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The bright side of fashion: Environmental and social sustainability in the south of Italy

Abstract. Growing societal and academic concern regarding environmental damage has led the fashion indus-try to engage more with sustainability (Li et al., 2024). This paper examines *Il Nido di Seta*, a small fashion and agricultural cooperative in southern Italy, which has initiated a regenerative silk production program and has recently developed a collaborative project with Gucci. The study investigates *Il Nido di Seta*'s ecological language, addressing themes related to global fashion, ecotourism, and regional enhancement. Based on a corpus of texts from the cooperative's website as well as texts from *Gucci's Equilibrium Impact Report 2022* and sections of the *Kering Report* which refer to their collaboration with *Il Nido di Seta*, this research analyses ecological discourse and assesses how these topics appear on *Il Nido di Seta*'s Instagram posts (N=363) from 2019 to 2024. Through corpus linguistics, content analysis, and framing analysis, the study explores term frequency, content alignment, and how ecological messages are conveyed multimodally on social media.

Keywords: sustainable fashion**,** ecological discourse, Instagram, website communication, multimodality, content analysis, frames

1. Introduction

Political and social pressure on all sectors of the economy to adopt more sustainable practices has grown steadily since Our Common Future (also known as the Brundtland Report, 1987) in-troduced an agenda to address global environmental and developmental challenges. This report popularized the concept of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 43). The decades following the Brundtland Report saw a number of summits and protocols

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aimed at understanding, framing, and institutionalizing sustainable development, most notably the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, and the Rio+20 conference, which marked the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit. Subsequently, in 2015, the UN pledged to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and more recently, the European Union's 2023 Corporate Social Responsibility Directive mandates that all publicly listed companies disclose information on the risks and opportunities related to social and environmental issues, as well as on the impact of their activities on people and the planet (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022).

In response to these initiatives, businesses have been increasingly reshaping their corporate cultures and adjusting their products and services to reflect greater environmental responsibility. Many are actively aiming to emphasize and showcase a "commitment to sustainability and sustainable development" to strengthen their market position, build brand identity, and distinguish themselves from competitors (Jones et al., 2014, p. 6). This move also serves as a strategic approach to attract environmentally conscious consumers who are progressively factoring sustainability into their purchasing decisions.

While most sectors of the economy are now recognizing the imperative of sustainable development, driven by the intensifying concerns of society regarding environmental degradation, this shift is particularly pronounced in the fashion industry, which is infamous for its significant negative impacts on the environment (EMF, 2017; Fletcher, 2008; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2017). Consequently, there has been increasing pressure on fashion companies to adopt a more comprehensive approach to sustainability, integrating environmentally responsible practices throughout their operations to mitigate their ecological footprint and align with growing societal expectations (Li et al., 2024).

Although it is the large fashion corporations that are most often criticized for their significant environmental impact and unethical practices (Caniato et al., 2012; Joy et al., 2012) and could therefore play a leading role in promoting social well-being with environmental stewardship, small companies can also contribute to advancing more sustainable practices within the industry. These smaller firms, despite operating on a reduced scale, often have the flexibility to implement innovative, ethical, and eco-friendly solutions that challenge traditional industry standards (Fletcher, 2014; Kozlowski et al., 2012). Moreover, small businesses are uniquely positioned to foster transparency, sustainability, and ethical supply chain management, which can influence broader industry practices by setting examples for larger companies to follow (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011).

Therefore, examining how fashion companies present their environmentally responsible practices, despite the widespread criticism of the industry's environmental and social shortcomings, can inform research on environmental discourse, particularly in an industry that has often been accused of greenwashing (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022; Alizadeh et al., 2024; Khorsand et al., 2023).

Fashion companies engage with their stakeholders through various communication channels, including social media platforms, blogs, websites (Bellucci & Manetti, 2017; Manetti & Bellucci, 2016) as well as corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports. Analyzing the language employed and the topics addressed in these communications is essential since language is a key tool for demonstrating transparency. Indeed, fashion companies are increasingly expected to disclose their social and environmental practices and provide reports on their activities to "demonstrate transparency to the financial markets and to persuade stakeholders that they can be trusted as investment opportunities" (Koskela & Crawford Camiciottoli, 2020, p. 60).

Based on these premises, this paper addresses the growing importance of language in sustainability communication within small businesses in the fashion industry, especially when discussing regenerative practices and biodiversity. Specifically, the paper investigates *Il Nido di Seta*, a small cooperative based in Calabria, southern Italy, which is implementing a regenerative silk production program on a local scale. The cooperative has recently initiated a project in collaboration with Gucci, adopting a nature-positive approach to biodiversity. The central focus of the study is to examine the language used on the company's website to convey its sustainable practices, and to assess how these sustainability-related themes are represented and communicated through the cooperative's Instagram posts. In particular, the study explores how *Il Nido di Seta* uses language in the ecological context (Stibbe, 2012), including issues related to the global fashion industry, ecotourism, and regional enhancement.

2. Background to the study

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

The increasing global concern for environmental and social issues has significantly contributed to the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR can be defined as "the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the community and society at large" (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2002). More comprehensively, CSR is described as "an approach to business that embodies transparency and ethical behavior, respect for stakeholder groups, and a commitment to add economic, social, and environmental value" (SustainAbility, 2004, p. 4). On this basis, the principal domains of CSR encompass environmental stewardship, employee welfare, and societal engagement- all areas that firms are increasingly urged to communicate effectively to their consumers (Du et al., 2010).

As a consequence, an effective CSR communication strategy has become "a vital issue in building and sustaining the legitimacy and reputation of a company in the eyes of stakeholders" (Galati et al., 2019, p. 857). Indeed, the growing public concern for corporate accountability in social and environmental domains has prompted companies to disclose efforts toward minimizing negative impacts and enhancing their positive contributions. In this context, stakeholder engagement is essential for the implementation of effective CSR strategies and for contributing

to a company's economic success. Reflecting this necessity, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) emphasizes stakeholder involvement as a critical component of its framework for reporting on economic, environmental, social, and governance performance (Global Reporting Initiatives, 2013).

At the same time, governments are implementing regulations that encourage enhanced transparency, aiming to improve stakeholder confidence and the availability of quality information on corporate social activities. The underlying principle is that, equipped with better information, stakeholders can respond to corporate behavior through their market roles, e.g., as consumers, employees or investors, either rewarding or penalizing firms accordingly (Jackson et al., 2020). In fact, beyond regulatory pressures, rising consumer demand for sustainable products and services has impacted CSR adoption. Ethical consumers increasingly prioritize products and services aligned with environmental and social values, thus incentivizing responsible corporate behavior (Charter et al., 2002; Whelan & Fink, 2016). Moreover, Centobelli et al. (2022) report a growing number of consumers willing to pay premium prices for clothing perceived as more environmentally friendly. Consequently, forward-thinking companies are embracing a broader stakeholder approach that considers not only shareholders but also employees, suppliers, and society as a whole (Carroll, 2008; Charter et al., 2002; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002), an approach that reflects a growing public awareness of environmental and social issues compared to past generations.

2.2 Fashion and sustainability

In the context of the fashion industry, there is an urgent need to reassess conventional practices in both fashion consumption and production (EMF, 2017). Governments and international organizations have increased scrutiny of garment manufacturing worldwide given the well-known detrimental impacts of this industry. In fact, the sector aggravates global pollution through its extensive use of raw materials, dyes, hazardous chemicals, transportation, greenhouse gas emissions, and consumes exorbitant amounts of water throughout the supply chain. Additionally, the fashion industry faces criticism for practices associated with animal cruelty and hazardous working conditions, which frequently infringe on human rights (Chen & Burns, 2006; Dickenbrok & Martinez, 2018; Jimenez & Pulos, 2016; Zhang et al., 2021).

Therefore, responsible management which entails a conscious commitment to sustainability through the adoption of sustainable business models and practices is essential as society as a whole is increasingly prioritizing these values. This trend is especially pronounced in the fashion industry, where rising public concern has driven brands to engage more comprehensively with sustainability (Li et al., 2024). The term "sustainable fashion" is now frequently used to describe apparel that integrates social and environmental sustainability, encompassing fair labor practices, animal welfare considerations, and the use of biodegradable materials, such as organic cotton. In essence, "sustainable fashion" emphasizes sourcing, manufacturing, and design practices that aim to maximize benefits for both the industry and society while minimizing environmental impact (Battle et al., 2019; Henninger et al., 2016; Reimers et al.,

2016). This concept often functions as an umbrella term for various ethical and eco-conscious subcategories (Belova, 2022; Fletcher, 2014). These include "ethical fashion", which emphasizes the fair treatment and welfare of individuals and animals across all stages of the fashion supply chain; "conscious fashion", a concept popularized by the zillennial generation, characterized by heightened awareness of the materials, processes, and environmental impacts associated with clothing production; "circular fashion", which seeks to minimize waste and extend the lifecycle of garments and textiles through practices such as recycling, upcycling, and product longevity; and "slow fashion", a counter-movement to "fast fashion" that promotes mindful production, durable design, and reduced consumption cycles. Although the terms often overlap, each of these categories contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability in the fashion industry by addressing distinct aspects of environmental, social, and ethical responsibility.

The term slow fashion draws inspiration from the Slow Food movement, promoting sustainable practices through local production, traditional techniques, and high-quality, longer-lasting garments. As discussed by Fletcher (2014), slow fashion offers an alternative framework that values ecological balance, cultural heritage, and ethical labor practices, emphasizing quality over quantity and considering garments as objects of craft and cultural meaning rather than simply as disposable goods. However, despite these benefits, Fletcher notes that slow fashion is often misunderstood, with its principles reduced to niche marketing rather than true systemic change. Hence, steps need to be taken to promote the role that slow fashion, and sustainable fashion in general, can play in fostering long-lasting change, encouraging the fashion industry to re-evaluate its current practices to build a sustainable future rooted in ecological and social well-being.

For example, Fletcher (2014) discusses the role that small and independent fashion companies can play in driving change within the industry seeing that they are often more agile and able to experiment with innovative and sustainable practices. She notes, in particular, that while larger companies may struggle with the complexities of sustainability due to scale and established practices, smaller companies have the opportunity to be more flexible, creative, and transparent in their design and production processes. She emphasizes how small business and start-ups can often pioneer new models of sustainability that larger companies could possibly later adopt or adapt. Similarly, in their study on how fashion companies adopt and implement environmental sustainability in their supply chains, Caniato et al. (2012) highlight how small companies can contribute to sustainable practices, in particular through local sourcing and engaging in direct sales with consumers, bypassing traditional retail channels. In fact, by focusing on localized, sustainable production methods, small firms can reduce waste, prioritize ethical sourcing, and create more equitable working conditions, thereby contributing to a systemic shift toward sustainability in the fashion industry (Bocken et al., 2016). These efforts, although limited in scope compared to multinational corporations, may have the potential to catalyze wider industry change, particularly through consumer education and demand for more responsible production processes (Fletcher, 2010, 2014).

2.3 CSR communication

As previously discussed, growing public concern regarding businesses' social and environmental policies has affected how companies engage and communicate with stakeholders, who are increasingly interested in understanding the true impact of companies toward sustainable development (Neu, Warsame & Pedwell, 1998).

Numerous studies have explored how companies in the fashion industry convey their sustainability performance and initiatives to stakeholders. For instance, Kwon and Lee (2021) conducted a quantitative content analysis to examine how the fashion industry promotes its CSR efforts on social media. Their findings reveal that the industry uses a range of strategies in CSR advertising campaigns, incorporating both textual and visual techniques. Mickelsson, van Haren, and Lemmink (2023) identified discrepancies in CSR communication within service brands by examining differences across the three primary sources of CSR agendas associated with fast fashion brands. Jimenez and Ruffolo (2024) investigated the content and linguistic features employed by two top fast fashion companies when communicating their sustainable practices to their stakeholders. The authors found that the companies use a variety of linguistic features to inform and convince the public that the fast fashion industry is in fact attempting to respect CSR principles. Research has also been carried out on how fashion brands use social media to promote sustainable fashion and benefit their communication with customers (Zhao et al., 2022).

However, there is still room for further investigation into how the fashion industry is adapting its practices to meet evolving environmental and social expectations, with particular attention to the sustainable practices undertaken by smaller fashion companies and the strategies that these companies use to communicate these initiatives to stakeholders through digital channels, including websites and social media platforms.

3. The study

The present study employs a corpus-based approach to investigate contents, linguistic features, and narratives around sustainable practices, regional enhancement, and environmental impacts of fashion production used by *Il Nido di Seta*, a small emerging fashion and agricultural cooperative whose name translates to 'silk nest'. Founded by a group of young people committed to revitalizing their homeland, Calabria, the company's mission is governed by core values of environmental and landscape preservation, regional economic growth, and sustainability. Taking to heart the traditions of silkworm farming, *Il Nido di Seta* is establishing an integrated approach that combines artisanal crafts with cultural, artistic, and culinary aspects. Their main activity focuses on the production of clothes and accessories, using yarns and fabrics derived from their locally bred organic silkworms, including scarves, tops, ties, shoes, jewels, and food, such as confitures and mulberry liqueur. Moreover, to attract tourists, the cooperative offers guided tours that include visits to their silk museum, a walk along a path that brings to the mulberry grove, where silkworms are bred, and an organic meal. They are also keen on engaging

with younger generations with educational projects specifically designed for schools. Recently, *Il Nido di Seta* launched a collaborative project with Gucci that takes a nature-positive approach to biodiversity. The overall aim of the study is to investigate how this cooperative promotes its business and products and communicates its commitment to sustainability through its website and Instagram posts.

3.1 Methodology

This study presents findings obtained by corpus linguistic techniques, content analysis, and framing theory. Specifically, a textual corpus was compiled from the English-language sections of *Il Nido di Seta*'s website, alongside texts pertaining to their collaboration with Gucci, sourced from the *Gucci Equilibrium Impact Report 2022* and relevant sections of the *Kering Report*[2]. The resulting corpus contains 5,240 tokens and 1,469 types. In addition, a separate dataset of visual content of Instagram images and associated hashtags was automatically retrieved via Instaloader – a digital tool for automatic data extraction from Instagram – considering the time span from 2019 to 2024, totaling 363 posts.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used with a threefold aim: (1) identify and (2) examine the content of the website, (3) investigate the language employed to disclose information on sustainable practices, both on the website and on Instagram images.

3.1.1 Web textual data

The analysis of the textual corpus followed three main steps, i.e., the identification of Multiword Expressions, content analysis and categorization based on semantic fields, and discourse analysis. The initial step involved the extraction of multiword expressions in order to determine phrases that carry specific meanings in relation to the ecological discourse. Through the software *Sketch Engine*, multiword expressions relevant to sustainability, fashion, and local agriculture within the corpus were identified, using the English Web Corpus (EnTenTen21 corpus) as a reference corpus. In the second step, content analysis was applied to categorize the expressions into semantic fields to identify the most prominent and prioritized themes, and understand how discourse use aligns with the sustainable values of the companies. The semantic categorization focused on the identification of thematic areas such as sustainability, local biodiversity, and circular fashion practices. In the final step, discourse analysis was carried out to explore the sustainable perspectives embedded in the language of both *Il Nido di Seta* and Gucci. Through discourse analysis, the study aimed to uncover the portrayal of ecological and sustainable issues, and to examine how these portrayals align with their online communicative strategies.

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2   Kering is a French-based multinational corporation specializing in luxury goods. It owns several brands including Gucci, Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Yves Saint Laurent.

3.1.2 Instagram posts

As for the Instagram posts, the main themes in the visual content shared by *Il Nido di Seta* were ascertained in a multimodal way, and the type of frames these posts give access to were analyzed. In addition, the post-related hashtags were examined according to their multi-functional linguistic features in online discourse. In this thematic analysis, content was categorized according to predominant topics which are representative of the cooperative's communication priorities and messaging strategy, and their commitment to sustainable principles.

Following the theme identification, framing analysis was conducted to understand how these themes are presented and framed to the audience. Frames are interpretive structures that influence how people decode, emotionally connect with, or interpret a message. This step aimed at determining the narrative used in posts and uncover the cooperative's communicative intent. Moreover, this part of the study helped to identify to what extent *Il Nido di Seta*'s Instagram presence aligns with broader discourses on sustainability and ecological engagement.

For these purposes, a threefold framing investigation was conducted. First, posts were analyzed following the Construal Level Theory (CLT) (Grazzini et al., 2018; White et al., 2011). CLT explains how psychological distance affects individuals' mental representations of events or objects. When applied to sustainable fashion, positive, concretely framed messages resonate with consumers, making the message more accessible and actionable. By focusing on tangible, immediate benefits, such as local economic support or environmental impact, fashion brands can make sustainability feel relevant to the consumer's daily life. This approach can enhance consumer engagement, as messages framed at a "concrete level" are perceived as more personally relevant to consumers. Second, Perceived Self-Efficacy was investigated. Self-efficacy refers to people's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1993; Bandura & Wessels, 1997). By framing sustainable fashion choices as personally empowering, companies can promote a sense of agency among consumers. Encouraging individuals to take on sustainable fashion as a personal challenge can elicit emotional responses such as pride and commitment. This approach can lead to goal-oriented behaviors, as consumers project ambitions aligned with sustainability. Furthermore, when consumers perceive sustainable choices as doable and meaningful, they are more likely to see opportunities for contributing to broader environmental goals. Third, based on Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, which attributes frames the power to shape attitudes and guide public opinion on several issues, the study sought to determine which aspects the cooperative selects and highlights to influence their followers' perception and interpretation of posts. Entman's theory outlines four main functions of framing, namely *problem definition*, *causal attribution*, suggesting what or who is responsible for a given issue, *moral evaluation*, providing moral judgments, and *treatment recommendation*, suggesting solutions or actions to address the problem.

Finally, considering hashtags as both thematic markers and social media tools to increase the loudness of a discourse related to a specific topic, making it viral and searchable, the third step was based on their use in *Il Nido di Seta*'s posts. Instaloader was used to automatically collect hashtags

accompanying the posts, which were then analyzed with *Sketch Engine* for frequency. Indeed, hashtags can be considered as keywords which allow users to follow a specific topic or might be used as search terms contributing to the creation of a virtual community which shares a particular interest (Zappavigna, 2011). This analysis examined how hashtags contribute to the overall communication strategy and how effectively the cooperative promotes posts to relevant audiences and increases their digital presence and outreach within ecologically oriented social networks.

4. Results and discussion

The following sections explore the textual analysis of the website corpus, and examine *Il Nido di Seta's* Instagram posts and associated hashtags. Specifically, the website analysis delves into the discourse and terminology used to describe their manufacturing processes, sustainable methods, and the cultural significance of their territory. Similarly, Instagram's analysis focuses on visual elements and the strategic use of hashtags to strengthen these aspects and increase online engagement.

4.1 Website data

Il Nido di Seta's website reflects a strong commitment to sustainable and artisanal silk production, highlighting the company's connection to the local area and establishing it as a hub for eco-friendly textile production and cultural preservation. The site showcases unique and ethically made products, along with an educational section dedicated to eco-tourism services and workshops.

4.1.1 Keywords analysis

As mentioned above, the first step of the website textual analysis was related to the identification of multiword expressions. As shown in Table 1, the list of multi-keywords primarily relates to sustainable silk production, based on their "keyness score". This score measures the most frequent and salient keywords within a specific corpus (Baker, 2006).

Table 1. First 20 keywords

	Item	Keyness score		Item	Keyness score
1	silkworm breeding	4946,86	**11**	bracelet of silk	886,269
2	degummed silk	3010,915	**12**	manual spinning of the moth	886,269
3	ancient traditional loom	3010,915	**13**	moth broken cocoon	886,269
4	hot-foil stamp	2479,754	**14**	non-violent silk	886,269
5	san floro	1948,592	**15**	pomegranate skin	884,832
6	natural dye	1704,025	**16**	mulberry fruit	878,523

	Item	Keyness score			Item	Keyness score
7	nido di seta	1417,431	**17**		pure silk	850,66
8	dyer's chamomile	1063,323	**18**		raw silk	833,628
9	peace silk	1059,812	**19**		silk thread	788,72
10	silk rope	1051,896	**20**		organic silkworm	709,215

Most of the terminology appears to be related to (1) the manufacturing process – *ancient traditional loom degummed silk*, and *manual spinning of the moth*, and (2) types of silk – *peace silk*. Hence, the former expressions show a strong focus on traditional and sustainable production processes, along with other items, namely *natural dye*, *dyer's chamomile*, and *pomegranate skin*, which confirm the cooperative's commitment to natural, chemical-free processes. As for the latter, the occurrence of expressions such as *peace silk*, *non-violent silk*, and *organic silkworm*, suggest how products are made of naturally and ethically sourced materials. On the other hand, specific expressions refer to the range of products – *bracelet of silk*, *pure silk*, *raw silk*, and *silk thread* – potentially appealing to different market segments interested in sustainable fashion or handmade goods. In addition, the reference to *San Floro*, where *Il Nido di Seta* is located, indicates a strong bond with the place.

4.1.2 Content analysis (semantic fields)

In exploring *Il Nido di Seta*'s texts on the website, 5 core categories were identified throughout the range of offerings – *manufacturing process*, *types of silk and related products*, *territory (nature and/or culture)*, *food*, *tourism services*. As a result, by combining traditional techniques with contemporary values, the company emphasizes sustainability and local heritage, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Content analysis categories

Category	Examples
Manufacturing process	sustainable silkworm breeding, degummed silk, ancient traditional loom, ecoprinting technique
Types of silk and related products	pure non-violent silk, bracelet of silk, peace silk, Gucci's collection
Territory (nature and/or culture)	san floro, capital of silk, textile archaeology, mulberry fruit
Food	extra confiture, extra jam, consumer taste, healthy ingredient
Tourism services	tourist service, educational farm

Specifically, at the heart of *Il Nido di Seta*'s *manufacturing process* is a dedication to environmentally friendly methods and the preservation of ancient crafts. By using sustainable silkworm breeding practices, the cooperative ensures that its production respects both nature and the animal life involved. Their use of degummed silk reflects a refined technique that enhances the fabric's quality and, along with the use of traditional looms, preserves historical methods and promotes artisanal craftsmanship. Additionally, *Il Nido di Seta* uses eco-printing techniques, a dyeing method based on natural pigments with minimal environmental impact.

The company offers a wide range of *silk products* that cater to an audience looking for ethical and luxurious items. Indeed, the cooperative's "peace silk", a pure, non-violent silk, is produced without harming the silkworms. Furthermore, *Il Nido di Seta*'s partnership with Gucci's sustainable collection reinforces the potential of traditional craftsmanship to find a place in luxury goods.

In their texts, the cooperative emphasizes the *cultural and natural landscape* of San Floro, in the province of Catanzaro known as the "capital of silk". The cooperative also relies on the local mulberry trees, both an essential part of silkworm feeding and a symbol of the area's natural wealth. As a result, the blend of history, nature, and culture is central to *Il Nido di Seta*'s identity and mission, reviving the past into the present through its commitment to the land. Moreover, the cooperative includes its sustainable practices to *food* products, namely confitures and jams that prioritize the use of high-quality, natural ingredients. By emphasizing the authenticity and richness of local ingredients, it promotes regional agricultural practices and flavors, aligning with the values of sustainability and community well-being.

Beyond products, *Il Nido di Seta* offers immersive experiences that allow visitors to engage with the region's silk tradition. These may be considered as eco-tourism initiatives that foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of local culture and sustainable practices. Although these categories representing products and service may be overlapping, (1) they confirm the cooperative's commitment to traditions while adapting to contemporary values, (2) demonstrate the integration of tradition, sustainability, and community engagement.
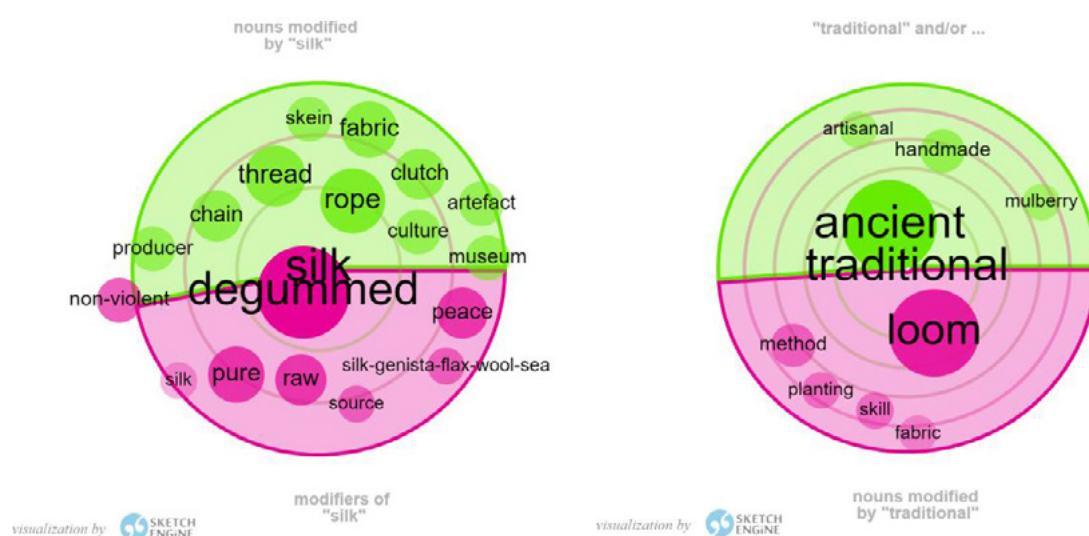

Figure 1. Word Sketch visualization: *silk* and *traditional*

As a matter of fact, the visual representation of two keywords, i.e., the noun *silk* and the adjective *traditional* – which represent the core products and concepts of *Il Nido di Seta* – demonstrate the overlap of the different categories (see Figure 1). Moreover, the modifiers of *silk* put forward the aim of being cruelty free opting for peace and non-violent silk, which refers to silk produced without harming or killing the silkworms. As for *traditional,* its collocates position the cooperative in a slow fashion sector emphasizing old procedures, *artisanal* and *handmade,* which are likely to make this an innovative firm thanks to the rediscovery of ancient methods.

4.1.3 Discourse analysis

In order to carry out a discourse analysis, emphasis was placed on language choices and strategies used to communicate their values. The company tends to use an emotive language referring to ethical issues, while highlighting sustainable practices and referring to artisanal labor (extract 1). These aspects reinforce their eco-conscious approach, emphasizing their products as sustainably crafted rather than mass-produced, thus calling attention to quality and authenticity.

> (1) *Pure Non-Violent* silk skein produced from our *sustainable silkworm breeding,* the thread was obtained through the *manual spinning of the moth broken cocoons*.

The description of their products stresses the connection between raw local material sourcing and finished products, providing transparency (extract 2). Also, references to the production process draw attention to the traditional craftsmanship involved, supporting the uniqueness of products. Moreover, the extract part of Gucci's Report (extract 3) connects the brand to the small cooperative, focusing on how Gucci supports and promotes artisanal and sustainable initiatives.

> (2) *Pure silk clutch* from our *organic silkworm* farm located in San Floro. The yarn has been obtained in an *artisanal way* and woven on *ancient looms*.

> (3) The House supports projects within Italy and around the world, and these raw materials will be included in Gucci's collections. As part of this vision, *Gucci is helping revive Italian farming communities and in Calabria,* for example, the agricultural cooperative *Nido di Seta* is developing a new local regenerative silk farming supply chain.

The reference to Catanzaro as the "capital of silk" (extract 4) suggests regional pride and consolidates local identity, while recalling historical traditions.

> (4) The city of Catanzaro was considered the *capital of silk*, and a production circuit had been formed around it, that traced a so called "*Calabrian Silk Route*", a corridor that connected the Tyrrhenian coast to the Ionian coast. Mulberry trees and *raw silk* were produced (by peasant families) in the surrounding villages, while weaving took place in the artisan workshops of Catanzaro.

As for food, a dedicated section promotes *Il Nido di Seta*'s commitment to local, seasonal produce with descriptions of mulberry fruits and jams (extract 5) that evoke tradition and environmentally-friendly products, supporting the Slow Food movements.

> (5) These plants not only provide an abundant amount of leaves (remember that the leaves are the only food for the silkworm), but also give us "*mulberry fruits*", a particular berry that ripens between the end of May and early June each year, which can be tasted either fresh or in the form of delicious jams or marmalades.

In the description of tourism services (extract 6), the language refers to sensory perceptions encouraging visitors to take part in a stimulating authentic experience rooted in Calabrian culture. Similarly, the references to "Silk Journey" and "educational farm" underpin the cooperative's commitment to community and education.

> (6) *EDUCATIONAL FARM* After the success of last year's "*Silk Journey* 2018", which had the presence of about 7,000 visitors to San Floro (CZ), the educational project is back this year with many new features and *eco-experience* more desired by *schools* in Calabria and beyond.

Overall, the company portrays itself as a sustainable and culturally rich destination. The discourse used blends the core concepts that build its identity and credibility, combining ethical, sustainable, and cultural themes. In addition, *Il Nido di Seta*'s association with a luxury brand like Gucci contributes to a broader discourse about luxury and sustainability, suggesting that traditional, artisanal products can coexist with high fashion. As a result, these products appeal to consumers interested in high-quality, ethically produced goods linked to specific cultural and historical roots.

4.2 Instagram

Supported by Instaloader for data collection, 258 images and 105 videos were extracted for a total of 363. Most posts were published in 2020 (n=76), in 2021 (n=130), and in 2023 (n=71), as can be seen in Figure 2. The erratic trend may be due in part to an increased promotional online activity during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.
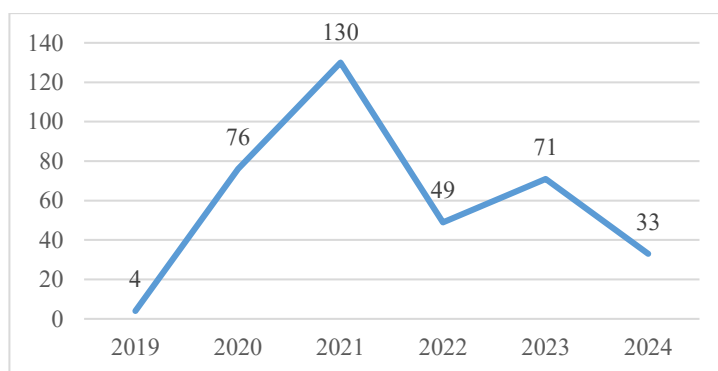
Figure 2. Timeline Instagram posts

4.2.1 Themes

The thematic analysis was based on a set of 11 categories defined *a priori*, including fashion, nature, tourism, silkworm, food, production, courses, workers, territory, school, and other. The examination was performed twice in order to identify a main theme and a secondary theme.

Table 3. 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ themes

1ˢᵗ theme		2ⁿᵈ theme	
Fashion	99	Nature	162
Other	57	Other	81
Nature	54	Territory	40
Tourism	39	Production	31
Silkworm	30	Fashion	25
Food	25	Tourism	9
Production	22	Food	5
Courses	11	Silkworm	5
Workers	11	Workers	4
Territory	9	School	1
School	6		

As shown in Table 3, most of the posts were categorized under the theme of fashion (27%). These posts mainly focus on *Il Nido di Seta*'s sustainable and ethical fashion products, highlighting their design, products, and the natural materials employed, in particular the silk produced

locally. This theme shows the cooperative's commitment to sustainable and artisanal fashion, engaging with followers interested in eco-friendly fashion choices. The second most frequent theme is nature (15%), emphasizing their close connection to the natural environment. These posts include landscapes and images of the silk-producing mulberry trees, reflecting the co-operative's dedication to the environment to the local area. Tourism-related posts accounted for 11% of the content, placing *Il Nido di Seta* as a suitable destination for eco-tourism. These posts likely showcase guided tours, workshops, and cultural experiences, inviting followers to visit the cooperative and engage in hands-on learning about sustainable practices in a picturesque setting. The silkworm is also a focal point, making up 8% of the posts. These images and stories cast the silkworm as the "protagonist" of the silk production process, educating followers on the life cycle of the silkworm and its essential role in creating the cooperative's silk products. This theme serves to enhance appreciation for the natural processes behind sustainable fashion. Posts related to food make up 7% of the total content, possibly reflecting the cooperative's commitment to circular economy, transforming possible waste into food products such as marmalades made of mulberry fruits. Production-focused posts, comprising 6% of the content, showcase the different stages of the silk-making process, from harvesting mulberry leaves to weaving the silk. Through this theme, they emphasize transparency in production and allow followers to gain a deeper understanding of the labor and skill involved in creating their products. Educational courses are highlighted in 3% of posts, marking the dedication of the cooperative towards education and enhancement of skills. These posts advertise workshops on topics such as sustainable agriculture, natural dyeing, and silk weaving, aimed at fostering eco-conscious practices in the community. The theme of workers is also represented in 3% of the posts, drawing attention to the individuals involved in the cooperative. These images reinforce the ethical principle with regards to fair labor practices. Posts focusing on the territory and school themes each accounted for 2% of the content. The "territory" theme includes aspects of the region, its cultural heritage, and natural landscapes, positioning *Il Nido di Seta* within a specific geographical and cultural context. The "school" theme provides information on educational collaborations with local schools, supporting environmental education, including a focus on sustainable development, to the younger generations. In addition, 57 posts (16%) were labeled with the theme "other," covering a different range of content not included under the main categories. These posts include media references such as newspaper articles and TV programs concerning *Il Nido di Seta*, as well as events and conferences in which the cooperative participated. These posts help to build credibility and brand visibility by showing the cooperative's influence and engagement in broader discussions on sustainability.

Many images on the cooperative's Instagram account often feature more than one theme, with nature being the most frequent secondary theme. This emphasis on nature stresses the company's dedication to environmental consciousness and the significance of natural processes in silk production. By doing so, the cooperative strengthens the idea that its products are deeply rooted in, and respectful of, the local environment. In addition to categorizing posts by

theme, each one was also classified in terms of the type of sustainability focus it represented, differentiating the economic, environmental and social sustainability themes. Not surprisingly, economic sustainability is the most relevant type, reflecting the fact that social media platforms are primarily used by businesses to promote and sell products. Posts in this category often emphasize the value of sustainable products attracting consumers interested in purchasing high-quality, eco-friendly goods. Although economic sustainability is more frequent, environmental sustainability is also an important topic appearing in posts promoting eco-friendly production processes, highlighting the cooperative's commitment to low-impact manufacturing. Social sustainability is also present in the images, although to a lower extent. Common topics in these posts include fair labor practices, community involvement, and the cooperative's role in revitalizing local culture and skills. In featuring the actual workers behind its products, *Il Nido di Seta* communicates the ethical aspect of its values and also emphasizes the social benefits that support for local community-based businesses can have.

Table 4. Fashion posts

Fashion	86
Economic sustainability	84
Nature	58
Fashion	14
Production	5
Other	3
Territory	2
Food	1
Tourism	1
Environmental sustainability	1
Territory	1
Social sustainability	1
Production	1

Table 4 highlights the sustainability-oriented focus within 86 fashion-related Instagram images. The breakdown shows the prevailing emphasis on economic sustainability within these posts, with a smaller number addressing environmental and social sustainability. Economic sustainability is represented in 84 fashion-related posts, suggesting that the promotion and advertisement of products are key to the brand's communication strategy. Nature is the most frequent secondary theme (58 times) associated within economic sustainability, indicating a strong link between fashion products and natural elements. Fashion itself appears as a dominant subtheme (14 times), reflecting the direct promotional content related to the brand's products. Posts related to production highlight the manufacturing process (5 times). Other (3 times) includes different topics such as events related to the cooperative. Territory (2 times), Food (1 time), Tourism (1 time) relate to *Il Nido di Seta*'s regional identity, local food, and tourism, which could enhance the product's appeal by highlighting local culture and heritage. As for environmental sustainability,

only one post links fashion to environmental sustainability through territorial themes. Finally, social sustainability is minimally represented, with only one post related to production. These findings suggest a product-focused strategy with some integration of sustainability narratives, thus confirming the main use of social media platforms for business purposes.

4.2.2 Frames

Generally speaking, based on the Construal Level Theory, the messages were framed positively and presented at a concrete level, in such way they tend to be more effective in influencing behaviors. In fact, by framing economic or environmental messages in a positive way and focusing on immediate, tangible actions and products, people are more likely to be motivated to act and buy. Focusing on the frames identified in posts labeled within the field of economic sustainability (n=84), 75% of them revolve around the concept of self-efficacy, whereas 8% were labelled with "together", and 22% with "your contribution". In fact, the cooperative seems to promote their products leveraging their self-identity and efficacy. According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, through personal challenges that evoke emotional responses greater motivation can be achieved. For instance, the posts tend to tell what they do, how and why they do it, serving as an example of best practices. Messages labeled with "together" refer to asking their followers for collaborative efforts in their activities, although it is not the dominant factor. The label "your contribution" means that personal or collective contributions are needed to reach their objectives and involve their followers.

According to Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, within the context of sustainable fashion, the identified frames included moral evaluations and solutions. Problem definitions and causes were not detected. As a matter of fact, moral evaluations are referred to as likely indicative of how far fashion can reflect personal and social values, thus motivating consumers to choose products that can be aligned with their ethical beliefs. Indeed, supporting local fashion may benefit the local economy, community, and environment. As for the solutions, through the promotion of slow fashion, the cooperative can encourage sustainability as a means of personal expression and authenticity, interfering with the mass-production narrative. Local production is framed as environmentally beneficial which also contributes to the strengthening of local connections, enabling consumers to practice their values through conscious purchasing choices that support their community. Moreover, it can be said *Il Nido di Seta* uses its own identity to mirror consumers' identity to foster sustainable behaviors.

4.2.3 Hashtags

As for hashtags associated with the Instagram images, the ranking of the most used hashtags confirms that this cooperative uses Instagram to promote their visibility, the territory, and their products and how these are made. Indeed, the cooperative tends to emphasize their brand identity and the territory, highlighting #nidodiseta (186) linked to #Calabria (112) and the specific locality of #sanfloro (111), thus placing the brand as a locally-rooted, community-focused

cooperative. This regional emphasis likely appeals to audiences interested in supporting small, locally-based businesses with an emphasis on cultural and regional authenticity. In addition, hashtags such as #silk (71), #puresilk (32), and #peacesilk (18) emphasize the primary material used and the ethical aspects of its production highlighting both quality and standards of the silk products. Moreover, other tags, namely #naturaldyes (41), #bio (23), #organic (21), #handwoven (21), and #handmade (19), reflect their sustainable and artisanal practices. The use of these hashtags suggests that the company targets environmentally conscious consumers, supporters of local artisanship, and people who prioritize sustainability in fashion.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that the cooperative addresses different aspects of sustainable fashion in its discourse. Through the website, the company emphasizes the importance of sustainable practices in the manufacturing process of fashion items. In fact, although silk breeding and production are often criticized for their energy and water intensity, mulberry trees offer significant benefits for hydrogeological stability, which is particularly advantageous for regions like Calabria that are prone to such challenges. Additionally, the use of natural dyes minimizes groundwater pollution. Moreover, *Il Nido di Seta* provides transparency about the supply chain and highlights steps taken to reduce waste, conserve resources, and ensure the sustainability of each item.

The cooperative draws attention to conscious fashion by raising awareness and consideration of the broader impacts of fashion on society and on the environment. This concept is applied to specific sectors like tourism and schools. In fact, they promote local products and eco-friendly traveling experiences, while with schools, their aim is to educate students about sustainable practices related to silk breeding, nature and fashion and the land. As for slow fashion, they offer detailed descriptions of their products in a way that is mindful of quality and sustainability, without causing harm to the silkworms, reassuring ethical standards such as the use of peace silk. This aspect is also highlighted in their posts on Instagram.

Compared to the website, it appears that the content on their social media platforms is more strategically designed to engage a broader audience, encourage the adoption of more sustainable fashion practices, and promote the sale of their products. Through captions, hashtags, and visuals, the cooperative promotes an eco-conscious mindset, encouraging followers to be mindful of the planet in their fashion choices, and to choose quality over quantity. Posts often display images of the people who work for the company, thus using Instagram's function of connecting people on a personal level, showing the faces behind the products and sharing stories of the people involved in production. The cooperative highlights its commitment to reducing environmental impact, showcasing eco-friendly materials, low-waste packaging, and conservation efforts.

Thus, the cooperative's discourse practices do not simply communicate sustainable actions but actively play a role in promoting sustainability, shaping public understanding, and encouraging

the adoption of sustainable practices within its business model. The strategic use of discourse across both their website and social media platforms demonstrates how communication is an integral component of their overall sustainable operations.

6. Limitations and further studies

For the purposes of this study, Instagram's Italian-language textual content was excluded in order to maintain consistency in the analysis; however, a comprehensive multilingual approach would be essential for a more thorough examination of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural engagement patterns. Furthermore, the study could be expanded to include consumer perceptions and behavioral responses in order to provide a more robust understanding of the cooperative's impact.

Moreover, based on the partnership of *Il Nido di Seta* with the luxury brand Gucci, an important question arises: who currently benefits more from this collaboration – the famous brand with global visibility, or the smaller, locally rooted cooperative? On the one hand, Gucci's endorsement of *Il Nido di Seta* could enhance the company's profile and provide a much wider audience. On the other hand, Gucci might gain positive recognition from this commitment to sustainable and community-focused initiatives, reinforcing its brand image as a socially responsible, environmentally conscious luxury company. Future research could explore this dynamic, analyze the impact of such collaborations, and provide fruitful insights into how large and small companies can achieve a mutually advantageous relationship.

Finally, a contrastive analysis with similar businesses in the fashion industry, especially those with comparable target markets or brand values, would help establish a broader set of best practices which could potentially also serve as a catalyst for sustainable approaches in the wider fashion market. This could be particularly valuable for small and emerging fashion brands looking to improve their digital presence and engagement strategies based on successful case studies.

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Authors' contributions

Although the authors have collaborated in the research work and in writing the paper, they have individually devoted specific attention to the following sections: Jean M. Jimenez: 1. Introduction; 2. Background to the study, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3; 3.1, 3.1.1; 4 Results and discussion, 4.1, Website data, 4.1.1, 4.1.3; 5. Conclusions. Vanessa Marcella: 3. The study, 3.1.2; 4.1.2, 4.2 Instagram, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3; 5. Conclusions; 6. Limitations and further studies.

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