Sustainable Strategies for Brand Loyalty and Customer Loyalty: Unraveling Born Global Firm Practices

A Qualitative Approach on How Born Global Companies Use Sustainable Practices to Gain a Competitive Advantage and Achieve Customer Loyalty.

ANNA EGAAS STENBERG AND
STINE VOLLENG

SUPERVISOR

Kalanit Efrat

Preface

This master's thesis is written as a part of the master's program in International Business at the School of Business at the University of Agder. The thesis is a compulsory part of the program BE-509 with 30 ECTS credits. To complete the master's degree in International Business at the University of Agder's business school, we selected a focus on subjects within sustainability, brand loyalty, and the growing number of born global companies. The background for the research is our common interest in internationalization, sustainability, and what influences brand loyalty.

While working on the assignment, we have learned how to set up a larger research design and how to use a qualitative method. It has been a demanding, but also an exciting and educational process, where we have entered dialogue with several managers from companies that have expanded internationally and gained a broad understanding of sustainability impact on customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Furthermore, we would like to thank our supervisor, Kalanit Efrat, for her involvement, constructive feedback, and professional input. Furthermore, we would like to thank the University of Agder - School of Business and Law for two educational and content-rich years. It has been educational, exciting, and challenging, and it has provided us with lifelong friends. It was difficult to contact companies in the research for empirical evidence during the master's thesis. We would like to thank all the informants who took the time, were willing to answer all our questions in detail and presented themselves in a positive manner. Finally, we'd like to thank our friends and family for their support throughout the process. Thank you for your positive commitment and encouraging words. Thank you to everyone who has read the assignment and provided helpful feedback. This master's thesis would not have been possible without their assistance.

Thank you so much and enjoy your reading!
Kristiansand, May 2023

Abstract

The research in this thesis aimed to explore how sustainability impacts brand loyalty in born global companies, which are companies that early in their development establish themselves internationally. Sustainability is a critical issue for businesses in today's world as consumers and stakeholders demand that businesses take social and environmental responsibility. In this thesis, we take an exploratory approach by applying the Gioia method to examine the topic more thoroughly. The research highlighted a significant relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies, as most companies incorporate sustainable practices into their operations, products, and services, resulting in building trust and loyalty among customers.

Integrating sustainability into corporate branding is a positive driver of competitive advantage, as companies that receive recognition for their commitment to sustainability differentiate themselves from competitors, which attract and retain a customer base that values sustainability. The research also highlights the importance of communicating sustainable practices through various channels, such as social media, marketing, websites, and direct customer interactions, to improve brand identity and customer trust.

The research highlights that several born global companies incorporate sustainability into their corporate branding strategies, which help develop a distinct brand that communicates the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). The study also emphasized the importance of incorporating sustainability into all aspects of the company's operations, including supply chain, product development, packaging and communication efforts, as key factors for effective sustainability branding.

As a result, sustainability and brand loyalty are strongly connected in born global companies. The importance of corporate social responsibility has a further impact on the society and environment, while it also strategically differentiates themselves from competitors. This results in increased trust and brand loyalty among the customers.

Sammendrag

Forskningen i denne oppgaven har som mål å utforske hvordan bærekraft påvirker merkevarelojalitet i fødte globale bedrifter, som er virksomheter som tidlig etablerer seg internasjonalt. Bærekraft er et avgjørende spørsmål for bedrifter i dagens verden ettersom forbrukere og interessenter krever at virksomheter skal drives på en sosialt ansvarlig og miljømessig måte. I denne avhandlingen tar vi en utforskende tilnærming ved å anvende Gioia metoden for å undersøke temaet mer grundig. Forskningen avdekker et betydelig forhold mellom bærekraft og merkevarelojalitet i fødte globale selskaper, ettersom de fleste bedriftene inkorporerer bærekraftig praksis i sine operasjoner, produkter og tjenester, som igjen resulterer i å bygge tillit og lojalitet blant kundene.

Integrering av bærekraft i bedriftens merkevarebygging er en positiv drivkraft for konkurransefortrinn, ettersom selskaper som mottar anerkjennelse for sitt engasjement for bærekraft, skiller seg fra konkurrenter, og tiltrekker seg og beholder en kundebase som verdsetter bærekraft. Forskningen fremhever også viktigheten av å spre bærekraftig praksis gjennom ulike kanaler, som sosiale medier, markedsføring, nettsider og direkte kundeinteraksjoner, for å forbedre merkeidentitet og kundetillit.

Studien viser til at mange fødte globale bedrifter inkorporerer bærekraft i bedriftens merkevarestrategier, noe som bidrar til å utvikle en distinkt merkevare som kommuniserer selskapets forpliktelse til miljømessig ansvarlig praksis. Studien understreker også viktigheten av å inkludere bærekraft i alle aspekter av selskapets virksomhet, inkludert forsyningskjede, produktutvikling, pakking og kommunikasjonsarbeid, som en nøkkelstrategi for en effektiv merkevarebygging for bærekraft.

Oppsummert er bærekraft og merkelojalitet sterkt forbundet i fødte globale selskaper. Betydningen av samfunnsansvar har en ytterligere innvirkning på samfunnet og miljøet, samtidig som det skiller seg strategisk fra konkurrentene. Dette resulterer i økt tillit og merkelojalitet blant kundene.

Table of content

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the thesis and outlines the research project's structure. The following chapters will go over the theoretical framework, research methodology, interview findings, discussion, conclusion, research suggestions, and limitations of the research process.

1.0 Introduction

The relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty has become an increasingly important topic in today's business world. In addition, customers are becoming more aware and demanding in terms of sustainable development and social responsibility (Deedster 2022). The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of sustainability on brand loyalty in born global companies. Born global companies play a significant role in driving positive environmental change and sustainable development by integrating sustainable practices into their operations, products, and services. This research aimed significant connection between sustainability and brand loyalty in these companies. By incorporating sustainable practices into corporate branding strategies, born global companies are able to build trust and loyalty among their customers, and thereby having a competitive advantage to differentiate themselves from competitors (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The main theme of the master's thesis is to investigate how sustainable practices impact brand loyalty in born global companies. The background for this research is the common interest in sustainability, brand loyalty and companies which are expanding internationally. Sustainability is a very current topic that affects the whole of society and companies to this day. The thesis will present theory of characteristics and significance of born global companies, and their internationalization strategies. Furthermore, theory within sustainability, corporate social responsibility, brand loyalty, brand equity and corporate branding will be presented. These are all central topics that will provide a significant basis for being able to answer the thesis' problem. Based on what's mentioned above, the following research question will be clarified in this thesis:

"Sustainable strategies for brand loyalty and customer loyalty: Unraveling born global firm practices".

The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how born global companies can integrate sustainable development into their business strategies while maintaining a loyal customer base. This can result in increased awareness of how companies can take responsibility for their impact on the environment and society while running a successful business.

Throughout the research project, a qualitative research method has been chosen to investigate experiences that will provide a more complete understanding. Qualitative research is a research method that involves investigating and comprehending social phenomena through the eyes of the people involved (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). To answer the research question, we have conducted in-depth interviews with born global companies within different industries around Norway. A total of nine informants, comprising both men and women of different ages were interviewed. The informants for this study were individuals who held leadership positions or were involved in the founding of the company and possessed a broad understanding of the company's sustainability strategies and their impact on brand loyalty. The in-depth interviews helped to give a fuller understanding of the internationalizing companies and how much their sustainability strategies impact brand loyalty among their customers. In the thesis only the company's point of view on the situation has been taken into account, which may undermine the credibility of the customer's perception.

The thesis is divided into six chapters, excluding the appendices of the information letter, interview guide, transcription, summary, and references. In chapter two, the theoretical framework for the thesis is presented. Furthermore, the research methodology will be presented in chapter three. The results from the interviews are presented in chapter four, which leads to the discussion section in chapter five. In chapter six a conclusion is written to answer the research question. In addition, suggestions for further research, as well as the limitations of the research process, will be presented.

Chapter 2. Related literature and theoretical focus

This chapter establishes the theoretical focus of the study and reviews and synthesizes existing literature to lay the groundwork for our research. We intend to identify knowledge gaps and develop a framework that will guide our analysis and contribute to the understanding of sustainable strategies for brand loyalty in born global firms by drawing on previous research and theories.

2.0 Literature review

In chapter two the theoretical framework is presented as a foundation for empirical evidence, results, and discussion later in the thesis. First, the methodology for literature review will be presented. Secondly, born globals, the Uppsala model and the characteristics and significance of such companies will be defined. Furthermore, the theoretical framework within sustainability, corporate sustainable development and corporate social responsibility will be presented. Moreover, the theoretical framework presents terms within brand loyalty, brand equity and corporate branding. These are all critical components of building a strong brand. To cover the research question, the theoretical framework also discusses relevant literature that examines the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies to cover the research question.

2.1 Methodology for the literature review

In conducting the literature review, the present study followed the guidelines and recommendations of Bougie and Sekeran (2020) in conducting the literature review. The search for relevant literature was conducted through established databases such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Oria, which offer access to reputable academic articles and journals. Additionally, some of the academic articles and journals referred to well-known consulting companies, while other relevant literature was obtained from reputable websites.

To refine the search for relevant academic articles, additional keywords were employed, including born global, sustainability, and brand loyalty. To obtain an understanding of their fundamental principles the search initially aimed at identifying articles that addressed each of the three concepts individually. Subsequently, the search was extended to identify articles that established the relationship between the three concepts, forming the basis of the theoretical framework for the study. This involved identifying common themes and linkages between the concepts.

To assess the relevance of each article, the title, abstract, and keywords were carefully analyzed, providing an overview of the research's purpose, methodology, findings, and conclusion, as recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2016). Relevant articles were then selected for full-text review, with a focus on determining their suitability for inclusion in the literature review.

2.2 Born global companies

There has been an increase in the number of companies that sell a greater portion of their products on foreign markets. Companies that operate internationally have largely been perceived as well established and large companies with experience and size, such as multinational enterprises (Collinson et al., 2020) In addition, there are also smaller companies which operate internationally that are experiencing growth for a variety of reasons, including lower international transportation costs and shorter product life cycles. These companies are often referred to as "Born globals" or as "International New Ventures" (Hashai and Almor, 2004). Born globals are companies that rely on a foreign presence to gain significant competitive advantages from resource use and production sales. The customers are served both locally and globally by leveraging company-specific advantages (FSAs) such as new technology, unique products, or other valuable services. The existence of born globals is due to their international status, which allows them to capitalize on commercial opportunities that arise in various locations around the world (Collinson et al., 2020).

Born globals are defined as "*small, technology-oriented companies that operate in international markets from the earliest days of their establishment*" (Knight and Cavusgil,

1996). They are also defined by Knight and Cavusgil (2004) as "*entrepreneurial start-ups that seek significant shares of their income by selling products on international markets*" (Knight and Cavusgil 2004, p.124). Born globals rely on a foreign presence to survive or succeed immediately. In order to leverage critical resources beyond their national borders, born global companies engage in early and rapid internationalization (Collinson et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Uppsala model

The Uppsala Model and Born global firms take fundamentally different approaches to business internationalization. The Uppsala Model, also known as the Uppsala Internationalization Model, is a theory that explains how firms gradually increase their foreign market activity. This model was developed by Swedish researchers Johanson and Vahlne in 1977 and has since become an important reference point for understanding firms' internationalization processes.

Firms internationalize their operations in a step-by-step approach based on knowledge and experience in the foreign market, according to the Uppsala Model. This method is divided into four stages. Companies in the first stage have no regular export activities. The second stage entails exporting through independent agents (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). The firm establishes a foreign sales subsidiary in the third stage, and foreign production or manufacturing units in the fourth and final stage (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977).

The model's fundamental principle is the concept of market knowledge and commitment (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). According to the model, as a company gains more experience and knowledge about a specific foreign market, it becomes more committed to allocating resources in that market. However, due to market uncertainties and risks, commitment decisions are made in stages.

The Uppsala Model has had an impact on international business, but it has also been criticized. Critics can argue that the model may not apply to all types of firms or industries, and that it may fail to account for firms that rapidly internationalize, such as born global firms.
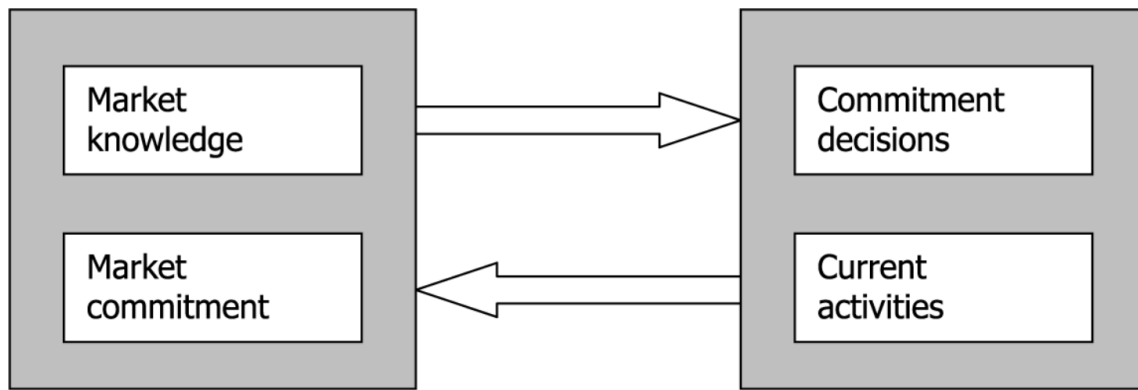
Figure 1: The Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977).

As previously stated, the Uppsala Model recommends a gradual, step-by-step process of internationalization. Firms begin with no export activities, then export through independent agents, then establish a foreign sales subsidiary, and finally establish foreign manufacturing units (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). Experiential learning and knowledge of foreign markets, which accumulate over time, drive this incremental process. The model is frequently associated with firms that gradually internationalize their operations over time.

Born global company, on the other hand, are businesses that seek to gain a significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and sales outputs from multiple countries from the start, or shortly thereafter (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004). They do not follow the Uppsala Model's gradual, step-by-step internationalization process. Instead, because of advancements in technology and communication, they begin their operations with a global perspective and may enter multiple countries at the same time. These companies frequently operate in niche markets where they can leverage their distinct capabilities on a global scale (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

In essence, the Uppsala model and born global firms differ in terms of internationalization speed and process. The Uppsala model proposes a slow, sequential approach based on the accumulation of experience and commitment, whereas born global firms are distinguished by a rapid, non-sequential internationalization process that is typically driven by unique capabilities, innovative products, or services, and enabled by modern technologies.

2.2.2 Characteristics and significance of born globals

There are several characteristics that differentiate born global companies from traditional corporations. In comparison to traditional corporations, which are frequently large manufacturers with significant annual sales, born global companies are characterized as small businesses with fewer than 500 employees, and annual sales of less than $100 million. Born globals also rely on cutting edge technology to create relatively unique product or process innovations (Knight and Cavusgil, 1996). Born globals is characterized by their dedication to innovation and entrepreneurial ownership, youth, and management structure (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2021).

The term "Born Globals" and "International New Ventures" refers to an early and rapid internationalization, which challenges existing theories in the field that previously are focused on gradual internationalization from larger companies with a longer track record (Øyna and Alon, 2018). Born globals can be found across national boundaries and industries, they are small, have limited resources and experience, but they still operate their value chains in the same way that larger multinational enterprises do (Øyna and Alon, 2018). Some of these businesses achieve significant international success despite their small size, financial constraints, and resources (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004).

Another characteristic is that born global companies often have unique product development which allows them to serve specific markets. This leads to increased market share and sales growth. Start-up companies like born globals want to succeed in foreign markets, but because of their young and relatively small capabilities of resources, they want to avoid direct competition with larger or more established companies. In a competitive international market, such an approach maximizes share and performance for typical dominated and large companies (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, born global companies often take risks related to innovative products or processes in order to achieve a position in international markets. This impacts the relationship with the company's sustainability due to clear demands from the customers. The companies have high capacity to adapt to the environmental conditions, and through sustainable solutions their performance will often be better (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2021). Born global

companies can either incorporate their sustainable solutions into their products and services or with sustainable practices into their workplaces (Nasiri et al. 2018).

2.3 Sustainability

The term Sustainability refers to the three pillars of the concept that is social, economic, and environmental, also known as the triple bottom line (Purvis et al., 2018). Economic sustainability refers to an economy's ability to sustain a certain level of economic production indefinitely. This pillar of sustainability focuses on economic activities that benefit society in the long run while not negatively impacting either the social or environmental aspects (Purvis et al., 2018). Environmental sustainability entails making decisions and taking actions to protect the natural world, with a particular emphasis on preserving the environment's ability to support life (Purvis et al., 2018). It is all about conserving natural resources, reducing waste and emissions, and preserving biodiversity. This pillar also addresses issues such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Social sustainability is concerned with identifying and managing the effects of business on people. It entails ensuring that universal human rights are respected, that fair labor practices are implemented, and that everyone has a good quality of life (Purvis et al., 2018).

All three of these sustainability pillars are interdependent, which means that they must all be operational and in balance for true sustainability to be achieved (Purvis et al., 2018). Businesses should strive for not only a financial bottom line, but also bottom lines related to environmental preservation and social equity.

Environmental stewardship entails the ethical and responsible management and protection of the environment (Bennet et al., 2018). It is founded on the realization that our actions today have an impact on the well-being of future generations as well as the overall health of the planet. Environmental stewardship seeks to maintain a long-term balance between human activities and the natural world by embracing principles of sustainability and conservation (Bennet et al., 2018).

At its core, environmental stewardship emphasizes the need to conserve natural resources. This entails using resources like water, forests, and energy in an efficient and sustainable manner, while avoiding wasteful practices that deplete these valuable assets (Bennet et al., 2018). Another critical aspect of environmental stewardship is pollution prevention. It entails putting in place strategies to reduce or eliminate pollution and waste. This can be accomplished by using cleaner production methods, promoting recycling and waste management practices, and employing eco-friendly technologies. Sustainable practices are central to environmental stewardship. They entail adopting methods and approaches that promote long-term ecological balance (Bennet et al., 2018).

Overall, environmental stewardship is a comprehensive approach to environmental management and protection. It encourages individuals, businesses, organizations, governments, and communities to adopt responsible practices such as conserving natural resources, preventing pollution, promoting sustainability, protecting biodiversity, addressing climate change, and emphasizing education and awareness (Bennet et al., 2018).

Environmental stewardship is a component of sustainability that focuses on the responsible management of the natural environment, whereas sustainability encompasses a broader perspective that includes social and economic considerations as well as environmental ones (Bennet et al., 2018).

Sustainability has emerged as a critical issue for all nations. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the sustainable development goals (Tjahjadi et al., 2021). The literature of sustainability can be defined according to the UN's sustainable development goals (SDG), where they have aimed a global action plan for sustainable development "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Regjeringen, 2023) (FN, 2023). The action plan includes 17 SDGs and 169 related goals that address global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, and social disparities (Khaled et al., 2021). It is critical for a born global company to investigate potential frameworks for executing and achieving its strategies and goals for contributing to sustainable development (Khaled et al., 2021).

2.3.1 Corporate sustainable development

Sustainable development refers to economic, environmental, and social development that meets current needs while not impeding future generations from meeting their own. Businesses play a significant role in sustainable development. However, progress toward sustainable development has been slow, and there is more need for specific guidance to enable businesses to act strategically and successfully in a sustainable manner (Baumgartner and Rauter, 2016).

Sustainable development is defined as addressing global environmental and social challenges in order to provide a framework for development and solutions to these challenges. On the other hand, sustainable development does not provide clear guidelines for which strategies, activities or plans that must be implemented (Baumgartner and Rauter, 2016). Participation from a variety of actors at various levels of society is required for sustainable development to become more binding, concrete, and actionable. Individuals, organizations, regions, states, and societies all have important roles to play in any form of sustainable development (Baumgartner and Rauter, 2016).

According to Megistru and Panizzolo (2023) there are three reasons that companies adopt sustainable practice. First, the pressure from stakeholders, which include the governments, investors, political groups, trade associations, suppliers, employees, and customers (Mengistu and Panizzolo, 2023). Stakeholders expect companies to achieve their vision and mission in a sustainable manner. To realize their vision and mission, they must first establish trust with their stakeholders (Tjahjadi et al., 2021). Second, the concern about environmental and social impacts that is growing on the planet. Third, it develops competitive advantage in the company (Mengistu and Panizzolo, 2023). Prioritizing sustainability can help a brand stand out from other competitors in the market and gain competitive advantages in the company.

Corporate sustainability is defined as a company's ability to take care of and support growth over time by meeting the expectations from customers (Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Increased focus on corporate sustainability has grown as a result of environmental changes that have contributed to companies considering strategies to reduce their environmental impact. There is a strong emphasis on social responsibility, the impact on

10

performance, and the improvement of activities to ensure proper resource utilization (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2021). This can be accomplished by the implementation of sustainable processes or the development of sustainable products or services.

The company's sustainable development can be published as a sustainability indicator in an annual sustainability report which consists of economic, environmental, and social indicators (Tjahjadi et al., 2021). In the long run, corporate sustainability development is expected to conduct business activities that benefit society's economic, social, and environmental well-being (Tjahjadi et al., 2021). Bansal (2005) refers to corporate sustainable development through a three-dimensional framework that includes (1) economic prosperity achieved through value creation, (2) social justice achieved through corporate social responsibility (CSR), and (3) environmental integrity achieved through environmental management. The integration of value creation, CSR, and environmental management creates a holistic focus on the company's long-term sustainable development (Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos, 2014).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is one of the approaches developed to help corporations manage various aspects within sustainability (Baumgartner and Rauter 2016). In addition, it is also an important factor for customers when it comes to building brand loyalty. By engaging in socially responsible practices, such as sustainable development and ethical practices, companies can express their commitment to values that align with their customers (Du et al., 2010). This can increase customers' trust in the company and create a sense of loyalty towards the brand.

2.3.2 Corporate social responsibility

Customers are becoming more aware of the company's impacts on the society and environment. The government has traditionally had the responsibility to improve the living conditions of the population. As a result of society's needs outnumbering the government's ability to meet them alone, the role of business in corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown (Jamaili and Mirshak, 2006). Jamali and Mirshak (2007) define corporate social responsibility as "*commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, local communities and families*" (Jamali and Mirshak,

2007, p. 243-244). In other words, CSR is also defined as the obligation to contribute to the prosperity of society through various business activities and contributions from the company's resources (Du et al., 2010).

Many customers consider it necessary that companies define their roles in society and set social and ethical standards for themselves (Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010). Corporations that engage in CSR activities build the company's image, strengthen customer relationships, and prepare customer behavior for a longer term (Du et al., 2010).

Furthermore, companies are increasingly utilizing CSR activities to position the company's brand to customers through communication on websites and annual reports (Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010). Such activities are not always well received by all, particularly because they can elicit skepticism and mistrust even if it is genuine (Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010). As a result, it is critical that the company is regarded as trustworthy (Lock and Seele, 2016). When it comes to communication, credibility is essential in any setting. Whether it is political communication, interpersonal interaction, or the corporation is communicating their role and responsibility in society. CSR communication can also be perceived as strategic by the company, and therefore it will not be perceived as credible by customers and stakeholders (Lock and Seele, 2016). In order for the company's CSR reports and communication about their sustainable strategies to be perceived as credible, they must be understandable to the readers, as well as truthful and sincere (Lock and Seele, 2016).

Customers frequently want to know what good deeds the company they buy from does, at the same time the customers can become unsure when companies promote their CSR efforts and sustainable strategies. Customers may perceive the company's CSR activities to be motivated by genuine concern or as an attempt to increase profits. In general, the company's objectives result in positive reactions from customers. It is important that managers have an understanding of what the key issue of CSR communication is. This includes what they want to communicate, which channel it should be communicated from and which factors affect the effectiveness of CSR communication (Du et al., 2010).

It is all about the society's expectations of the company's behavior. Customers have set pre-existing societal expectations, and companies begin by establishing CSR objectives based on the needs and expectations of their customers. In some cases, businesses attempt to alter

customer expectations. Achieving successful CSR implementation will necessitate managers communicating with their customers with a focus on finding common goals and obtaining support for their strategic course (Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010). Such initiatives improve the company's reputation and foster positive customer relationships which result in increased brand loyalty.

2.4 Brand loyalty

According to Deedster (2022), brand loyalty and sustainability are becoming increasingly intertwined in today's marketplace. Consumers want brands that prioritize sustainability in their operations and products, and they are more likely to stick with companies that share their values. In order to form strong bonds with customers who share these values, businesses must prioritize sustainability and demonstrate a commitment to environmental responsibility.

Brand loyalty is a key marketing concept that refers to a consumer's consistent purchase of a specific brand over time, even when confronted with competing products. This behavior reflects a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand as well as their willingness to go out of their way to choose that brand over others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Brand loyalty is an important metric for businesses to track because it can lead to increased customer retention, lower marketing costs, and increased sales revenue.

Furthermore, brand loyalty is influenced by factors such as product quality, brand image, customer service, and advertising (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Businesses can foster brand loyalty by creating a strong brand identity that resonates with their target audience, offering products and services that meet customer needs, while exceeding customer expectations with excellent customer service (Oliver, 1997).

Brand loyalty is an important concept in marketing because it represents a consumer's continued purchase of a specific brand over time, even when confronted with competing products (Oliver, 1997). Brand loyalty reflects a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand and willingness to go out of their way to select that brand over others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

For businesses, brand loyalty is essential because it can lead to higher customer retention, lower marketing expenses, and higher sales revenue (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Customers who are loyal to a brand are more likely to return, even if competitors offer comparable or even better products (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). Customers who are loyal to a brand are more likely to recommend it to others, thereby expanding the brand's reach and reputation.

There are also several factors influencing brand loyalty. Product quality is one of the most important considerations. Customers who are satisfied with the quality of a product are more likely to continue purchasing from that brand because they believe the brand consistently delivers products that meet their needs (Dick & Basu, 1994). Furthermore, a brand's image and reputation can influence brand loyalty. A trustworthy, reliable, and socially responsible brand is more likely to attract and retain loyal customers (Dick & Basu, 1994).

Another important aspect of developing brand loyalty is customer service. Brands that prioritize customer service and respond to customer inquiries and complaints in a timely and helpful manner are more likely to build trust and loyalty with their customers (Oliver, 1997). Furthermore, customer service can assist in resolving any issues or concerns that customers may have, preventing negative experiences from affecting their brand loyalty.

Building brand loyalty is one benefit of advertising. Effective advertising campaigns can create an emotional bond between a brand and its customers, encouraging them to remain loyal to the brand (Dick & Basu, 1994). Advertising can also help to build brand awareness by increasing the brand's reach and visibility and attracting new customers.

Brand loyalty is a critical component of establishing a strong brand identity. Providing high-quality products, cultivating a positive image and reputation, providing excellent customer service, and running effective advertising campaigns can all help to increase brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Customers who are loyal to a brand can significantly contribute to its success, so businesses must prioritize developing and maintaining customer loyalty (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Brand loyalty and brand equity are closely linked, as brand loyalty is one of the key drivers of brand equity. Brand loyalty is clearly illustrated in David Aaker's Brand equity model as one of the four main segments that fall under brand equity. A strong brand identity, product quality, customer service, and effective advertising can all foster brand loyalty, which in turn contributes to increased brand equity. In addition to customer loyalty, other intangible factors such as brand reputation and perceived quality are also important in building brand equity. Companies must consistently invest in marketing, advertising, and customer service efforts to maintain a positive image and reputation and cultivate customer loyalty to increase their brand equity over time. By prioritizing sustainability and demonstrating a commitment to environmental responsibility, businesses can further enhance their brand equity and appeal to socially conscious consumers who value sustainable practices.

2.4.1 Brand equity

Brand loyalty is a part of Aaker's Brand equity model. Brand equity is the total value of a brand, taking both tangible and intangible factors into account. Intangible factors include a brand's reputation, customer loyalty, and perceived quality. Tangible factors include a brand's financial performance, whereas intangible factors include a brand's reputation, customer loyalty, and perceived quality (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). A strong brand is more likely to be perceived positively by consumers, which can lead to increased sales revenue, increased customer loyalty, and a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Ebrahim, 2020).

Building brand equity necessitates a consistent effort to maintain a positive image and reputation, which may include marketing, advertising, and customer service investments (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). A strong brand identity, clear messaging, and consistent visual and verbal branding can all help to increase the equity of a brand. Furthermore, customer loyalty, positive reviews, and word-of-mouth recommendations can all contribute to the development of brand equity over time (Ebrahim, 2020).

The brand equity model developed by renowned marketing professor and brand consultant David A. Aaker, is a comprehensive framework that identifies five categories of brand assets

and liabilities that contribute to the value of a product or service (Aaker, 2009). The model posits that a strong brand consists of several components, including brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. These four main components contribute to the overall value of the brand and its ability to generate long-term revenue and profits for the company.
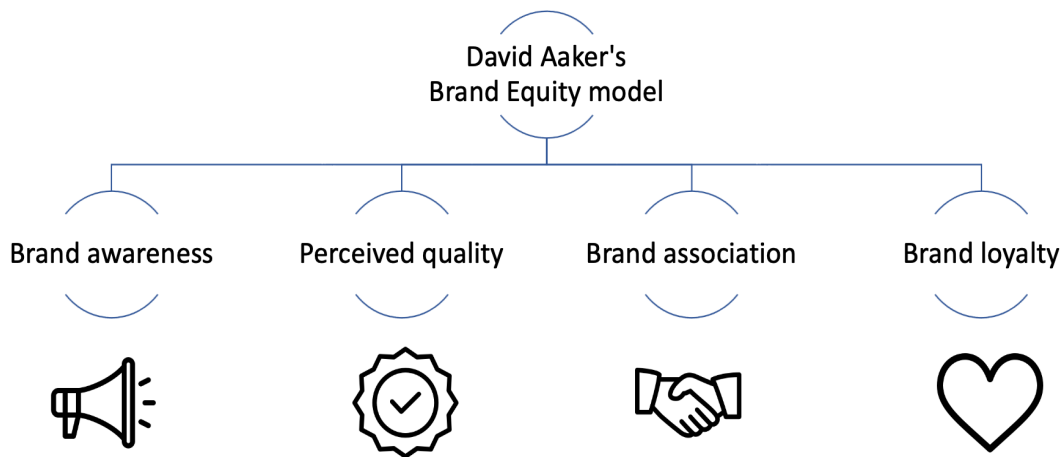
Figure 2: David A. Aaker's Brand equity model (created by the authors).

Brand awareness is the degree to which consumers are familiar with the distinguishing characteristics or image of a specific brand (Aaker, 2009). Consumers with high brand awareness can easily recognize and recall the brand. This recognition can occur spontaneously, unaided, or with the assistance of cues. A higher level of awareness indicates that the brand will be included in the consumer's consideration set, which can lead to more frequent purchases. Advertising, sponsorships, partnerships, and other marketing strategies can help to increase brand awareness (Aaker, 2009).

Perceived quality is a customer's perception of a product or service's overall quality or superiority in comparison to alternatives and in relation to its intended purpose (Aaker, 2009). It is subjective and may not accurately reflect the product or service's quality. Higher perceived quality can distinguish a brand from its competitors, allow the brand to charge a premium price, and be an important factor in the purchasing decision. It can be influenced by a variety of factors, including previous experiences, third-party reviews, and other brand elements such as price, advertising, packaging, and so on (Aaker, 2009).

Brand associations are defined as anything that creates a mental link between the brand and the customer (Aaker, 2009). These associations can arise from a variety of sources, including a logo or color, a celebrity endorsement, a specific feeling, or any other attribute associated with the brand. Strong, positive brand associations can help distinguish the brand, foster positive attitudes and feelings, and lead to increased brand equity. Managing these associations necessitates continuous monitoring and management of all brand-related stimuli to which customers are exposed (Aaker, 2009).

According to Aaker (2009), brand loyalty refers to the degree of attachment that a customer has to a specific brand, as discussed in 2.4. This factor is critical because loyal customers are more likely to continue purchasing from the brand despite competing offerings. Customers who are loyal to a brand are less sensitive to price changes and can even become brand advocates, sharing their positive experiences with others. This can result in a more stable customer base, lower marketing costs, and increased resilience to competitive threats. Quality products, excellent customer service, and consistent branding can help to foster this loyalty (Aaker, 2009).

The combination of these four components, according to the brand equity model (Aaker, 2009), creates a distinct brand identity that distinguishes a brand from its competitors and provides a source of value for the company. Understanding and managing these components can help businesses increase the value of their brand and gain a competitive advantage.

Brand trust is closely related to the main pillars of the brand equity model, as both contribute to a brand's overall success. A brand's reputation, customer service, and product quality play a crucial role in building trust with consumers (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). Social media provides a platform for authentic engagement and personalized communication, which can help to build trust and increase brand loyalty and equity (Ebrahim, 2020). Therefore, brand trust is an important factor in building and maintaining a strong brand identity.

Consumers' trust in a brand's ability to deliver on its promises is referred to as brand trust. It is an important component of brand loyalty because consumers are more likely to stick with a brand they trust (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). A brand's reputation,

customer service, and product quality are all factors that can help build trust. Positive interactions with a brand's social media presence can also help to build trust (Ebrahim, 2020).

Social media provides a unique opportunity for brands to build trust with their customers through authentic engagement and personalized communication. Social media can allow brands to showcase their values, highlight their social responsibility efforts, and respond to customer feedback in real-time (Ebrahim, 2020). A brand that consistently responds to customer inquiries and complaints on social media in a timely and helpful manner can build trust with its customers, leading to increased brand loyalty and equity (Ebrahim, 2020).

Brand loyalty, brand equity, and brand trust are all critical components of building a strong brand identity. Building brand loyalty requires a sustained effort to create an emotional connection with customers, while building brand equity requires a focus on both tangible and intangible factors (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). Trust is a key factor in shaping both brand loyalty and equity, as it can impact a brand's reputation, financial performance, and overall success. Social media provides a unique opportunity for brands to build trust with their customers, making it a critical tool for building and maintaining a strong brand identity (Ebrahim, 2020).

2.5 Corporate Branding

Corporate branding and sustainability branding are essential for building a strong brand identity and establishing trust and loyalty with customers. Corporate branding involves creating a consistent and distinct image for a company, while sustainability branding communicates a commitment to environmentally responsible practices. Both types of branding benefit from social media engagement and integrating sustainability into all aspects of a company's operations. Measuring and reporting on sustainability performance is important for building trust with stakeholders and demonstrating progress towards sustainability goals.

Corporate branding is the process of creating and maintaining a strong and consistent image and reputation for a company in the minds of its stakeholders, which include customers,

employees, investors, and the general public (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Corporate branding entails creating a distinct identity and personality for the company and communicating this to its target audience through various channels such as advertising, marketing, public relations, and social media (Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

Corporate branding for sustainability is a strategic approach that entails creating a brand image and messaging that communicates a company's commitment to environmentally responsible practices. The goal is to establish a strong link between the brand and sustainability, which can aid in the development of brand loyalty and customer trust (Lozano & Escrig, 2019).

Companies must ensure that sustainability is integrated into all aspects of their operations and communications in order to effectively brand towards sustainability (Deloitte, 2018). Sustainability must be prioritized in their supply chain, product development, packaging, marketing, and communication efforts. Companies that successfully brand themselves as environmentally responsible and sustainable use language and imagery that emphasizes their commitment to environmental responsibility and sustainability (Deloitte, 2018). This could include using environmentally friendly packaging, incorporating recycled materials into products, or demonstrating their use of renewable energy sources.

 Companies can attract customers who prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions by developing a strong brand image centered on sustainability (GlobalWebIndex, 2019). These customers may become more loyal to the brand if they believe the company is concerned about the environment and making a positive contribution to society. Corporate branding for sustainability is an effective way for businesses to communicate their commitment to sustainable practices and environmental responsibility, and it can aid in the development of brand loyalty among environmentally conscious customers (Deloitte, 2018).

Integrating sustainability into a company's branding efforts requires a sustainability strategy. The strategy should identify key sustainability issues relevant to the company's operations and stakeholders, establish goals and targets for addressing these issues, and lay out a plan for achieving them. The strategy should be consistent with the overall mission and values of the company, and it should be integrated into the company's business operations and decision-making processes (Greyson & Hodges, 2017).

Companies can incorporate sustainability into their brand identity by using eco-friendly materials, sustainable packaging, and environmentally friendly production processes. This can help to communicate the company's commitment to sustainability and differentiate it from competitors. Companies can also consider using sustainable messaging and imagery in their branding to highlight their sustainability efforts.

Measuring and reporting on sustainability performance is critical for demonstrating progress and fostering stakeholder trust (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Companies can track and report on their environmental performance, such as greenhouse gas emissions, energy and water consumption, and waste generation (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). This can help the company demonstrate its progress toward its sustainability goals and build trust among its stakeholders.

Understanding the concerns and needs of stakeholders, such as customers, employees, suppliers, and local communities, requires interaction with them. Surveys, focus groups, and other forms of outreach can be used to collect feedback from stakeholders and incorporate their concerns and needs into sustainability initiatives (Freeman, 1984). Engaging stakeholders can also aid in the development of stronger relationships and the enhancement of the company's reputation as a socially responsible business (Freeman, 1984).

Integrating sustainability into corporate branding efforts necessitates a comprehensive approach that is consistent with the company's values and objectives (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Companies can improve their reputation, build stronger relationships with stakeholders, and contribute to a more sustainable future by developing a sustainability strategy, integrating sustainability into brand identity, communicating sustainability initiatives, measuring, and reporting on sustainability performance, and engaging with stakeholders.

2.6 Relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies

In the contemporary marketplace, brand loyalty and sustainability have become increasingly intertwined, as consumers have become more environmentally and socially conscious. According to Deedster (2022), consumers often seek out brands that share their values, and companies that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices can establish strong connections with their customers, leading to increased brand loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). As per Mohr et al. (2001), sustainability has become a crucial factor in determining stakeholder brand loyalty, and consumers are willing to pay more for products that align with their values.

Implementing sustainable practices can add value to a company and result in a better perception from stakeholders. Companies that prioritize sustainability practices show their customers that they care about the environment and want to make a positive difference. This can build trust and loyalty among environmentally conscious customers, leading them to choose the same brand over others in the future (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Consumers also perceive sustainable businesses as more trustworthy (Dumitriu et al., 2019). According to Luo and Bhattacharya (2016), stakeholders are more likely to remain loyal to companies that are environmentally and socially responsible, as this loyalty is based on the company's commitment to society, the environment, and future generations.

Prioritizing sustainable development not only benefits the environment and society, but it can also increase yield through increased demand. Companies that invest in sustainable development and communicate their measures to stakeholders can differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a competitive advantage in the market. Customers are more likely to choose brands that are transparent about their sustainability practices and can demonstrate an environmental commitment. Companies that implement sustainable practices not only have a positive impact on the environment and society, but they can also build stronger relationships with their customers and increase brand loyalty (Dumitriu et al., 2019).

Chapter 3. Method

This chapter aims to provide a detailed account of the research methods employed to address the research question. The chapter introduces the scientific method and the philosophical underpinnings of the research. Subsequently, the research design, method, and strategy are elucidated upon, followed by a comprehensive explanation of the data collection techniques and analysis methods utilized. Moreover, an assessment of the research design is presented before concluding the chapter with ethical considerations and a summary of the methods employed.

3.0 Introduction of Methodology

Chapter three will detail the research approach and methodology employed in this study. The chapter is structured into four parts, each focusing on specific aspects of the methodology. The term "method" is derived from the Greek word "methodos," which refers to following a specific path towards a goal. In social science research, the method is concerned with how information about social reality is obtained and analyzed. This involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Johannessen et al., 2017).

The research question, which aims to investigate the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies, must be consistent with the research method. The research method is utilized as a tool for data collection, analysis, and interpretation in order to analyze the perspectives of the companies. Business research is a systematic and organized effort to investigate specific decision problems encountered in the workplace that require a solution. It is characterized as an organized, systematic, data-driven, critical, objective inquiry or investigation into a specific problem (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020).

3.1 Research Design

A researcher must make several decisions in order to conduct an investigation. First, a decision must be made about what and who will be investigated, as well as how the entire research process will be carried out (Johannessen et al, 2017). A research design is a plan for gathering, measuring, and analyzing data in order to answer your research question (Sekaran

and Bougie, 2020). In other words, research design can be seen as a map or plan for how the researcher will respond to the problem. The overall plan or strategy used by a researcher to conduct a study is referred to as research design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). It entails identifying research questions or hypotheses, selecting appropriate research methods and techniques, and deciding on sampling procedures and data analysis techniques. A well-designed research study should be able to answer research questions or hypotheses while minimizing potential biases and errors effectively and efficiently (Neuman, 2014). The obtained data can either be a qualitative or quantitative method (Sekeran and Bougie, 2021).

In this thesis, a qualitative research method has been chosen to investigate experiences that will provide us a more complete understanding. By using this method, subjective experiences will be disclosed that cannot be measured in numbers (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). Qualitative research is a research method that involves investigating and comprehending social phenomena through the eyes of the people involved. Non-numerical data, such as words, images, and observations, are used in qualitative research methods to understand and interpret social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This focus is achieved through the use of a variety of techniques, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, to collect data that provides insights into participants' perspectives and experiences.

Furthermore, the qualitative method seeks to comprehend how people perceive a situation and is used by researchers to express themselves within a specific field (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020) One of the primary advantages of qualitative research methods over quantitative methods is that they allow for a more in-depth examination of social phenomena. Researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena by using open-ended questions and flexible data collection techniques (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research methods also enable the investigation of unexpected findings and the development of new hypotheses or theories that can be used to guide future research (Morse, 2015).

As a result of our research problem, it is considered appropriate to use a qualitative research method. Our research method will be able to collect complementary and significant data that will allow us to shed light on the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies. Our informants rely on their experiences, opinions, and knowledge of how this has affected their company.

3.2 Collection of Data

Data collection methods should be designed to collect valid and reliable data while answering research questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). Common data collection methods include questionnaires, interviews, observation, and document analysis. The empirical data is gathered through in-depth interviews. This method is used to obtain information from the informant's point of view. The goal of the in-depth interview is to have a relaxed and free conversation about several topics related to our research question. A time frame has been chosen to allow the informant to reflect on their own opinions and experiences in relation to the research theme (Tjora, 2021).

Bougie and Sekaran (2020) refer to interviews as a guided, targeted conversation between two or more persons". A semi-structured interview was conducted in this qualitative research. This is when the interview is planned, and it is clear what kind of information that is required. The content can also be planned ahead of time (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020).

A structured interview was conducted with the assistance of an interview guide (Appendix 2). In advance, the theme questions and the order of the questions have been determined. The structure was established ahead of time. It began with an introduction where we introduced ourselves, our purpose, and ensured confidentiality and requested permission to record the interview. The interviews were conducted with employees from born global companies who were well suited to provide the information required to answer our problem (Thagaard, 2009).

3.2.1 Choice of born global companies

Selection is employed when it is not feasible to obtain data from the entire population, as asserted by Saunders et al. (2012). The authors suggest two selection techniques: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling allows the researcher to generalize findings from a sample to the entire population. On the other hand, non-probability sampling comprises various techniques, most of which involve subjective judgments. Strategic selection is one of these techniques.

Johannessen et al. (2017) and Saunders et al. (2012) used strategic selection to identify companies that best align with the research question and survey goals. The current study investigates born global companies in Norway, which are defined as smaller companies with a flexible organizational structure that have internationalized early in their development (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004). Companies from various industries across Norway were interviewed to ensure that there is no industry bias in the selection process. A strategic selection approach was employed to address the research question and achieve the survey objectives (Saunders et al., 2012). To identify suitable born global companies in Norway, several criteria were considered, including:

1. Company size
2. Norwegian founded company
3. Company that has or will expand into international operations

In this study, the criterion for selecting companies includes the number of employees, which ranges from 1 to 500 Norwegian employees. The chosen companies are born global, i.e., they are established and owned by Norwegians, and have engaged in international business within three years, as per the basis established in Chapter 2.2.1. The aim of this selection criterion is to explore the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in companies engaged in international business.

Conducting an intensive search for these companies has been challenging, as some of them have been difficult to reach, and others have not responded positively. To obtain more information about the companies, websites such as proff.no have been used, along with the companies' own websites. The chosen companies operate in different industries, including maritime and offshore suppliers, boat safety, water production, retail, and different tech industries such as maritime technology and agricultural technology.

It is interesting to investigate if there are any differences in the focus on sustainability and brand loyalty across these diverse industries. The companies selected for this study are presented in the following table.

Informants	Industry	Role of informant	Employees	Established	International expansion
1	Supplier for Maritime and offshore	Managing director	107	2009	2017
2	Boat safety	CEO	3,5	2017	2023
3	Maritime	Chief executive officer	2	2021	2022
4	Tech	Managing director	170	2008	2008
5	Water	Sales and marketing director	11	2018	2018
6	Tech	CEO and founding Partner	9	2018	2022
7	Water	CEO and founding Partner	2	2017	2021
8	Agricultural technology	CEO	5	2018	2022
9	Retail	Retail Manager	16	2015	2019

Table 1: Overview of the companies (created by the authors).

The initial plan for this thesis was to include a proportion of companies meeting specific criteria, both in Norway and Israel. However, due to the political unrest that occurred in Israel during the spring of 2023, conducting interviews with the intended Israeli companies became challenging. As a result, it was deemed necessary to alter the original research plan by increasing the proportion of Norwegian companies to be interviewed and prioritizing the aforementioned selection criteria as the starting point for the study.

3.2.2 Choice of Informants

In the context of social science research, population remains a key concept and is defined as the total number of research units that are relevant to the research problem (Johannessen et al., 2017). While it may seem straightforward to determine the population and its boundaries, it can also pose challenges. The population refers to the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher intends to investigate, and the group from which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions is based on sample statistics (Sekeran and Bougie, 2020).

For the present study, primary data was collected through interviews, which represent the most significant source of data. Informants were chosen based on their position and role within the company, with a focus on those who had good knowledge of the company and direct involvement in internationalization processes and entry strategies. Interviews offer several advantages, including the provision of data directly related to the case study and the opportunity to obtain personal views and explanations. However, there are potential drawbacks, such as interviewer bias, informants telling the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear, poor memory or inaccurate expression, which can be addressed through the confirmation of information (Yin, 2014).

The informants for this study were individuals who held leadership positions or were involved in the founding of the company and possessed a broad understanding of the company's brand loyalty and sustainability strategies. A total of 9 informants, comprising both men and women of different ages and positions within the company, were interviewed.

3.2.3 The Interviews

The use of qualitative interviews in research is a common practice in social science. Researchers can choose from different types of interviews, each with varying degrees of structure. Johannessen et al. (2017) classify three types of qualitative interviews: unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews. Unstructured interviews are informal and flexible, with the topic given in advance, but questions adapted during the

interview. In contrast, structured interviews are characterized by predetermined themes and question formulations, with the order decided before the interview. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, use an overall interview guide as a starting point, but the topics, sequence, and questions may vary.

In-depth interviews, which typically consist of three stages (warming up, reflection, and rounding off), are commonly used in social science to gather primary data (Tjora, 2021). During the warming up phase, simple and specific questions are asked to the informants to establish background information. In the reflection stage, the informants provide more detailed responses based on their past experiences, forming the basis of the research. For this study, the focus was on sustainability, brand loyalty, and their interrelationship. Finally, the interview is concluded with rounding off questions, allowing the informants to ask any questions they may have about the research project. The interview ends with a note of appreciation for the time and efforts of the informant.

Different modes can be used to conduct interviews, such as phone, video meetings, or face-to-face interviews (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). In this study, both video and face-to-face interviews were conducted, depending on the preference of the company. The majority of the interviews were conducted over video, as it saves time and can be conducted from anywhere.

3.3 Data Analysis

According to Johannessen et al. (2017), the problem of qualitative research is to manage the enormous volume of unstructured data, find patterns, and develop a framework so that the data may be shared. The foundation for qualitative data analyses often consists of text-based data, according to Johannessen et al. (2017). As one of the research approaches in this thesis, interview transcription has been used. The main goal will be to highlight the text's meaning. According to Cohen et al. (2011), while qualitative data focuses on a smaller number of people than quantitative research, the data is rich in detail. As a result, data analysis should prepare data, reduce data to themes, and present data in figures, tables, or discussions (Creswell, 2014).

The investigator will probe the empirical data material's internal connections using an interpretative analysis of qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation (Dalen, 2004). The Gioia method is the strategic method used in this thesis (Dagnino & Cinici, 2016). This method typically employs an inductive approach for data analysis by employing a single case study design based on interpretive premises. The thesis' underlying epistemology resonates with this approach, aiming to discern the strategies of "born global" companies toward the interplay of sustainability and brand loyalty.

The Gioia methodology was designed to incorporate qualitative rigor into the research process (Gioia et al., 2013). Given the scarcity of existing research addressing the central research question in this thesis, an exploratory approach is required, necessitating the development of a distinct analytical structure. Furthermore, the Gioia method is appropriate because of its ability to serve as a powerful schema for revealing novel insights.

The concept of "first-order codes", which are then grouped into "second-order themes" at a higher level of abstraction, is central to the Gioia method. This structural construct is represented graphically by a figure consisting of boxes and arrows based on first-order codes classified into second-order themes. The interviewees' verbiage and descriptive expressions are encapsulated in first-order codes (Corley & Gioia, 2004). The analysis began by identifying commonalities and differences between these codes (Gioia et al., 2013). Interview transcriptions were meticulously examined to guide the coding process. For example, a recurring sentiment expressed by multiple informants was the firms' emphasis on sustainability, which was depicted in the first-order code's inaugural box. The next step was to identify links between these categories, after which the quotes were subsumed under the categories "Varying approaches to sustainability", "Adapting strategies and initiatives based on regional context and challenges", "Brand loyalty and customer relationships" and "Impact of sustainability on business performance" denoting the second-order code. The end result of this intricate coding procedure was a superior order theme that provided rich insights into the data.

We used the Gioia method to conduct our data analysis in themes, while using these data to contribute to and link to existing theories. Although we use the Gioia methodology to analyze our data, our study does not include the method's grounded theory perspective because we do

not intend to construct a new theory based on our data. Our goal in using this approach is to help us use a systematic approach in data analysis and to see the rigor of our findings.

3.4 Ethics and data protection

In business research, ethics refers to a "*code of conduct or expected societal norms of behavior*" (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020, p.374). Ethics is concerned with the human relationship, and this includes reflecting on our own actions in relation to others. Ethical behavior is important for researchers who conduct research and the research informants and organizations that are involved in the research process. It will be necessary to make ethical decisions at each stage of the research process (Johannessen et al., 2017). Ethical considerations are when designing and conducting research, and the researchers must consider ethical issues (Creswell, 2014). This includes obtaining participants' informed consent, protecting their privacy and confidentiality, and minimizing potential harm or risks to participants.

The data storage that is done has been in accordance with the University of Agder's guidelines (UiA, n.d). UiA adheres to the guidelines established by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (Sikt) for the processing of personal data in research (Sikt, n.d). Sikt is referred to as "The knowledge sector's service" and is a provider of the Norwegian administrative body. By applying to Sikt in the beginning of the process to ensure the legal collection and storage of empirical data, these guidelines were complied with. Before conducting any of the interviews, a permission from Sikt was obtained.

Each informant was given an interview guide ahead of time (Appendix 2). This guide emphasizes the purpose of the research and explains who is in charge, why they were asked to participate, what it entails, their rights, and how it will be carried out. This document also contained information for the informant about how we intend to process and store the data once the research is completed. The interviews were audio recorded in accordance with Sikt guidelines to ensure confidentiality. The data will only be used for research purposes and will be deleted once the project is completed.

The informants from the various companies are anonymized according to the application that was approved by Sikt in order not to recognize the informants' position or company. Participation is voluntary, and the potential informant could withdraw from participating at any time without having to give any explanation. The informants signed a written consent agreement to approve the terms of participation and information about data protection (Appendix 1).

3.4.1 Validity and reliability

Thorough documentation of the research process, including details of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, is an important factor in ensuring the research's reliability. It is important that the data that is collected reflects the research topic. The empirical research literature will address the concept of validity in this context. Validity is used to assess the "goodness of measures", and in business research it refers to "*reliability is the evidence that the instrument, technique, or process used to measure a concept does indeed measure the intended concept*" (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020, p.380).

Standardized data collection and analysis methods and tools were used in this study. This can help to ensure consistency and dependability of results. Structured interview guides were used to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions and that the data was analyzed methodically based on the interview round.

As a data collection method, interviews were used, with notes and recordings taken to ensure that all details are captured and documented in a reliable manner. In addition to interviews, various articles dealing with the same topics were used as documentation to achieve reliability linked to articles. Information was gathered by visiting the websites of the companies that were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted in Norwegian since informants' often express themselves better in their native language and to achieve the most optimal conversation during the interview. The interviews were transcribed from the original language and then translated to English to ensure that the informant's meaning became fully understandable. There could be

some consequences of translating from one language to another because the sentence may be perceived differently in another language. To ensure validity, Abalkhail (2018) refers to two techniques for translating the empirical data collected in one of the following methods:

1. Word for word translation
2. When a sentence cannot be translated word for word, translate the entire sentence.

This technique was used to ensure that the meaning is not lost in translation and that it contains the correct meaning from the informant (Abalkhail 2018).

Internal validity illuminates the extent to which it is possible to demonstrate a causal relationship. A high internal validity indicates that the survey was conducted in such a way that it is possible to say that a proven connection between two variables entails a possible causal connection (Johannessen et al., 2017). This refers to how accurately the research findings are represented. The final transcription of the informants' interviews was sent to them to ensure that their data was accurately represented. This improves internal validity and strengthens the credibility of the results.

It is critical that the empirical data collected during the research process is reliable. Reliability "*attests to consistency and stability of the measuring instrument*" (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020, p.378). A measure's reliability indicates its lack of bias as well it ensures consistent measurement over time and across the various elements of the instrument. In other words, a measure's reliability can be an indication of stability and consistency that measures the concept and aids in determining the "goodness" of a measure (Sekaran and Bougie 2020).

A researcher can test reliability by repeating the measurement with the same method. The measuring can also see if the results are consistent. In other words, if a new researcher follows the same procedure as the original researcher and thus conducts the same study, the new researcher will reach the same conclusions and findings as in the original investigation. This is used to identify potential sources of error in the survey (Johannessen et al,. 2017, p36-37). In order to ensure that the pertinent subjects are consistently agreed upon, reliability has been maintained by employing multiple publications and journals that address the same topic.

The difficulty in obtaining consistency in the research process, particularly when it comes to data collecting and interpretation, is one problem with dependability in qualitative research. Data collection and analysis must be meticulous and in-depth, and established procedures

must be used to maintain consistency. Qualitative researchers can improve the reliability of their results by thoroughly documenting the research process and using a transparent approach to data analysis.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The results section is an important part of the thesis because it presents the research study's findings. The results section of this master thesis will summarize the key findings obtained from various company representatives about how sustainability impacts brand loyalty in born global companies. The findings will be presented logically and systematically, with relevant examples from the interviews which will further be discussed in relation to relevant theory in Chapter 5.

It is worth noting that the informants for this study are individuals who held leadership positions or were involved in the company's founding and had a thorough understanding of the company's brand loyalty and sustainability strategies. This choice of informants is significant because it allows for a more in-depth understanding of how the company's sustainability strategies affect brand loyalty. The use of quotations in the results section will aid in substantiating interpretations of obtained data and provide evidence to back up the research findings.

Overall, the results section of the master thesis will provide readers with a clear understanding of the impact of sustainability on brand loyalty in born global companies. The findings of the research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic and may also inform the development of sustainability strategies in other companies.

4.0 Findings

First-order codes

- Varying approaches to sustainability.
- Strive to utilize environmentally friendly versions of their products or services.

- Sustainability may not be a concern for all customers.
- Stakeholders are particular focused on it.
- Communicate their commitment to sustainability.

- Prioritizing sustainability in their core values.
- Dialogue on a variety of platforms to emphasize their dedication to environmental responsibility.

- Differ in their geographic reach.

- Some viewing brand loyalty as a key success factor and others not attribution the same level.

- Maintaining robust customer relationship.
- Innovation.

- Committing to transparency and sustainability.
- Some also adopt a holistic approach.

- Businesses adapt varied strategies when handling criticisms about their sustainability practices.
- There`s a general consensus that criticisms should be addressed seriously. .

- Ignoring sustainability could lead to customer attrition.
- Sustainability will have a crucial role in maintaining competitiveness and relating customers .

Second-order themes

- Varying approaches to sustainability

Adapting strategies and initiatives based on regional context and challenges

Brand loyalty and customer relationships

Impact of sustainability on business performance

Aggregate dimensions

Sustainability strategies and performance
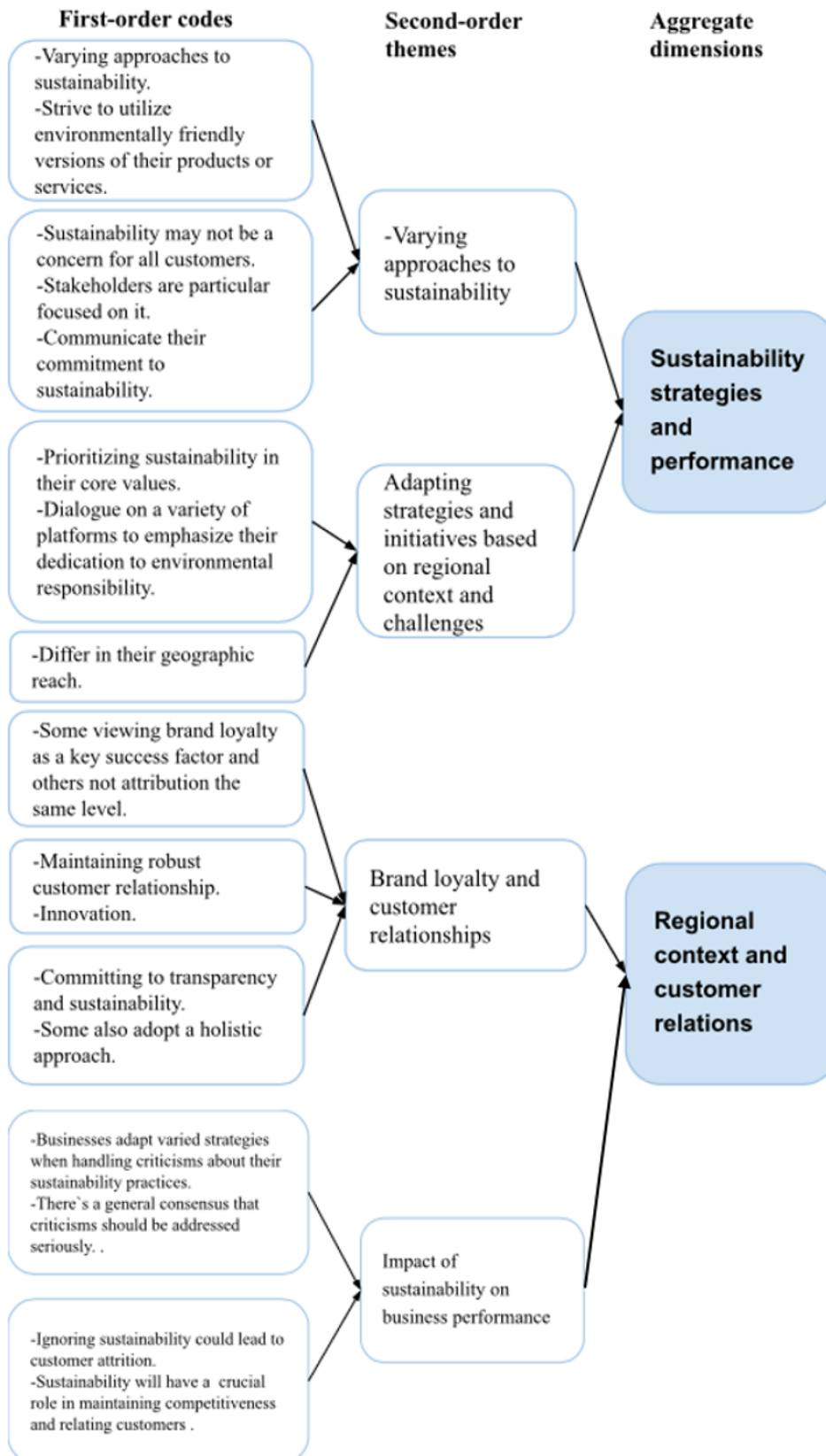
Regional context and customer relations

Figure 3: Data structure (compiled by the authors).

The data structure from figure 3 will be used to present key findings from the interview. Because the figure has two dimensions, the findings will be divided into four parts. The first dimension emphasizes sustainability strategies and performance. The second dimension focuses on regional context and customer relations. In each segment, examples of informant responses will be presented.

We used the Gioia method to conduct our data analysis in themes, while using these data to contribute to and link to existing theories. Although we use the Gioia methodology to analyze our data, our study does not include the method's grounded theory perspective because we do not intend to construct a new theory based on our data. Our goal in using this approach is to help us use a systematic approach in data analysis and to see the rigor of our findings.

4.1 Sustainability strategies and performance

The diverse approaches to sustainability theme, focuses on the various methods and practices that businesses employ to integrate sustainability into their operations and strategies. It includes approaches to environmental, social, and economic sustainability, as well as how businesses innovate and adjust these approaches over time.

The impact of sustainability on business performance themes look into the effect of sustainable practices on a company's overall performance. Among other performance indicators, it can include analyzing the impact of sustainability on financial outcomes, employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, and market reputation.

4.1.1 Varying approaches to sustainability

The study focused on how different companies incorporate sustainable practices into their operations, revealing variations in their approaches. While some businesses emphasize that their entire product offering is sustainable, others focus more on implementing eco-friendly measures within their workplaces. A notable approach came from a company that strives to

utilize the most environmentally friendly versions of their products. In addition, certain companies dedicate their services to assist others in incorporating sustainable practices into their operations. However, one of the participating companies does not prioritize sustainable practices.

One of the respondents, Informant 3, indicated that the sustainable solution they offer is at the heart of their product. They aim to transition customers from fossil fuels to electric propulsion, thereby making their entire business model centered around sustainability. Informant 4 highlighted their use of digital communication and paperless operations to reduce their environmental footprint, a practice they had adopted even before the pandemic.

On the importance of sustainability to their brands, a significant majority of the informants agreed on its importance. However, one participant noted that while sustainability is not a major concern for their customers, stakeholders such as shareholders and investors are particularly focused on it. In contrast, one informant stated that sustainability is their selling point, while another considered it to be the core of their business idea. A tech company admitted that they should probably focus more on sustainability.

As for how companies communicate their sustainable practices, some use digital platforms like social media, marketing efforts, websites, or direct customer engagement. Others communicate their commitment to sustainability through their products. Informant 9 considered sustainability so important to their operations that they are willing to pay for sustainable materials despite their higher cost. In contrast, Informant 8 indicated that while customers do not prioritize sustainability, stakeholders such as shareholders and investors are keen on it. One participant does not communicate about sustainable practices due to their absence in the company.

Various strategies are in place to align sustainability practices with customers' values and expectations. Some informants believe that they are ahead of their customers in sustainability, while others use direct dialogue or formal agreements in the case of B2B relationships. However, some companies do not experience any sustainability-related demands or expectations from their customers.

In terms of customer concerns about sustainability, companies generally respond with seriousness and importance. Some participants address customer concerns by offering information about their practices and products, while others consider it a business opportunity. Nevertheless, one informant rarely experiences such concerns from their customers.

All informants implementing sustainable practices believe that their commitment contributes to a competitive advantage. While some companies have a stronger sustainable focus than others, they all consider this focus to be a valuable asset in their market. Even those informants whose customers are not particularly concerned with sustainability believe their dedication to these practices draws customers. For instance, Informant 5 explained that while their product, water, is not unique, their sustainable packaging offers a competitive advantage.

4.1.2 Adapting strategies and initiatives based on regional context and challenges

During a recent series of interviews with company informants, it became evident that their organizations emphasize certain core values, though the particular focus varies. Many of these values revolve around quality, a strong company culture, environmental stewardship, professionalism, and offering customers financial security.

For instance, one informant, who operates in an environmentally-focused enterprise, emphasizes their organization's commitment to combat ocean pollution caused by plastic waste. Quality assurance was highlighted by another informant, whose organization prides itself on understanding customer needs intuitively due to shared industry "language".

The importance of company culture and a passion for people was underscored by a separate informant. Another interesting perspective came from an informant whose organization is determined not merely to establish a brand, but rather to normalize the use of cardboard as a packaging material. Such environmentally-friendly approaches were prevalent in the water industries, as they too endeavor to use eco-conscious packaging.

Elucidating on how their companies developed their corporate brands, several informants pointed towards a focus on sustainability strategies. Informants 3, 5, 7, and 9, in particular, revealed that their companies underscored sustainability during the development of their brands. One company leveraged collaborations with branding and sustainability-focused companies to forge its own brand, while another tailored its brand development strategy based on market needs. Dialogue with customers, utilizing various platforms, and marketing were also common elements in their brand development strategies, with sustainability often singled out as a key strategy.

The topic of globalization was also discussed, as many of these companies have adopted a "born global" approach, internationalizing from inception. While some adapt to specific target markets or regions, others maintain a broader, global focus. Several informants mentioned their companies' aspirations to further expand their international reach, despite already operating in multiple countries.

For instance, one informant from the water industry shared that while one of their products has a global presence, the remainder of their production is dispersed across several countries, with Norway not being a primary target market. Therefore, it is clear that whether focusing on quality, culture, environmental initiatives, or global reach, these organizations have diverse yet focused core values that guide their operations and brand development strategies.

4.2 Regional context and customer relations

Adapting strategies to regional contexts and building brand loyalty through customer relationships are two key themes in business. Adapting to local environmental, social, and economic factors is critical for success in various geographic areas. Similarly, understanding customer expectations, delivering high-quality products/services, and engaging customers effectively are critical for building brand loyalty. Both themes stress the importance of adaptability, customer focus, and effective engagement strategies in achieving business success.

4.2.1 Brand loyalty and customer relationships

Brand loyalty is the measure of a customer's dedication and connection to a particular brand, generally considered as a vital factor in marketing and business success. The significance of brand loyalty, however, was not uniformly perceived among the informants. Some viewed it as crucial to their company's success, while others did not share the same sentiment.

Gauging brand loyalty posed challenges, leading the informants to employ a range of methods. Some monitored customer behavior and repeat purchases, while others sought customer feedback via surveys and QR codes imprinted on their products. Employee retention rates also served as an indicator of brand loyalty for some informants. The consensus among the informants was the importance of fostering strong relationships and teamwork with customers to achieve brand loyalty, underlining the need to offer quality products and services to retain customer loyalty.

Informant 5 explained their measure of brand loyalty as, *"We really only measure repeat purchases, get customers back and customers as 'word of mouth' from some customers who have recommended us"*. While Informant 9 asserted, *"It is super important, but it is difficult to measure end consumers, but we see all the time that we measure it by seeing that we get more and more regular customers who come back"*.

The informants suggested several strategies to bolster customer brand loyalty. These strategies encompassed accurately representing the customer and enhancing their work, offering high-quality products, customer follow-up and broadening the agreement with customers. A few informants underlined the significance of repeat purchases as an indicator of customer satisfaction and subsequent loyalty. Other strategies included delivering on promises, innovation to stand out from rivals, hiring and retaining excellent employees and advisors, staying readily available to customers, problem-solving, maintaining a steady flow of brand information, and working with customers at a local level.

Informant 4 exemplified this strategy, stating, "*We want the same customer to come back and use us under several circumstances…*". Informant 6, on the other hand, highlighted the

importance of innovation, stating, *"We exceed the agreements we sign, and we're also committed to innovation and being innovative...Continuous development"*.

In terms of distinguishing themselves from competitors and enhancing brand loyalty, the informants provided a range of responses. A few highlighted the importance of treating people with respect, nurturing a sense of family or community within the company, ensuring the excellence of their goods, while pledging to transparency and sustainability. Others stood out by adopting a holistic approach, considering the larger context and impact of their offerings, and employing a diverse and creative team that stays abreast of industry trends.

Informant 1 affirmed this, saying, *"If you treat people well, they will come back to us and that is a big difference between us and our competitors"*, whereas Informant 6 focused on relationships and research, stating, *"There are many things that make you get selected, but of course there are relationships, recommendations from customers and research behind it"*.

In conclusion, building and enhancing brand loyalty necessitates a multifaceted approach. It requires treating people well, offering high-quality products, taking into account the larger context of solutions, being responsive to customers, and having a diverse and creative workforce that is in tune with market trends.

4.2.2 Impact of sustainability on business performance

The diverse perspectives from informants highlight an ongoing debate about the impact of sustainability on brand loyalty. Some argue that sustainability plays a pivotal role in reinforcing brand loyalty, asserting that consumers' inclination towards eco-friendly products can foster recurring patronage, particularly if these products are competitively priced. These proponents contend that brands built on sustainable practices naturally attract loyal customers. An example of this perspective is expressed by Informant 2, who asserts, *"It plays an enormous role. That is what we build our product on, that is sustainability"*.

Contrarily, other informants either disregard the notion of sustainability influencing brand loyalty or do not view it as a fundamental element. Informant 8, for instance, argues that

"customers are not concerned with sustainability goals and see it as an extra thing they have to report on".

Such contrasting views emphasize that the significance of sustainability in cultivating brand loyalty could be dependent on various factors such as industry, customer preferences, pricing policies, among others. Striking a balance between offering environmentally friendly products at affordable prices and meeting customer demands is key in gauging brand loyalty.

Some informants shared instances of how sustainability initiatives enhanced customer loyalty in their companies. They observed that the quality and health benefits of sustainable products led to customer satisfaction and repeat purchases. They further noted that sustainability is vital in attracting new customers and establishing brand credibility. Brands that are socially responsible and contribute to societal solutions can galvanize customer support.

Informant 4 captures this sentiment, stating, *"But at least I think that companies that take social responsibility can attract customers who are concerned with social justice and inclusion, right?"*.

Regarding the reaction to negative feedback or criticism on sustainability practices, the responses varied. While some emphasized their commitment to social responsibility and brushed off criticism, others were more receptive to feedback. These open-minded informants believe in responding politely, factually, or introspectively to criticisms, ensuring transparency, and leveraging data to back their responses.

A noteworthy remark came from Informant 5: *"We try to answer in a polite way and take what they come up with as criticism or feedback"*.

It is clear from the informants' responses that varying strategies are employed in handling criticism about sustainability and social responsibility. The general consensus, however, is that negative feedback should be addressed seriously, transparently, and in a fact-based manner that encourages self-reflection.

In the context of sustainability's increasing significance for brand loyalty, the informants agreed that businesses ignoring sustainable practices run the risk of customer attrition.

Consumers are gravitating towards sustainable choices, obliging businesses to adapt by developing sustainable products and conveying their commitment to sustainability. According to Informant 5, *"We notice that there will be a potential increase in sustainable options and offers since our generation is more concerned with it. If you do not incorporate sustainability early in the development, you have most likely lost a large customer group"*.

This increasing trend towards sustainability necessitates a proactive approach, with businesses urged to stay ahead by continuously seeking sustainable materials and solutions. Some informants predict that sustainability may even become a regulatory requirement in the near future. As a final note, Informant 3 warns, *"If companies give up on sustainability, their brands will eventually disappear"*. This view underscores the growing importance of sustainability for businesses striving to remain competitive and retain customers.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Implications

In this crucial chapter, we delve into the heart of our master thesis, "Sustainable strategies for brand loyalty and customer loyalty: Unraveling born global companies practices". Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive discussion of the research findings and their implications, building on the empirical findings and analysis presented in the previous chapters. This chapter serves as a platform for synthesizing research findings, providing insights, and addressing the initial research questions.

5.0 Discussion

This chapter presents the research data from our literature review and qualitative survey using the method of first-order categories, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. The primary focus is on highlighting the most important findings derived from interviews about the impact of sustainability on brand loyalty in newly established global companies. These findings are critical for future-born global companies seeking to understand the significance of sustainable development in increasing brand loyalty and effectively communicating their sustainable strategies to customers.

The analysis section is based on the interview guide's main themes. It should be noted that some findings may be associated with multiple categories, necessitating the following classification: (5.1) varying approaches to sustainability, (5.2) adoption of strategies and initiatives based on regional context and challenges, (5.3) the relationship between brand loyalty and customer engagement, and (5.4) the impact of sustainability on business performance.

Following that, these findings will be thoroughly examined and discussed in relation to the theoretical and empirical background. This section will present relevant theoretical perspectives as well as our own interpretations. Our research problem, as previously stated, is "investigating the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born globals". As a result, any potential solutions to this problem will be thoroughly considered and investigated.

5.1 Varying approaches to sustainability

As we face challenges such as climate change, scarce economic resources, and social inequality, the concept of sustainable development is becoming increasingly important in today's world (Baumgartner and Rauter, 2016). Every informant emphasizes that sustainability is important, even though there is a difference in how much the companies incorporate their sustainable practices. Society faces environmental, economic, and social challenges and to solve these problems several goals and frameworks are set. However, these frameworks do not provide any specific guidelines for which strategies, activities and solutions that must be implemented to achieve these goals (Baumgartner and Rauter, 2016). It was highlighted by the informants that most of these companies did incorporate sustainable practices into their operations. Some emphasized that their entire product is sustainable, "*We are sustainable in every aspect, and what we live on".* While others emphasized measures they take in their workplace. There is also one informant that mentions there is no focus on sustainable development in their company yet.

The emphasis on environmental products or services encompasses companies' efforts to adopt ecologically sustainable iterations of their offerings in order to use environmentally friendly versions of their products or services. Stakeholders are focused on sustainability and communicating their commitment to sustainability. This demonstrates the importance organizations place on environmentally responsible practices, such as the development or modification of their products or services to reduce negative environmental consequences. Such initiatives may include the use of sustainable materials, waste and pollution reduction, and energy efficiency promotion. Companies that adopt these practices demonstrate their commitment to environmental stewardship and contribute to the larger goal of achieving market sustainability.

There are no guidelines for which strategies and activities every company should use in its operations, and as we can see from the informants' perspective there is a difference in how the companies implement their sustainable practices into its operations. Some of the companies have sustainable processes at their workplace as their sustainable strategy, and others produce and sell sustainable products and solutions to their customers. Although sustainable development does not offer specific guidelines, born global companies can take proactive steps to integrate sustainability into their operations, products, and services to drive

a positive change for the environment and contribute to sustainable development. As a result, the strategies will play a significant role in sustainable development either by adopting sustainable practices into the workplace or through sustainable products and solutions. This will further be discussed in section 5.4 as the strategies are linked to how the company's sustainable practices impact brand loyalty.

The existing body of literature substantiates the notion of corporate sustainability as the capacity of an organization to effectively manage its growth trajectory over time, while simultaneously fulfilling the evolving expectations set forth by its clientele (Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Moreover, there is an escalating awareness among customers regarding a company's societal and environmental impacts, prompting a growing demand for explicit articulation of their societal roles and adherence to ethical standards (Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010). The statements provided by the informants suggest that their approaches to ensuring alignment between their sustainability practices and customer values and expectations exhibit disparities. Their perspectives on sustainability differ, with some perceiving themselves as leading the way for customers, while others emphasize the significance of direct engagement and dialogue with customers in achieving this alignment.

The literature supports that the company's sustainability is crucial to meeting the customer's values and expectations. Customers are also increasingly aware of these preferences, and as a consequence demand more responsibility and transparency from companies about their sustainable development. The informant's statements indicate a difference in the approach to validating an adaptation of their sustainability practices to the customers' values and expectations. Some feel they are at the forefront, while others prioritize a direct dialogue to ensure the customer's values and expectations. This highlights the need for companies to take a focused approach to sustainability, which active engagement and communication to understand the customer's needs and expectations. By doing so, born global companies can build trust and loyalty among their customers.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, one of the three reasons that companies adopt sustainable practices is that it contributes to competitive advantage in the company (Mengistu and Panizzolo, 2023). All of the informants that include sustainable development into their company think they have a competitive advantage and that they stand out from other competitors in the same market. One example is from informant 3 that mentions that their sustainability strategy is one of the factors that contributes to a competitive advantage in their

firm *"Yes, I do. It is one of many factors that trigger the purchase decision"*. By implementing environmentally and socially responsible practices and products, born global companies can attract and retain customers who value sustainability. It can also improve their reputation, and therefore adopting sustainable practices has become an essential aspect of corporate strategy in today's world.

It will be critical for the company to communicate its practice to its customers because they will acquire knowledge about the company's sustainable development (Dumitriu et al., 2019). In the interviews the informants elaborated how they communicate their incorporation of sustainability. The informants that do incorporate sustainable development do this mostly through social media, marketing, their websites, and other platforms. The companies that have a sustainable product or solution also communicate it directly to their customers and when marketing their products. As a result, companies that invest in sustainable development and communicate their measures to customers can differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a competitive advantage in their market segment.

5.2 Adapting strategies and initiatives based on regional contexts and challenges

Corporate branding involves creating a compatible and distinct image for a company and it is essential for building a strong brand identity and developing trust and loyalty with customers (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). As mentioned earlier in chapter 4, the companies have different core values. The values that are mentioned by the informants are quality, culture, the environment, values, being professional and providing customers with financial security. Most of the informants mention the environment as one of their core values. One example is from informant 2 who mentions this; "*our core values are saving lives, the environment and values*". According to a review of the literature, it is essential to create a competitive image to build a strong brand identity, which contributes to increased trust and loyalty among customers. In chapter 4, the informants specifically mentioned the environment as one of their core values and highlighted its importance for the company. By prioritizing the environment as a core value, born global companies can both create a positive image and differentiate themselves from their competitors, which can lead to increased customer loyalty.

In addition, by aligning its brand efforts with the core values, born global can build a stronger brand identity that responds to customers.

As a company develops its corporate brand, it must make several decisions and shape the brand accordingly. The informants elaborated how the company developed their corporate brand. There are no similarities between the companies on how they develop their corporate brand, although several of the companies have a common focus on building their brand towards sustainable strategies. Informants 3,5, 7 and 9 mention that they have focused on sustainability when developing their corporate brand. Example from informant 3 *"We built the company around it being a sustainable solution and we depend on us to try to think sustainably in what we do"*. Lozano and Escrig (2019) mention that corporate branding for sustainability is a strategic approach that entails creating a brand image and messaging that communicate a company commitment to environmentally responsible practice. The goal is to create a strong link between the brand and sustainability, which can help to provide brand loyalty and customer trust.

In the literature, it is mentioned that the development of the corporate brand is required in order to be able to make strategic decisions to shape the brand (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). The informants shared how their companies developed their corporate brand, where several of the companies had focused on sustainability. In particular, informants 3, 5, 7 and 9 mentioned that their companies placed a significant emphasis on sustainability when developing the company's brand. Aligning the company's branding with a focus on sustainability is a strategic approach that involves creating a brand image and that communicates the company's commitment to environmentally responsible practices, as noted by Lozano and Escrig (2019). This can help create a strong link between the brand and sustainability, which can increase trust and brand loyalty. This can also lead to long-term success and a positive impact on the environment.

To effectively brand towards sustainability, businesses must ensure that sustainability is integrated into all parts of their operations and communications (Deloitte, 2018). According to Deloitte (2018) sustainability should be prioritized in their supply chain, product development, packaging, marketing, and communication efforts. Based on the information from the informants, many of the companies use environmentally friendly products,

packaging, or solutions in their products. The theoretical literature suggests that sustainability must be integrated into all aspects of a business. The informants indicate that several companies have already taken a step in the right direction to include environmentally friendly products, packaging, and solutions in their offers to customers. However, it is essential to assess whether sustainability is integrated in all areas of the company to ensure the effectiveness of efforts for responsible and environmental practice.

When it comes to environmental stewardship, our informants, that originate in various industries, frequently incorporate sustainability into their fundamental principles, emphasizing their commitment to environmental responsibility. This behavioral pattern demonstrates their dedication to minimizing the negative environmental effects of their activities and promoting long-term progress. Similarly, these organizations demonstrate that they actively seek input from a variety of sources, reinforcing their commitment to environmental sustainability. By participating in these discussions, they hope to not only raise environmental awareness and educate the public, but also to foster an open exchange of ideas about relevant environmental issues.

Another critical choice is whether to develop a global brand or modify it to different regions and target markets. Born global companies internationalize from the beginning in their development, and some adapt to new target markets or regions while others focus on becoming global (Collinson et al., 2020). Based on the response from the informants some of them have pronounced that they are global. Some other companies mention that they operate in several countries, but do not see themselves as global yet. In addition, several of the companies have an ambition to reach out to even more countries and become global. These companies are dependent on a foreign presence to gain significant competitive advantages from resource use and production sales (Collinson et al., 2020). In the literature, it is suggested that born global companies are faced with an important choice between developing a global brand or modifying it for different regions and target markets (Collinson et al., 2020). The informants indicate that several of them are considered as global, while others are still in the process of expanding to more countries and have an ambition to become global. The literature notes that going global can provide significant competitive advantages, which can drive companies to follow the global trend.

The Uppsala model, a business theory that explains how firms gradually increase their activities in foreign markets, differs significantly from the informants' perspectives. While the Uppsala model focuses on the internationalization process, the informants' responses are focused on sustainability practices, corporate branding, and customer perceptions. According to the Uppsala model, companies typically begin operations in their home markets before expanding into culturally similar, less distant markets (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). In contrast, the informants indicate that their companies were "born global," operating in multiple countries from the start or with plans to rapidly globalize (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

Furthermore, the Uppsala model does not address issues such as corporate branding. Nonetheless, that is a focal point of the informants' responses. They talk about how their companies incorporate sustainable practices, how important sustainability is to their brands, and how they communicate these practices to their customers.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of stakeholder engagement in reinforcing an organization's commitment to environmental sustainability. It is perceived as a parallel strategy that organizations use to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to environmental preservation. Sustainability, like the dimension of environmental stewardship, is prioritized within these organizations and is ingrained as a fundamental principle in their operational ethos. As the informants express, environmental concerns are not an afterthought for these organizations. They recognize that environmental issues have a significant impact on their operations as well as the rest of the world.

While the Uppsala model does not explicitly link sustainable practices to competitive advantage, informants clearly see sustainability as a significant differentiator and competitive advantage in their markets. The Uppsala model and the responses of the informants highlight various aspects of business operations. The relevance of the Uppsala model is found in its guidelines for international expansion strategies, while the informants emphasize the importance of sustainability and branding in their business models.

The aggregate dimension of regional differences has a significant impact on the development of strategies and initiatives. Variable characteristics, cultures, and challenges necessitate a context-specific approach in diverse geographic landscapes. Understanding these regional

distinctions thus aids in the development of tailored strategies and initiatives. To effectively address geographical area environmental concerns and challenges, organizations must consider regional variations and adapt their environmental stewardship and stakeholder engagement strategies accordingly.

5.3 Brand loyalty and customer relationships

The information gathered from the questions about brand loyalty, building brand loyalty, and differentiating from competitors aligns with David Aaker's brand equity model. The model highlights the importance of brand loyalty as one of the components that contribute to the overall value of the brand. Responding to the first question, the informants emphasize the importance of brand loyalty in their companies and use various metrics to measure it, such as repeat purchases and customer satisfaction surveys.

The responses to the second question about building brand loyalty among customers also aligns with the brand equity model, which emphasizes the importance of creating long-term relationships with customers to encourage repeat business and customer loyalty. Responding to this question, the informants mention providing good service, meeting customer needs, and delivering on promises as approaches to building brand loyalty. While some informants are unaware of their competitors' strategies, the overall focus is on developing customer relationships, providing value, and developing a market-oriented brand identity.

One recurring theme is the view of brand loyalty as a critical factor in achieving success. Some individuals as well as companies believe that customer loyalty to a brand can lead to increased sales, customer retention, and a positive brand reputation. This emphasizes the significance of strong customer relationships and the implementation of trust and loyalty-building strategies. However, there are differing viewpoints on the significance of brand loyalty. While some people consider brand loyalty to be extremely important, others do not. This suggests a divergence in perspectives, with some people valuing other factors or strategies over brand loyalty when determining success. Nonetheless, the emphasis on competitive advantage through innovation indicates that organizations recognize the importance of market differentiation.

Lastly, the responses to the third question about differentiation from competitors also aligns with the brand equity model, which emphasizes the importance of creating a distinct brand identity that distinguishes a brand from its competitors. The informants in this question mention different factors that differentiate their companies from their competitors, such as having a diverse design team, delivering quality and sustainable products, and emphasizing good relationships with customers.

The information gathered from the three questions aligns with the brand equity model, which emphasizes the importance of brand loyalty and other components in creating a distinct brand identity that provides value to the company.

Based on the responses provided by the informants, it can be concluded that brand loyalty is considered important in most of the companies interviewed. However, there are different ways of measuring it, ranging from repeat purchases and positive referrals from customers to employee retention rates and customer satisfaction surveys. Some companies do not have a specific way of measuring brand loyalty, while others use more sophisticated methods such as QR codes on products to obtain direct feedback from customers. It is also noted from the theory gathered that brand loyalty is particularly important in industries with a high level of competition, and that developing strong partnerships with customers is seen as crucial for fostering loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994).

When it comes to building brand loyalty among customers, the informants provided various approaches. These include representing the customer well, providing life-saving equipment and influencing insurance companies, providing good customer follow-up, encouraging repeat purchases, delivering on promises and being innovative, having good employees and advisers, being available and actively helping when things go wrong, and having a stable flow of brand information as well as working locally with customers. The emphasis is on providing good service, meeting customer needs, and building long-term relationships to encourage repeat business and customer loyalty.

The informants also provided insights on how their companies differ from their competitors in terms of building and improving brand loyalty. These factors include treating people well and focusing on creating a family culture (Informants 1 and 4), having a holistic approach and providing in-depth knowledge about the products and their impact (Informant 3),

delivering products with top-notch quality and sustainability (Informant 5), being available to customers (Informant 8), and having a diverse design team with a variety of specialties and backgrounds (Informant 9). However, some informants could not provide a clear answer or did not have enough knowledge about their competitors' strategies (Informants 2 and 6), while one informant recognized the strength of competitors in building brand loyalty around sustainability (Informant 7). Overall, the responses suggest that the companies differentiate themselves from competitors by emphasizing good relationships with customers, quality products, sustainability, and a diverse and market-oriented approach to design.

The insights gathered from the informants align with David Aaker's brand equity model, which emphasizes the significance of brand loyalty in creating a distinct brand identity that provides value to the company. The informants highlight the importance of building long-term relationships with customers, delivering on promises, and differentiating from competitors. They recognize the need to provide good service, meet customer needs, and emphasize factors like quality, sustainability, and diverse design teams.

The findings indicate that brand loyalty is important in the majority of the companies surveyed, with various methods used to measure it. Among the metrics used are repeat purchases, customer satisfaction surveys, and positive referrals. Furthermore, strong customer partnerships are viewed as critical for fostering loyalty, particularly in highly competitive industries. Customer representation, good follow-up, repeat business encouragement, innovation, and providing extensive brand information are all aspects of the informants' approaches to building brand loyalty.

5.4 Impact of sustainability on business performance

Corporate Social Responsibility is a theory that can be linked to the information gathered (CSR). The voluntary commitment of a company to take responsibility for its impact on society and the environment is referred to as CSR. It includes actions that go above and beyond what is required by law to address social, environmental, and economic issues.

According to the data gathered, customers are increasingly demanding that businesses take responsibility for their impact on society and the environment. Companies are realizing the

value of sustainability in retaining customers, and many are taking steps to incorporate it into their products and services. Furthermore, the informants emphasized the importance of social responsibility, such as contributing to the resolution of social problems and being open about their practices.

As stated in 5.1, there are no set guidelines for the strategies and activities that every company should implement in terms of sustainability. It indicates that companies take different approaches to incorporating sustainable practices into their workplace, with some emphasizing sustainable processes and others producing and selling sustainable products and solutions. Despite the lack of specific guidelines, the findings indicate that businesses can proactively incorporate sustainability into their operations, products, and services to drive positive environmental change and contribute to sustainable development. Stakeholders are generally in agreement that criticisms of sustainability practices should be taken seriously. This theme emphasizes the significance of acknowledging and responding to criticisms in a genuine and meaningful way. Businesses must recognize the importance of sustainability issues and address them proactively.

Overall, the data collected emphasizes the importance of CSR in today's business world, where customers are looking beyond products and services and demanding that businesses act in a socially responsible and sustainable manner. Companies that take CSR seriously and incorporate sustainability into their practices are more likely to experience increased customer loyalty and a positive reputation.

CSR is the voluntary incorporation of social and environmental factors into a company's operations, as well as the communication of this to stakeholders (Du et al., 2010). Customers are more aware and expect more from businesses than just products and services, according to this theory. Companies can improve their image and reputation, as well as build greater trust and brand loyalty among consumers who share similar values, by implementing CSR practices (Du et al., 2010). As a result, this theory emphasizes the importance of businesses accepting responsibility for their impact on society and the environment and making a positive difference.

The risk of customer attrition and the importance of maintaining competitiveness are two key factors that highlight the importance of sustainability. Customers are increasingly demanding that businesses take responsibility for their impact on society and the environment, so

ignoring sustainability may result in customer attrition (Du et al., 2010). Furthermore, sustainability is important for maintaining competitiveness because businesses that prioritize sustainability are more likely to attract and retain customers.

The relationship between sustainability and customers is complex. Customers are more likely to remain loyal to companies that prioritize sustainability, so sustainability efforts are critical for customer retention (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). Addressing sustainability concerns can improve customer satisfaction because customers value companies that demonstrate environmental and social responsibility (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). As a result, incorporating sustainability into business practices can increase customer loyalty and overall customer relationships.

5.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study begins with "born global companies," which are firms that, from their inception, aim to derive significant competitive advantage from the utilization of resources and sales outputs in multiple countries. These companies play a critical role in the framework as they are the entities integrating sustainability into their operations, products, and services (Jabreen, 2009).

These businesses then apply "sustainability practices." These procedures are actions that support business objectives while proactively addressing societal and environmental implications. These sustainability initiatives are thought to improve "Corporate Branding Strategy," strengthening the organization's reputation and fostering greater customer confidence. Sustainability policies have an impact on business operations as a whole, but they also directly improve branding efforts by highlighting environmental responsibility.

This framework also takes into account "differentiation," in which born global companies differentiate themselves from competitors through a variety of means such as quality, sustainability, customer relationships, and market-oriented designs. This differentiation is thought to directly increase "brand loyalty," as customers are more likely to support brands that distinguish themselves with distinct, positive characteristics.

Simultaneously, sustainability practices increase "corporate social responsibility activities." CSR activities are those that benefit not only the company but also the larger society. These activities, in turn, boost the company's "brand equity," or the value derived from consumer perception of the brand name, leading to increased brand loyalty.

Finally, the framework's main outcome is "brand loyalty." This is defined as a customer's repeated purchase and positive association with a brand, which is frequently the result of customer satisfaction, fulfillment of promises, superior service, and innovation. According to the conceptual framework, CSR activities, differentiation, and sustainability-integrated branding strategies all have an impact on brand loyalty.

In essence, the conceptual framework emphasizes the interdependence of sustainability, differentiation, brand loyalty, and CSR activities in the context of newly established global corporations. Adoption and prioritization of sustainability practices, combined with a strong focus on CSR activities and a clear differentiation strategy, are thought to significantly contribute to increased brand loyalty in these companies.
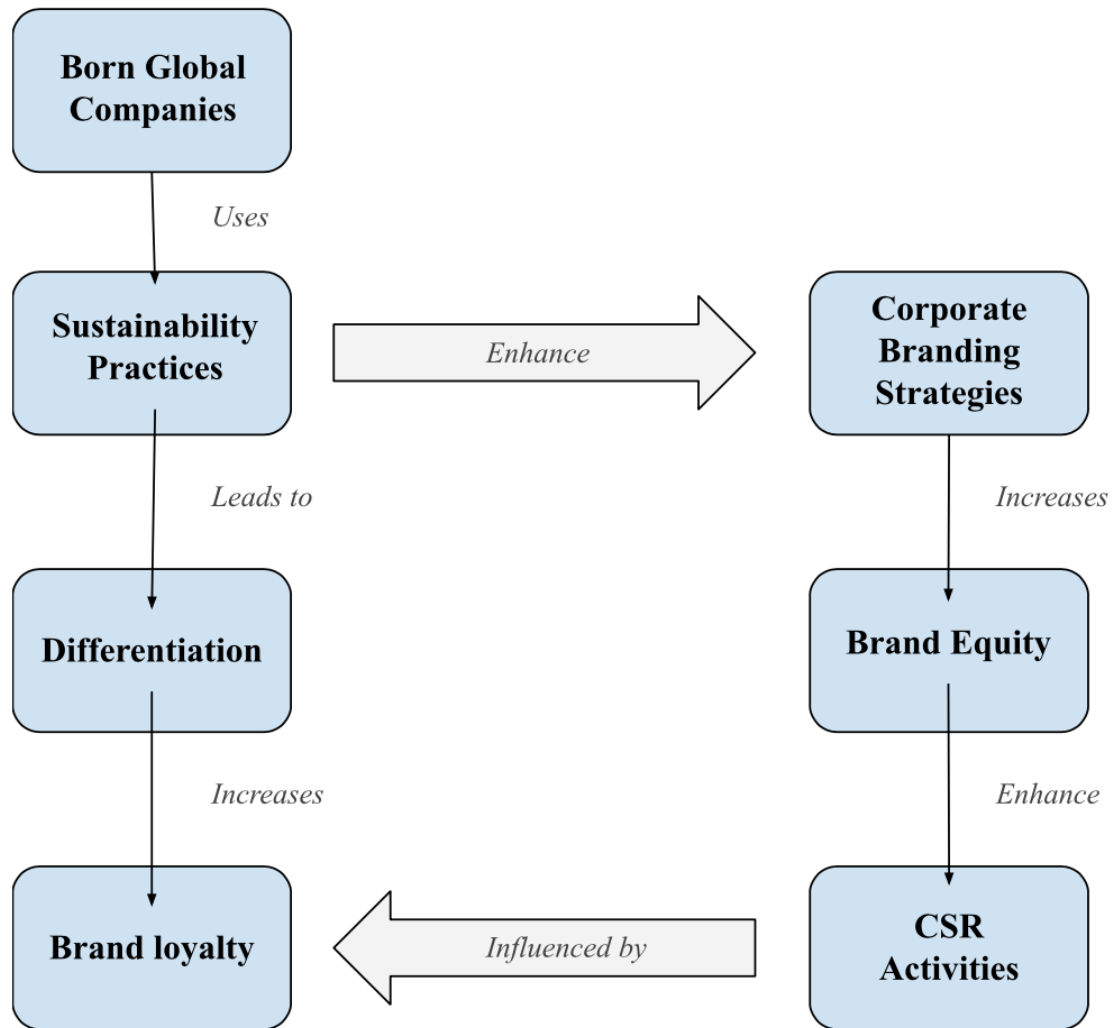
Figure 4: Conceptual framework (compiled by the authors).

5.6 Theoretical implications

The implications of the information presented in this section suggest that sustainability has become a significant aspect for born global companies in contributing to sustainable development and meeting customer expectations. Customers are becoming more aware of a company's impact on society and the environment. The information provided in section 5.1 indicates that sustainability is crucial for born global companies to contribute to sustainable development, as the world faces environmental, economic, and social challenges. Corporate sustainability is defined as a company's ability to take care of and support growth over time

by meeting the expectations of customers. Customers are becoming more aware of the company's impacts on society and the environment, and demand that companies define their roles in society and set social and ethical standards for themselves.

Born global companies can build trust and loyalty among their customers by taking a focused approach to sustainability. Adopting sustainable practices has become an essential aspect of corporate strategy in today's world, as it contributes to competitive advantage and improves reputation. Therefore, it is critical for companies to communicate their practice to its customers, which will acquire knowledge about the company's sustainable development. In section 5.2, it is highlighted that corporate branding is essential for building a strong brand identity and developing trust and loyalty with customers. By prioritizing the environment as a core value, born global companies can create a positive image and build a strong brand identity that contributes to increased trust and loyalty among customers.

5.7 Practical implications

As we face challenges such as climate change, lack of economic resources, and social inequality, the concept of sustainable development is becoming increasingly important in today's world. Born global companies can take proactive steps to integrate sustainability into their operations, products, and services to drive a positive change for the environment and contribute to sustainable development. However, there are no specific guidelines for which strategies and activities every company should use into its operations, and how companies operate their sustainable practices differ.

Existing research supports the definition of corporate sustainability as an enterprise's ability to foster and sustain long-term growth by aligning with customer expectations. The modern consumer is increasingly aware of a company's societal and environmental footprint, which frequently necessitates that companies articulate their societal roles and set their own moral and ethical benchmarks. This emphasizes the importance of businesses taking a strategic approach to sustainability, characterized by proactive involvement and dialogue to understand their customers' needs and expectations. Globally recognized companies can cultivate trust and loyalty among their customers by implementing this strategy.

One of the reasons companies adopt sustainable practices is that it contributes to a competitive advantage for the company. All of the informants that include sustainable development into their company think they have a competitive advantage and stand out from other competitors in the same market. By implementing environmentally and socially responsible practices and products, born global companies can attract and retain customers who value sustainability. It can also improve their reputation and therefore, adopting sustainable practices has become an essential aspect of corporate strategy in today's world.

It will be critical for the company to communicate their practice to its customers because they will acquire knowledge about the company's sustainable development. Companies that invest in sustainable development and communicate their measures to customers can differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a competitive advantage in their market segment. The informants communicate their incorporation of sustainability mostly through social media, marketing, their websites, and other platforms. Companies that have a sustainable product or solution also communicate it directly to customers and with their products.

Corporate branding involves creating a compatible and distinct image for a company and it is essential for building a strong brand identity and developing trust and loyalty with customers. Born global companies can both create a positive image and build trust and loyalty by prioritizing the environment as a core value. It is essential to create a competitive image to build a strong brand identity, which contributes to increased trust and loyalty among customers. The informants specifically mentioned the environment as one of their core values and highlighted its importance for the company.

In terms of global vs. regional strategies in corporate branding, it is important for born global companies to create a consistent and compatible image across different regions. They need to ensure that their brand values and identity are communicated effectively to different customers in different markets. This will help them to establish a strong and recognizable brand identity, which will contribute to building trust and loyalty with their customers. However, they also need to take into account the specific cultural and regional differences and adapt their branding strategies accordingly. By doing so, born global companies can create a strong and consistent brand identity that resonates with customers across different regions.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis's final chapter, "Sustainable strategies for brand loyalty and customer loyalty: unraveling born global firm practices," synthesizes and consolidates the key findings from our investigation. It reflects on the significant insights discovered about various industries' sustainable strategies that can improve both brand loyalty and customer loyalty within born global firms, drawing conclusions based on the empirical and theoretical studies presented in the previous chapters.

6.0 Conclusion

The goal of this research was to advance how sustainability affects brand loyalty in born global companies. Sustainability is a critical issue for companies in today's world, as consumers and stakeholders increasingly demand that businesses operate in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated a significant relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies. These organizations are playing an important role in catalyzing positive environmental changes and fostering sustainable development by incorporating sustainable practices into their operations, products, and services. They build trust and loyalty among their customers by meeting rising customer expectations for responsible and transparent business practices.

The ability of these companies to integrate corporate branding and sustainability practices has been demonstrated to be a powerful driver of competitive advantage. When a company receives recognition for its commitment to sustainability, it distinguishes itself from competitors, attracting and retaining a customer base that values sustainability. It has been discovered that spreading these practices through various channels, such as social media, marketing, websites, and direct customer interactions, improves the company's brand identity and customer trust.

According to the findings of this study, a significant number of born global companies are incorporating sustainability into their corporate branding strategies. The incorporation of

sustainability into corporate branding is an effective strategy for developing a distinct brand image that communicates the company's commitment to environmentally responsible practices. This approach has been shown to strengthen the link between the brand and sustainability, increasing customer loyalty and trust.

Furthermore, incorporating sustainability into all aspects of a company's operations, such as supply chain, product development, packaging, and communication efforts, has been identified as a key strategy for effective sustainability branding. The perspectives of the informants on risk management and internationalization differ from the traditional Uppsala model, since these perspectives carry a clear emphasis on sustainability and brand loyalty. They claim that being "born global" provides them with a competitive advantage, especially when sustainable practices are integrated into their operations and branding strategies.

In conclusion, the incorporation of sustainable practices and a focus on sustainability in corporate branding strategies significantly contribute to the development of brand loyalty in born global companies. As a result, it is critical for such businesses to continue prioritizing sustainability in their operations and communications while also focusing on exceeding their customers' expectations in order to boost brand loyalty even further.

The study underlines the crucial relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born globals, with a substantial alignment with David Aaker's brand equity model and the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). These companies place a high value on brand loyalty, a key component of brand equity, as evidenced by the importance they place on repeat purchases, customer satisfaction, and long-term customer relationships. Companies use a variety of methods to measure and build brand loyalty, including superior customer service, promise fulfillment, and innovation.

The study also emphasizes the importance of differentiation, with businesses differentiating themselves from competitors through product quality and sustainability, excellent customer relationships, and diverse, market-oriented design approaches. This differentiation contributes to the overall value of the brand by increasing brand loyalty.

Furthermore, the importance of CSR and sustainability in influencing brand loyalty is clear. Sustainability is becoming a key influencer of brand loyalty as society becomes more aware of businesses' impact on the environment and social fabric. Customers are increasingly demanding that businesses act responsibly and sustainably beyond what is legally required.

Companies that incorporate sustainability into their practices not only positively contribute to societal and environmental issues, but they also strengthen customer loyalty and brand reputation.

In essence, sustainability and brand loyalty are strongly intertwined in born globals. Companies that value brand loyalty are more likely to pursue sustainable practices, and those that prioritize sustainability see an increase in brand loyalty. This relationship emphasizes the importance of companies responsibly managing their impact on society and the environment, as well as strategically differentiating themselves in order to build a strong, loyal customer base. More research could deepen our understanding of this relationship and provide more nuanced strategies for businesses to sustainably increase their brand equity.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research

This section emphasizes the limitations and makes recommendations for future research. The master's thesis has several limitations. First, we would like to criticize that the research question can be perceived as broad and could have been more narrowly defined. However, we chose not to limit it in order to be able to go into several aspects within sustainability and how it affects brand loyalty in born global companies. In addition, we will criticize the interview guide. We experienced new angles and perspectives during the work, and we see that we could have reformulated the questions to obtain even more complementary empirical evidence. To do this, we could have had more specific interview questions.

Furthermore, the methodological approach to the thesis can also be criticized. The implementation of the qualitative interview can lead to incorrect information for a number of reasons. It is therefore important to be critical of all data that is collected. Most of our interviews were accomplished on video, which may lead to several elements being missed. Examples of this could be technical errors or disturbances.

To strengthen the reliability, we could have had a bigger sample size to better generalize our findings. The sample size of the study may limit its generalizability. There was a total of nine interviewees, and it will therefore be difficult to know whether they speak for "everyone". A

larger sample size would allow for a more representative sample, improving the results' validity. As mentioned earlier, the original plan was to compare born global companies from Israel and Norway. However, due to the political unrest that occurred in Israel during the spring of 2023, conducting interviews with the intended Israeli companies became challenging.

As a result, it was deemed necessary to alter the original research plan by increasing the proportion of Norwegian companies to be interviewed and prioritizing the aforementioned selection criteria as the starting point for the study. In addition, due to the time constraints, we were unable to collect the desired number of Norwegian born global companies. For further research, it could be interesting to conduct a comparison between two different countries.

Furthermore, only the company's point of view on the situation has been taken into account, which may undermine the credibility of the customer's perception. Since the customer's perspective is not considered in the master´s thesis, it could be interesting to look at the customer's perception for future research.

The study's use of self-reported data could be limited by bias or memory errors. Using objective measures to assess brand loyalty or the environmental impact of sustainability may help to address this limitation. This is due to the fact that self-reporting is heavily reliant on respondents' honesty, self-awareness, and memory, all of which can be influenced by a variety of factors. Some people may skew their responses intentionally or unintentionally based on social desirability bias, which means they may present themselves in a socially acceptable manner rather than providing truthful responses. Others may simply fail to recall necessary information, resulting in memory error bias.

Furthermore, subjective perceptions vary greatly between individuals, which means that what one person interprets as "brand loyalty" or "sustainable behavior" may be interpreted differently by another. As a result, self-reported data can be inconsistent and unreliable, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn from such a study.

The study could provide a more holistic view of the phenomena it is investigating by combining self-reported data with more objective measures. This approach has the potential

to not only validate or challenge individuals' subjective perceptions, but also to provide deeper insights into the factors influencing brand loyalty and the real-world impact of sustainability efforts.

The research at hand is characterized by a cross-case study design, a methodology that examines a specific phenomenon across multiple cases or contexts. This approach can offer rich, context-specific insights, yet it also presents some limitations. A key shortcoming of a cross-case study like ours is the challenge of generalizing findings beyond the cases examined. This difficulty arises because the data is collected from distinct cases, each of which is likely unique in various ways, thus complicating extrapolation of the findings to a broader population or context.

A within-case study design, in which data from the same case is collected over time, could have provided a more nuanced, arguably deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By tracking changes over time, researchers can investigate the evolution of variables and behaviors within a single case (Babel, 2021). A within-case design, for example, would have allowed for a detailed exploration of brand loyalty within a specific context, demonstrating how it develops and changes over time in the context of our study.

While our cross-case study design provided us with valuable insights into the dynamics and potential causal factors of brand loyalty across multiple contexts, a within-case design could have provided more intricate insights into the dynamics and potential causal factors of brand loyalty within a specific context.

This chapter suggests possible future research directions. Researchers can continue to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, uncover new insights, and make significant advances in their field of study by broadening the scope, conducting additional comparative studies, addressing limitations, and pursuing new research questions.

Future research could compare the impact of sustainability on brand loyalty in born global companies versus established global companies. The comparison of born global and established global companies' practices promises to generate valuable insights. Are agile and adaptable born global companies more successful at implementing sustainability measures

and, as a result, increasing brand loyalty? Or, with their vast resources and experience, do established global companies take the lead in embedding sustainability and fostering loyalty?

The answers to these questions may have an impact on future business strategies. If sustainability is found to be a significant driver of brand loyalty in both types of businesses, it will highlight the universal need for a greater emphasis on sustainable practices. If, on the other hand, one company type shows a stronger correlation, tailored strategies could be developed to capitalize on this advantage. However, such research should take into account a variety of influencing factors, including industry type, target demographic, and geographical location. These factors have the potential to significantly alter the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty, adding layers of complication to an already complex investigation. To accurately capture the dynamics at work in this intriguing exploration of sustainability and brand loyalty in the context of global business operations, a comprehensive approach is required.

Another future research could look into the impact of different types of sustainability on brand loyalty, such as environmental or social sustainability. This would enable a more nuanced understanding of how various aspects of sustainability influence brand loyalty. Sustainability has become a cornerstone for businesses worldwide in the context of growing environmental and societal concerns. However, the complex relationship between various types of sustainability and brand loyalty is still being studied. Future research could shed light on how different types of sustainability, such as environmental or social, affect brand loyalty, providing a more complete picture of this relationship.

Environmental sustainability, for example, encapsulates a brand's efforts to reduce its environmental impact through initiatives such as emissions reduction, renewable energy adoption, and recycling program implementation. In an increasingly environmentally conscious society, these actions could potentially boost brand loyalty by aligning with customers' values. Social sustainability, on the other hand, encompasses a brand's societal impact, such as fair labor practices, diversity and inclusion, community involvement, and philanthropy. Brands can foster a deeper connection with their customers and increase loyalty by demonstrating ethical behavior and social responsibility.

Researchers could learn more about brand loyalty by investigating these types of sustainability independently. This, in turn, would provide businesses with a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms by which sustainability initiatives could strengthen their customer relationships. This knowledge could help them better tailor their sustainability strategies to foster stronger brand loyalty among their customer base.

Given these limitations, future research could include a long-term study to examine the long-term impact of sustainability on brand loyalty. In order to understand the role industry characteristics play in this relationship, it would be beneficial to include companies from a variety of industries in the study. Future research could include both quantitative and qualitative measures of sustainability, providing a more comprehensive understanding. Furthermore, cross-cultural research could help determine whether cultural factors moderate the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty. Investigating consumer perceptions of the company's sustainability efforts could provide valuable insights into the relationship's psychological and behavioral aspects. Detailed case studies of both born global and established global companies could also offer in-depth insights into their sustainability strategies and their effects on brand loyalty. Finally, in the digital age, it would be interesting to investigate how companies use digital media to communicate their sustainability efforts and how this communication impacts brand loyalty.

References

Aaker, D. A. (2009). *Managing Brand Equity*. Simon and Schuster.

Abalkhail, J. M. (2018). Challenges of translating qualitative management data. Gender in Management: An International Journal. Retrieved from emerald.com.

https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/GM-03-2016-0029/full/pdf?title=challenges-of-translating-qualitative-management-data

Babel. (2021, November 29). Hva er longitudinelle studier? *Utforsk Sinnet*. https://utforsksinnet.no/longitudinelle-studier-hva-er-de/

Balmer, J. M. T., & Greyser, S. A. (Eds.). (2006). Revealing the corporation: Perspectives on identity, image, reputation, corporate branding, and corporate-level marketing. Routledge.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. Psychological Bulletin, 117(3), 497-529.

Baumgartner, R. J., & Rauter, R. (2016). *Strategic perspectives of corporate sustainability management to develop a sustainable organization*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652616304358?casa_token=XGboOmzyOkkAAAAA:Jrk65RBsUFmROfOwDyZSMGVljLL4wvq41GOqRG9wdRLkGdvLKzS0D23YWBXz2xzNqLST1z-hdw

Bennett, N. J., Whitty, T. S., Finkbeiner, E., Pittman, J., Bassett, H., Gelcich, S., & Allison, E. H. (2018). Environmental stewardship: a conceptual review and analytical framework. *Environmental management*, *61*, 597-614.

Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). *The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty*. Journal of Marketing, 65(2), 81-93.

Cohen, L., Manion, L, og Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education*, 7th edition. New York: Routledge

Corley, K. G., & Gioia, D. A. (2004). Identity ambiguity and change in the wake of a corporate spin-off. Administrative science quarterly, 49(2), 173-208.

Collinson, Simon, Rajbeesh Narula, and Alan M. Rugman. (2020). *International Business*. United Kingdom: Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2016). Qualitative Inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. SAGE Publications.

Dagnino, G. B., & Cinici, M. C. (Eds.). (2016). Research methods for strategic management (p. 363). Oxon and New York, NY: Routledge.

Dalen, M. (2004). Intervju som forskningsmetode – en kvalitativ tilnærming [Interview as a research method - a qualitative approach]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Deedster. (2022, April 7). *Why Does Sustainability Play A Role In Customer Loyalty?* Deedster. https://deedster.com/sustainability/

Delgado-Ballester, E., & Munuera-Alemán, J. L. (2005). Does brand trust matter to brand equity? Journal of Product & Brand Management, 14(3), 187-196.

Deloitte Insights. (2018). Winning over sustainability-conscious consumers. https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/retail-distribution/sustainability-conscious-consumer-trends.html

Dick, A. S., & Basu, K. (1994). Customer loyalty: Toward an integrated conceptual framework. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 22(2), 99-113.

Dumitriu, D., Militaru, G., Deselnicu, D. C., A. N., & Popescu, M. A.-M. (2019). *A Perspective Over Modern SMEs: Managing Brand Equity, Growth and Sustainability Through Digital Marketing Tools and Techniques*. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/7/2111

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. International Journal of Management Reviews, 12(1), 8-19.

Ebrahim, R. S. (2020). The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, *19*(4), 287-308.

Escandon-Barbosa, D., Salas-Paramo, J., & Rialp-Criado, J. (2021). *Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a moderator of the relationship between ambidextrous learning and corporate sustainability in born global firms*. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/13/7344

FN. (2023, 19.01) Fn.no. Retrieved 20.02.2023.

https://www.fn.no/om-fn/fns-baerekraftsmaal

Freeman, R. E. (1984). Strategic management: A stakeholder approach. Pitman Publishing.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. Organizational research methods, 16(1), 15- 31.

GlobalWebIndex. (2019). Sustainable brands: How and why consumers choose eco-friendly products.https://www.globalwebindex.com/reports/sustainable-brands-how-and-why-consumers-choose-eco-friendly-products

Hashai, N., & Almor, T. (2004). *Gradually internationalizing 'born global' firms: An oxymoron?* https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969593104000472?casa_token=s88iI6l_EaoAAAAA:1CxpMAIMqTnRMylIFZ-wl_70AKZRFaOq6POe1oGcdsIgQKy4WhFaOMStgQin92mgra7wPi_fYw

Jabareen, Y. (2009). Building a conceptual framework: Philosophy, definitions, and procedure. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8(4), 49-62. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800406

Jamali, D., & Mirshak, R. (2007). *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Theory and Practice in a Developing Country Context.* https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-006-9168-4

Johannessen, A., Kristoffersen, L. & Tufte, P. A. (2009) "Forskningsmetode for Økonomisk-Administrative Fag", 2. Utgave. Oslo: Abstrakt Forlag AS

Johannessen, A., Christoffersen, L., & Tufte, P. (2017). Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode (4. utg. ed.). Oslo: Abstract.

Johanson, J., & Vahlne, J. (1977). The Internationalization Process of the Firm—A Model of Knowledge Development and Increasing Foreign Market Commitments. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *8*(1), 23–32. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490676

Khaled, R., Ali, H., & Mohamed, E. K. (2021). *The Sustainable Development Goals and corporate sustainability performance: Mapping, extent and determinants.* https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S09596526211018175?casa_token=VhM31Kfoe3wAAAAA:lQASfLLWB8D0hdImOPgv9JuFfEPNcfmdZ5AAfMaeNPvVYDcNfg0vVxOq-ueG71G3Brb9FR0raA

Knight, G., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2004). Innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-global firm. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *35*(2), 124–141. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400071

Knight, G. A., & Cavusgil, S. T. (1996). *researchgate.* Retrieved from researchgate.net: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301840778_The_born_global_rm_A_challenge_to_traditional_internationalization_theory

Leedy, P.D., & Ormrod, J.E. (2019). Practical research: Planning and design. Pearson.

Lindgreen, A., & Swaen, V. (2010). *Corporate Social Responsibility*. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00277.x?casa_token=QSTqDerBVKQAAAAA%3AF9UyC9WN2Ycv_AvkYvvgOBXCs-wjcH958psAus7fJYIb1dotg8cl4gj0gPma3FG0hsvqgYOMQbKUHA

Lock, I., & Seele, P. (2016). *The credibility of CSR (corporate social responsibility) reports in Europe. Evidence from a quantitative content analysis in 11 countries*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652616002377?casa_token=yoJQponwcrEAAAAA:5sSq1gi2IVtNsMAGdJ8nAUVaZ7LUulMxB084_pvwwfPjVNJ-ZlXoVnb2do6EYSthuH7kwZhf_w

Lozano, R., & Escrig-Tena, A. B. (2019). The business case for sustainability. Harvard Business Review, 97(6), 58-66. https://hbr.org/2019/05/the-business-case-for-sustainability

Luo, X., & Bhattacharya, C. B. (2006). Corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction, and market value. *Journal of marketing*, *70*(4), 1-18. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1509/jmkg.70.4.001?casa_token=7Gl1bmHTxk4AAAAA:S52ICGteH7BNnw0gtOP62imudUWf56ydnljYucFNd7WeXb6mDDyybtAjQFrmS2hssgEa0chpjoCs

Mengistu, A. T., & Panizzolo, R. (2023). *Metrics for measuring industrial sustainability performance in small and medium-sized enterprises*. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJPPM-04-2022-0200/full/html

Mohr, L. A., Webb, D. J., & Harris, K. E. (2001). Do consumers expect companies to be socially responsible? The impact of corporate social responsibility on buying behavior. *Journal of Consumer affairs*, *35*(1), 45-72.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1745-6606.2001.tb00102.x

Montiel, I., & Delgado-Ceballos, J. (2014). *Defining and Measuring Corporate Sustainability: Are We There Yet?* https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1086026614526413?casa_token=KZ9s4F777zoAAAAA:Km9iUhcBSMTtHLPuCdVK3v0fE4PF3wo__cSncXzxk_FXYv2bGA1QVoiQE0z8cFCyHJqCsCn2G5Si

Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. Qualitative Health Research, 25(9), 1212-1222. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1049732315588501

Nasiri, M., Rantala, T., Saunila, M., Ukko, J., & Rantanen, H. (2018). *Transition towards sustainable solutions: Product, service, technology, and business model.* Sustainability

https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/2/358/pdf

Neuman, W. L. (2014). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. Pearson

Oliver, R. L. (1997). Satisfaction: A behavioral perspective on the consumer. McGraw-Hill.

Purvis, B., Mao, Y., & Robinson, D. (2018). *Three pillars of sustainability; in search of conceptual origins*.

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-018-0627-5

Regjeringen. (2022, 03.03). Regjeringen.no. Gathered 04.03.2023

https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utenrikssaker/utviklingssamarbeid/bkm_agenda2030/id2510974/

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) "Research Methods for Business Students" 6th edition. England: Pearson Education Limited

Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2020). Research methods for business: A skill building approach. John Wiley & sons

Sikt (n.d.). About Sikt- Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

https://sikt.no/en/about-sikt

Tjahjadi, B., Soewarno, N., & Mustikaningtiyas, F. (2021). *Good corporate governance and corporate sustainability performance in Indonesia: A triple bottom line approach.*

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844021005582

Tjora, Aksel. (2021). Kvalitative forskningsmetoder i praksis. Oslo: Gyldendal.

UiA (n.d) Code of practice for processing personal data in research and students' dissertations - Universitetet i Agder.

https://www.uia.no/en/research/about-the-research/code-of-practice-for-processing-personal-data-in-research-and-students-dissertations

Øyna, S., & Alon, I. (2018). *A Review of Born globals*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/00208825.2018.1443737?needAccess=true&role=button

Appendices Appendix

Appendix 1. Information letter to the informant

Are you interested in taking part in the research project "Investigating the Relationship between Sustainability and Brand Loyalty in born globals"?

Purpose of the project

You are invited to participate in a research project where the main purpose is to Investigate the Relationship between Sustainability and Brand Loyalty in born globals **due to our master's thesis.**

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

School of Business and Law at University of Agder is responsible for the project (data controller).

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are asked to participate on the behalf of the company you are working for.

What does participation involve for you?

The method we will be using is Interview, in person or digital. The information will be recorded only by sound for us to gather all the details from the interview. The interview will take approx. 30-40 minutes.

Participation is voluntary.

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data.

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).

The only ones having access to the information we are gathering are the students writing this master's thesis.

The participants will not be recognizable in the publications. Only the company name will be published.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The planned end date of the project is 1. June 2023. At the end om the project the recordings will be deleted.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with School of Business and Law at University of Agder, The Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- School of Business and Law at University of Agder via Kalanit Efrat.
- Our Data Protection Officer: School of Business and Law at University of Agder.

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt, contact:

·   **Email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.**

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader   **Student (if applicable)**

(Researcher/supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project Investigating the Relationship between Sustainability and Brand Loyalty in born globals and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- **to participate in an interview**

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 2. Interviewguide

Welcome! We are writing our master's thesis and we will therefore have an interview to get your views and perspectives regarding our issue. First of all, we would like to thank you for attending the interview for our master's thesis. The purpose of the interview is in connection with a research project linked to our master's thesis.

- Your information will be anonymized in the assignment.
- An audio recording will be made of the interview. We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations.
- Further information is also provided in the information letter.
- The project's goal is to take a closer look at the problem to be answered is "The relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in Born Globals".
- It is estimated that the interview will last approx. 30 minutes

Question for the Interviews:

Company

1. In which industry does your company operate in?
2. How many employees are there in your company?
3. When did your company expand globally?

Sustainability

How we define sustainability in corporations:

- *Sustainability refers to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing economic, social, and environmental factors and ensuring that we maintain a healthy and fair world for all. Corporate sustainability is defined as a company's ability to take care of and support growth over time by meeting the expectations of various stakeholders.*

4. How does the company incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?
5. How important is sustainability to your brand?
6. How do you communicate this to your customers?

7. How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?

8. How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?

9. Do you see your company's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your company?

Corporate branding

10. How would you describe the core value of your brand?

11. How did your company develop your corporate brand?

12. Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?

Brand Loyalty

13. How would you describe the core value of your brand?

14. What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?

15. How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?

The relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty

16. What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?

17. Can you share any examples of how your company's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?

18. How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?

19. How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?

Appendix 3: Transcript summary

Interview	Question related to sustainability

informants	
Informant 1	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** We don't really focus on it to be honest. It is not something we base our business on. That's quite simply what we do, as we recruit and hire personnel. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** It is important in the times we live in, and in the industry, we operate in such as maritime, offshore and oil and gas. It is important that we all focus on sustainability, on doing things as best as possible with regard to the sustainability goals. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** We do not do that. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** Much of the same applies, we have our customers who operate in the oil and gas industry who have a great focus on that. They are such large companies and deal with a lot of different things, and crews and personnel from every single component of what they do. We have to communicate to customers that we take care of what we do, but we do not get the criteria or the list from the customer of how to handle it. **How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?** There aren't many sustainable concerns, there are always little things here and there. Mostly, nothing has come to us from the customer's side. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** It will be over time, same as you have all these environmental certifications and that type of thing. It becomes an important part when we present a company to a new customer, which sustainability goals we have and how we handle them. Right now, we have not focused on it, but it will be part of the offer to our customers later.
Informant 2	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** We do this by checking that all the products we make are reusable or recyclable before we proceed with any production or ordering. All our products are recyclable and can be used again. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** Without saving lives, sustainability is number two. Life comes first, then comes sustainability and environment, and then values. Save lives, the environment, and values. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** It is in our branding on the website, and we also communicate on other platforms. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** We are ahead of the customers. Those who are interested in our product and become customers immediately understand that this is sustainable and environmentally friendly.

		How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers? With the most seriousness. We take it very seriously; we have made a completely new product and therefore we have spent some time before we did start the production precisely to buy sustainable materials and sustainable components that we make before we put it together. Everything we do is sustainable and green. We've been planning it since we started production. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** Absolutely, I believe it is the way forward in the world today. Stop littering the harbor and the environment.
Informant 3		**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** Primarily, the entire product we deliver is a sustainable solution. It is used to get customers to switch to fossil fuel for electric propulsion. The business idea is built around offering a sustainable solution. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** It is essential, since we built the company around that it should be a sustainable solution and we depend on us to try to think sustainably in what we do. A bit of the challenge as a small company is actually quite demanding to follow a product or solution from A to Å. Example: delivering an electric motor - where are the batteries produced, where are the chemicals from and how to follow this entire flow. What we try to do is deliver solutions that are as sustainable as possible and think holistically both in the product and the way people will experience the product. The product is of course not to release pollutants into the sea, but to give the customer a sustainable experience. It is, after all, bringing people closer to nature. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** We do this via websites and social media. We have written on the boat "listen to nature" and people notice that, as well. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** We do this by having conversations with customers and talking to customers. They buy our product because they are interested in it. After all, there will be a dialogue about what they want, what they achieve, what is the purpose behind it and what advantages it provides. It becomes a direct dialogue with the customer. **How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?** It is only positive. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** Yes, I do. It is one of many factors that trigger the purchase decision.
Informant 4		**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** It is the usual things that we have used. Instead of paper and plastic cups and things like that. Then we work 99.99% paperless. We have a printer, but mostly for scanning things. We have increased the use of digital communication. The way you probably all over the world have done after corona to reduce paper consumption.

And of course, travel business. After all, we have a digital company, so it is in a way in our nature to work digitally. And holding meetings digitally instead of traveling to physical meetings, we have done that for many years, even before corona.

I have worked in the tech industry since 1999 and. I'm guessing from 2007 or 2008 they have had meetings that have mostly been 90% digital. Yes, the tech industry has been very far ahead of what we have, in a way, been telling the other industries that this is the way to go, but no one listened to it until you got to the corona. Because now there is definitely a change in all possible industries.

In addition, we donate to charitable organizations and engage in voluntary work that has a positive impact on society.

How important is sustainability to your brand?
I could probably have focused even more on the message itself, but also because pointing to sustainability in tech is very much in the wind. And it has direct value for us as well. So as of now, it's probably not that much value, but that's what we do with it even then if it's a good answer. We probably communicate a little in a way which organizations we support and things like that. But the fact that we are taking other measures has not been communicated. But as I said in the tech industry, it's very valuable and you can say that you take sustainability seriously, so it's something we should focus more on.

How do you communicate this to your customers?
We have a long way to go there, certainly. We communicate with customers through our websites and social media.

How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?
Yes OK, how do we ensure the sustainability of the practice as customers who have values and expectations. It is very little. There is very little demand or expectation from our customers as of today because our core business is, as I said, renting out specialist expertise. So, as of today, we haven't had much pressure on it from our customers. But we are now in the process of getting ISO certifications and things like that in place as we want to move up into the larger segments with larger customers, and there it is a bit like that. Then there will be a lot more of the company policy that sustainability must be taken care of, so we have a race that I have now started on that.

How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?
Yes, no, it's a bit difficult again as we rarely experience such concerns from our customers, because they have a lot of small and medium-sized companies in Norway as customers. But now that we are moving up into slightly greater cooperation, that is why we have started ISO certification and things like that, not only on sustainability, but on other things as well.

Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?
So yes, it will be a bit the same. There will be a bit of repetition then, but as of today, there is not really as much focus as it should be. But when we start playing with the more professional players, it is certainly a competitive advantage because you have to have ISO certifications and environmental beacons and all sorts of things in place to be allowed to talk to them once.

Informant 5	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** We are sustainable in every aspect, and what we live on. We have incorporated from the start simply because we offer a sustainable product, so we have built a factory on sustainable evidence. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** Alpha omega, that's what we sell. It is sustainability. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** We are influencing a change in attitude, because we are trying to get people to understand that there is no difference between a plastic bottle and a cardboard box. By supporting facts from Tetra Pak, which is the world leader in packaging. We use their information as they have an entire laboratory and a team that is constantly researching the latest in sustainability. We promote the information we get from there and create some statistics ourselves. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** We reduce the customer's plastic consumption, which is a simple way of showing that we ensure the customer's sustainable practices. We replace what we have with something more sustainable. **How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?** We have a lot of information, and we notice that as soon as we offer a product that is different from what is normal, it is very important that we back it up with information. We have received a lot of information from Tetra Pak which is based on research. If we get questions, we will be able to answer them as best we can. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** Absolutely, we notice that there is a great demand for sustainable products and sustainable packaging. We have hit a wave. Water is water, and there is nothing special about our water. It is the packaging that gives us a competitive advantage.
Informant 6	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** All the work they do is to help customers become and be more sustainable. They help customers achieve their sustainability goals. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** It is extremely important, and it says everything we do. Sustainable practice we may not be as good at communicating, but what we do is sustainable practice. It is one of the most important points for success. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** We listen to the customers and ask what they have and what they want. Then sustainability is mostly one of the goals, say there is a sustainability goal they want to achieve, and then we show how they can achieve it. Mostly through communication and direct conversation with the customer. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** Everything is written in the form of contracts and now we are working with one of

	the world's largest companies that we have worked with for 6 months to sign. The challenge here is that they have so many demands, and we spend a long-time documenting what we can and cannot do, and what we can manage in the long term. Up until now, we have managed to deliver to expectations. **How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?** We react to it as something positive. We try to help them deal with it, and if you solve a need, more needs arise. So, we try to solve it by having a dialogue with them. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** Yes, 100%
Informant 7	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** We use more environmentally friendly packaging, it's much more sustainable to use aluminum, that's the first. And that is the basis for the brand and building sustainable packaging. We also donate 1% of sales to pick up plastic in the ocean. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** That's the whole business idea, that's all. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** Through the marketing, the storytelling and also physically through each product. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** What we have today is not sold to private individuals. It is only sold to professional companies such as hotels or whoever it may be. Then we have all the written material on what they want when we engage in dialogue with them. Then we know what they want and what's expected. And we give a contract, so we have it written. **How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?** That is the business idea itself. If they weren't worried, they wouldn't have used us. You can get plastic cheaper, but since their customers again want it, the demand is there. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** Yes, 100%.
Informant 8	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** It mostly depends on what we do, where we help farmers to become more sustainable. By producing more food, but also reducing the use of the input factors that farmers have, such as water, fertilizer, and plant protection agents. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** For customers, it is not important at all. The customer group has little focus on sustainability. Stakeholders such as shareholders and investors are focused on it.

	How do you communicate this to your customers? We do it through the product itself. We communicate sustainability directly in the functions, and we focus on the financial sustainability out to the customer base, where it is economically beneficial to cut the use of fertilizer, which is the main focus for them, but is also an environmental effect of it. **How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?** The expectations of the customer are to be able to report to the requirements set by the authorities and the governments and as long as they manage to do that, it is fine. **How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?** For our customers, how much work it is for them to meet new requirements as a result of sustainability is the focus around the world. For us, it is important to make it easy for them to follow those requirements and be informed about them and communicate them well. So that they don't have to see it as an extra job. **Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?** Yes, absolutely, even if the customer is not concerned with it, they have to deal with it. We get customers because of that focus.
Informant 9	**How does the firm incorporate sustainable practices into its operations?** So, in practice, we work based on the industry, so it is a very formulaic industry in that sense. But we always try to work with the best products, i.e., the most environmentally friendly variants available. Those that have better content such as natural products and organic products and other degradable products. After all, there are many different versions of substances. You have the viscose, but then there is something called ecovero viscose and whose coziness is the most environmentally friendly viscose you can find. Or on cotton, we try to use organic cotton, and we try to use something called BCI cotton (better cotton initiative), where they use significantly less water and toxins or chemicals in coloring the materials. After all, we look around then and try to find the most environmentally friendly variants available. If we use polyester, we always use recycled polyester. I guess that's how we incorporate sustainability in practice. **How important is sustainability to your brand?** It is very important. It's something we value, so we're willing to pay for it. In other words, sustainable materials cost more than non-sustainable materials, but we are willing to take that cost, and the product must also cost a little more. We try to act as sustainably as possible. **How do you communicate this to your customers?** We communicate that both during the sales, but we also communicate it in the form of, if you're talking about our customers, who are stores then primarily, yes, we communicate it via informing about it and sending out letters about it. Plus, it is the end customer, and our customers also see these "hangtags" that hang on where there are descriptions of what the product contains. It is of course mandatory to disclose what the product contains, but there is also additional labeling or tags that explain about materials in the garments that are sustainable.

Whether it's cotton, polyester, or viscose or whatever, it's an extra tag when it's sustainable materials we've used.

How does your company ensure that its sustainability practices are aligned with its customers' values and expectations?
Yes, so unfortunately it is the case that the end customer often does not want to pay that much more, but we see that the end customer is becoming more and more aware of sustainability.

So, the expectations from our customers, i.e., those we sell to who are stores and those who run them, are rising, and only getting higher. And those willing to charge more for a sustainable product versus a non-sustainable product. But we follow up and meet the requirements that both the end customer and our customers expect. It's not a cheap brand we have, but it's not a very expensive one either. We try to lie, so to speak, in the middle of the tree on this scale when it comes to textiles. Everything is relative to what you compare yourself to but based on the price level we have as well, I would say that you get both a good product and you get a very sustainable product compared to many other brands.

How does your company respond to sustainability concerns raised by customers?
Yes, we do. But we then try to respond and confirm to and satisfy the concerns and demands that the customers have and that come as much as possible and what is actually possible to conform to. Because there are limitations. The limitations lie in the fact that it is not always possible to get hold of or find out that good enough sustainable products have been made within the material we need.

Do you see your firm's sustainable development as a competitive advantage in your firm?
Yes, I would say that. We try to work specially to see that we actually keep up with, for example, Sweden, where they are very concerned about sustainable materials.

But again, there is always a challenge with that versus price over what they are willing to pay for, but they are very keen that we, as far as possible, use sustainable materials. We see that as a competitive advantage. Compared to all these affordable brands. There are many cheap brands that are very bad and only focus on volume and mass overproduction and do not think about sustainability.

Interview informants	Question related to corporate branding
Informant 1	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** We deliver quality, and almost everyone who works in the office has been in the industry, so we make sure to speak the same language as the customer. We understand the customer's needs, without being explained too much by the customer. We deliver projects in consideration of what the customers require for that type of personnel, and do they have the skills for the matrix for that type of position, and that our people fit into this type of matrix. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** It is extremely important; we work with people. In order to get more customers, we

	need more candidates. We have to process candidates. They are our ambassadors, and our offshore crew brand is a well-known brand in the industry we work in. We have over 85,000 followers on LinkedIn, and 30,000 on Facebook. These channels we use to reinforce the Offshore crew brand, and we think this is right. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** It is Global.
Informant 2	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** Our core values are saving lives, the environment, and values. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** We have used a professional advertising agency to set up the most important points, we also use our website, social media, and the customer portfolio, for example: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to spread our message. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** It is global. What needs to change is the language. The product will be the same no matter where in the world, but the language and culture must change. We adapt our product to the culture we will sell it in.
Informant 3	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** Doing things professionally and with quality. It is important for us to do it the right way, and not any quick and half solutions. Be professional and deliver good technical solutions and be good technical support, good support, and good expertise in what we do. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** We built the company around it being a sustainable solution and we depend on us to try to think sustainably in what we do. We built the company around it being a sustainable solution and we depend on us to try to think sustainably in what we do. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** Currently it is global, it is not adapted to anything in particular no.
Informant 4	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** So, we value culture very much, so in a way. Our values are passion for people and technology. And culture is what we focus on the most because employees are the most important resource you have, and that means training new employees or losing an employee. Then you should feel at home, and you should feel seen, and there should be a good environment. There must be a good culture of openness and simple dialogue, short reporting lines and things like that. So, it is one of our core values, that those who start in our company should want to give everything for us. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** A bit unsure, but I think it was an internal competition, to shape our logo and the values then came from the employees and up there in a way. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** It is, after all. After all, it is our brand that is in the regions and markets we are in, i.e., company group and our company engineering and company digital. That's what our employees are. Our brand offices are located in the areas in which we operate.

Informant 5	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** We do not build any brand; we try to normalize cardboard and water into cardboard more normally. That you don't see it and think it tastes like shit. We send it for shipping, or we get customers to foil it themselves. For example, DNB has its own DNB water. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** Best in logistics and packaging. We can offer your company an increased sustainable profile. We developed more according to what we saw the market needed. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** We are global as we are all over the world, partly because of shipping.
Informant 6	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** The core value is that we want everyone to have the same data. Must ensure that as much as possible is free and provide the best decisions. Water data for everyone. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** The name means the totality of it all. All the seven seas are connected, and if we want to look at that overall picture. That was the start of us finding a name like ours, which means "the total" in Latin. The team has a background in branding, we as owners, and worked with the Snøhetta. We have also used a branding company in London that has built our name. We collect savings along the way to position the name and used consultants to clarify the brand. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** Not global but has ambitions for it. Known in Norway, Scandinavia, and a few countries so far.
Informant 7	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** The core value is to fight against plastic in the ocean. Both by the packaging and spending money on it. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** We have worked with the world's largest privately owned company with branding, and we have collaborated with various partners who are strongly committed to sustainability. Right now, we want the children to draw attention to it by Smurfs, the brand we know which is the most sustainably focused. We knew that when they contacted us, and they were happy to work with us to show that they are sustainable. They don't want to be on anything that is plastic. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** The collaboration with smurf is global, and the brand goes through several countries, regions and large chains that have the product. Norway is not our focus.
Informant 8	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** It is security, and it is about being secure in everyday life as a farmer and becoming simpler and having financial security and the crops are as good as they can be. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** Mostly in dialogue with the customer. Close customer dialogue and there is little focus on branding other than sharing on social media.

	Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?
	We operate in the same way wherever it is in the world. In other words, what the customer group needs. It's a bit like that, it's a bit of a weird situation, we're mostly alone in a tractor when you're a farmer. Then you have no colleagues on the farm, so having some actors you can talk to is very important.
Informant 9	**How would you describe the core value of your brand?** We think about value, product, and money. This means that our products must come at the right price. And not least that we must be sustainable, that is also a strong core value. We think about the environment. When it comes to sustainability, we also focus on animal welfare. We are concerned that the environment in the factories we use is good, and that there is no trace of situations involving child labor and poor conditions for workers. There must be good control bodies that control the factories, a good code of conduct at our production sites. They undertake to sign this before we enter into a partnership with someone with a factory, for example. **How did your firm develop your corporate brand?** In other words, we develop the brand in the form of making good products and sustainable products at a reasonable price. You also develop from there via some marketing that we do. Today, most marketing takes place on the internet, i.e., social media. We have a wish that we would rather grow a little more slowly, but are focused on getting into the right stores, i.e., the best stores in our eyes in relation to what suits our products. Good stores that have some of the same values as us. We grow with our customers and market ourselves together with our customers and our own marketing towards new customers. **Is your brand global or do you adopt it to different regions/target markets?** We are not a proper global company yet, but we are constantly growing and therefore primarily in Scandinavia. Sweden is the main market apart from Norway, and then we have some in Denmark and a little in Finland. And so now we have acquired some customers in Greenland. We want to expand into Europe and there are more people who are interested in both buying and selling our products, but we want to grow organically and healthily. So that's why we take it a bit step by step and don't be in such a rush to do things very quickly. It costs a lot, so we must have a good platform and good communication and organization behind it in order to achieve good growth in Europe. So, then we concentrate primarily on Norway and Scandinavia. We need organic and healthy growth, so we take everything step by step.

Interview informants	**Question related to brand loyalty**
Informant 1	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** It's everything, from both sides where those who work from us and from us to customers. We have no way of measuring loyalty, but it is something we look at a

	lot. It is about how we treat our colleagues and how we treat our customers. We see it through the fact that our customers take assignments again and again. And if they are good, we also want to use them again. Loyalty is extremely important to us. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** When we go out on a mission for a customer, we represent our customer. We must have people who are good at working for us, and on our behalf who present the us and the customer in a good way. How we want to continue working, and that things only get better and better. But I think we are doing a good job there already. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** If you treat people well, they will come back to us and that is a big difference between us and our competitors. No matter what type of position it is, whether it is temporary work, a project, or a position for a shorter period, we treat them as if they are part of our family. This is a big difference from other suppliers. By focusing on it, our clients see that this is a rather important part for us, and we achieve loyalty with clients and our candidates. This is what sets us apart from other suppliers.
Informant 2	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** We are the only company selling this product and how are we supposed to measure it? There will probably be competitors within 2-5 years and then this will be more relevant for us. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** It is the same thing that I mentioned earlier, which is that we help customers with lifesaving equipment and the environment. We help to influence insurance companies and the authorities. Those who have the product in the boat get discounts because your boat does not sink. You can also save a lot of value for insurance companies by getting the boat up and repairing it instead of it sinking to the seabed. We try to make arrangements for customers so that it will be easy and a low threshold for customers to buy our product. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** Difficult to answer since we are the only ones with this product in the world.
Informant 3	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** We don't measure brand loyalty. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** Not relevant. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** We probably think a little more holistically in our solutions. Example: you are going to have an electric motor in a boat, and you go to several suppliers. Other suppliers do not know enough about the surrounding scope. For example: how it affects the environment or if you are out sailing, they don't know what effect it has. We see that others lack, seeing the whole and being able to explain everything that will happen around and not just the one product we deliver.
Informant 4	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** It is, of course, important. We measure this by the fact that we customers refer to us

	positively in surveys to our customers, and employees stay with us for a long time. It is, in a way, a measurement parameter we can have for loyalty. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** It is classic customer follow-up to dialogue with customers. Then of course there is social media and things like that. But doing something like that takes a different approach to it, I think. We do the type of assignment where we want the same customer to come back and use us under several circumstances. But I also want to expand the agreement with the customer all the time and be able to fill it up with new people and services then. Also, developing a customer is fantastic, much cheaper than acquiring a new customer. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** I don't have a good answer to that, because I think it is very high on the agenda of most companies of a certain size, but then again, we focus on good culture and consider ourselves a family, so you have that on websites everywhere join our family. We must genuinely care about each other. It's not just a slogan, so it's something we include in all our meetings, so we talk a lot about culture. We have one or another question at the beginning of absolutely every meeting, so that is the first item on the agenda. Then we like to spend a quarter of an hour simply saying, "how was the weekend?" Were such things done? Does anyone have anything in particular they would like to address?' So yes, I think it's a culture then that perhaps separates us from some, but I see that a lot of people are doing this now. It is good. It's like a big change from how working life was only like 10, 15 and 20 years ago when you should be happy that you had a job. Now it's more the companies that are fighting to keep the good people then, because there are so many benefits out there to get something other than a salary.
Informant 5	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** We really only measure repeat purchases, get customers back and customers as "word of mouth" from some customers who have recommended us. Our way of seeing that we have done something right. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** Repeat purchases. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** We deliver a product where the quality is top notch. As soon as we deliver a product that is crap, everyone will think that cardboard is crap. We are concerned that we produce as sustainably as we can and do not lie on any numbers and deliver a product of top quality.
Informant 6	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** It is difficult to measure since we have relatively few customers and it is B2B-business to business. These are quite large contracts, and we have 20 customers with whom we have a close dialogue, and they are satisfied. We don't use any big instruments on it. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** We are extremely keen to deliver and the most important thing for us is to have integrity and deliver what we say we will deliver and rather deliver more. That's the

	most important thing, so we exceed the agreements we sign, and we're also committed to innovation and being innovative and solving problems that can't be solved today but can be solved in 6 or 12 months. Continuous development. Up until now we have managed to solve all the problems, but it is important for us to be sincere and honest about what we can and cannot solve. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** I don't know enough about how the competitor's work. But just with technology companies there are many things that make you get selected, but of course there are relationships, recommendations from customers and research behind it.
Informant 7	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** It is extremely important; we notice it on all our sales we make and are measured in detail. We have a QR code on the product so that we can get feedback from customers, and they can contact us directly. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** We have good employees and are keen to find the best advisers. Those who work for us, and they have a plan for it. It is in line with growth and the company, which will do it more in line with your income. But we set aside a lot of money to implement. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** Competitors are extremely good at building brand loyalty. Soft drinks are a major competitor, and now it is functional drinks that are the biggest competitor. No one has as strong a branding around sustainability as the competitors. We have an advantage there that we must exploit.
Informant 8	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** Loyalty is very important. The customer group is very loyal once they have come to us. Measure it over as long as we keep a customer. **What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?** Being available is the most important thing. All companies can have challenges and problems that can go wrong, but being available and answering the phone when things go wrong and actively helping to find out why. That is what makes them stay. **How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?** Pick up the phone and be available. We know that the competitors are not as available.
Informant 9	**How important is brand loyalty in your company, and how do you measure it?** Brands and loyalty are always important. It's super important, but it's difficult to measure end consumers, but we see all the time that we measure it by seeing that we get more and more regular customers who come back. Also, via online shopping, we also see it on social media that there is an influx that is getting bigger and bigger. We notice that we are getting more and more loyal customers. Yes, we see that we are growing, and we get feedback from our customers that we have steady and stable growth. It is very important that people are loyal to us. That means an incredible amount. But as it is today, there is a jungle of both brands and stores out there. So, it's about

finding stable, good partners with whom we can develop together. After all, it is teamwork between us and the customers and finally to the end customer.

What is your approach to building brand loyalty among their customers?
Yes, that approach is about always having a stable flow of brand information. And that the profiling is even. That we work locally with the customers we have. In our industry, it is the case that many stores have many loyal customers. We also work with the end customers locally. But that is our approach or structure then.

How does your company differ from the competition when it comes to building and improving brand loyalty?
There are some objectives which mean that we must maintain brand loyalty by being good at basic garments and everyday clothes. Basic products are the products you use several times a week. That we are good at this type of product, while also following the textile industry and constantly working to develop creative solutions and renew trends and such. And there I think we have a strength compared to several other brands, in that we have a design team and are very active in the market and in the form of having our own stores. Then we quickly see that we are very market-oriented, which is reflected in our brand. We keep a close eye on which trends are moving. We also have an advantage in our design team that, compared to many other brands, we have designers who are quite different with different backgrounds and origins etc. So, there is quite a large variety in our designers. We have an advantage in that we have international designers. One of our designers is Russian and lives in Norway and has a lot of experience from having worked in Sweden for many years. We also have one who is from ESMOD and has worked a lot in Oslo. And they all have different specialties from technical outerwear, knitwear, quality fabric etc. So, we've had a conscious approach to finding the right people in our team. This gives us a market advantage over competing brands as we have a very diverse team. We work largely in Scandinavia, and we see that many others are quickly forgotten when they do not work directly with creativity and trends in the same way that we do.

Interview informants	Question related to relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty
Informant 1	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** We are not focused on it right now, but we have to get together one day and start looking forward to things that are becoming more and more important. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** Have no examples as it is not relevant for us yet. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?**

	Social responsibility is an important part, and so far, we have had no complaints from customers. We are very pleased with that. We place social responsibility as an important part of our company. We have supported other things that we think are important such as around the war in Ukraine, we have more people from there working for us, we have helped them find places to live around Europe, set up a bank account, and several things like that. We are part of the world, and we must ensure that we help those who need it. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** There is something coming, and it is becoming more and more important. We are probably a bit behind others, and we can only admit that. There will be more focus on how we work, and how we show customers the work we do, such as how we send people on assignments and how the entire business is adapted to today's requirements linked to sustainability. We don't have more than that for now.
Informant 2	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** It plays an enormous role. That is what we build our product on, that is sustainability. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** Yes, one of our customers is the lifeboat- the rescue company, and another customer is the fire service around Norway, which has boats that are commissioned to retrieve sunken boats in various municipalities. The lifeboat saves fishermen and private individuals who are sinking. They have tried the product for a while, and they are so satisfied that they are coming back to buy more and will equip more boats and municipalities with our equipment to prevent boats from becoming garbage on the seabed and that they also save lives. This is probably a form of building brand loyalty among our users. They buy more and buy again. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?** We have received very little criticism, but there have been a few "online trolls". Every time we have saved a boat, there is a stupid comment. Don't know if they maybe are jealous or something? If it is a serious comment that there is a fault with the equipment, that is something else. There has not been that yet "knock on the table". We don't put any effort into negative comments, if we get feedback about potential for improvement, we certainly listen to it and see if it can be improved. I don't care about negative comments where they don't know what they're talking about, to be honest. It's a waste of time. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** As of today, we are a long way ahead over others and above average sustainably with our product. For us this is very important, and this will only become clearer. The more customers we get, the more clear it will become for the customer that this is a very green and sustainable product. I think we are a bit ahead.
Informant 3	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** We don't measure brand loyalty. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?**

	At electric boat fairs, we experience more people who experience it positively, and good vibes about what we do. There are the "grumpy old guys" on social media who think everything new is just bullshit. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?** We have largely chosen to ignore comments on social media. If it is completely "bananas", we will remove the comments. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** The way the trend is going, you will struggle to have a good brand, if you cannot show that you have a sensible use of sustainability in relation to what you work with, you will be separated. It will vary as to how significant it is from customer to customer, but if you give up on sustainability, I think those brands will disappear.
Informant 4	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** I don't think it's something we actually measure. But we are actively working to get an ISO certification in place and so on so that customers can talk to the big guys and come to the table. And once you have come to the table there, there is a certain loyalty. It's because you have, in a way, done that job with sustainability to be able to talk. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** It will be a bit like that on a theoretical level because I don't have any concrete examples, I think. But at least I think that companies that take social responsibility can attract customers who are concerned with social justice and inclusion, right? And companies that take responsibility for social problems and contribute to solutions can also inspire customers to support them. So, by supporting the likes of the Stine Sofie foundation and things like that, it's a positive thing that can attract customers, but I don't have any concrete examples of customers contacting us because we're doing something good. But that is at least what we hope to achieve then, in addition to of course supporting a good organization. But our theory is at least based on the fact that it is something that can be developed even better in the future, and what we are doing so far is more than what many people are already doing. So, it is definitely on the agenda. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?** We have never experienced that. But of course, if we had experienced it, I think we would probably have a self-critical approach to it. Rather, we have in a way experienced the opposite. In typical Portugal, that is, all the employees we have there are very happy because they have, on average, much higher wages and much better working conditions than many others in Portugal. There are many people in Portugal who want to work at our company. But I would like to believe that we would have had a self-critical approach to it. Yes, it is too, the loyalty of our foreign employees says a lot about brands. Then they have the opportunity to move to Norway if they want to or move to Sweden or work towards the Norwegian or Swedish market from Portugal with higher prices than what they manage to get internally in the countries. You are encouraged to do so if you wish, so we now have 3 people from Portugal working for me in Oslo. They enjoy themselves in Norway, with the exception of winter. Not very fond of it.

	How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends? It is becoming more and more important. As I said, we are going through iso certifications to accommodate this. More formally and social media are also an important tool for associating ourselves with sustainability. It doesn't work in a way just to post it on the website. It is something that you have to include in your LinkedIn updates and things like that so that you have to associate yourself with it. It just has to be repeated and repeated for it to sink in. I think it is becoming more and more important for all companies really. We want to develop more within that. But there have also been quite a few initiatives that not many have started with yet because they are in a way digital and have been for all these years. And the industry is, after all, the one that in a way paves the way for digitalization. After all, we are working on digitization with our customers, so yes, that is what we are doing in a way.
Informant 5	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** That's why people choose us, it's half of our business and it matters a lot to us that people come to us since we offer a sustainable product and measured sustainable figures. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** Feedback we have received. Our best feedback is that it is as good as a plastic bottle. We have also received a lot of feedback from international customers about the quality of the water. We know that Norway has top quality here already. We have received several feedbacks that people think it is health-promoting. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?** We try to answer in a polite way and take what they come up with as criticism or feedback and answer the facts and use a lot of Tetra Pak if there are questions that we cannot answer ourselves. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** We are very lucky to have Tetra Pak. After all, they have done a lot of research into what is important in the future. They have received back lots of numbers that our generation is making more sustainable choices. It has come within the hospitality industry's own buttons on their websites that they go under as a sustainable hotel. We notice that there will be a potential increase in sustainable options and offers since our generation is more concerned with it. If you do not incorporate sustainability early in the development, you have most likely lost a large customer group.
Informant 6	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** We don't have any measurements on that today. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** Most customers have been small customers from the start and tested us out, and very much of what they have wanted to do with the goals, many have economic growth as one of their goals. You have many sustainability goals, but we can achieve a couple of them.

	How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility? We would like to hear what they have to say, so far we have not received any criticism, but if we were to receive it we would like to hear what they have to say and check if there is any evidence for what they say, even if there is no evidence because of what they say, we have to explain why and if there are any points that we haven't seen, we have to change and adapt. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** We believe that in the long term there will be more suppliers who deliver the same as us. There is surely someone who is better at communicating to the market than we are. So, we have to be leaders in what we do and ensure that customers achieve the sustainability goals and better than possible competitors. We would prefer to work with the most complex and difficult customers as we do now, and then we need to evolve and provide the best technology and be better at communicating.
Informant 7	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** It is very demanding; water is one of the few products for which you have fairly good substitutes. We have chosen to flavor the water in 10 out of 11 products. The quality of the water is good. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** We enter into dialogue with all the largest. Meny do not take anyone in but did take us in because we are sustainable and unique. We have the Norwegian flag, unique design and are competitive. We talk to all kinds of chains such as Starbucks. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?** We haven't received any yet. But take it seriously and first of all find out if they have any points in what they say. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** We see them as the core product. We use the most expensive solution to get the strongest sustainability meaning. For our part, critical mass applies, it is the most important thing to influence the market in order to become large enough to survive. Now we are investing a lot of money in it to ensure that we can manage in the future. We have the solution but must get even further into the market.
Informant 8	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** None, the customers are not concerned with sustainability goals and see it as an extra thing they have to report on. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** Looking at the economic sustainability where it is profitable to be a farmer, we contribute to the presence and follow-up and ensure that they earn more money as a farmer. In that way, sustainability is important.

	How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility? We've heard criticism about greenwashing, but it's about communication and how we actually contribute environmentally. We are a company that uses data to find things out and uses the data to respond to any criticism. **How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?** We know that it will change in the customer group, they have to deal with it and be concerned with being sustainable. The EU is in the process of introducing regulations that mean that those who buy food (the chain stores) will be able to pay less or choose not to take in the goods if they do not grow it in a sustainable way. We are at the forefront where we see which functions help to document in order to be sustainable. We can advise on it along the way and how it affects the sustainability score. This will come from 2025 and we are already on this ball.
Informant 9	**What role does sustainability play in measurement of brand loyalty?** It plays a big role, and we notice our customers are aware. And not least the end customers. If they find a product that is good and sustainable, then they prioritize it over a product that does not have sustainable materials in it. We see that the fact that it means something, and that it is those customers who are then loyal to the brand. But ultimately everything depends on and is connected to price and that we have a reasonable price level. You want to use common sense, i.e., that you feel you are getting a good product at a reasonable price based on sustainability and building materials that reflect that. **Can you share any examples of how your firm's sustainability efforts have positively impacted customer loyalty?** The examples are that we see that our customers, who are the stores and not the end customer, decide for themselves what to take in. We see that it is easier to get new customers, so that has a positive effect there. If you have a lot of sustainable material, it is easier to get new customers. And when you first have a customer, they are concerned that a large part of the collection, or most of it, is sustainable when you examine it. When you go out with it as a selling point for them to buy the products. But clear examples are that we have managed to establish ourselves in Sweden as a Norwegian brand. I would say that we have achieved that so far, and as one of the few Norwegian brands. There are almost no Norwegian brands to be found in Sweden apart from ours and a couple of other brands that you find there that are Norwegian. But beyond that, there are almost no Norwegian brands there because the Swedes are very loyal to their own brands, and in addition they are very concerned about sustainability. In Sweden, we clearly see that sustainability affects loyalty and strongly strengthens us. **How do you respond to negative feedback or criticism related to your company's sustainability practices or social responsibility?** We don't get a lot of negative feedback, if we get anything during that time, we get questions that we then answer questions that come from both our customers and end customers. You also have what is called the Transparency Act today, which has entered into force. Based on it, you are obliged to state both what the product contains, but also the place of production and all information surrounding it. We don't keep anything like that a secret. With that also if a customer asks questions and sends an e-mail that requires answers to where it was produced and what the

content is, we answer those things. If there is any negative criticism and there is something we have not done correctly, we will of course try to correct it. We conform to the existing standard and try to answer as best we can to critical questions and always try to find good sustainable solutions. New materials and new environmentally friendly products appear all the time.

I have worked in the industry for over 30-40 years, so I have been part of this development. There was nothing called recycled at the start or called organic. So, there are new standards and new templates all the time, which is positive.

But there is no such thing as an information channel in Norway or internationally on a standard. It is more gradual that manufacturers come up with new sustainable solutions, and manufacturers know that if they come up with sustainable products that are good, then they get to sell them rather than selling things that are not sustainable. They are concerned with constantly developing and finding more and more sustainable meta-goods.

How do you see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty evolving in the future, and what steps is your company taking to stay ahead of these trends?

The development in the future will be that there will be more and more spotlights on sustainability all the time, i.e., sustainable products or meta goods as I call them. We want to be at the forefront of this, and then it is important to follow what is happening internationally, and these international meta goods and fairs that are being set up.

And not least, constantly "pushing" the factory to search for sustainable materials. That's how you have to follow along the whole way and be active. Both follow online and be present at trade fairs and follow what is happening all the time.

After all, research is constantly being done to find better solutions to be as sustainable as possible. You also have other companies that consciously only think about price and profit, and you cannot focus on that in the same way if you are going to try to be as sustainable as possible.

Then you have to take a slightly different approach. You have to be willing to pay a little more for such products that are completely sustainable, and then it is important to get your end consumers or customers to understand why - Why that product looks quite similar to another product, but that it costs a few hundred Swedish kroner more. It is then important to argue that this is sustainable, and not least to have documentation both ready for our customers and the end customer if they ask.

So, we are constantly trying to stay ahead of the curve, but developments happen very quickly every day. In that sense, it's good, because the faster development happens, the better prices you get for sustainable products today compared to before.

Appendix 4. Discussion Paper Number One: The Concept of International
By Stine Volleng

Introduction

Our master's thesis investigates the impact of sustainability on brand loyalty in newly established multinational corporations. Understanding the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty is becoming increasingly important as customers prioritize sustainable development and social responsibility (Deedster, 2022). Born global companies that are known for incorporating sustainable practices play an important role in driving positive environmental change (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies and how it affects their competitive advantage.

The thesis provides a thorough theoretical framework that covers the characteristics and significance of born global companies, internationalization strategies, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, brand loyalty, brand equity, and corporate branding.

The research employs a qualitative research method, utilizing in-depth interviews with nine informants from born global companies in various industries in Norway, to gain a deeper understanding. The informants, who included leaders and founders with knowledge of their companies' sustainability strategies, shed light on how sustainable practices affect brand loyalty. It is important to note that the thesis focuses primarily on the company's perspective, which may have an impact on the credibility of customer perceptions.

Internationalization and different strategies

Over the last few decades, the business landscape has undergone transformative shifts, owing primarily to the interconnected global economy, and ever-evolving digital technology. The concept of internationalization "the process of expanding an organization's operations beyond its domestic boundaries to engage with foreign markets" is central to these changes. Internationalization is not just for multinational corporations (Melin, 1992). A distinct class of companies known as "born globals" have been observed to engage in international business activities from their inception or shortly thereafter. Because of their business models

and innovative approaches, born global firms frequently target global markets rather than domestic opportunities.

Simultaneously, there has been a surge in interest in sustainability in the global business sphere, as organizations increasingly recognize their role in environmental preservation and social well-being (Khaled et al, 2021). In response to the global call for sustainable development, an increasing number of businesses are committing to sustainable practices and strategies. Furthermore, consumer behavior has shifted toward brands and products that demonstrate a higher level of environmental and social responsibility (Khaled et al., 2021). In this context, the concept of brand loyalty, which refers to consumers' commitment to repeatedly purchase or support a specific brand over time, has undergone a shift. Brand loyalty is now more than ever intertwined with a company's sustainability initiatives.

Our master thesis will investigate the relationship between brand loyalty, sustainability, and investigate the internationalization concept of this in the context of born global firms. It specifically seeks to comprehend how these companies use their sustainability practices to foster brand loyalty, thereby facilitating their internationalization process.

This investigation, which is firmly rooted in the context of born global firms, provides a unique perspective on these interconnected concepts. This is especially important in today's business environment, which is characterized by rising global concerns about sustainability and increasing market interconnectedness (Khaled et al., 2021). This discussion paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse in international business studies by examining these themes and to provide practical insights for born global firms embarking on or deepening their internationalization journeys.

Unit of analysis

This study revolves around the concept of population in social science research, specifically focusing on key individuals within a company. Data collection was primarily achieved through interviews with selected informants, chosen for their roles and knowledge within the business, especially regarding its internationalization processes and entry strategies. The potential limitations of this approach, including interviewer bias and inaccuracies due to poor memory, were mitigated by confirming information.

Nine informants, including both men and women of various ages and positions within the company, were interviewed. These individuals held leadership positions or were involved in the company's founding and possessed a comprehensive understanding of the brand loyalty and sustainability strategies.

The study used qualitative interviews, which Johannessen et al. (2017) classified as unstructured, semi-structured, and structured. To collect primary data, in-depth interviews were conducted in three stages: warming up, reflection, and rounding off. The preferences of the interviewees determined whether the interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video call, with the majority preferring video calls for convenience and time efficiency. The primary emphasis was on the interdependence of sustainability and brand loyalty. The interviews were designed to provide valuable insights into the company's strategies and approach to internationalization.

We interviewed employees from established multinational corporations. We want to find out if they have a conscious attitude toward developing strategies for making sustainable choices and solutions. These are new businesses that want to go global as soon as possible. Born globals are defined as "*small, technology-oriented companies that operate in international markets from the earliest days of their establishment*" (Knight and Cavusgil, 1996). Born globals rely on a foreign presence to survive or thrive right away. Born global companies engage in early and rapid internationalization in order to leverage critical resources beyond their national borders (Collinson et al., 2020).

Internationalization strategies

As my research delves into the practices of Born global firms, the concept of "international" is inextricably linked to the study. These companies operate in a global marketplace, and their strategies are influenced by and shape international trends and forces. Globalization, sustainability, and digitalization are three significant trends worth discussing in the context of internationalization in this discussion paper linked to our master thesis.

The Beginning Global corporations are products of the globalization process (Beck, 2018). Because of the increasing interconnectedness of economies and societies, these businesses

can reach a global customer base from the start (Beck, 2018). As a result, the customer and brand loyalty strategies they employ must cater to a diverse, international customer base. For example, globalization has reduced entry barriers, allowing Born global firms to enter international markets. However, it also results in intense competition and a wide range of customer preferences (Collinson et al., 2020). As a result, in order to address these challenges, businesses must strategize their brand and customer loyalty initiatives.

Sustainability has emerged as a critical global trend (Khaled et al., 2021). Born global firms' sustainable strategies for building brand and customer loyalty align with global consumer trends that favor environmentally friendly and socially responsible businesses (Collinson et al., 2020). This trend is a driving force behind these firms' strategic orientation. Sustainability as a global trend is increasingly shaping consumer preferences, making it an essential component of Born global strategy development. In this new global environment, my research highlights the effectiveness of sustainable practices in establishing brand and customer loyalty.

These global trends and forces have a significant impact on the topic and findings of my thesis. These global trends have an impact on Born global firms' operations, strategic approaches to brand loyalty and customer loyalty, and overall operating environment.

The Uppsala Internationalization model and born global firms represent two opposing views on how businesses internationalize. According to the Uppsala model, firms should take a cautious, step-by-step approach to internationalization, gradually increasing their international commitments based on acquired experiential knowledge (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). Born global firms, on the other hand, have a global focus from the start, often fueled by technological innovations and unique business models. They skip the traditional stages of the Uppsala model in favor of a more aggressive approach to internationalization, fueled by unique resources, capabilities, and a global mindset (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). Born globals may employ innovative strategies for implementing long-term brand and customer loyalty strategies due to their early and extensive exposure to diverse international markets. Their accelerated internationalization strategy, on the other hand, implies a higher level of uncertainty and risk, making strategic decisions for building loyalty a critical factor in their global success (Collinson et al., 2020).

Brand loyalty

This section will go over the concept of brand loyalty, its importance in today's market, and how it contributes to a company's success. This section will also go over various factors that influence brand loyalty, such as quality, trust, customer satisfaction, and emotional connection.

Brand loyalty and sustainability are becoming increasingly intertwined in today's marketplace. Consumers prefer brands that prioritize sustainability, making it easier to form strong bonds with customers who share these values (Deedster, 2022). Brand loyalty is defined as a consumer's consistent preference for a specific brand, reflecting emotional attachment and repeated purchase behavior even in the face of competition (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Brand loyalty is critical for businesses because it leads to increased customer retention, lower marketing costs, and increased sales revenue. Even if competitors offer similar or superior products, loyal customers tend to repurchase and recommend the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). Product quality, brand image, customer service, and effective advertising are all influencing factors.

Brand loyalty also contributes to brand equity, which is the total value of a brand that includes both tangible and intangible factors (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Alemán, 2005). Brand loyalty is an important component of Aaker's Brand equity model in determining overall brand value. It not only increases sales but also improves the brand's reputation, raises brand awareness, and, ultimately, creates a competitive advantage in the market (Aaker, 2009). As a result, businesses must prioritize brand loyalty as a strategic step toward long-term success.

Brand loyalty, in addition to the tangible benefits, contributes to brand trust, which influences the brand's reputation, financial performance, and overall success. Brands can gain consumer trust through personalized communication and authentic engagement on social media platforms (Ebrahim, 2020). Thus, a strong emphasis on brand loyalty, when combined with a commitment to sustainability, can significantly improve a company's market presence and performance.

The success of born global firms in the international market is dependent on their understanding of these global forces and their ability to respond to them effectively (Collinson et al., 2020). They must keep up with changes in the international business landscape and adjust their strategies as necessary to maintain brand and customer loyalty. The global market's dynamism necessitates constant vigilance and adaptability, transforming the act of sustaining brand and customer loyalty into a continuous, iterative process (Collinson et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Based on an examination of the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in the context of born global companies, it is possible to conclude that sustainable practices have a significant impact on brand loyalty and thus the overall competitiveness of these firms. Consumer behavior in the modern business environment has shifted toward sustainable and socially responsible brands. As a result, firms that are born global and incorporate sustainability from the start can effectively leverage this trend to foster brand loyalty and facilitate their internationalization process (Khaled et al., 2021).

In today's market, brand loyalty and sustainability are inextricably linked, according to the study. Businesses that prioritize sustainability tend to form stronger bonds with their customers, which results in benefits such as higher customer retention, lower marketing costs, and higher sales revenue. Brand loyalty not only increases brand equity, but it also increases brand trust, which improves the brand's reputation, financial performance, and overall success.

The research conducted in the context of born global firms provides valuable insights that can help other companies on their internationalization journeys. Businesses can foster brand loyalty, improve market presence and performance, and secure a competitive advantage in today's increasingly interconnected and sustainability-focused global market by understanding and implementing sustainable practices from the start.

To summarize, the "international" is more than just a setting; it is an active participant in shaping Born global firms' strategies and practices. Understanding this interaction is critical

to understanding how these companies foster and sustain brand and customer loyalty in the global marketplace.

References

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. Psychological Bulletin, 117(3), 497-529.

Beck, U. (2018). *What is globalization?*. John Wiley & Sons. (Beck, 2018)

Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). *The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty.* Journal of Marketing, 65(2), 81-93.

Collinson, Simon, Rajbeesh Narula, and Alan M. Rugman. (2020). *International Business.* United Kingdom: Pearson.

Deedster. (2022, April 7). *Why Does Sustainability Play A Role In Customer Loyalty?* Deedster. https://deedster.com/sustainability/

Delgado-Ballester, E., & Munuera-Alemán, J. L. (2005). Does brand trust matter to brand equity? Journal of Product & Brand Management, 14(3), 187-196.

Ebrahim, R. S. (2020). The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, *19*(4), 287-308.

Johannessen, A., Christoffersen, L., & Tufte, P. (2017). Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode (4. utg. ed.). Oslo: Abstract.

Johanson, J., & Vahlne, J. (1977). The Internationalization Process of the Firm—A Model of Knowledge Development and Increasing Foreign Market Commitments. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *8*(1), 23–32. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490676

Khaled, R., Ali, H., & Mohamed, E. K. (2021). *The Sustainable Development Goals and corporate sustainability performance: Mapping, extent and determinants*. Retrieved from sciencedirect.com: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621018175?casa_token=VhM31Kfoe3wAAAAA:lQASfLLWB8D0hdImOPgv9JuFfEPNcfmdZ5AAfMaeNPvVYDcNfg0vVxOq-ueG71G3Brb9FR0raA

Knight, G., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2004). Innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-global firm. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *35*(2), 124–141. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400071

Melin, L. (1992). Internationalization as a strategy process. *Strategic management journal*, *13*(S2), 99-118.

Appendix 5. Discussion Paper Number Two: The Concept of International

By Anna Egaas Stenberg

Presentation of the thesis

This discussion paper is written based on our Master´s programme in International Business. The paper will discuss the concept of "International" considering the topic of *Sustainable strategies for brand loyalty and customer loyalty: Unraveling born global company practices.* In this discussion paper, I will discuss and reflect on our master thesis in light of its international connection, considering the topic and research question, units of analysis, findings, and conclusions of our master's thesis.

The main theme of the master's thesis is to investigate the relationship between sustainable practices and brand loyalty in born global companies. The unit of analysis we have chosen to focus on is Norwegian born global companies. Born global companies are companies that from inception seek to operate globally and have emerged as an important phenomenon in international business in the recent years. These companies face unique challenges in terms of resource constraints and market entry barriers, but also have the advantage of being able to quickly establish a global presence (Collinson et al., 2020).

Sustainability has become a critical issue for all companies in today's world, and it will be significant for a company to establish sustainable frameworks in order to implement and achieve its strategies and goals (Khaled et al., 2021). Such initiatives enhance the company's reputation and encourage positive customer relationships, leading to increased brand loyalty (Deedster, 2022). Brand loyalty is an important concept for any company, but it is especially vital for born global companies, which must build a strong brand presence in order to compete in international markets. Understanding how sustainability practices impact brand loyalty is thus a critical subject of research for born global companies.

First, I will define the concept of International in this paper. Further, I will emphasize what Born global is and what connection it has to internationalization. Furthermore, I will present the unit of analysis. Lastly, I will highlight how sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies impacts international trends and forces in light of our findings and conclusions.

105

Internationalization and its connection to born global companies

According to Welch and Luostarinen (1988) they suggest internationalization involves increased involvement in foreign markets. In other words, internationalization can refer to anything that involves more than one country. This could include economic, political, or cultural exchanges between nations and global organizations (Knight 2003).

International business is referred to as "*the study of transactions taking place across national borders for the purpose of satisfying the needs of individuals and organizations*" (Collinson et al, 2020 p.654). The exchange of goods and services across international borders is known as international trade (Collinson et al, 2020). Companies that are international conduct business activities that involve the transfer of resources, goods, services, knowledge, skills, or information across national borders. It can be more complex and uncertain than domestic operations due to different cultural, environmental, and operational requirements (Shenkar and Luo, 2008).

Born global companies are defined by Knight and Cavusgil (2004) as "*entrepreneurial start-ups that seek significant shares of their income by selling products on international markets*" (Knight and Cavusgil 2004). Such companies engage in early and rapid internationalization in order to leverage critical resources beyond their national borders (Collinson et al., 2020). The companies are characterized as small businesses and develop unique product or process innovation (Knight and Cavusgil, 1996). Despite the fact that the vast majority of born global companies lack resources, several of the companies succeed in foreign markets (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004).

Unit of analysis

The informants in the research study were chosen based on their position and role in the company. The informants needed to be well-versed in the company and have direct experience with the internationalization process and strategies. The unit of analysis were informants in Norwegian born global companies. The informants held leadership positions or were engaged in the company's development. They also possessed a broad understanding of the company's brand loyalty and sustainability strategies. A total of 9 informants were interviewed, including both men and women of various ages within the companies.

International trends and forces in light of the master thesis

Born Global companies are increasingly influenced by international trends and forces, particularly in terms of sustainability. The term sustainability is a critical issue for companies in today's world, as consumers and stakeholders increasingly demand that businesses operate in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Born global companies that demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility will be well received by consumers and increase brand loyalty (Deedster, 2022).

Companies such as born globals implement sustainable strategies for a variety of reasons. One of the primary reasons is pressure from stakeholders (Mengistu and Panizzolo, 2023). According to Thahjadi (2021) consumers expect companies to achieve their vision and mission in a sustainable manner (Tjahjadi et al., 2021). Companies that are investing in sustainable development and communicate their practice to their consumers are more likely to increase their trust, reputation, and brand loyalty (Dumitriu et al, 2019).

As mentioned, sustainability is one of the major international trends as of today. This trend is relevant to our research question because of our focus on investigating the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies. Sustainability is one important concept that is connected in today's business world. As a result of the research findings, there are several Norwegian born global companies that use sustainability as one of their main strategies. There is a difference in how they incorporate sustainable development in their companies. Some offer sustainable products and solutions to their customers, and others incorporate sustainable practices into their workplace.

Increased globalization and technological development enable born global companies to reach out to more markets across national borders (Laanti et al., 2007). Globalization aids in the advancement of communication technology, global demand, and transportation in international trade. As a result, this facilitates international strategy and allows smaller businesses to operate in markets other than their home market (Andersson & Wictor, 2003). Born global companies are characterized by utilizing technology to expand in international markets (Laanti et al., 2007). Technology and the Internet are international forces, which help to influence international trade in born global companies. Technology helps to reduce costs and promote export growth (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004). The Internet has become an

important part of the world, both for communicating and trading across national borders. The Internet reduces costs for companies to conduct international trade as the suppliers find information about new markets more easily, and at the same time they can reach out to potential buyers (Freund and Weinhold, 2004).

Globalization and international trade have resulted in an international force of increased interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR). The government has traditionally been responsible for improving the population's living conditions, but in terms of societal needs outnumbering the government's ability to meet them alone, the role of business in CSR has expanded (Jamaili and Mirshak, 2006). To gain a competitive advantage and differentiate themselves from competitors, born global companies must incorporate sustainable development from the beginning. Companies such as born global with commitment to environmental and social responsibility are likely to both build brand loyalty and gain a competitive advantage over other competitors (Deedster, 2022).

According to Czinkota and Ronkainen (2009) there is increasing pressure from both stakeholders and governments. This entails bigger involvement from companies to stakeholders and will play a significant role in the company's image building. International forces make the governments implement regulations and guidelines to businesses to act in a more sustainable manner. By following guidelines and regulations, it can both attract and retain customers who value sustainability and social responsibility (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2009). The regulations and political guidelines within sustainability and corporate social responsibility from the governments is critical for born global companies. As there is only one world, everyone is dependent on the measures we take for our planet, and thus it is not possible for future generations to meet their needs without international cooperation to work towards a sustainable future.

As well as there is pressure from stakeholder´s and regulatory requirements there is increasing consumer demand for sustainable products and services. An increasing international trend is that there is increasing consumer awareness for sustainability and demand for sustainable services and products (Deedster, 2022). Consumers are becoming aware of the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions (Mohr et al., 2001). As a result, there is an increase from consumers in seeking out sustainable products and brands that share the same values. Companies that prioritize sustainability are likely to

attract and retain these environmentally conscious consumers which will lead to brand loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994).

As a result, the thesis highlights the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born globals. The informants state how they see the role of sustainability in brand loyalty, and what steps the company is taking to stay ahead of these trends. The informants elaborated that sustainability is becoming increasingly crucial for brand loyalty, and companies that do not implement sustainable practices risks of losing customers. Businesses must adapt to this trend by developing sustainable products and services, as well as communicate their commitment to sustainability, due to customers making more sustainable choices. In the findings some of the informants elaborated the importance of effectively communicating sustainability efforts through social media and other channels. Otherwise, the informants emphasize the importance of staying ahead of sustainability trends and constantly looking for sustainable materials and solutions. Some of our informants believe that in the future, sustainability will be a regulatory requirement. Overall, it emphasizes the importance of sustainability in order for businesses to remain competitive, retain customers and increase brand loyalty.

To summarize, the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies is highly relevant to international trends and forces. Born global companies that prioritize sustainability can benefit from stakeholder expectations and regulatory compliance, and they will differentiate themselves from other competitors in the market and increase their customer loyalty. Customers also have better access to information about the companies and their products and services. It will be critical for the born global companies to communicate their sustainable performance to the customers to build brand loyalty.

Conclusion

In this discussion paper, I have defined and highlighted the connection between the term International and the master thesis, which is about the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born globals. To conclude, the relationship between sustainability and brand loyalty in born global companies is highly relevant to international trends and forces. This study can help born global companies to understand the significance of sustainable development in enhancing brand loyalty and inform their customers about their sustainable

strategies. Born global companies that prioritize sustainability can benefit from consumers' expectations and regulatory compliance, and they will differentiate themselves from other competitors in the market.

References

Andersson, S. and Wictor, I. (2003) "Innovative Internationalisation in New Firms: Born Globals-the Swedish Case", Journal of International Entrepreneurship, Vol. 1, issue 3, pp. 249-275 Retrieved from link.springer.com: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1024110806241

Collinson, Simon, Rajbeesh Narula, and Alan M. Rugman. (2020). International Business. United Kingdom: Pearson.

Czinkota, M. R., & Ronkainen, I. A. (2009). Trends and indications in international business: Topics for future research. Management international review, 49, 249-265.

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11575-008-0138-1

Deedster. (2022, April 7). Why Does Sustainability Play A Role In Customer Loyalty? Deedster. https://deedster.com/sustainability/

Dick, A. S., & Basu, K. (1994). Customer loyalty: Toward an integrated conceptual framework. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 22(2), 99-113.

Freund, C. L., & Weinhold, D. (2004). The effect of the Internet on international trade. Retrieved from sciencedirect.com:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S002219960300059X?casa_token=7l9g DEsjwn8AAAAA:zYBptFP-Ewb6rD5wtblJdaQifiwJ1eLGHrY-r1vY0RyeIls-J6m0qsWOteajY4AouRurNneL7Q

Shenkar, O., & Luo, Y. (2008). International business. Sage.

https://books.google.no/books?hl=no&lr=&id=ppXWE0rUVWEC&oi=fnd&pg=PR13&dq=International+business&ots=886jZ13Vvs&sig=b3BnSYUbzaix5q_LJNorDVqKTcw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=International%20business&f=false

Khaled, R., Ali, H., & Mohamed, E. K. (2021). The Sustainable Development Goals and corporate sustainability performance: Mapping, extent and determinants. Retrieved from sciencedirect.com:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621018175?casa_token=

VhM31Kfoe3wAAAAA:lQASfLLWB8D0hdImOPgv9JuFfEPNcfmdZ5AAfMaeNPv
VYDcNfg0vVxOq-ueG71G3Brb9FR0raA

Knight, G. A., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2004). Innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-
global firm. Retrieved from link.springer.com:
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400071

Knight, J. (2003). Updated definition of internationalization. International higher education,
(33).

Laanti, R., Gabrielsson, M., & Gabrielsson, P. (2007). The globalization strategies of
business-to-business born global firms in the wireless technology industry. Retrieved
from sciencedirect.com:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S001985010600174X?casa_token=e2A
RYJkPMxAAAAAA:ZbISWy5hHBMHJEcgYzhwQXNgVHl6HQmd4u6OGKiQ9Lc
rQ9Vu26UvjBCHq9qKTOmcVjbpoBqTzg

Mengistu, A. T., & Panizzolo, R. (2023). Metrics for measuring industrial sustainability
performance in small and medium-sized enterprises. Retrieved from emerald.com:
https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJPPM-04-2022-0200/full/html

Mohr, L. A., Webb, D. J., & Harris, K. E. (2001). Do consumers expect companies to be
socially responsible? The impact of corporate social responsibility on buying
behavior. Journal of Consumer affairs, 35(1), 45-72. Retrieved from
onlinelibrary.wiley.com:

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1745-6606.2001.tb00102.x

Tjahjadi, B., Soewarno, N., & Mustikaningtiyas, F. (2021). Good corporate governance and
corporate sustainability performance in Indonesia: A triple bottom line approach.
Retrieved from sciencedirect.com:
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844021005582

Welch, L. S. & Luostarinen, R. K. (1988) "Internationalization: Evolution of a Concept",
Journal of General Management, (winter), pp. 34-57

Øyna, S., & Alon, I. (2018). A Review of Born globals. Retrieved from tandfonline.com:
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/00208825.2018.1443737?needAccess
=true&role=button