

## Understand Employees' Opinions toward Sustainable Fashion Companies-through a Text Mining Based Content Analysis

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Sustainable fashion has been on the rise as consumers become increasingly aware of the negative impact that fast fashion has on the environment and society. Retailers like Patagonia, Ralph Lauren, and Reformation leverage their sustainability practices to enhance their brand image (Murphy, 2024). By capitalizing on diverse Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, these sustainable fashion companies attract not only a conscientious customer base but also foster a work environment that prioritizes ethical standards, social equity, and environmental sustainability (Damen, 2023). Employees are attracted to companies that focus on sustainability as part of their business strategy because it gives meaning to the work they do (Tenney, 2024). Employee perceptions and feelings are significant as they relate to engagement, retention, performance, and employee value. Although many studies have investigated the impact of CSR practices on employees' perceptions (Lomonaco-Benzing & Ha-Brookshire, 2016; Lee & Ha-Brookshire, 2018), there is no research specifically exploring the voice of employees working in sustainable fashion companies. Furthermore, previous studies have not explicit the influence of CSR practices on employee value in sustainable fashion companies. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore employees' real opinions and employee value in sustainable fashion companies through the analysis of the employee reviews from Glassdoor platform.

This study combined the Theory of Moral Responsibility of Corporate Sustainability (MRCS) (Ha-Brookshire, 2017) and Employee Value Proposition (EVP) (Heger, 2007) as the theory framework. According to MRCS, a truly sustainable organization can only be achieved through the collaboration and commitment to sustainability from both the company and its employees. This collective commitment ensures that sustainability becomes an integral part of the organizational culture, influencing every level of operation. To explore whether companies' commitment to CSR impacts their ability to attract, engage, and retain employees through a compelling employee value, this study also incorporated the EVP theory. EVP is a set of offerings provided by an employer to its employees in return for their performance and skills. It encompasses the total rewards and benefits that employees receive, such as health benefits, career development, work-life balance, etc. Employees working in sustainable fashion companies are likely to find alignment with the corporate culture and mission, experiencing a sense of purpose and pride in their work, thus feeling fulfilled and gaining value. By combining these two theories, this study would explore how CSR practices within the sustainable fashion companies impact the employee value and employee perception toward the companies.

To reach the study goal, Glassdoor was chosen as the primary source due to its ample information of employee-generated content, including pros and cons of the company, providing an authentic and varied employee perspective on the companies' internal operations. Two

sustainable fashion companies – Patagonia and Reformation – were selected for their exemplary sustainability practices. Both companies are renowned for their eco-friendly initiatives, and have a substantial presence on Glassdoor.com, where numerous employee reviews offer valuable insights into the organizational culture and practices. In this study, A total of 770 employee reviews detailing the pros and cons from these two fashion companies were crawled by Python on Feb 7, 2024. The data was then analyzed using Leximancer, an advanced online text data analytical tool, to develop concept maps. These maps visually represent the relationships and prevalence of key themes among employee reviews, offering an understanding of the internal employees’ opinions toward their companies.

The result shows several significant themes in pros and cons in employee reviews, reflecting employee value and employee experience in sustainable fashion companies. The major themes that Patagonia employees mentioned in the pros shown in Figure1, include “Perks”,

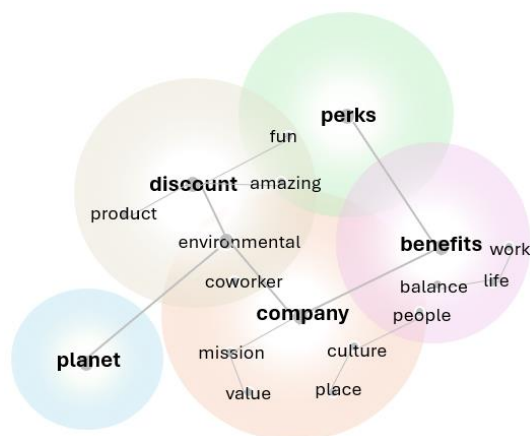


Figure 1. concept map of the pros in Patagonia employee reviews

“Benefit”, “Discount”, “Company”, and “Planet”.

The theme “Benefit” underscores the work-life balance employees experiences. The theme “Company” reflects satisfaction with the company culture and ethical stance, as evidenced by comments praising the clear mission and environmental responsibility. For example, employee mentioned “*their mission is clear. They build amazing products and do right by our environment.*” The prominence of “Planet” as a theme indicates Patagonia employees' high satisfaction with the company’s commitment to sustainability and the planet.

Employees praised the company’s efforts in reviews such as, “*This company is doing everything to be apart of saving the planet by selling sustainable*

*clothing*”, “*People and planet centric, would recommend*”. The concept map of the pros in Reformation employee reviews revealed similar themes and concepts, including “Discount”, and “Sustainability”. Reformation provides 50% employee discount, demonstrating the company’s effort to make their product more accessible to employees. The emphasis on “Sustainability” aligns with Reformation’s ethos, suggesting that employees value the company’s dedication to eco-friendly practices. The concept map of cons comments shows that employees were mainly concerned about the low salary, the effectiveness of management and lack of professional growth opportunities in both Patagonia and Reformation, pointing to areas where both companies could improve. For example, employees complain “*Seriously low paid for a conscious minded company.*”, “*Competitive and not too much room for growth*”, “*Growing pains, and poor management*”. These critiques suggest that there are perceived gaps in compensation, career development, and management practices.

Based on MRCS and EVP theories, this study offers an understanding of employee value and employee experience in sustainable fashion companies. The findings reveal significant themes reflecting the values and experiences of employees in the renowned sustainable fashion companies. Positive aspects such as work-life balance, company culture, ethical practices, and

commitment to sustainability demonstrate the alignment of employee values with company sustainability missions. The findings also indicate that employees seek fair remuneration, clear pathways, and ample growth room in sustainable fashion companies. However, even though the sustainable fashion market is expected to grow fast, the scale of sustainable fashion companies is relatively smaller than fast fashion companies, leading to a lack of growth opportunities. Sustainable fashion practitioners could mitigate employees' concerns by offering training/skill development sessions, maintaining open lines of communication about the company's growth plan, etc. Future research should further consider the roles and hierarchical levels of employees to examine how an individual's position within fashion companies affects their perceptions of sustainability practices.

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