

## Exploratory Analysis of Sustainability Practices in Outdoor Apparel Brands: Cases of Fjällräven and Haglöfs

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**Introduction and background.** The global outdoor apparel market continues to grow and is expected to reach around USD 19.45 billion by 2026 (Zion Market Research, 2019). With the increasing awareness and demands of sustainability in the globe, numerous outdoor apparel companies started to incorporate sustainability practices in their material selection, production, and supply chain for the past two decades (NuORDER, n.d.). However, these companies still face into challenges for the holistic integration of sustainability in their business practices by themselves; thus, they try to bring the industry together and share their sustainability practices with others (Gunther, 2016). By joining sustainability affiliated initiatives (e.g., Sustainable Apparel Coalition, B Certified Corporation), apparel brands can access advanced guidelines, expert services, and recommendations regarding sustainability practices (Assoune, 2020). Although previous studies (e.g., Diddi & Lee, 2013) explored sustainability practices of two apparel companies with and without the affiliation of Sustainable Apparel Coalition, limited research was conducted to understand the similarities and differences between members and non-members of sustainability affiliated companies, specifically in the outdoor apparel industry. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine whether there is any difference of sustainability practices in terms of their affiliation of sustainability-related initiatives. In this case study, we explored sustainability practices of two outdoor apparel brands, Fjällräven and Haglöfs.

**Method.** Two Swedish-based outdoor apparel brands, Fjällräven and Haglöfs, were purposefully chosen for this case study; each as a member and non-member of sustainability affiliated initiatives, respectively. Both brands have a long history of manufacturing outdoor products, similar target markets, and product categories. They also have been investing in sustainable product design and development as well as implementing sustainability-related practices in their supply chain greatly in recent years.

Triple bottom line (TBL) is a fundamental tool to achieve sustainability which has been widely implemented in various industries' sustainability practices; the environmental, economic, and social performances of a company can be measured by implementing TBL (Elkington, 1994; Slaper & Hall, 2011). Guided by the TBL framework, a qualitative case study approach was used to analyze sustainability practices of Fjällräven and Haglöfs from environmental, economic, and social perspectives.

The qualitative data used in this study were obtained from the publicly available secondary sources including Fjällräven's 2021 sustainability annual report, Haglöfs's 2020 sustainability report, and both Fjällräven and Haglöfs's official websites. These were then categorized and thematically content analyzed guided by the TBL framework. We inductively formed and specified codes in the data analysis process and stopped adding new codes at the

point of theoretical saturation. The subcategories under TBL were product lifespan extension, sustainable material development, sustainable production, green supply chain management, animal welfare, sustainable energy, sustainable packaging, long-term relationships between suppliers, human rights protection, stakeholder engagement, and community involvement. These themes were further analyzed and compared between the two companies.

**Findings.** *Concerning the environmental aspect of sustainability*, both Fjällräven and Haglöfs focused on product lifespan extension, sustainable material development, and green supply chain management. Fjällräven specifically aimed to create the product attachment between users and products to foster emotional durability and educate users on the way to maintain the product quality, while Haglöfs invested in quality control and offering free repair services. Fjällräven made more progress on material innovations compared to Haglöfs. Fjällräven invested in producing eco-friendly materials, including perfluorocarbons (PFC)-free fabric, and replacing PFC by Greenland wax to reduce negative environmental impacts in water repellent treatments. Meanwhile, Haglöfs concentrated on sourcing organic materials in manufacturing. Moreover, both companies utilized certain tools to ensure transparency in supply chain and manufacturing; for example, Fjällräven's Down Promise and Haglöfs' Track My Down system. Haglöfs also used renewable energy in operations and put efforts to reduce the waste of packaging.

*In terms of the social dimension of sustainability*, both companies implemented a code of conduct to ensure the well-being of labors in the supply chain. They each have different strategies in stakeholder engagement. Fjällräven focused on engaging consumers to sustainability-related events, whereas Haglöfs showed more dedication to their employees' well-being. Additionally, Haglöfs encouraged different stakeholders (e.g., product developer, material managers, marketers) to take yearly courses in the sustainability related fashion academy to gain fundamental knowledge about the topic. Animal welfare was also emphasized by both companies. For example, Fjällräven avoided live-plucking and force-feeding in farms, while Haglöfs placed their own animal welfare policy when sourcing animal-based materials.

*The economic dimension of sustainability* emphasizes profits and financial statements that are often unavailable for public viewing and are confidential information within the company. Since we only used the publicly available sources as our data, we did not have access to the financial data of both companies. Based on the released data from both companies' annual reports, it can be assumed that they maintain a long-term relationship with suppliers to achieve economic sustainability. Specifically, Haglöfs adopted the strategies in which they own limited number of factories in the supply chain; rather, the company built a network connecting with 80 suppliers and manufacturers across 17 countries to maximize the profit.

**Conclusion.** Although each brand's sustainability implementation and strategies were different due to various access to related guidelines and expert services, both brands (Fjällräven and Haglöfs), a member and non-member of sustainability affiliated initiatives, aimed to achieve sustainability through similar practices such as product lifespan extension, sustainable material development, green supply chain management, animal welfare, human rights protection, and stakeholder engagement. This exploratory case study revealed that both brands heavily engage in

sustainability practices regardless of their affiliation of sustainability initiatives. It concludes that being affiliated in a certain sustainability organization does not mean their engagement in sustainability practices is higher than those with non-affiliated brands. Sustainability practices is a must-do action in the outdoor apparel industry.

The findings of this study were based on two Swedish-based outdoor apparel brands, which might be shaped by a specific culture; thus, the results may not be replicated for other companies. The data had limitations to explicitly examine the economic dimension of sustainability; thus, in future research, it is urged to use multiple data sources instead of only using the secondary data sources. Using diverse data sources will be beneficial to gain the holistic understanding of their sustainability practices. Further research is also suggested to analyze sustainability practices of diverse outdoor apparel brands, which will provide a common trend of the outdoor apparel brand's sustainability practices in general. Overall, this case study provides important insights into the current sustainability practices of outdoor apparel brands.

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