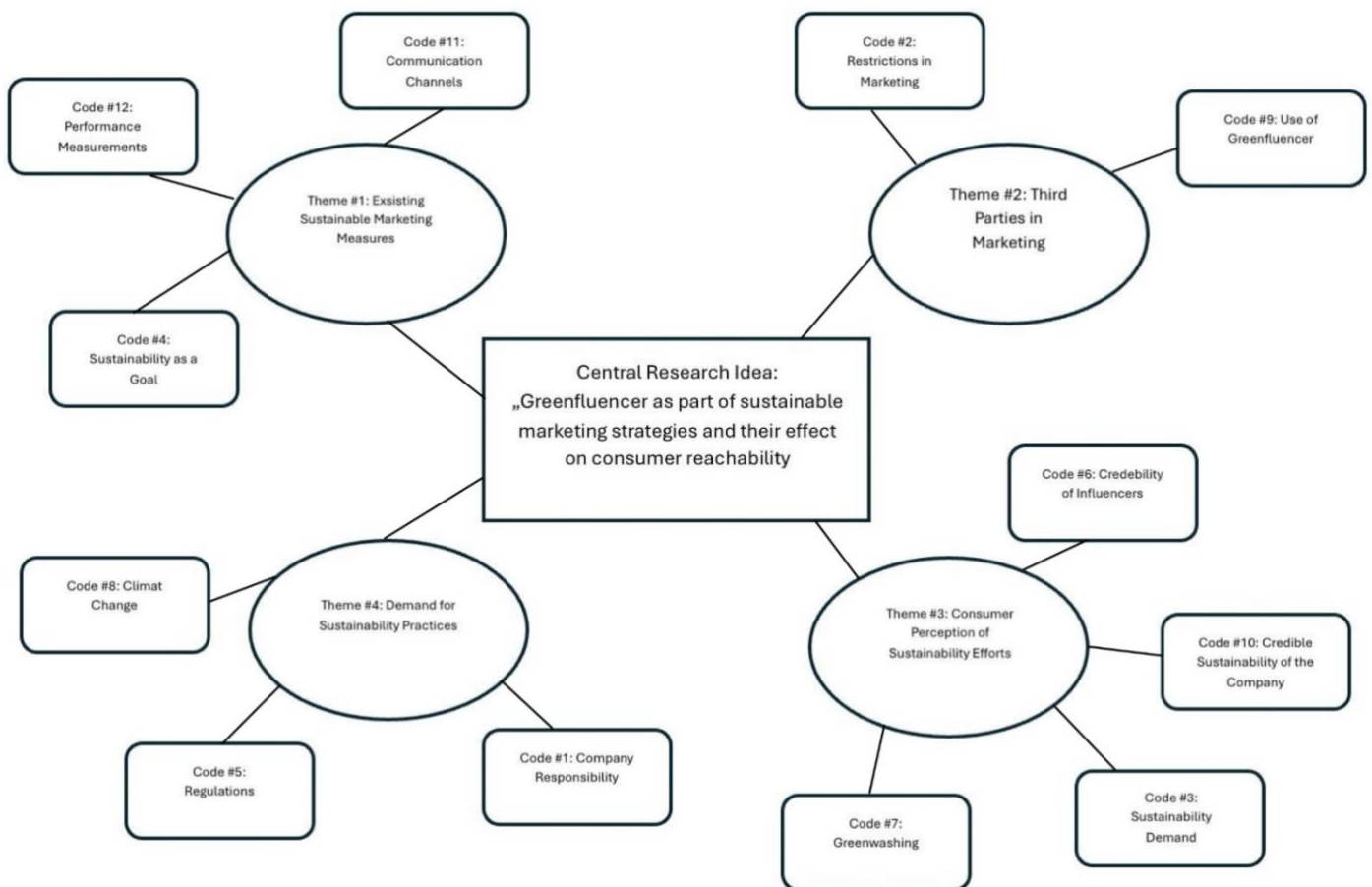
Step (8) Writing Up: In the last step of writing up the findings, they should be written with headings for each theme, linking theory to empirical data with quotations of participants for support. Context details although should be included for the readers understanding and effectiveness of later recommendations. Making use of quotations and mediums to support the reader endorses the credibility of the research, see chapter 3.4 - Research Credibility. (Thompson, 2022, p.1418) The created themes are marked with the headlines: Theme #1 Existing Sustainable Measures, Theme #2 Third Party Marketing, Theme #3 Consumer Perception of Sustainability Efforts and Theme # 4 Demand for Sustainability Practices.

Further details, context and links to the reviewed literature are included in the thesis Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Chapter 6 - Recommendations, Limitations and future Research, as well.

3.4 Research Credibility

There are different measures in place when it comes to the credibility of research. In order to ensure credibility, data and audio formats must be securely stored and easily accessible for eventual verification purposes. Conformability is established through direct evidence from the researcher's experiences with participants, while transferability ensures the relevance of findings to similar situations. Using appropriate research instruments and collecting first-hand information can enhance credibility by reducing distortions and fabrications of collected data. Triangulation, involving multiple sources and perspectives, can further enhance the credibility of research findings. Generally, the data has to be presented truthfully. (Muzari et al, 2022, p.18)

To ensure credibility for the thesis research it was made sure to consider credibility throughout the research process. The researcher followed the ethical guidelines of the degree-granting institution and stored, accessed and destroyed data according to the requirements as well. Evidence through experience with the participants was established through an in-person interview situation and evidence of expertise was granted by review of certificates and degrees. Data bases and sources verified by the degree-granting institution were used as research tools to avoid fabrication. Multiple sources like second hand data and first-hand data, through different research methods, like interviews and literature research were combined to supported research credibility. Furthermore, the open-ended question approach supports the effort to work against any arising biases the researcher may have towards the participants. Additionally, interviewing experienced experts in their field gives additional credibility to the found data.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations in research are important due to the handling of personal data. It is essential to ensure data protection, privacy and consensual questioning the participants of the research. This is necessary throughout the process of the research, such as providing the option of withdraw from the study and anonymizing participants to protect their identity. Transparency of information, including risks and alternatives, should also be given to help participants feeling comfortable with their participation in the study. These ethical

interventions help to maintain the integrity of the research data and show respect for the participants involved. (Muzari et al, 2022, p.18-19)

The interviews were conducted in-person and recorded on the communication tool Teams. The data was stored on the researcher's personal device and only the researcher had the access to stored data. The study was conducted with no external funding and the data was not given to any second-hand source. The data was destroyed appropriately in the given time frame after the conduction of the study. All participants were interviewed consensually and informed about the data processing process in advance of the conduction. Participants were also made aware of their rights to withdraw from the interview, deny answering questions or disclose information, be anonymized to a discussed extend and have access onto the data collected from them before the thesis was published. The Data Management Plan for the thesis, concluding the data handling can be found in Appendix 1.

4 Results

The most important findings related to the thematic analysis of the conducted interviews are reviewed in this chapter. From the thesis perspective, the most important information and factors of Greenfluencers in correlation to companies sustainable marketing strategies and consumers are listed and categorized here, to help explain and justify the thesis conclusion and recommendation. The chapter is structured in the found themes and their subordinate codes. To provide a reference demonstration and ensuring thoroughness of the interview results, figures including the quotes for each code are listed at the end of each sub-chapter.

4.1 Existing Sustainable Measures

Under the theme of existing sustainable measures, Communication Channels (Code #11), Performance Measurements (Code #12), and Sustainability as a Goal (Code #4) are covered. All three codes summarize parts of the conducted interviews that provide results about the established sustainable measures in the companies of the interviewees.

Both interview participants stated the use of online communication channels, such as social media and websites, are used for their sustainable marketing strategies towards customers. This also includes different other tools for the participants like having a presence on social networks for business contacts, such as LinkedIn or utilizing also traditional marketing methods like product packaging and sharing information at trade fairs.

Both interview participants shared that their companies look at views, likes, and other metrics for their social media presence. However, they also introduced additional performance measures such as sharing the figures with their media department for data collection to analyze their impact and reach, or utilizing advertising tracking. One interviewee acknowledges the challenges of setting sustainability as a goal within a company, noting that it is typically not seen as a topic of priority compared to other areas of business. They emphasize the long-term nature of sustainability and the difficulty in making it a central focus within organizations.

Figure 6 Existing Sustainable Measures – Codes & Quotation. Adapted from the Thesis Interviews

Code #11: Communication Channels	"Any (sustainability) seals at most, the focus was actually on social media and website." (Interviewee 2) "… Voluntary report, that insured people, stakeholders or so can inform, what are they actually doing about it (suitability), something like that can then be handed out at trade fairs." (Interviewee 1) "We are now starting to use this (sustainability marketing strategies) on LinkedIn to show a little of what we do." (Interviewee 1)
Code #12: Performance Measurements	„… you've done advertising tracking, measurements, social media, you've looked at your clicks, …" (Interviewee 2) "Of course, I then look at the number of views and likes and so on." (Interviewee 1) "… it's more of a pilot project (LinkedIn presence), so I'll send my LinkedIn API figures to our media department every quarter, they'll check them and see how they develop. But that's more of a data collection exercise, how is it going, what effect is it having, how is the reach developing." (Interviewee 1)
Code #4: Sustainability as a Goal	"… I have realized how difficult it is to establish this topic (sustainability) in the company or to make it present at all, because it is not the first, yes, the first important aspect of life, I would say, especially not for companies, because sustainability is extremely long-term, …" (Interviewee 2)

4.2 Third Party Marketing

Under the theme of third-party marketing, Use of Greenfluencer (Code #9) and Restrictions in Marketing (Code #2) are covered. The two codes summarize parts of the conducted interviews that contain results on thoughts about opportunities, challenges and restrictions that companies face, with third-party marketing and especially in relation to Greenfluencers.

Participants express differing views on the use of Greenfluencers and both had not cooperated with them previously and are answering hypothetically from their expertise. Interviewee 2 suggests that while Greenfluencers are not a major concern due to the just recent emerge of influencer marketing, they see them as a potential next, additional level for enhancing brand image or reaching specific target groups that are not typically reached through traditional advertising methods. Interviewee 1 recognizes potential in working with smaller influencers to expand reach to people interested in sustainability and drawing attention to sustainability campaigns and enhance customer identification and satisfaction with the company, particularly given their existing work with mainstream influencers in certain areas. Bothe participants state that there are strict restrictions to be applies when it comes to marketing in their sectors because of the type of products they are selling or services they are offering.

Figure 7 Third Party Marketing– Codes & Quotation. Adapted from the Thesis Interviews

Code #9: Use of Greenfluencer	"…Greenfluencer, I think, was not yet an issue, because they (marketing) have only just started to deal with influencer marketing in general…" (Interviewee 2) "So, I think this topic of Greenfluencers would be the next level and that aspect wasn't the predominant one, it's always a downstream aspect to the performance, to the brand image and so on." (Interviewee 2) "Depending on the product, I now have very different target groups, older, younger … And then a Greenfluencer is a medium for reaching a specific target group. … A target group that I might not reach via print or whatever." (Interviewee 2) "We haven't considered it ourselves yet (Greenfluencer cooperation). However, I can imagine it for our company because we already do it for other topics, at least on our Instagram channel. … Influencers are often involved in info postings … taking over the stories for a day or appearing in a reel." (Interviewee 1) "There are also influencers who deal with vegan nutrition. Here you could then also work with smaller Influencers." (Interviewee 1) „ And I believe that if, for example, you strive for co-operations (with Greenfluencers), ... you could then also generate a greater reach for them to draw their following's attention to it. And that's just hypothetical or theoretically speaking. I think placements are also good for drawing the attention of your own followers to campaigns ... that would of course be the goal, to appeal to people who are also interested in health and sustainability or, for example, climate and health, that you then address them and draw attention to the fact that the company is also concerned with this and then, of course, hopefully this will lead to a higher level of identification with the company and people will feel … and are happy to be insured there." (Interviewee 1)
Code #2: Restrictions in Marketing	"… but in the OTC sector, for example, you can't do that at all (Influencer Marketing), because you, i.e. OTC, over-the-counter, ... pharmacy-only medicines, because you are only allowed to make recommendations to a very limited extent. This means that there are extremely many restrictions." (Interviewee 2) "I think that as a statutory health insurance fund, we have a bit more guidance on how we advertise, ... Because we also have a clear legal mandate, so we're actually only allowed to do what is stipulated in the Social Code ..." (Interviewee 1)

4.3 Consumer Perception of Sustainability Efforts

Under the theme of Consumer Perception of Sustainability Efforts, Credibility of Influencers (Code #6), Credible Sustainability of the Company (Code #10), Sustainability Demand (Code #3) and Greenwashing (Code #7) are covered. All four codes summarize parts of the conducted interviews that provide results on factors that are or can be perceived by consumers and therefor also influence their perspective of brand products or services, either positively or negatively.

The interviewees emphasize the importance of credibility, especially when it comes to influencers. It can be unclear to consumers whether opinions are genuine, or to what extent are they are paid. This issue is stated to be of even greater significance in the context of Greenfluencers. Additionally, there is a lack of established standards for cooperations utilizing Greenfluencer that they can apply.

Both participants highlight the importance of companies to first take action on sustainability within the company before then communicating it made externally. Interviewee 1 adds that individuals driving sustainability efforts should be involved in communication and approval processes of said communication, while interviewee 2 adds that companies that have been active in sustainability for a long time are more likely to gain approval from the public when collaborate with Greenfluencers.

The participants mention different shareholder and their demand for sustainability. Despite the noticeable increasing climate anxiety, especially among young people, mentioned by interviewee 1, interviewee 2 states that many consumers still prioritize affordability over more eco-friendly options. Additionally, the private sector often prioritizes shareholder interests and short-term goals over sustainability concerns.

The interviewees address the importance of avoiding greenwashing, defined by Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2024) as activities by a company or an organization that are intended to make people think that it is concerned about the environment, even if its real business actually harms the environment. In sustainable marketing this means ensuring that companies do not report on topics they do not actually practice. They emphasize the need to incorporate sustainability into marketing efforts authentically.

Figure 8 Consumer Perception of Sustainability Efforts – Codes & Quotation. Adapted from the Thesis Interviews

Code #6: Credibility of Influencers	"I think credibility is enormously important, and that's a bit of an influencer issue. ... You never really know, is it really your own opinion? I mean, people will probably know by now, but is it really their own opinion? To what extent are they paid? How are the products made available to the influencer? And I think with Greenfluencer it's still so, so, so much more important, ..., because there are simply not yet such established standards that you can apply." (Interviewee 2)
Code #10: Credible Sustainability of the Company	"First do it, then communicate it and at the same time make sure that the people who are driving the topic forward are somehow involved in the communication and, if they only read about it again, approve it." (Interviewee 1) "What I think is important is that a company has integrated the issue of sustainability into its own strategy. And if you have this and position ... as a company that has been active in this area for a long time, you are more likely to be accepted if you have green influencers talking about this brand." (Interviewee 2)
Code #3: Sustainability Demand	"Another topic that is becoming increasingly important is climate anxiety, especially among young people. "(Interviewee 1) "In fact, the focus - sustainability claims, I would say - was not always the focus and was also difficult to accommodate, because many end consumers and shoppers do not necessarily value the topic at the end of the day. If you have the choice between, I have an inexpensive product and, especially in the context of inflation and the energy crisis …, I have the choice of buying an inexpensive product, which I may also know, versus a product that may now have a sustainability claim but is also more expensive, the choice is very, very, very often still in favor of the inexpensive one, even though you say of yourself, no, sustainability is totally important to me." (Interviewee 2) "On the other hand, the private sector often has other interests, even in companies such as those listed on the stock exchange, which have to satisfy shareholder interests, short-term goals are often more in the foreground ..." (Interviewee 2)
Code #7: Greenwashing	"… but generally, we did not focus so strongly on this (publicize own sustainability) and not incorporated it so blatantly into marketing topics, because there is of course the danger of being accused of greenwashing." (Interviewee 1) "But it's worth taking an extra step to ensure that companies don't become seen as greenwashing or reporting too much on topics that they don't actually live by." (Interviewee 1) "And I think with Greenfluencer it's still so, so, so much more important that you don't have that greenwashing aspect in there." (Interviewee 2)

4.4   Demand for Sustainability Practices

Under the theme of Demand for Sustainability Practices, Climate Change (Code #8), Regulations (Code #5), and Company Responsibility (Code #1) are covered. All three codes summarize parts of the conducted interviews that provide results about why the interviewees believe in the increasing importance of sustainability in business practices.

The participants also touch on the topic of climate change occasionally in connection to sustainability during the interview. Interviewee 1 adds to this by mentioning that the effects are recognized over years now. Both interviewees provided insights into the regulations surrounding sustainable marketing. Interviewee 1 mentioned sustainability reports that are not mandatory for every company, but they do as a non-obligated company. Interviewee 2 emphasized that regulations and laws regarding sustainability are becoming stricter, making it more difficult for companies to avoid them. The EU and United Nations (UN) also recognize this scientifically proven route. Both interviewees emphasize the importance of companies taking responsibility in combating climate change. Interviewee 2 highlighted the important role of the private sector in achieving this goal and interviewee 1 points out the ethical responsibilities their company has towards the topic of climate change, while balancing financial responsibility to the system and people.

Figure 9 Demand for Sustainability Practices – Codes & Quotation. Adapted from the Thesis Interviews

Code #8: Climate Change	"Hovering over everything (the topic of sustainability) a little bit of man-made climate change. That's the big threat, and we've been noticing the effects or results of it more and more for a few years now." (Interviewee 1)
Code #5: Regulations	"And the bottom line is that it is not sustainable for the companies either, because at some point you will no longer be able to work with it (not being sustainable) because the prices will be too high, …, if you don't go down this route, which is now recognized by the EU and the UN and simply scientifically proven." (Interviewee 2)
	„The good thing is that the regulations and loopholes are becoming smaller, so that at some point companies will no longer be able to avoid them, simply because they have to comply with regulations or laws. "(Interviewee 2)
	"… we don't fall under the, I think, the reporting obligation (for Sustainability Reports), that didn't apply to us, it's more of a voluntary report, …" (Interviewee 1)
Code #1: Company Responsibility	"We are working on the basis of the Paris Climate Agreement; we are working on the basis of 1.5 degrees of global warming and that the private sector also has an important part to play in achieving this goal." (Interviewee 2)

	"So, climate change cannot be stopped without transformation processes taking place in all companies. "(Interviewee 2) "... It also makes sense for us to set up our organizations in such a way that they also help fight climate change a little. But on the other hand, we don't just have a financial responsibility to ourselves and the system, but also to our policyholders, because we have to provide the money for them ..." (Interviewee 1)

5   Conclusion

This study has shown that Greenfluencer can potentially be part of sustainable marketing strategies. They blend in with existing measures of sustainable marketing strategies, such as the newest way of brand communication on digital or social media platforms (Meltareza & Tawaqal, 2023, p.155) and they are both following not only the profit goal but also the well-being and responsibility that come with sustainability (Krishnan et al., 2022, p.363; Balaji et al, 2022, p.536). They can also be measured with the same performance measures that are already applied for the sustainable marketing measures in the participants companies, such as looking at the data that can be gathered from the posted content, like views and likes. Additionally, Greenfluencer represent a similarity in long-term relationship nature that one desires for the effect of sustainable marketing objectives (Werbach, 2011).

The practical application of this concept was discussed differently in the theoretical approaches of the interviewees. This could either happen in the form of cooperation with smaller Greenfluencers to draw attention to sustainability campaigns and improve customer engagement and satisfaction, similar to what is done with regular influencers. Alternatively, Greenfluencers could be the next level aspect to enhance the brand image of a company, by making use of their established platform. On the other hand, using Greenfluencers may not be suitable for every company, as there are regulations in place to regulate marketing for products and services in need of regulation, that make the use of a third party in marketing difficult or not possible at all. Speaking from their characteristics, Greenfluencers fit into sustainable marketing strategies. Experts have ideas on how to utilize them beneficially, but getting to the point of effectively utilizing them is not as easy as creating marketing internally.

The study also revealed that there are different factors that come in place when it comes to Greenfluencer's influence on the reachability for environmentally friendly purchases. The credibility of not only the Greenfluencer, like previous literature showed as well (Cavazos-Arroyo & Melchor-Ascencio, 2023), but the entire company must be convincing to the consumers and communicated correctly to prevent accusations and the general phenomenon of Greenwashing. If consumers do not even trust the Greenfluencer marketing

or the brand itself, it may not positively impact accessibility and could even have a negative effect on all parties involved. This is also supported by the previously mentioned literature in the thesis (Cavazos-Arroyo & Melchor-Ascencio, 2023; Luoma-aho et al., 2021, p.1).

Despite the different approaches to utilizing Greenfluencers, participants agreed that working with Greenfluencers could help reach specific target groups who are already interested in sustainability, through other methods than the traditional channels of communication like print. This is also compliable with reviewed literature, stating that sustainable influencers may reach users who are already interested or aware of sustainability (Breves & Liebers, 2022, p.773).

However, despite growing climate anxiety especially in the younger generation, some consumers still prioritize affordability over eco-friendly options due to familiarity and price. This goes hand in hand with the evidence of the possibility to classify consumers into different types depending on how they act on their purchasing choices from a sustainability perspective (Hovan George & Shaji George, 2022, p.71) and that individuals with higher incomes, who are able to afford environmentally friendly products and services do so more often (Chandani et al., 2020, p.713-714). While Greenfluencers can influence consumer reachability for environmentally friendly purchases positively through their platform for a company, the basic condition of mutual credibility and the right communication must be met in order to reach other potential buyers, mostly younger people who are already interested in sustainability.

6   Recommendations, Limitations and future Research

The demand for sustainability practices mentioned by the participants provides a reason to recommend sustainable marketing and generally sustainable business practices to every company. Climate change and the therefor established regulations, lead to not only companies having the possibility to take on responsibility for sustainability, but needing to take it on to remain competitive in the future, as climate change effects have been recognized for years now. The recognition of climate change is also supported by previous reviewed literature (Famuyiwa, 2023, p.3).

By implementing sustainable marketing strategies, companies can effectively utilize Greenfluencers to drive innovation in this field, as indicated by the study and its literature review (Fang et al, 2022, p.1). However, companies must approach this in a suitable,

credible, appropriate, and informed manner and combine it with different channels of communication to create a more efficient and personalized experience for the consumer (Czaplewski et al., 2021, p.287). Whom they want to reach here is also important, as the interview data and literature have shown that age and gender (Chandani et al., 2020, p. 711) play a role in consumer behavior and perception. Moreover, companies should focus on Greenfluencers with a smaller platform, as this study has shown that they have a greater impact on consumer purchasing decisions (Abell & Pittman, 2021).

There are limitations to be considered in this study, besides the inherent limitations of the analysis method of the qualitative research method utilized, like misunderstandings in interview situations, memory bias, or the use of multiple sources of data to confirm or validate research findings (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Additionally, participants in the study have not worked in practice with Greenfluencers previously, which may limit the expertise and informative value. Also, the interview questions were formulated by the author of the thesis, potentially introducing bias.

Future research could involve replicating the results with a different set of participants or exploring alternative analysis approaches, such as qualitative methods, to obtain a different set of data and potential analysis benefits. Further research could also explore the perspectives of consumers or Greenfluencers on this topic or a detailed plan on how a strategy for sustainability including Greenfluencer could be planned and executed. Case studies, based on this research, on the use of Greenfluencers in specific companies or business areas could provide valuable insights for future research as well.

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Appendix 1. Interview Questions & Thesis Codebook

Permission Request

Practical Information about interview type & time reserved

Confidentiality

Purpose of the research

Your right not to answer and remain anonymous

- What is your job title and your career background?

- Could you tell me about your perspective on sustainability and why you believe it is important?

- Can you discuss your organization's marketing strategies, particularly in regards to sustainability?

- How do you measure the success of your strategies?

- Have you ever considered collaborating with Greenfluencers for your organization's marketing and how could that look like?

- How can Greenfluencers enhance the effectiveness of your established sustainable marketing strategies?

- In what ways would Greenfluencers impact your consumer accessibility for environmentally friendly products or services?

- Is there anything you would like to add?

Access to Research

Data Management Plan

Appendix 1. Data Analysis Codebook

Code #1	Company Responsibility
Definition	Participant talks about their responsibility as business towards sustainability.
When to use	Use this code when talking about a company's responsibility towards sustainability in business.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about personal responsibility or any other responsibility.
Example	Interviewee 2: "We assume ... that the private sector also has an important part or an important share in achieving this goal (Paris Climate Agreement)."
Code #2	Restrictions in Marketing
Definition	Participant talks about the applicable restrictions for their marketing in their own company sector.
When to use	Use this code when talking about marketing restrictions.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about restrictions of another kind.
Example	Interviewee 2: "... but for example in the OTC area (over-the-counter), including prescription products, because you are only allowed to make recommendations to a very limited extent."
Code #3	Sustainability Demand
Definition	Participant talks about consumer demand for their sustainable products and services.
When to use	Use this code if there is consumer demand for sustainable products and services.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about the demand from other parties for sustainable products and services.
Example	Interviewee 2: "... was not always the focus (sustainability) and was also difficult to accommodate because many end consumers and shoppers do not necessarily value the topic (sustainability) on balance."
Code #4	Sustainability as a Goal
Definition	Participant talks about the characteristics of sustainability in relation to an objective.
When to use	Use this code when sustainability is mentioned in relation to an objective.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about goals in a different context or other characteristics of sustainability.
Example	Interviewee 2: "... the private sector often (has) other interests, ... shareholder interests have to be satisfied, short-term goals are often more in the foreground and sustainability is a very long-term goal."
Code #5	Regulations
Definition	Participant talks about the regulations that apply or are expected to apply.
When to use	Use this code when discussing regulations relating to sustainability.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about other regulations.
Example	To interviewee 2: "And the bottom line for companies is that it is also not sustainable (not acting sustainably), because at some point you will no longer be able to work like this because the prices will be too high, because your consumers will no longer want it, because your

	customers will no longer accept it if you do not take this path, which is now recognized and scientifically proven by the EU and the UN."
Code #6	Credibility of Influencers
Definition	Participant talks about points concerning them about the credibility of Influencers.
When to use	Use this code when discussing the credibility of influencers in relation to consumers.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about other untrustworthiness or general influencer characteristics.
Example	Interviewee 2: "...you never really know, is this really your own opinion (of the Influencer)?"
Code #7	Greenwashing
Definition	Participant talks about Greenwashing as a risk or a danger.
When to use	Use this code when Greenwashing is discussed with regard to the company.
When to not use	Do not use this code if the above is not given.
Example	Interviewee 2: "And I think with Greenfluencer it's so, so, so much more important that you don't have this greenwashing aspect in there."

Code #8	Climate Change
Definition	Participant talks about climate change.
When to use	Use this code when talking about climate change in relation to your company and the economy.
When to not use	Do not use this code when talking about the general effects of climate change.
Example	Interviewee 1: "... man-made climate change ... where we have been noticing the effects or the results of this more and more for a few years now. ... So, climate effects and climate changes and environmental changes also have a very direct impact on our health. (View as an employee of a statutory health insurance company)"
Code #9	Use of Greenfluencers
Definition	Participant talks about the possible use of Greenfluencers.
When to use	Use this code if you have specific or possible applications of Greenfluencers for your own company or area.
When to not use	Benutze diesen Code nicht, wenn nur über konkrete Einsatzstrategien von Influencern für dir Firma gesprochen wird.
Example	Interviewee 1: "... sustainable nutrition. That would be a good topic to play, for example. There are also influencers who deal with vegan nutrition. You could also work with smaller influencers."
Code #10	Credible sustainability of the company
Definition	Participant talks about the importance of personal and honest company commitment to sustainability.
When to use	Use this code when the core sustainability of the company itself is addressed.
When to not use	Do not use this code when credibility is used in a different context.
Example	Interviewee 1: "Do it first, then communicate. That you first approach it cleanly, build a clean basis and also anchor the topic properly in the company."

Code #11	Communication Channels
Definition	Participant talks about their company's own communication channels.
When to use	Use this code when discussing external communication channels for marketing purposes to the consumer.
When to not use	Do not use this code if, for example, internal communication channels are addressed.
Example	Interviewee 2: "The focus was actually on social media, website."
Code #12	Performance Measurement
Definition	Participant talks about their company's ways and means of measuring the success of strategies.
When to use	Use this code when specific ways and means are mentioned.
When to not use	Do not use this code when discussing any other measurements or achievements.
Example	Interviewee 1: "Of course, I look at the number of views and likes and so on."

Appendix 2. Data Management Plan

For the thesis purpose, interviews are carried out. Participation in the research is voluntary, and the research data is anonymised to a discussed extend. During the investigation, no personal data is stored. It is important to note that gathering personal information outside of professional background is not mandatory for the thesis procedure.

1 Management and storage of research data

Participants are offered the option to be anonymized, meaning anonymizing personal names and the organizations name mentioned in the interview. The interviews involve the use of voice recordings, a detail communicated to participants in the interview request and invitation. The material collected in the study is stored carefully and confidentially on the researcher's personal device, which is protected by an access code.

2 Processing of personal data and sensitive data

As the thesis is based on secondary literature and business point of view interviews only, personal data or sensitive information are in no need to be processed.

3 Ownership of thesis data

The author owns the data and results of the thesis. There are no other parties involved in the project.

4 Further use of thesis data after the work is completed

The author does not wish to utilize the research data for further use. The author of the thesis stores the data in a secure manner for a period of one year from the date of approval of the thesis, so that the results of the thesis can be verified, if necessary, and data deleted in a secure manner.