Economia Aziendale Online

Business and Management Sciences
International Quarterly Review

Sustainability report as a non-financial disclosure tool for B-Corps: analysis of the Italian fashion industry

Matteo Ferioli

Pavia, September 30, 2022
Volume 13 - N. 3/2022

DOI: 10.13132/2038-5498/13.3.459-478

www.ea2000.it
www.economiaaziendale.it

Pavia University Press

Electronic ISSN 2038-5498
Reg. Trib. Pavia n. 685/2007 R.S.P.

Economia Aziendale Online – Business and Management Sciences International Quarterly Review
Vol. 13-3/2022 - DOI: 10.13132/2038-5498/13.3.459-478

Sustainability report as a non-financial disclosure tool for B-Corps: analysis of the Italian fashion industry

Matteo Ferioli

Research Fellow.
Dipartimento di Economia, (DiECO) University of Insubria Varese. ITALY

Corresponding Author:

Matteo Ferioli
University of Insubria
Via Monte Generoso, 71. 21100 Varese. Italy.

matteo.ferioli@uninsubria.it

Cite as:

Ferioli, M. (2022). Sustainability report as a non-financial disclosure tool for B-Corps: analysis of the Italian fashion industry. *Economia Aziendale Online, 13*(3), 459-478.

Section: *Refereed Paper*

Received: June 2022
Published: 30/09/2022

ABSTRACT

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) implies the need for companies to communicate the socially responsible activities to stakeholders. The paper aims to investigate whether the Italian fashion certified B-Corps undertake non-financial disclosure activities comparable to large listed companies, which often have more resources and capital to invest. In particular, the analysis focuses on the sustainability reports and websites as they are among the leading non-financial disclosure tools. The paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of B-Corps, an innovative topic still little discussed in the literature. The results shows that certified B-Corps are more active via the web than listed companies. Although the law and B Lab impose different disclosure requirements, they are not observed by all companies analyzed as some do not make the sustainability report publicly available on their website. Furthermore, the size and the economic resources available influence the disclosure activities and the ability to adopt more complex and comprehensive reporting frameworks; in fact, listed companies publish a more comprehensive report drafted using the GRI Standards. The GRI framework is the most used to draft the sustainability report, and most companies prefer to publish it as a separate document from the financial one. The results also show a discrepancy to what was declared by the Consob as a higher percentage of listed companies make the report publicly available. The paper highlights some managerial implications. Certified B-Corps should publish more sustainability reports on their websites to fulfill the requirements imposed by B Lab and the law. Instead, listed companies should publish more sustainability information on their websites because it is among the leading source of information for stakeholders to know how they contribute to society's well-being.

La responsabilità sociale d'impresa (RSI) implica la necessità per le aziende di comunicare le attività socialmente responsabili agli stakeholder. Il paper si propone di indagare se le B-Corp certificate appartenenti all'industria della moda italiana intraprendono attività di divulgazione non finanziaria paragonabili alle grandi società quotate, che spesso hanno più risorse e capitali da investire. In particolare, l'analisi si concentra sui bilanci sociali e sui siti web in quanto essi sono tra i principali strumenti di comunicazione non finanziaria. L'articolo si propone di fornire una comprensione più approfondita delle B-Corp, un argomento innovativo ancora poco discusso in letteratura. I risultati mostrano che le B-Corp certificate sono più attive sul sito web rispetto alle società quotate. Sebbene la legge e B Lab impongano requisiti di informativa diversi, essi non vengono osservati da tutte le società analizzate poiché alcune non rendono pubblicamente disponibile il bilancio sociale sul proprio sito web. Inoltre, la dimensione e le risorse economiche disponibili influenzano l'attività di informativa e la capacità di adottare framework di rendicontazione più complessi e completi; le società quotate, infatti, pubblicano un report più completo redatto utilizzando i GRI Standards. Il framework GRI è il più utilizzato per redigere il bilancio sociale e la maggior parte delle aziende preferisce pubblicarlo come documento separato da quello finanziario. I risultati evidenziano inoltre una discrepanza rispetto a quanto dichiarato dalla Consob in quanto una percentuale maggiore di società quotate rende pubblico il bilancio sociale. Il documento evidenzia alcune implicazioni manageriali. Le B-Corp certificate dovrebbero rendere pubblico di più il bilancio sociale per soddisfare i requisiti imposti da B Lab e dalla legge. Invece, le società quotate dovrebbero pubblicare più informazioni relative alla loro sostenibilità sui siti web in quanto essi sono una delle principali fonti di informazione per gli stakeholders e per sapere come esse contribuiscono al benessere della società.

Keywords: B Corp, Benefit Corporations, certified B Corps, corporate social responsibility, sustainability report, non-financial statement, NFS, GRI Standards.

1 – Introduction

Over the years, the evolution of value systems, many environmental and financial scandals, stock market failures, and slow economic development led to the evolution of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and making the market increasingly competitive (Gazzola, 2012b; Ferioli *et al.*, 2021). Consumers begun to consider ethical aspects in their purchasing decisions (Gazzola, 2012b) and started asking for more sustainable products and services even when offered at premium prices (Choi *et al.*, 2012; Gazzola *et al.*, 2020b; 2020c; Vu *et al.*, 2020; Kim, 2021). For this reason, social and environmental responsibility become a requirement to compete in the long term (Gazzola, 2012b). It implies that companies must adopt a long-term perspective to generate a shared value between the company and society and undertake their economic activities considering that stakeholders measure the performance according to the economic, social, and environmental perspectives, in line with the Triple Bottom Line approach introduced by Elkington in 1997 (Elkington, 1997; Alhaddi, 2015; European Commission, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 2011). For this reason, it has become necessary to promote new business models and hybrid organizational forms (for more information see Haigh *et al.*, 2015, Battilana & Lee, 2014, Haigh & Hoffman, 2014) that integrate cleaner production practices and enable a sustainable development (Sousa-Zomer *et al.*, 2018; Tunn *et al.*, 2019; Gazzola, *et al.*, 2020a; Provin *et al.*, 2021), such as the B-Corps one (Gazzola *et al.*, 2019; Mosconi *et al.*, 2020). In the scientific literature, there are examples of companies that, thanks to the adoption of the B-Corps business model, have been able to develop solutions capable of combining business and profit needs with the need to reduce the impacts produced on society, the natural environment, and the economy (Ferioli, 2022). In this way, they are innovative companies, and their activities align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ferioli, 2022; Gazzola *et al.*, 2022).

Social communication is a requirement for socially responsible companies to establish relationships of trust with stakeholders because they are increasingly interested in knowing how companies contribute to the environment and society's well-being (Romolini *et al.*, 2014; Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Lee & Lee, 2018; Nave & Ferreira, 2019). It is particularly true for B-Corps (Ferioli, 2021). Companies engaged in social and environmental activities are increasingly called to share their success (Wray, 2015) by disclosing the sustainability results achieved through the non-financial statement (also called Sustainability Report). This document combine accounting, social and ethical information and allow companies to pursue internal and internal analysis and objectives (Brogonzoli, 2005).

Companies in the fashion sector have been repeatedly accused of lack of social responsibility and not having adopted sufficient socially responsible activities (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020). One of the main factors that led to this situation is the challenge of combining sustainability objectives with profit ones. It can be addressed thanks to the B-Corps' innovative business model (Gazzola *et al.*, 2019). The paper aims to understand the corporate social responsibility of the Italian certified B-Corps by evaluating their social communication activities. This activity has a cost that is reflected differently depending on the size and resources owned by a company. B-Corps, unlike listed companies, are often smaller in size and have fewer resources to invest in disclosure activities. However, they have higher transparency standards than traditional firms (Blasi & Sedita, 2022). For this reason, the research question aims to investigate: Do the certified B-Corps carry out non-financial reporting activities comparable to large listed companies in the Italian fashion industry? Specifically, the analysis focuses on sustainability reports and websites as they are among the main non-financial disclosure tools. Despite the growing number of certified B-Corps and the increasing importance of non-financial disclosure, this innovative topic is still little discussed in the literature. The paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of it.

2 – Literature review

2.1 – *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the fashion industry and B-Corps as a sustainable business model*

The evolution of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and corporate governance shifted the companies' focus from profit to creating value for all stakeholders (Gazzola, 2012c; Ferioli *et al.*, 2021). It led to the transition from the traditional notion of value produced for shareholders to sustainable value for the environment and society. In this way, companies began to maximize their results and started to make their processes sustainable to generate benefits for all stakeholders (Gazzola, 2012c; Arru & Ruggieri, 2016). The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility assumes different interpretations according to the culture in which it is applied and involves social, ethical, and environmental concerns (Mazurkiewicz, 2004; Adnan *et al.*, 2018; Feng & Ngai, 2020; Ferioli *et al.*, 2021). It aligns with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach which is based on environmental quality, economic prosperity, and social justice (Gazzola, 2012a; Gazzola & Mella, 2012). Sustainable companies can be considered social-economic actors as CSR requires them to generate a shared value for the business and society (Gazzola & Mella, 2012), a concept introduced in 2011 by Porter and Kramer (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Today, CSR has become a fundamental requirement for the companies' long-term survival (Gazzola, 2012b; Ferioli *et al.*, 2021). They must obtain sustainability certifications and develop new business models capable of solving social and environmental problems.

The fashion industry is worth over $ 3 trillion US dollars, and it is one of the largest industries in the world (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020). In Italy, it represents 8.5% of turnover exceeding 80 billion euros, 12.5% of employment in the manufacturing industry, and employs 500,000 people, especially in micro and small enterprises (Montanino *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, although it has on average lower productivity than the manufacturing sector, it has grown more rapidly since 2007, with an average annual rate of 1.3% (Montanino *et al*., 2020). The fashion industry is mature and characterized by short life cycles, high volatility on the demand side, high buying impulse, high-cost pressure, and low predictability (Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė, 2014). These factors led the companies to produce using a low-price policy and a low-cost structure, embracing the cheapest methods possible (Provin & de Aguiar Dutra, 2021). This posed sustainability challenges (Provin & de Aguiar Dutra, 2021). The fashion industry has been repeatedly blamed for the lack of social responsibility and negative ecological footprint as it was slow to introduce sustainable raw materials and manufacturing techniques, and only a few companies hired CSR experts to address the impacts produced on society and the environment (Chan *et al*., 2020; Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020). The industry uses over 98 million tons of non-renewable resources annually, including petroleum to make synthetic fibers, fertilizers for cotton crops, and chemicals to make and dye fabrics (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Making the industry sustainable requires innovative business models that promote cleaner production practices and integrate economic, social, and environmental aspects, such as the B-Corp one.

B-Corps are companies having an innovative business model that aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and allows facing the challenge of sustainability without forgetting the financial objectives (Gazzola *et al*., 2019; 2022). They manage CSR and business, combining the urgency for sustainability with the need to generate financial returns (Gazzola *et al*., 2019; Mion & Loza Adaui, 2020). B-Corps provide sustainability thought leadership and drive change on a larger scale (Stubbs, 2016; 2017). In the literature, they are defined as "hybrid organizations" (Mion & Loza Adaui, 2020; Riolfo, 2020) as they are between profit and non-profit companies, that is, between those that aim to achieve only profit objectives and those that only generate a social benefit (Riolfo, 2020). B-Corps refers to two categories of companies: certified B-Corps and Benefit Corporations. The former has a three-year sustainability certification issued by B Lab, the American non-profit organization which created it. The certification guarantees high standards of social and environmental performance. To obtain it, the companies must undertake a process called B Impact Assessment (BIA), which evaluates the environmental and social performance, public transparency, and legal responsibility, assessing five areas of management: environment, community, customers, governance, and human resource management (Gazzola *et al*., 2019; Burger-Helmchen & Siegel, 2020). Furthermore, every year B Lab randomly selects 10% of the B-Corps (globally) to submit them to a control mechanism to verify that they do not adopt greenwashing practices. It is why the literature considers them truly sustainable businesses. During the BIA certification process, B Lab assigns a score for each area considering the unique characteristics of the companies (i.e., the size, sector, and geographical area). Furthermore, they can earn additional points if they are the best in the governance, best for workers, or changemakers categories (Nigri *et al*., 2020). The individual scores are added together to form the B Impact Score, which ranges from a minimum of 80 points to a maximum of 200. On the other hand, the Benefit Corporation is a legal form conceived in 2010 in Maryland and allows companies to introduce the environmental and social objectives in the "business purpose" (Gazzola *et al*., 2019). In this way, they can pursue profit and social objectives to generate well-being for society and the environment. Benefit Corporations was recognized in Italy (the first European country) after the approval of to the "Stability Law" n.208 of December 28th, 2015. They are defined as purpose-driven corporations because their activities are oriented toward a scope going beyond market expectations and including social and environmental concerns (Mion & Loza Adaui, 2020). Despite the distinction, there are certified B-Corps that are also Benefit Corporation, as the legal form meets the requirements of certified B-Corps.

Unlike traditional companies, B-Corps have stricter purpose, accountability, and transparency standards to let stakeholders assess the impacts produced more comprehensively ("Stability Law" n.208 of December 28th, 2015. Article 1 (paragraphs 376-384). The paper analyzes the Italian certified B-Corps, which are more than 140 companies, employing more than 15,000 people, and representing 7.9 billion US dollars in turnover (B Lab, 2021). However, the analysis was carried out in December 2021 when there were 124 Italian certified B-Corps (Nativa, 2021) and the data dates back to 2020.

2.2 – *Non-financial disclosure*

The pressures exerted by the European Union, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the greater attention of stakeholders towards the companies' activities generated the need for companies to disclose information regarding how they achieve the social purpose and the impacts produced on society and the environment (Romolini *et al*., 2014; Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Nave & Ferreira, 2019; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; IIRC, 2011; Romolini *et al*., 2014; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). For this reason, it become necessary to integrate sustainability into the core business and communicate non-financial information to establish positive relationships with stakeholders (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Dahlsrud, 2008; Carroll, 2008; Romolini *et al*., 2014). In this way, companies can bridge the gap generated by asymmetries in the market to increase their economic value (Gazzola, 2012a), mitigate the legislative pressures posed by social and political stakeholders, and maintain their corporate legitimacy (Romolini *et al*., 2014; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). Furthermore, they will meet the stakeholders' expectations and obtain a better reputation to generate sustainable environmental, financial, and social value (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Gazzola, 2012a; Ağan *et al*., 2016).

Gazzola *et al*. (2022) showed that transparency is also linked to the ability to innovate, which is a fundamental requirement to face the challenge of combining social and profit objectives. The authors showed that the most sustainable companies, such as certified B-Corps, adopting social responsibility practices and having high transparency standards have higher innovation activity than traditional large listed companies. In contrast, companies that declare to adopt socially responsible behaviors only to improve their image (i.e., use CSR only as a marketing tool) achieved lower innovative activity (Gazzola *et al*., 2022).

Social communication requires a more conscious approach by adopting the Triple Bottom Line which requires companies to combine their economic dimension with the social and environmental one (Pedrini, 2012; Gazzola, 2012a). Nowadays, social communication demands the disclosure of financial and non-financial information. The latter includes the aspects of waste treatment, pollution, climate change, health, employee safety, and the use of resources and energy (Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). It represents a new challenge for companies as it requires higher transparency and more sophisticated communication strategies (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Romolini *et al*., 2014; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d; Tsalis *et al*., 2020; Threlfall *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, corporate culture and government influence the way companies manage their relationships with stakeholders (Romolini *et al*., 2014; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). One of the main tools for disclosing non-financial information is the website. Therefore, it is possible to formulate the following *hypothesis*:

> **HYPOTHESIS 1 (H1).** *B-Corps, as sustainable businesses, communicate more information related to sustainability through their website than traditional companies.*

2.2.1 – Sustainability Report

Voluntarily disclosed information, such as those on the websites, are not complete, accurate, neutral, objective, and therefore difficult to compare (Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). For this reason, it was necessary to develop adequate documents and reporting tools to evaluate the economic, social, and environmental aspects of a company (Pedrini, 2012).

The *sustainability report* is a tool that allows to disclose the social and environmental responsibility activities more comprehensively compared to the website. Unlike the financial statement, which is a purely financial instrument and is not effective in responding to the increased stakeholders' demand for information, the sustainability report reveals the complexity of the non-monetary aspects of the management and meets the requirements imposed by B-Lab and the law (Pedrini, 2012). It represents the solution to shift the focus from economic and financial value to the social and environmental one (Gazzola & Mella, 2012). Furthermore, it helps companies to communicate the social impacts produced by their economic choices and socially responsible behaviors (Gazzola, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; Brogonzoli, 2005; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). The report consists of a structured document (Gazzola, 2012a), complementary to the financial statements, which contains both quantitative information, which can be economic and non-economic, and qualitative, often used to complete and describe the results and the impacts of the company's activities (Romolini *et al*., 2014). It follows the principles of (Gazzola, 2012a):

- responsibility: for the social responsibility actions undertaken and any omissions;
- compliance: with the laws and internal policies of the company;
- transparency: the obligation to inform stakeholders about the social and environmental impacts produced by the business activity.

The sustainability report combines accounting information with ethical and social aspects to effectively communicate how a company pursues its objectives (Brogonzoli, 2005), using a short-, medium-, and long-term perspective. The goals of this document can be grouped into three categories: communication of the results achieved, evaluation of how the objectives have been achieved, and formulation of sustainability strategies. Specifically, it allows to (Brogonzoli, 2005; Gazzola, 2012b):

- demonstrate that the business objectives and policies are aimed at creating social well-being;
- express the corporate culture and values;
- increase transparency to allow the development of democracy;
- report the social and environmental results achieved and allow a comparison with the previously planned objectives;

- show the impacts produced on society by the company's activities (in terms of utility, efficiency, and legitimacy);
- strengthen the relationship with stakeholders and promote a positive company's image.

According to the Legislative Decree no. 254/2016, the sustainability report can be published in an integrated or separate form from the financial one (Legislative Decree no. 254/2016; Gazzola, 2012b; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). The integrated form allows stakeholders to benefit from a single document containing all financial and non-financial information that helps to understand the value generated for society and the environment. The report allows the improvement of traditional reporting practices, offering the advantage of disclosing social benefits more exhaustively, specifying how the company accesses and uses different financial, human, and social resources (IIRC, 2011). It has a dual function as it allows for pursuing both internal and external objectives (Brogonzoli, 2005). The former mainly concern the company's internal analysis, while the external ones refer to communication and stakeholder involvement (Brogonzoli, 2005). Specifically, the internal analysis objectives allow the company to evaluate how sustainable its strategies and area of activity have been. In this way, the report serves as a self-analysis tool to improve various management aspects (Brogonzoli, 2005). Instead, the external analysis function concerns the impacts produced to allow stakeholders to appreciate whether and to what extent the activities have generated value for society and the environment. The sustainability report can also be used to evaluate future strategies as it includes indicators to compare the sustainability goals achieved in different years of activity. In this way, the company can be more effective and evaluate and plan the actions for future improvements. For this reason, it represents an evaluation tool for the (IIRC, 2011):

- actual resource allocation;
- investors and other stakeholders’ information needs;
- strategies and long-term feasibility of the business model.

The sustainability report offers the advantage of communicating corporate sustainability policies and promoting a positive image of the company, thus representing a helpful tool for gaining the trust and appreciation of the society (Gazzola & Mella, 2012). In fact, it generates the advantage of simplifying communication with stakeholders as it provides a clear vision of the degree of implementation of the activities undertaken and the value generated for society and the environment. In this way, the companies can show the results deriving from the investments made for all those activities that do not belong to the core business, which are often far from short-term profitability (Brogonzoli, 2005). In fact, it involves information and indices to allow stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the social utility produced (so-called sustainability performance) or to establish how much and if the company's activities have been sustainable (Gazzola, 2012c). Specifically, there are one or more thematic areas for each stakeholder category, followed by an assessment made by the managers (Brogonzoli, 2005). In this way, companies’ communication is complete and targeted with different stakeholders and helps strengthen their relationships by promoting a positive image and demonstrating that social well-being is part of their objectives and policies.

The sustainability report must satisfy the requirements of truthfulness and transparency, showing both the positive and negative effects of the management to gain greater trust to obtain the community's approval (Gazzola, 2012a; 2012b; Brogonzoli, 2005). For this reason, companies can decide to certify their report through an audit to attest that it has been drawn up following the guidelines. The most widely used international audit standards are ISAE 3000, Accountability 1000 (AA1000), and the Integrated Reporting Working Group's guidelines developed by the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB) (Bianchi, 2017).

Disclosing non-financial information through the sustainability report is essential for B-Corps as they have higher transparency standards than traditional firms (Blasi & Sedita, 2022). Specifically, B Lab requires certified B-Corps to make public a report drafted according to an independent standard that assesses the overall impact. While the law requires the Benefit Corporations to inform stakeholders about the social and environmental impacts the company generated (Lyon *et al*., 2018). In addition, they must appoint a manager dedicated to evaluate the company's impact on society and verify that the report meets the transparency requirements (Mion *et al*., 2021). The companies must annually disclose the social goals achieved, impacts on society, and future sustainability strategies utilizing social reporting models and standards. According to the law ("Stability law" n.208 of December 28th, 2015), annual reports must be published on the companies' websites (paragraph 383) (Mion *et al*., 2021) and must include (Riolfo, 2020):

- a description of the actions, objectives, and methods for achieving the social benefit. If the company does not reach its social goals, it must provide the reasons;
- the evaluation of the performance of companies, which must include the areas of corporate governance, employees, other interested parties, and the environment. Impact assessment measures must be provided by external assessment standards developed by a credible independent body, and they must also be comprehensive, articulated, and transparent.
- a description of the future lines of action that the companies intend to pursue in the following year.

In function of the analyzed theory, it is possible to state that:

HYPOTHESIS 2 (H2). *Compared to traditional companies, B-Corps have higher transparency standards and communicate more through the sustainability report.*

Companies can draw up the sustainability report following the guidelines they prefer as there are no universal principles and performance indices to evaluate the impact produced (Romolini *et al*., 2014). Therefore, they can decide whether to communicate using qualitative or quantitative information. However, it creates the challenge to compare and quantify different companies (Romolini *et al*., 2014). For this reason, many governments introduced minimum standards in their legal codes (for more information see Dhanesh, 2012 and Agudelo *et al*., 2019). Reporting requirements have evolved differently in various jurisdictions, increasing the companies' compliance burden (IIRC, 2011). The most used reporting standards are:

- the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which includes economic, social, and environmental aspects;
- the principles of the Study Group for the Social Report (GBS);

- the Integrated Reporting Framework of the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC): used when the sustainability report is incorporated in the financial one.

2.2.2 – The GRI's Sustainability Reporting Guidelines

The Sustainability Reporting Guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) are the most used social reporting framework to disclose the companies' social, environmental, and economic impacts (Romolini *et al*., 2014; Threlfall *et al*., 2020; GSSB, 2020). They are interrelated standards developed in 1997 which provide an overview of how a company managed resource consumption and the related impacts (GSSB, 2020). In September 2011, ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and GRI signed a memorandum of understanding to design sustainability reporting standard practice (Romolini *et al*., 2014). The last update was in 2016. However, the Global Sustainability Standards Board (GSSB) is currently updating the GRI Universal Standards to improve the quality and consistency of reporting. The new version will be available in January 2023 and concerns:

- consideration of revisions to the reporting principles in GRI 101: Foundation 2016;
- consideration of the revisions of the reporting model in GRI 101: Foundation 2016;
- consideration of the revisions to GRI 102: General Disclosures 2016;
- integration of due diligence in GRI 103: Management Approach 2016;
- integration of human rights into the GRI Standards.

(Source: https://www.globalreporting.org/standards/standards-development/the-review-of-the-universal-standards/):

The GRI Standards describe a company's positive and negative contributions to sustainable development (GSSB, 2020). They partially solve global comparability challenge because they define the content of the sustainability report, thus allowing to compare the reports of those companies that adopted these standards. According to them, the sustainability report must include the following areas (GSSB, 2020):

- *completeness*: i.e., the discussion of all those relevant issues for a correct and truthful representation of the economic, social, and environmental situation to make stakeholders able to assess the company's performance correctly;
- *materiality*: i.e., information must reflect the economic, social, and environmental impacts, indicating which factors can influence the stakeholders' decisions and assessments;
- *inclusiveness*: i.e., the identification of different stakeholders' categories and how the company reacted to their expectations;
- *sustainability context*: i.e., the organization's performance in the sustainability context.

The following GRI reporting principles define the report's content and quality (GSSB, 2020):

- *accuracy*: the information contained in the report must be sufficiently detailed to assess the company's performance;

- *balance*: the report must include positive and negative impacts to show a complete and impartial overview of the company's operations;
- *clarity*: the content must be accessible and understandable for all stakeholders' categories;
- *comparability*: the information communicated must allow comparisons over time with other companies;
- *reliability*: the company must disclose verifiable information;
- *timeliness*: the company must provide in-time information to allow stakeholders to make decisions.

According to the GSSB (2020), the GRI Standards can be grouped into two macro-categories: universal and topic-specific standards. Universal standards (GRI 100) apply to every organization. Specifically, "GRI 101: Foundation" is the starting point, includes requirements and specific claims, and defines the reporting principles for the content and quality. "GRI 102: General Disclosures" contains information about the company's profile, strategy, ethics, governance, stakeholder engagement, and reporting process. "GRI 103: Management Approach" discloses information about the management approach for each material practice. Instead, topic-specific standards are used to report the company's economic, environmental, and social impacts and include three series of standards: GRI 200 (economic topic), GRI 300 (environmental topic), GRI 400 (social topic).

According to the company's reporting needs, the sustainability report can be drafted using the whole set of GRI Standards or just selected ones. If a company decides to use the whole set, it must declare in the report that it is drafted "in accordance" with GRI Standards (GSSB, 2020). In this case, there are two options: Core or Comprehensive. The Core option requires the company to disclose the minimum information necessary to understand the nature of the organization, its impacts and material topics, and how they are managed. Instead, the Comprehensive option, in addition to all the core option's information, requires communicating the company's ethics, strategy, integrity, and governance (GSSB, 2020).

Social communication has a cost for companies that varies according to the complexity of the report. A more complex report which follows more rigorous reporting standards (such as the GRI) requires investing more time than a simpler and less structured one. For this reason, the size, and resources available to a company affect its social communication activities and the ability to communicate in a more structured way. Therefore, it is possible to define the following *hypothesis*:

> **HYPOTHESIS 3 (H3).** *Listed companies use more complex reporting frameworks than B-Corps as they are larger and have more resources to invest in this activity.*

3 – Methodology and data

The research is focused on the Italian fashion industry, specifically on listed companies and B-Corps that have the transparency obligations imposed by B Lab and the law to publish the sustainability report as sustainable development and social communication tool. The companies were identified through the B-Corp directory and the Bureau van Dijk's AIDA database, which collects the Italian companies' financial statements and other information. The former was used to identify 7 certified B-Corps belonging to the fashion industry. The analysis also includes the textiles, clothing, accessories, leather goods, jewelry, and perfumery sectors because they share part of the supply chain. Instead, to identify the Italian fashion listed companies, the research included two filters. The first held only listed companies (376), while the second kept only those belonging to the following ATECO 2007 economic activities (60,293):

- 13 - Textile industries;
- 14 - Packaging of articles of clothing; packaging of leather and fur items;
- 15 - Manufacture of leather and similar items;
- 1812 - Other print;
- 20596 - Manufacture of auxiliary products for the textile and leather industries;
- 206 - Manufacture of synthetic and artificial fibers;
- 2219 - Manufacture of other rubber products;
- 237 - Cutting, shaping, and finishing of stones;
- 2441 - Production of precious metals;
- 3212 - Manufacture of jewelry and goldsmith items and related items;
- 3213 - Manufacture of costume jewelry and similar items;
- 4616 - Intermediaries in the trade of textiles, clothing, fur, footwear, and leather goods;
- 4771 - Retail sale of clothing items in specialized stores;
- 4772 - Retail sale of footwear and leather goods in specialized stores;
- 47751 - Retail sale of perfumery items, toiletries, and personal hygiene products;
- 4777 - Retail sale of watches and jewelry in specialized stores.

The database showed 18 companies, 5 of which were excluded as they do not belong to the fashion sector (3) or belong to the home fashion sector (2), not considered in this analysis. Therefore, the final sample of companies analyzed includes 7 certified B-Corps (35%) and 13 listed companies (65%). Since this study considers the entire population of Italian fashion companies having the characteristics mentioned earlier, it is possible to define it as "population".

The AIDA database was also used to collect quantitative information to classify both categories of companies, namely:

- revenues from sales;
- total assets;
- number of employees;
- if the company belongs to a group;
- how many companies are part of the group.

Following the recommendation 2003/361/EC, the companies' size was defined. Next, the analysis focused on their websites to check whether the sustainability report and other sustainability-related documents were publicly available. Then, the sustainability reports (or consolidated financial statements if the report were integrated) were analyzed to collect information regarding the report's name, the framework used to draft it, and its location (i.e., published as a separate document or integrated into the financial one). Finally, these data were compared with those published by the Consob.

4 – Results and Discussion

The population analyzed counts 20 companies, 90% of which belong to a group composed on average by 36 companies. Specifically, all the listed companies belong to a group that, on average, is involves 52 companies, while 71.43% of certified B-Corps to a group of 7 companies. Furthermore, 57.14% of certified B-Corps are also Benefit Corporations.
Following the recommendation 2003/361/EC, it emerged that 85.71% of certified B-Corps are SMEs (Table 1) as they have on average 8 employees, € 18,300,537.43 of revenues from sales, and € 37,647,274.14 of total assets (Table 2). While listed companies are mainly large, having on average 857 employees, € 279,217,716.31 of revenues from sales, and € 701,194,837.54 of total assets.

Size	Certified B-Corps	Listed companies	%
Micro	1	0	5%
Small	3	0	15%
Medium	2	3	25%
Large	1	10	55%
Total	7	13	20 (100%)

Table 1 – Companies' size following the Recommendation 2003/361/EC

Balance sheet data	Certified B-Corps	Listed companies
Average number of employees	80	857
Average revenues from sales	18,300,537.43 €	279,217,716.31 €
Average total assets	37,647,274.14 €	701,194,837.54 €

Table 2 – Balance sheet data

4.1 – *Non-financial disclosure activities on the website*

The first *hypothesis* assumes that the B-Corps in the fashion industry communicate more they sustainability on the website compared to listed companies because they are truly sustainable and are more oriented towards social communication. The results shows that 50% of the corporate population discloses sustainability information on the homepage and 90% on a dedicated web page. Certified B-Corps post more on their websites than listed companies. Specifically, 100% of B-Corp have a dedicated web page, and 85.71% communicate their social responsibility on the home page. While 92.31% of listed companies have a dedicated web page, and only 38.46% publish on the home page (Table 3).

The literature recognizes the need to integrate sustainability strategies and non-financial disclosure to establish positive relationships with stakeholders (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Dahlsrud, 2008; Carroll, 2008; Romolini *et al.*, 2014). The results show that certified B-Corps, as truly sustainable companies, are more active in social communication on their websites compared to listed companies. Therefore, it is possible to confirm **H1**. Certified

B-Corps proved to be more active in disclosing their sustainability results and the impact related to waste treatment, pollution, climate change, employee safety, health, and resources and energy consumption (Gazzola *et al.*, 2020d).

Website disclosure	Certified B-Corps	Listed companies
Webpage dedicated to sustainability	100%	92.31%
Sustainability on the homepage	85.71%	38.46%

Table 3 – Disclosure of social responsibility information on the website

In this way, they can meet the stakeholders' expectations and obtain a better reputation compared to listed companies. Moreover, they will acquire and maintain the corporate legitimacy and mitigate the legislative pressures exerted by social and political stakeholders (Romolini *et al.*, 2014; Gazzola *et al.*, 2020d). It will generate a sustainable environmental, financial, and social value (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Gazzola, 2012a; Ağan *et al.*, 2016).

4.2 – *The Sustainability Report as a comprehensive non-financial disclosure tool*

The second *hypothesis* supposes that certified B-Corps have higher transparency standards and communicate more through the sustainability report than listed companies. The results show that despite B Lab and law impose different obligations, not all certified B-Corps (85.71%) and listed companies (92.31%) make their reports publicly available. Listed companies communicate their sustainability more through sustainability reports and other sustainability documents compared to certified B-Corps (Table 4). These reports include more complete and comprehensive information than the websites, which often communicate sustainability in a more superficial way. "Other sustainability documents" do not address all aspects of corporate social responsibility but concern specific aspects of sustainability, such as policies or the impacts and benefits generated for a stakeholders' category. Thus, it does not provide a complete understanding of the company's impacts.

Comparing the results with CONSOB data, more listed companies make these types of documents available on the website.

Reports disclosure	Certified B-Corps	Listed companies
Sustainability reports	85.71%	92.31%
Sustainability reports (According to CONSOB)	-	61.54%
Other sustainability documents	28.57%	46.15%

Table 4 – Availability of sustainability reports and other sustainability documents on companies' websites

Considering the population of companies, non-financial statements consist, on average, of 93 pages. Specifically, listed companies publish a longer report (on average 108 pages) than certified B-Corps (on average 64 pages). The most used name to call the NFS is "Sustainability Report", and 77.78% of the population chose to publish it as a separate document (85.71% considering only certified B-Corps and 66.67% considering listed companies), while 22.22% include it in the financial statement (figure 1).

The results show that not all B-Corps fulfill the obligations imposed by B Lab and the law. In fact, not all of them make the sustainability report publicly available on their website. The same is true for other sustainability documents. However, it is essential to underline that the population analyzed is unbalanced as listed companies are almost double the number of B-Corps. It implies that the weight for each company not publishing the report is higher for B-Corps.

In fact, although only one B-Corp and one listed company do not publish it, the results are in favor of the latter.

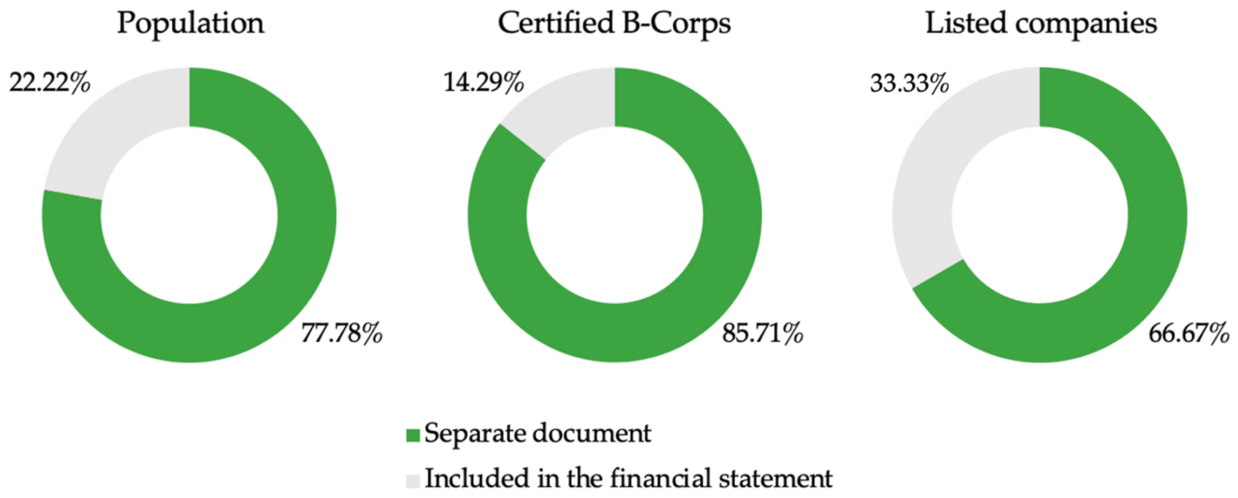

Figure 1 – Where companies place the sustainability report

As previously discussed, listed companies are classified as "large" and have more resources to invest in social communication than B-Corps. The results show that companies with more resources are more likely to publish a more comprehensive report. For this reason, it is possible to say that the company size influences the disclosure activity. Therefore, **H2** is not confirmed.

4.3 – *GRI Standards as the most used framework for sustainability reporting*

The third *hypothesis* assumes that listed companies use more complex reporting frameworks than B-Corps as they are larger and have more resources to invest in non-financial disclosure. Considering the entire population of companies, the most used framework is the GRI - Core option (72.22%), 5.56% utilized only some principles, and 22.22% combined several frameworks (Figure 2). Specifically, GRI has been adopted by 33.33% of certified B-Corps and 91.67% of listed companies. Furthermore, 66.67% of certified B-Corps do not use a specific framework to draft the sustainability report, while only 8.33% of the listed companies use some principles.

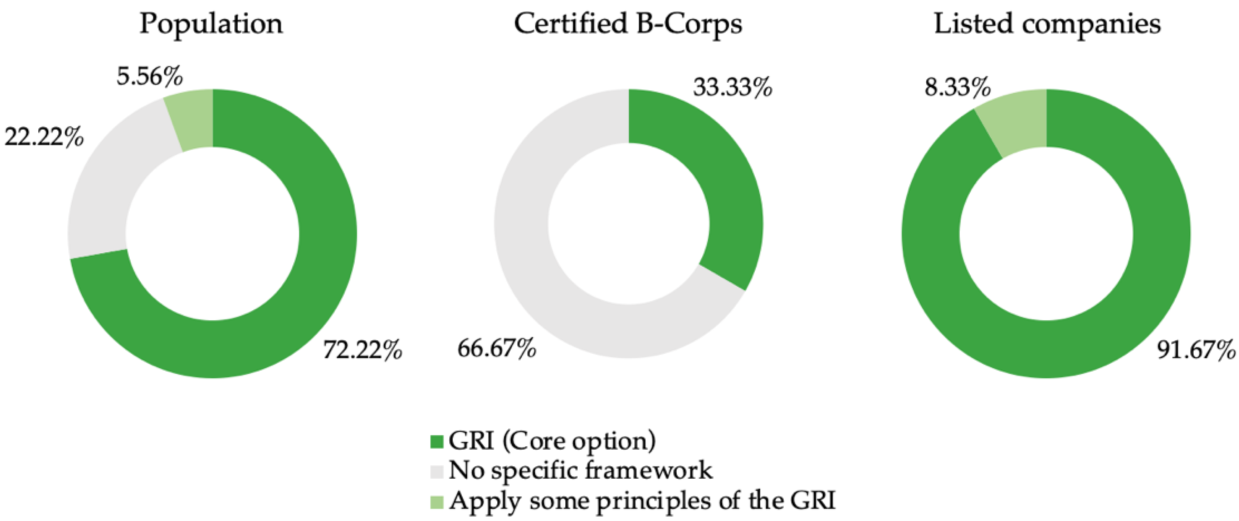

Figure 2 – Framework used to draft the sustainability report

The results show that the GRI Standards are the most used framework for sustainability reporting. Listed companies have more resources and are more likely to use complex reporting frameworks. In fact, almost all of them adopt the GRI. Certified B-Corps prefer not to use a specific framework and communicate using a less structured approach. For this reason, it is possible to state that the company's resources and size reflect the ability to use more comprehensive and complex reporting frameworks. Therefore, it is possible to confirm **H3**.

5 – Conclusion

This study aims to investigate whether certified B-Corps undertake non-financial disclosure activities comparable to large listed companies in the Italian fashion industry. The literature shows that corporate social responsibility implies the need to communicate to stakeholders the impacts and activities undertaken to address the challenges of sustainability as they are increasingly interested in knowing how they contribute to the environment and the society's well-being (Commission of the Communities Europeans, 2001; Dahlsrud, 2008; Carroll, 2008; Romolini *et al*., 2014; Rahman, 2015; Lee & Lee, 2018; Nave & Ferreira, 2019). Social communication represents a new challenge for companies as it requires greater transparency and sophisticated communication strategies (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Romolini *et al*., 2014; Gazzola *et al*., 2020d; Tsalis *et al*., 2020; Threlfall *et al*., 2020). It is particularly true for B-Corps because they have higher transparency standards than traditional companies (Blasi & Sedita, 2022).

The results show differences in social communication between these two types of companies. B-Corps communicate more on the website compared to listed companies. However, although B Lab and the law impose disclosure requirements, not all the B-Corps make the sustainability report publicly available. Furthermore, the size and the economic resources available influence the disclosure activities and the ability to adopt more comprehensive and complex reporting frameworks. In fact, listed companies having more resources are more likely to publish a more comprehensive report drafted using the GRI Standards. Instead, certified B-Corps prefer to adopt a less structured approach by drafting it without using a specific framework. The GRI Standards are the most used for the sustainability report, and most of the companies opted to publish it as a separate document from financial the financial one. The results show a discrepancy to what was declared by the CONSOB as a higher share of listed companies makes the report publicly available.

The study highlights some managerial implications. Stakeholders are increasingly interested in knowing how they contribute to the environment and the society's well-being and measure the companies' performance according to the economic, social, and environmental perspectives (Romolini *et al*., 2014; Rahman, 2015; Lee & Lee, 2018; Nave & Ferreira, 2019). Therefore, fashion companies should communicate the sustainable initiatives undertaken. B-Corp should publish more sustainability reports on their websites to fulfill the B Lab and legal requirements because it is an effective non-financial disclosure tool. Instead, listed companies should publish more information about the socially responsible behaviors and activities undertaken on their websites because it is among the leading source of information for stakeholders to know how companies contribute to society's well-being. In this way, they will meet the stakeholders' expectations and acquire and maintain corporate legitimacy (Gazzola *et al*., 2020d). Furthermore, it will generate a sustainable environmental, financial, and social value (Morsing, Schultz, 2006; Gazzola, 2012a; Ağan *et al*., 2016).

The paper recognizes several limitations. Although the analysis considers the entire population of certified B-Corp and listed companies in the Italian fashion industry, the sample size influenced the results and insights. Furthermore, CSR reporting quantity and quality in each country is different and is influenced by the culture (Adnan *et al*., 2018). Therefore, it does not allow for generalizability. Future studies should include a more significant sample of companies, analyzing a different country or a larger geographic area. In the future, this study could be deepened by interviewing companies to understand how they perceive non-financial disclosure and what are the challenges posed by social communication.

6 – References

Adnan, S.M., Hay, D., & van Staden, C. J. (2018). The influence of culture and corporate governance on corporate social responsibility disclosure: A cross country analysis. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 198, 820-832. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.07.057

Ağan, Y., Kuzey, C., Acar, M.F., & Açıkgöz, A. (2016). The relationships between corporate social responsibility, environmental supplier development, and firm performance. *Journal of cleaner production*, 112, 1872-1881. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.08.090

Agudelo, M.A.L., Jóhannsdóttir, L., & Davídsdóttir, B. (2019). A literature review of the history and evolution of corporate social responsibility. *Int J Corporate Soc Responsibility* 4, 1. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-018-0039-y

Alhaddi, H. (2015). Triple bottom line and sustainability: A literature review. *Business and Management Studies*, 1(2), 6-10. http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/bms.v1i2.752

Arru, B., & Ruggieri, M. (2016). I benefici della Corporate Social Responsibility nella creazione di valore sostenibile: il ruolo delle risorse di competenza e del capitale reputazionale. *Economia Aziendale Online-*, 7(1), 17-41. http://dx.doi.org/10.6092/2038-5498/7.1.17-41

B Lab. (2021). Cambiare il mondo è un'impresa. Possibile. Il primo report delle B Corp italiane. *B Lab*. Available at: https://unlockthechange.it/il-primo-report-delle-b-corp/

Battilana, J., & Lee, M. (2014). Advancing research on hybrid organizing–Insights from the study of social enterprises. *Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), 397-441. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.893615

Blasi, S., & Sedita, S.R. (2022). Mapping the emergence of a new organisational form: An exploration of the intellectual structure of the B Corp research. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 29(1), 107-123. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2187

Brogonzoli, L. (2005). La rendicontazione sociale. *Elemond scuola & azienda*. 4/5, 6-17.

Brydges, T., Retamal, M., & Hanlon, M. (2020). Will COVID-19 support the transition to a more sustainable fashion industry?. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 16(1), 298-308. https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2020.1829848

Burger-Helmchen, T., & Siegel, E.J. (2020). Some thoughts On CSR in relation to B Corp Labels. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 10(4). https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2020-0231

Carroll, A.B. (2008). A history of corporate social responsibility: Concepts and practices. *The Oxford handbook of corporate social responsibility*, 1. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199211593.003.0002

Chan, H.L., Wei, X., Guo, S., & Leung, W.H. (2020). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in fashion supply chains: A multi-methodological study. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 142, 102063. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2020.102063

Choi, T.M., Lo, C.K., Wong, C.W., & Yee, R.W. (2012). Green manufacturing and distribution in the fashion and apparel industries. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 135(2), 531. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpe.2011.07.012

Čiarnienė, R., & Vienažindienė, M. (2014). Management of contemporary fashion industry: characteristics and challenges. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 156, 63-68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.11.120

Dahlsrud, A. (2008). How corporate social responsibility is defined: an analysis of 37 definitions. *Corporate social responsibility and environmental management*, 15(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.132

Dhanesh, G.S. (2012). The view from within: Internal publics and CSR. *Journal of Communication Management*. https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541211197987

Elkington, J. (1997). The triple bottom line. *Environmental management: Readings and cases*, *2*, 49-66.

Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2017). A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future. *Ellen MacArthur Foundation*, 3-117. Available at: https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/a-new-textiles-economy.

European Commission. (2011). Communication from the commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions: A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility. *European Commission*, 6. Available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ae5ada03-0dc3-48f8-9a32-0460e65ba7ed/language-en

Feng, P., & Ngai, C.S.B. (2020). Doing more on the corporate sustainability front: A longitudinal analysis of CSR reporting of global fashion companies. *Sustainability*, *12*(6), 2477. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12062477

Ferioli, M. (2022). B Corp: Un Nuovo Modello di Business per la Mobilità Sostenibile. Il Caso del Gruppo Maganetti. *Economia Aziendale Online-*, *13*(1), 53-73. http://dx.doi.org/10.13132/2038-5498/13.1.53-73

Ferioli, M., Freitas, M., & Spulber, D. (2021). The freedom to be sustainable, from the past to the future. *Geopolitical, Social Security and Freedom Journal*, *4*(2), 59-79. https://doi.org/10.2478/gssfj-2021-0012

Gazzola, P. (2012a). CSR e reputazione nella creazione di valore sostenibile. *Economia Aziendale Online*, (2), 27-45. http://dx.doi.org/10.13132/2038-5498/2006.2.27-45

Gazzola, P. (2012b). *CSR per scelta o per necessità?* Maggioli, Santarcangelo di Romagna.

Gazzola, P. (2012c). La comunicazione sociale nella creazione di valore sostenibile. *Economia Aziendale Online-*, (2), 11-24. http://dx.doi.org/10.13132/2038-5498/2005.2.11-24

Gazzola, P., & Mella, P. (2012). Corporate performance and corporate social responsibility (CSR). A necessary choice? *Economia Aziendale Online-*, (3), 1-22. http://dx.doi.org/10.13132/2038-5498/2006.3.1-22

Gazzola, P., Grechi, D., Ferioli, M., & Slavata, D. (2022). B Corps and listed companies: empirical analysis on corporate social responsibility and innovation activity. *Kybernetes*, (ahead-of-print). https://doi.org/10.1108/K-04-2022-0549

Gazzola, P., Grechi, D., Ossola, P., & Pavione, E. (2019). Certified Benefit Corporations as a new way to make sustainable business: The Italian example. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *26*(6), 1435-1445. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1758

Gazzola, P., Pavione, E., & Dall'Ava, M. (2020a). I differenti significati di sostenibilità per le aziende del lusso e della moda: case studies a confronto. *Economia Aziendale Online*, *10*(4), 663-676. http://dx.doi.org/10.13132/2038-5498/10.4.2005

Gazzola, P., Pavione, E., Grechi, D., & Raimondi, V. (2020b). L'economia circolare nella fashion industry, ridurre, riciclare e riutilizzare: alcuni esempi di successo. *Economia Aziendale Online*, *11*(2), 165-174. http://dx.doi.org/10.13132/2038-5498/11.2.165-174

Gazzola, P., Pavione, E., Pezzetti, R., & Grechi, D. (2020c). Trends in the fashion industry. The perception of sustainability and circular economy: A gender/generation quantitative approach. *Sustainability*, *12*(7), 2809. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12072809

Gazzola, P., Pezzetti, R., Amelio, S., & Grechi, D. (2020d). Non-Financial information disclosure in Italian Public interest companies: A sustainability reporting perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(15), 6063. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12156063

Haigh, N., & Hoffman, A. J. (2014). The new heretics: Hybrid organizations and the challenges they present to corporate sustainability. *Organization & Environment*, *27*(3), 223-241. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026614545345

Haigh, N., Walker, J., Bacq, S., & Kickul, J. (2015). Hybrid organizations: origins, strategies, impacts, and implications. *California Management Review*, *57*(3), 5-12. https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2015.57.3.5

International Integrated Reporting Committee (IIRC). (2011). Towards integrated reporting - communicating value in the 21st century. *International integrated reporting committee publications*, pp.3-4. Available at: www.theiirc.org

Joshi, Y., & Rahman, Z. (2015). Factors affecting green purchase behaviour and future research directions. *International Strategic management review*, *3*(1-2), 128-143. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ism.2015.04.001

Kim, Y. (2021). Certified corporate social responsibility? The current state of certified and decertified B Corps. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *28*(6), 1760-1768. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2147

Lee, J., & Lee, Y. (2018). Effects of multi-brand company's CSR activities on purchase intention through a mediating role of corporate image and brand image. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-08-2017-0087

Mazurkiewicz, P. (2004). Corporate environmental responsibility: Is a common CSR framework possible. *World Bank*, *2*(1), 1-18.

Mion, G., & Loza Adaui, C.R. (2020). Understanding the purpose of benefit corporations: an empirical study on the Italian case. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, *5*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-020-00050-6

Montanino A., Iacovone D., Daviddi M., Ferri D., Radoccia S., & Boccardelli P. (2020). Settore Moda e Covid-19: Scenario, impatti, prospettive. *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, Ernst & Young, Luiss Business School*. Available at: https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/it_it/generic/generic-content/ey-settore-moda-e-covid-19-v5.pdf

Morsing, M., & Schultz, M. (2006). Corporate social responsibility communication: stakeholder information, response and involvement strategies. *Business ethics: A European review*, *15*(4), 323-338. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8608.2006.00460.x

Mosconi, E.M., Poponi, S., Fortunati, S., & di Trifiletti, M.A. (2020). *B Corp Certification for a Circular Economy approach and a sustainable pathway*. In Customer Satisfaction and Sustainability Initiatives in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 167-188. IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1419-1.ch009

Nativa. (2021). The B book: il grande libro delle B Corp italiane. *Nativa*. Available at: https://nativalab.com/bcorp-italian-summit/The-B-Book.pdf

Nave, A., & Ferreira, J. (2019). Corporate social responsibility strategies: Past research and future challenges. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *26*(4), 885-901. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1729

Nigri, G., Del Baldo, M., & Agulini, A. (2020). Governance and accountability models in Italian certified benefit corporations. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *27*(5), 2368-2380. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1949

Porter, M.E., & Kramer, M.R. (2011). *Creating Shared Value*. Harvard Business Review, january-february.

Provin, A.P., & de Aguiar Dutra, A.R. (2021). Circular economy for fashion industry: Use of waste from the food industry for the production of biotextiles. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 169, 120858. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120858

Provin, A.P., de Aguiar Dutra, A.R., Machado, M.M., & Cubas, A.L.V. (2021). New materials for clothing: Rethinking possibilities through a sustainability approach-A review. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 282, 124444. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.124444

Riolfo, G. (2020). The new Italian benefit corporation. *European Business Organization Law Review*, *21*(2), 279-317. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40804-019-00149-9

Romolini, A., Fissi, S., & Gori, E. (2014). Scoring CSR reporting in listed companies–Evidence from Italian best practices. *Corporate social responsibility and environmental management*, *21*(2), 65-81. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1299

Sousa-Zomer, T.T., Magalhães, L., Zancul, E., Campos, L.M., & Cauchick-Miguel, P.A. (2018). Cleaner production as an antecedent for circular economy paradigm shift at the micro-level: evidence from a home appliance manufacturer. *Journal of cleaner production*, 185, 740-748. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.03.006

Stubbs, W. (2016). Sustainable entrepreneurship and B corps. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *26*(3), 331-344. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1920

Stubbs, W. (2017). Characterising B Corps as a sustainable business model: An exploratory study of B Corps in Australia. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 144, 299-312. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.12.093

Thorisdottir, T.S., & Johannsdottir, L. (2020). Corporate social responsibility influencing sustainability within the fashion industry. A systematic review. *Sustainability*, *12*(21), 9167. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12219167

Tunn, V.S., Bocken, N.M., van den Hende, E.A., & Schoormans, J.P. (2019). Business models for sustainable consumption in the circular economy: An expert study. *Journal of cleaner production*, 212, 324-333. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.11.290

Vu, T., Nguyen, N., Nguyen, X., Nguyen, Q., & Nguyen, H. (2020). Corporate social responsibility, employee commitment, reputation, government support and financial performance in Vietnam's export textile enterprises. *Accounting*, *6*(6), 1045-1058. https://doi.org/10.5267/j.ac.2020.7.015

Wray, V. (2015). Communicating Social Impact. Retrieved June 25, 2016: https://www.conference-board.org/publications/publicationdetail.cfm?publicationid=2968&centerId=1

Websites

GRI. Universal Standards: Setting a new global benchmark for sustainability reporting. https://www.globalreporting.org/standards/standards-development/the-review-of-the-universal-standards/