

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Fashion industry's environmental policy: Social media and corporate website as vehicles for communicating corporate social responsibility

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## Abstract

Society requires companies to adopt ethical and responsible behavior with regard to environmental policies in order to achieve sustainable development. One of the most controversial sectors in terms of sustainable production is the fashion industry. This study analyzes the extent to which seven of the biggest fashion brands in Spain and around the world communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies (specifically, those related to sustainability). To this end, we identify the social media platforms used the most by the target audiences for these brands, and apply an exploratory, descriptive methodology to a content analysis of communication about their CSR policies, both formal (corporate websites) and informal (social media). The objective is to identify whether these companies communicate their sustainable activities and practices in the context of their CSR. Our findings confirm that the brands analyzed have integrated sustainability and environmental protection initiatives into their CSR policies. However, although they do communicate this on their corporate websites, they rarely do so on social media. We thus conclude that the seven fashion brands analyzed could make better use of social media to raise awareness and educate customers about environmental sustainability.

## KEYWORDS

communication, CSR, social media, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable fashion

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes the use that businesses in the fashion industry make of the social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and of their corporate websites, to disseminate information about their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. Specifically, our research focuses on their commitment to sustainability in the manufacturing and distribution processes of the products they offer.

The aim of the study is to determine whether these types of policies are adopted by the companies and communicated, on the one

hand, in the CSR Reports published on their website and, on the other, on their social media accounts. To this end, we identify the social media platforms that are used the most by young people (the main target audience of fashion brands) and analyze information related to CSR, environmental sustainability, and fashion consumption posted by the companies on those platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram).

Corporations are aware of the importance to their customers or stakeholders of responsible corporate action (Villagra & López, 2013; Sánchez de la Nieta et al., 2015). The adoption of CSR measures can

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constitute a distinguishing feature for a business, particularly in the case of fashion brands. It is therefore important to identify whether these kinds of companies have adopted relevant environmental sustainability measures, and also whether they communicate them effectively through the main social media platforms they use to interact with the public (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2020).

The rest of this article is structured as follows: the next section presents a review of the literature analyzing the interaction between CSR, corporate communication about CSR initiatives, and the use of the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, both by businesses and by their target audiences; this is followed by a description of our hypotheses and objectives research questions, and the methodology adopted for the research, involving a content analysis of posts by a sample of fashion brands in Spain; we then present the results, which are reviewed in the discussion section together with our final conclusions.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | Corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and fashion

Studies of consumer behavior highlight the fact that consumers are becoming more demanding with the products they buy, partly due to the information society in which we live (Hoyer et al., 2010), as consumers have easy access to information on companies.

The way that businesses communicate with the public has also changed dramatically in recent years. The online world facilitates instant two-way communication between companies and their users (Capriotti & Zeler, 2020; Carcelén-García et al., 2017; García-Medina et al., 2019; Monserrat-Gauchí et al., 2017; Suárez-Rico et al., 2018). The way that a business communicates its economic position and its social and ethical responsibility can influence the mental associations that people have in relation to a given brand (Capriotti & Zeler, 2020). Yet companies rarely promote their CSR activities on social media (Capriotti & Zeler, 2020).

CSR is associated with ethics, in the sense of how to be seen by their different stakeholders to be doing things well (Pérez-García, 2017). CSR is defined today as:

the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society. (...) To fully meet their corporate social responsibility, enterprises should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders, with the aim of:

- maximising the creation of shared value for their owners/shareholders and for their other stakeholders and society at large;
- identifying, preventing, and mitigating their possible adverse impacts. (European Commission, 2011, p. 7)

Grunig and Hunt (2000) define CSR as the performance of tasks and programs that reflect the organization's concern with solving general social problems. According to Pérez-Martínez and Topa (2018), a negative perception of a company's CSR could have a lasting impact on customer loyalty and on consumer decisions to buy or use what the company offers. Conversely, a positive CSR perception can enhance customer loyalty and favorable attitudes.

The approach of fashion companies to CSR, and specifically to sustainability, has been studied by numerous authors from many different perspectives, particularly in the fields of psychology, marketing and business. For example, Kim (2010) explores the influence of CSR and sustainability on fashion trends, while Kim and Oh (2020) examine how sportswear buyers' perception of a brand's sustainability determines their purchase intentions. Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020) conduct a literature review aimed at studying how CSR influences sustainability in the fashion industry; and Chung-Wha et al. (2020) explore the fashion industry's commitment to achieving sustainable development through a circular economy and stakeholder engagement. On the other hand, Dicuonzo et al. (2020) study the drivers of companies that have emerged as sustainable within the Italian fashion industry, while Jiménez-Marín et al. (2021) examine the relationship between energy resources and sensory marketing campaigns. From a more psychological point of view, Park and Lee (2021) conduct a study to conceptualise, develop and validate a scale to measure sustainable consumption of clothing products from the consumer's perspective. López-Concepción et al. (2022) analyse a systematic review of stakeholder engagement related to CSR. However, there are very few studies examining how fashion brands communicate their CSR sustainability policies to the public. Bellido-Pérez (2019) studies the relationship between responsible fashion, production, consumer activism, and communication. Martín-López (2019) analyzes the communications of certain fashion brands in Italy and Spain, finding that Zara and Mango, among other fast fashion brands, have begun releasing collections perceived as environmentally friendly in support of sustainability.

The creation of a transparent, committed CSR program is and should be a key objective of any business. Companies and institutions thus expect that such commitment will enhance their public image. Given that the term CSR is associated with knowing how to be seen by different stakeholders to be doing things well, businesses that are able to demonstrate a concern for their stakeholders will achieve greater success (Pérez-García, 2017; Pérez-Martínez & Topa, 2018; Suárez-Rico et al., 2018).

There is very little empirical research in Spain on the relationship between perceptions of a company's CSR and customer attitudes and behavior (Capriotti & Zeler, 2020; Pérez-Martínez & Topa, 2018; Suárez-Rico et al., 2018; Tur-Viñes et al., 2014). Internationally, CSR communication has been studied from a marketing perspective by various authors, including George (2003), Dowling (2004), and Leap and Loughry (2004). Worthy of special note among such studies is the CSR implementation model proposed by Maignan et al. (2005) involving eight steps, several of which (specifically, steps 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8) will be analyzed in this study:



*Step 1:* Identifying documents or statements about CSR-related values and norms.

*Steps 2 and 3:* Identifying stakeholders, and specifically those stakeholders who have the power to influence or the legitimacy to exert it.

*Step 4:* Assessing and evaluating the meaning of CSR for the stakeholders identified, focusing on the motivations and the importance of prioritizing them in the CSR policy.

*Step 5:* Auditing the practices promoted by the company in order to propose improvements or identify gaps/needs.

*Step 6:* Implementing CSR initiatives.

*Step 7:* Creating awareness and involving stakeholders.

*Step 8:* Obtaining stakeholder feedback after the implementation of initiatives and assessing it to determine future actions.

In addition, as Morsing and Schultz (2006) suggest, companies need to go beyond the informational stage and respond to their stakeholders. This means involving them in the communication of their CSR activities and practices, thereby expanding their role and lending legitimacy to their actions. In this way, they can build a positive reputation and strengthen their relations with their stakeholders over the long term. We therefore believe that social media and personal testimonies by those affected by CSR policies can serve as a foundation for communication based on taking action and publicizing the actions taken. These actions can thus be commented on and shared, placing the stakeholder at the heart of the whole process.

It would therefore be important to analyze customer perceptions of the different dimensions of CSR, with a view to assessing their future impact on customer behaviors and attitudes. Various authors (Manikonda et al., 2016; Morales & Morales Rodríguez, 2017; Tuunainen & Rossi, 2002) point to evidence that consumers consider information provided by fashion brands before making purchase decisions. Constant communication and promotion of CSR activities and practices being implemented by businesses, along with analysis of public reactions on social media, are key contributors to their success.

It is our view that a company's CSR communication should be a transparent and accurate reflection of the measures being taken to care for the environment, the community, and all individuals affected by fashion production and distribution processes. Information on these measures, when they have really been adopted and implemented throughout the business process, should be disseminated on the company's social media accounts for the benefit of their public reputation. This is why in this study, we propose to analyze communication about CSR policies by fashion brands on the main social media platforms they use to interact with their stakeholders.

## 2.2 | The United Nations and recommendations for sustainable fashion

In April 2019, the United Nations (UN) established a set of sustainable development goals for the fashion industry. According to the UN conference on trade and development, the fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world (United Nations, 2019).

The UN report highlights the fact that the amount of water used to make a single dress or pair of jeans is equivalent to the quantity that a person drinks over a period of seven years. The half a million tons of microfibers dumped into the oceans by the fashion industry each year is equivalent to 3 million barrels of oil. The industry is responsible for more carbon emissions per year than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. To combat this "fast fashion" with its rapid production, consumption, and replacement, the UN recommends the reduction of the negative impact on society, the economy, and the environment by following of a series of recommendations (United Nations, 2019).

There are numerous fashion brands that have launched interesting initiatives to protect the environment and even to make use of waste materials to make clothing or fashion accessories. Some of these initiatives have received UN recognition with the Champions of the Earth award. The measures range from raising awareness among fashion producers, consumers, and influencers, to the enactment of labeling laws to ensure that consumers know how the products they buy have been made. The UN promotes programs that encourage measures such as taking better care of clothes and recycling and take-back programs, partially adopted by some of the world's biggest fashion brands (United Nations, 2019). It is important to determine whether the brands analyzed in this study will commit to ending the "buy, use, and throw away" model, and whether they communicate this on their social media profiles to raise consumer awareness.

## 2.3 | Young people and social networking use

The majority of young people in Spain and around the world use social media. These platforms have become a powerful influencer over the use/purchase of different products/brands (Interactive Advertising Bureau, IAB, 2021; Miquel-Segarra, 2018; Polo, 2011). Current tendencies suggest that users will follow fewer accounts, and only those that offer them more in qualitative terms. They will follow accounts that they feel more affinity for and especially those they consider to be transparent and reliable. Content created by a company's employees (employee advocacy) will also be highly valued (Interactive Advertising Bureau, IAB, 2020).

The world available to the public on social media is in constant evolution. It is a movement that as many as 5 billion people across the planet have joined, according to a study by the Social Media Family (SMF) and the Spanish Franchise Association (AEF) (2020). The social media platforms with the biggest number of users in the world are Facebook with 1.55 billion users, WhatsApp with 900 million, Instagram with 400 million, Twitter with 300 million, and Snapchat with 200 million.

In Spain, the data available on social media reflects that approximately 22 million people are registered on Facebook (1.41% of the global total). This means that nearly half of all Spaniards have a profile on this platform (47.82%). On the other hand, slightly more than 4.4 million users have a Twitter profile (1.5 million of whom are active, having posted content at least once in the past two months), which,

extrapolated to the global level, places it on a scale similar to Facebook (1.37%) (The Social Media Family & Asociación Española de Franquiciadores, 2020).

According to the Annual Social Media Study published by IAB Spain (2020), 87% of Internet users in Spain aged between 16 and 65 access a social media service on a regular basis, which effectively amounts to around 25.9 million users. Around 52% of those users follow brands on social media. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are the dominant platforms, while TikTok is the social media service that has grown the most in the period analyzed. Users access these platforms for various reasons, including for entertainment (81%), to interact with others (77%), or for information (66%). The population aged between 41 and 54 is the age group that uses social media the most (29%), although the 25–40 age group is close behind it (28%). The level of use (i.e., minutes spent on the platform) is increasing in every age range, with males and people under 40 being the biggest users. Social media are information sources, and users participate actively on them by posting comments. More than half of all users (56%) state that social media have influenced their purchase decisions at least once (Interactive Advertising Bureau, IAB, 2020).

The rise of the online world has transformed the way that organizations communicate with their stakeholders (Carcelén-García et al., 2017; Monserrat-Gauchi et al., 2017). Social media allow stakeholders to create content related to different brands, and to interact with them or receive information about them (Altamirano & Túniz-López, 2016; Altamirano-Benítez et al., 2018; Martínez-Sala & Segarra-Saavedra, 2020; Navarro-Beltrá et al., 2020). In this way, platforms like Twitter have given rise to new ways of establishing and maintaining social relations, as well as relations with the brands that each consumer interacts with (Palazón et al., 2014).

According to Miquel-Segarra (2018), studies of Twitter's usefulness have highlighted three uses of the platform: (1) as a means of conveying a better brand/company image; (2) as a tool for corporate communication; and (3) as a channel for offering a service.

Ever since social media platforms started offering tools to facilitate product advertising, organizations have been leveraging their potential (Herrero-Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Miquel-Segarra, 2018). This phenomenon represents a new forum for horizontal interaction with the public, with a special significance associated not only with the achievement of the organization's commercial objectives but also with meeting its social responsibility commitments to the environment, to sustainability, and to society in general.

### 3 | RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the promotion and dissemination of sustainable activities and practices as a component of CSR communication by seven brands in the Spanish fashion industry. Specifically, we seek to determine the extent to which they make use of social media to communicate different issues related to their ethical values and responsible behaviors.

To this end, the study considers the following research questions:

Q1: Do Spanish fashion brands integrate activities and practices into their CSR policies related to sustainability?

Q2: Do Spanish fashion brands use their company websites and/or accounts on social media (specifically, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) to disseminate their CSR activities and practices?

Q3: Do Spanish fashion brands use their company websites and/or accounts on social media (specifically, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) to disseminate their sustainability activities and practices?

## 4 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this analysis, we selected a sample of seven fashion brands operating in Spain through a franchise system. This system has become quite widespread in recent years. According to data provided by Tormo Franquicias Consulting (2020), in 2019 a high percentage of franchises confirmed improved economic and business prospects for 2020. They also expected further development through the opening of new establishments and wider international coverage. In addition, 95% of businesses confirmed an increase in their investments for that year.

Research on franchises has also included communication on social media. The study conducted by Tormo Franquicias Consulting (2020) confirmed that the main channels for promotion of this kind of business is the website of the franchise itself, as well as social media and the corporate website of the parent company. Among the most widely used social media platforms today, we selected Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, based on their importance to both the general public and the corporate world. According to data provided by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (2020), Facebook (94%), Instagram (76%), and Twitter (70%) are the most instantly recognized social media platforms. In terms of user numbers, Facebook has the highest percentage with 81%, followed by Instagram with 59%, and Twitter with 51%.

We have conducted an exploratory descriptive case study (Batthyány & Cabrera, 2011) with the aim of attaining an in-depth understanding of the content of communications by different fashion brands in Spain and their relationship to sustainability. In view of the lack of research in this area, our intention is to establish and explore new lines of research for future studies. Since the main aim of this research is to analyze the promotion and dissemination of sustainable activities and practices as a component of CSR communication by franchises in the fashion industry, as well as the management of social media messaging about issues related to their ethical values and responsible behavior, we have chosen content analysis as our method to conduct a systematic, objective, and qualitative assessment of the messaging on these platforms (Krippendorff, 2013).

Following Reilly and Larya (2018), the study examines CSR communication on two levels: formal outlets (corporate websites) and informal channels (social media).



1. On the formal level, we analyze communication about CSR activities and practices incorporated into the content of the seven company websites of the fashion brands selected and/or of the business group they belong to. In 2019, the United Nations established the Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, with a commitment to introduce substantial changes to the fashion industry that would help reduce its negative impact both on the environment and on society. In this way, fashion became a driving force behind the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020). Our analysis involves the identification in CSR policies of two of the 17 goals, all of which are interconnected because the achievement of one will inevitably have an impact on the others. Although the fashion industry can contribute to the achievement of all 17 goals, for this study we have focused on the following two:
  - a. Goal 12: Ensure sustainable forms of consumption and production. Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) is about doing more and better with less. It is also about “decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, increasing resource efficiency and promoting sustainable lifestyles.”
  - b. Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
2. On the informal level, we analyze all CSR-related content posted on social media by the brands selected over a 2-month period, from January to February 2020. For this analysis, the same criteria used for the analysis of the CSR Reports published on the websites was adopted. The objects of study included tweets, retweets, posts, and reposts, based on the procedure proposed by Cortado and Chalmeta (2016) and Suárez-Rico et al. (2018) for analyzing CSR communication on social media.

#### 4.1 | Sample

The sample of brands studied was selected based on data provided by the 2016 Report on Leading Franchise Brands published by Tormo Franquicias (2020). According to the information provided in this study, Inditex, Mango, Desigual, Adolfo Domínguez, Intimissimi, and Bimba y Lola are all among the top ten fashion franchises in Spain. All these franchises have a brand ranking between “high” and “very high,” with good reputations and a considerable international presence (Figure 1).

On the other hand, in its industry ranking of fashion distribution companies, *Monitor Empresarial de Reputación Corporativa* (Merco Empresas, 2020) places Inditex, Mango, Desigual, and Bimba y Lola in the top ten, with only Adidas and Nike above them.

Once we had determined the brands to be included in the study, we searched for and recorded both their URLs and their corporate profiles on the selected social media platforms (Table 1).

In addition, the most currently used social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were selected based on their importance to both the general public and the business world Interactive Advertising Bureau (2020).

	VALOR DE MARCA	UNIDADES CADENA	AÑO DE INICIO	REPUTACIÓN DE EMPRESA	PRESENCIA EXTERIOR
<b>INDITEX</b>	ALTO-ALTO	1.826	1975	BUENA	AMPLIA
<b>MANGO</b>	ALTO-ALTO	246	1984	BUENA	AMPLIA
<b>Desigual</b>	ALTO-ALTO	96	1984	BUENA	AMPLIA
<b>CALZEDONIA</b>	ALTO	318	1992	BUENA	AMPLIA
<b>ADOLFO DOMÍNGUEZ</b>	ALTO	136	1976	BUENA	AMPLIA
<b>intimissimi</b>	ALTO	122	1996	BUENA	AMPLIA
<b>BIMBA Y LOLA</b>	ALTO	145	2000	BUENA	MEDIA
<b>neck &amp; neck</b>	MEDIO-ALTO	83	1993	REGULAR	AMPLIA
<b>October</b>	MEDIO-ALTO	90	2001	REGULAR	ESCASA
<b>Erkano</b>	BAJO-MEDIO	72	2013	REGULAR	ESCASA

**FIGURE 1** Fashion distribution ranking. Source: Tormo Franquicias (2020) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

The social media analysis covered a period of 2 months, from January to March 2020. This analysis included all the posts published by each brand during this time period.

## 5 | RESULTS

### 5.1 | Analysis of CSR policies on company websites (formal analysis)

Our review of the websites of the seven fashion brands selected revealed that although not all the brands include their CSR policies on their corporate websites, they can be found on the websites of the business groups to which they belong (Table 2). Moreover, all websites include information and codes of best practices related to sustainability.

Mango assigns great importance in its CSR Policy to caring for the environment, to which end it has undertaken various initiatives and studies, such as the *Study and Complete Calculation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions* and the *Practical Energy Efficiency Recommendations Guide for Clothing and Accessories Stores*. It also has an archive of Sustainability Reports accessible on its website, which stresses Mango's social, economic, workplace, and environmental commitments, to product quality and safety, and to working in partnership with the community. As stated in its 2019 Sustainability Report, the brand's CSR is an intrinsic part of its organization, defined by a commitment to sustainable development. At the same time, Mango has various active projects and policies aimed at meeting the potential needs of



**TABLE 1** Fashion brands, URLs, and social media profiles

Brand	Url	Facebook profile	Instagram profile	Twitter profile
Mango	<a href="https://shop.mango.com/es">https://shop.mango.com/es</a>	<a href="https://es-es.facebook.com/mango.com">https://es-es.facebook.com/mango.com</a>	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/mango/?hl=es">https://www.instagram.com/mango/?hl=es</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/mango">https://twitter.com/mango</a>
Bimba y Lola	<a href="https://www.bimbaylola.com/es_es/">https://www.bimbaylola.com/es_es/</a>	<a href="https://es-es.facebook.com/BimbayLolaOfficial/">https://es-es.facebook.com/BimbayLolaOfficial/</a>	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/bimbaylola/?hl=es">https://www.instagram.com/bimbaylola/?hl=es</a>	
Intimissimi	<a href="https://www.intimissimi.com/es/">https://www.intimissimi.com/es/</a>	<a href="https://es-es.facebook.com/intimissimi">https://es-es.facebook.com/intimissimi</a>	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/intimissimiofficial/?hl=es">https://www.instagram.com/intimissimiofficial/?hl=es</a>	
Adolfo Domínguez	<a href="https://www.adolfodominguez.com/">https://www.adolfodominguez.com/</a>	<a href="https://es-es.facebook.com/adolfodominguezofficial">https://es-es.facebook.com/adolfodominguezofficial</a>	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/adolfodominguezofficial/?hl=es">https://www.instagram.com/adolfodominguezofficial/?hl=es</a>	
Zara	<a href="https://www.zara.com/es/">https://www.zara.com/es/</a>			<a href="https://twitter.com/zaraes?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor">https://twitter.com/zaraes?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor</a>
Oysho	<a href="https://www.oysho.com/es/">https://www.oysho.com/es/</a>			<a href="https://twitter.com/oysho?lang=es">https://twitter.com/oysho?lang=es</a>
Desigual	<a href="https://www.desigual.com/es_ES/">https://www.desigual.com/es_ES/</a>			<a href="https://twitter.com/Desigual_ES?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor">https://twitter.com/Desigual_ES?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor</a>

Source: Compiled by authors.

**TABLE 2** Analysis of CSR on websites

Brand	CSR URL	Corporate website CSR policy	Website of business group		
			Sustainability CSR	CSR policy	Sustainability CSR
Mango	<a href="https://www.mango.com/web/oi/servicios/company/ES/empresa/rsc.htm">https://www.mango.com/web/oi/servicios/company/ES/empresa/rsc.htm</a>	Yes	Yes	No	No
Adolfo Domínguez	<a href="http://adz.adolfodominguez.com/manual_0.asp?i=636&amp;t=%A0Responsabilidad%20social%20corporativa">http://adz.adolfodominguez.com/manual_0.asp?i=636&amp;t=%A0Responsabilidad%20social%20corporativa</a>	Yes	Yes	No	No
Zara	<a href="https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/240915/Politica+de+Responsabilidad+Social+Corporativa+de+Inditex">https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/240915/Politica+de+Responsabilidad+Social+Corporativa+de+Inditex</a>	No	No	Yes	Yes
Oysho	<a href="https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/240915/Politica+de+Responsabilidad+Social+Corporativa+de+Inditex">https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/240915/Politica+de+Responsabilidad+Social+Corporativa+de+Inditex</a>	No	No	Yes	Yes
Intimissimi	<a href="https://www.calzedoniagroup.com/en/world-in-progress/sustainability-report">https://www.calzedoniagroup.com/en/world-in-progress/sustainability-report</a>	No	No	No	Yes
Desigual	<a href="https://www.desigual.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-DsglSharedLibrary/default/dwa9ea2594/docs/corporate/LoveTheWorld/Corporate_DesigualMemoriaDeSostenibilidad_2019_ES.pdf">https://www.desigual.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-DsglSharedLibrary/default/dwa9ea2594/docs/corporate/LoveTheWorld/Corporate_DesigualMemoriaDeSostenibilidad_2019_ES.pdf</a>	No	Yes	No	No
Bimba y Lola	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Compiled by authors.

its different stakeholder groups, as well as the effective management of its CSR. Finally, it also has a *Code of Ethics and Responsible Behaviors*, which outlines the brand's commitments and values, and which are integrated into its business strategy through their inclusion in its

objectives and action plans with the aim of ensuring the profitability and sustainability of the business over time.

On the Bimba y Lola corporate website we did not find any reference to either CSR or brand sustainability. It is the only brand that has



not posted its CSR activities and practices either on its own website or on the website of its business group (as it does belong to one). However, we have kept it in the study due to its importance in the Spanish fashion industry.

Intimissimi is part of the Calzedonia Group, and its CSR is only accessible on the business group's website. Although its corporate website does not appear to contain its CSR Policy, it does provide access to its Sustainability Report, an essential element of its corporate strategy that contains information on “environmental, social and staff-related topics, as well as respect for human rights and the fight against corruption, useful to ensuring a proper understanding of the activities carried out and their impact, as well as the Group performance and results” (Calzedonia Group, 2019, p. 465). Listed among its initiatives is its participation since 2019 as a signatory to the Fashion Pact. In addition, sustainability appears as a constant in the different tools and methods for interacting with its key stakeholders.

Adolfo Domínguez includes a brief CSR Policy on its corporate website. Its CSR guidelines can be found there, including its sustainability commitment. In this respect, it establishes the company's commitment to contributing “to economic, social, and environmental development with a view to achieving sustainable development” (Adolfo Domínguez, S.A., 2012, p. 1). In addition, as an appendix to its CSR policy, since 2006 it has had a Code of Conduct inspired by the principles of the UN Global Compact, to which it is a signatory.

Since both Zara and Oysho belong to the Inditex Group, we needed to consult the group website to locate their CSR policy, which was established with its first Strategic Environmental Plan for the period 2007–2010, with the aim of reconciling the group's economic growth with community care and environmental protection. Subsequently, the group approved a new Sustainable Inditex Strategic Environmental Plan for 2011–2015. Since 2015, it has advocated an integrated sustainable business model. Its most recent CSR policy, published in 2015 (Inditex, 2015), makes clear references to sustainability. The policy reflects the company's concern with creating sustainable values, to which end it is implementing various programs to engage with different stakeholder groups. It is worth highlighting that its Environmental Sustainability Policy, which demonstrates a commitment to making all its business activities environmentally sustainable, includes an Animal Welfare Policy, establishing ethical standards in the use of products of animal origin.

Desigual is a member of the Fashion Pact, a global coalition of clothing and fashion companies that aims to promote sustainability in the sector. This makes it clear that one of the company's objectives is to reduce its environmental impact. In 2019, it established a Sustainability and CSR Plan for the period 2020–2023. However, this document is not accessible on its website. There are some references to the plan on its “Love the World” page, which outlines “the philosophy that brings together all the actions taken by Desigual in keeping with its social and environmental commitment” (Desigual, s.f., n.d.) and includes a downloadable version of its Sustainability Report (Desigual, 2019). References can also be found on its “Environment” page, which mentions its environmental policy in the sections

referring to the calculation of its carbon footprint and the creation of sustainable spaces (Desigual, 2018) as key projects.

## 5.2 | Analysis of communication on social media (informal analysis)

### 5.2.1 | Mango, Bimba y Lola, Intimissimi, Adolfo Domínguez (Facebook, Instagram)

Our analysis of communication on social media by the companies Mango, Bimba y Lola, Intimissimi, and Adolfo Domínguez (Table 3) has yielded the following results:

The majority of the posts published, on both Facebook and Instagram, by all the brands analyzed, make reference to their products or services. In fact, Mango did not post anything in any other category on any social media platform. In the case of Bimba y Lola, we also identified seven promotions and three courtesy messages on Facebook, while on Instagram there were four courtesy messages. Intimissimi placed 98 posts on Facebook, most of which were related to products or services (81), although there were also three posts with promotions or offers and 13 courtesy messages. A similar pattern was evident on Instagram: most of the posts were about their products, while 10 were promotions or offers and one was a courtesy message. Finally, the analysis of Adolfo Domínguez suggests the same dynamic as the other brands: its posts on both social media platforms are mostly related to its products (in 100% of cases on Instagram), although on Facebook 28 promotions and 2 courtesy messages were also identified.

Since the focus of this study is on communication about CSR activities and practices on social media, a specific category was established to isolate information on this question. As is evident in the above table, most of the brands studied did not post anything related to sustainable practices, or to any other aspect of their CSR, on any of the social media platforms analyzed. Intimissimi and Adolfo Domínguez were the only brands to publish a single post in this category, and only on Facebook.

### 5.2.2 | Zara, Oysho, Desigual, Mango (Twitter)

The brands Zara, Oysho, Desigual, and Mango exhibited some differences from the other brands mentioned above. As can be seen in Table 4, posts directly related to the CSR of both brands were identified.

In the case of Zara, 42 tweets were identified, most of which had content related to the company's products. Only two of the 42 tweets featured content related to the company's CSR. No retweets were identified for this brand.

On Oysho's profile, a total of 47 tweets were posted. Like Zara, most of these were related to the brand's products, although six of the 47 posts did make reference to its CSR. A total of three retweets were identified, two of which had content referring to the brand's CSR.

**TABLE 3** Results of analysis of informal CSR communication (Facebook and Instagram) from January to March 2020

Type of content in post	Bimba y Lola		Mango		Intimissimi		Adolfo Domínguez	
	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB	IG
Products and services	45	57	20	54	81	81	30	62
Promotions and offers	7	0	0	0	3	10	28	0
Customer service, courtesy messages, etc.	3	4	0	0	13	1	2	0
About CSR	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0

Source: Compiled by authors.

**TABLE 4** Results of analysis of informal CSR communication (Twitter) from January to March 2020

		Zara	Oysho	Desigual	Mango
Type of content in post (Tweet)	Products and services	34	37	44	55
	Promotions and offers	2	0	17	9
	Corporate/business information	4	4	17	16
	About CSR	2	6	4	8
Type of content in post (Retweet)	Products and services	0	1	0	0
	Promotions and offers	0	0	0	0
	Corporate/business information	0	0	7	0
	About CSR	0	2	0	0

Source: Compiled by authors.

**TABLE 5** Percentage of content published on CSR/Sustainability out of all posts published

Position	Brand	% of total posts	Social media platform
1	Oysho	12.7%	Twitter
2	Mango	9%	Twitter
3	Desigual	4.8%	Twitter
4	Zara	4.7%	Twitter
5	Adolfo Domínguez	1.6%	Facebook
6	Intimissimi	1%	Facebook
7	Bimba y Lola	-	-

Source: Compiled by authors.

Out of the 82 tweets identified in the analysis of Desigual's profile, four included information on the brand's CSR related to the environment and environmental protection actions taken by the brand. Only seven retweets were identified, all of which contained corporate/business information.

Finally, Mango posted 88 tweets, mostly associated with its products. Out of the eight tweets related to the company's CSR, six included content related to sustainability. No retweets were identified for this company.

We also considered it relevant to identify which brands published the highest number of posts with content about CSR and sustainability. As shown in Table 5, Oysho is the brand that gave the most attention to its CSR on social media, followed by Mango and Desigual. However, all the percentages suggest that the brands give minimal importance to engaging with their stakeholders about issues related to sustainability.

## 6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which the social networks Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and the corporate website of different brands in the fashion industry have been used to communicate their CSR. The ethical values and responsible behaviors assumed by the companies analysed have been communicated through different media to their stakeholders, as evidenced by the results.

The brands analyzed, with the exception of Bimba y Lola, all publish their CSR policies and/or sustainability reports on their corporate websites. Although Mango and Adolfo Domínguez post their CSR policies and their CSR practices and activities on their company websites, they do not post them on the websites of their respective corporate groups (Punto Fa, S.L. and Grupo Adolfo Domínguez S.A.R.L.). In the cases of Zara and Oysho, however, the opposite is true: both their





CSR policy and sustainability activities and practices are featured on the websites of their corporate group, Inditex, but not on the brands' own websites. Finally, while in the case of Intimissimi, references to their CSR activities and practices can be found only on the group website, Desigual includes them on the brand's website. Based on these findings, in response to our second research question (Q2), we can conclude that most of the fashion brands analyzed use their company websites (either the group website or the brand website) to disseminate their CSR activities and practices. The publication on their websites of their sustainability reports and programs adopted to ensure the sustainable development of their activities suggests that these brands are aware of the importance to their stakeholders of responsible action by fashion companies (Sánchez de la Nieta et al., 2015; Villagra & López, 2013).

Moreover, it is worth noting that most of the brands analyzed (Mango, Adolfo Domínguez, and—through Inditex—Zara and Oysho) have recognized the importance of implementing CSR programs in their fashion product production and distribution processes. This effectively responds to our first research question (Q1), confirming that most brands integrate activities and practices related to sustainability into their CSR policies.

However, it seems that they are less concerned with raising awareness and engaging their stakeholders (Maignan et al., 2005) about these kinds of initiatives or issues. With regard to the social media platforms analyzed and within the geographical context considered for this study (Spain), barely any posts appear that make reference to the sustainability of their products, production processes, activities and practices, or materials used in fashion items. In response to Q3, we can thus conclude that the Spanish fashion brands analyzed do not leverage the tools offered by social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter to communicate their CSR effectively, achieve their corporate objectives, and raise public awareness.

On Facebook, we were able to identify only two posts making reference to CSR: one by Intimissimi and the other by Adolfo Domínguez. On Twitter, although it is true that all the brands analyzed posted a few tweets with content related to their CSR, such tweets represented only a small percentage of total posts. This suggests that the seven Spanish fashion brands analyzed generally do not make the consumer the focus of these policies as recommended by the UN (Polo, 2011), nor do they take into account that consumers consider information about CSR and sustainability before buying their products (Manikonda et al., 2016; Morales & Morales Rodríguez, 2017; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Tuunainen & Rossi, 2002). It also seems that these fashion brands do not encourage the participation of influencers to promote sustainable buying or use of their fashion products among their followers (United Nations, 2019). However, this is a new line of research effectively introduced by this publication.

Half of all social media users report that information they have obtained from social media has definitively influenced their decision to buy a particular product (Interactive Advertising Bureau, IAB, 2021). If we accept the assertion that society is becoming increasingly aware of the need for more sustainable and responsible production and consumption (Hoyer et al., 2010), we can conclude

that the Spanish fashion brands analyzed have not taken this idea onboard. Although they have certainly adopted CSR plans and sustainability policies, they do not seem to recognize the importance of sharing these initiatives or engaging their stakeholders in conversations about sustainability (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Such engagement would serve to raise public awareness about sustainable consumption and to create mental associations between their brand and sustainability.

These seven fashion brands have adopted some of the eight steps of the CSR implementation model for businesses proposed by Maignan et al. (2005). Among these, the step of communicating the implementation of CSR initiatives has been analyzed for the companies in the study. The companies have clearly identified documents or statements on CSR (Step 1). It would seem that they have also effectively identified their stakeholders, and those among them that are influencers or have the potential to influence (Steps 2 and 3). However, they have not been able to communicate the implementation in their organizations of Steps 4, 5, and 6, which include assessing and evaluating the importance to stakeholders of feeling they are a central part of CSR policies. Nor have they evaluated the CSR practices adopted, at least not by obtaining feedback from their stakeholders on social media, and they have not communicated the implementation of the sustainability plans that form part of their CSR.

There has been no evidence found to suggest that the seven Spanish brands analyzed have raised awareness or involved their stakeholders in CSR or sustainability initiatives (Step 7) on the social media platforms analyzed during the study period. There is also no evidence that these brands have obtained stakeholder feedback via social media after implementing sustainability initiatives for the purposes of evaluation and follow-up (Step 8).

The fashion brands analyzed do not appear to consider the fact that communication about these kinds of actions can influence the mental associations that consumers develop in relation to a particular brand, as demonstrated in research by Capriotti and Zeler (2020). Public associations with sustainability and environmental protection are not being developed by any of these seven brands. According to Pérez-García (2017) and Pérez-Martínez and Topa (2018), brands that effectively demonstrate a concern with CSR-related issues will achieve greater success in their projects.

As Ros-Diego and Castelló-Martínez (2011) point out, the use that companies make of social media as channels for the communication of their CSR programs is extremely limited. Despite the huge benefits that the use of social media can offer (such as easy, constant, and accessible community interaction), with the potential to become the very heart of the business (2013), most companies have yet to integrate them into their corporate communication plans.

There are some drawbacks that may explain why many companies choose not to make full use of social media. The internet can pose a risk insofar as the company is not in full control of the information and the way it is disseminated on these platforms. The content, scope, frequency, and timing of distribution of the messages are not determined exclusively by the company (Alejos Góngora, 2014) since any individual can create or share information, and even make accusations

related to any aspect of social or environmental importance. In this way, “if a company breaches its code of conduct or its CSR policy without going as far as breaking the law, it can be easily sanctioned through boycotts or negative publicity” (Alejos Góngora, 2014).

We can therefore conclude that the fashion brands analyzed in this study have for the most part adopted CSR policies that include activities and practices conducive to global sustainability in relation to both the materials and the production processes they use. However, it is clear that these initiatives have not been communicated on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram), as these have been used merely as channels for promoting their products. Their environmentally responsible initiatives have not been communicated on social media at all. They have also failed to generate discussion, raise awareness, or seek feedback from their stakeholders or customers on environmental issues, production processes, sustainability, or responsible consumption. Fashion brands in Spain are therefore squandering these resources for creating awareness about the importance of sustainability, in clear disregard of the recommendations of the UN (United Nations, 2019) and the findings of researchers on this subject (Capriotti & Zeler, 2020; Kim & Oh, 2020; Pérez-Martínez & Topa, 2018; Suárez-Rico et al., 2018).

It is important to stress the limited nature of this research, as a case study of only seven major international fashion brands with operations in Spain and in many other countries around the world. Very little research has been conducted on CSR communication by fashion companies, but with this study we seek to initiate new lines of research on the communication of the environmental and sustainability commitments adopted by fashion brands. This study has not examined whether the policies communicated by fashion companies in their CSR reports have actually been adopted or implemented, or whether they are mere marketing strategies designed to “greenwash” (Martín-López, 2019) their image. These questions, which have been analyzed by other authors (Bigné et al., 2006), fall outside the scope of this research.

The need to gain a better understanding of the reasons why companies tend not to communicate their CSR policies on social media constitutes one possible future line of research. Another involves the analysis of whether fashion brands in Spain have a preference for Twitter over other social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram to post content about their CSR and sustainability initiatives.

It is important not only to adopt responsible commitments to sustainability, the environment, and the future of the planet, but also to communicate them and engage stakeholders and consumers, placing them at the center of such initiatives (Manikonda et al., 2016; Morales & Morales Rodríguez, 2017; Tuunainen & Rossi, 2002; United Nations, 2019). Through their communication on social media, fashion brands have the capacity to promote the exchange of opinions, reflections, and discussions on contemporary issues like sustainability, resource scarcity, and climate change, and to raise public awareness about these issues, but the brands analyzed here are not doing so.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interest.

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