

Communicating Social Equity and Environmental Protection on the Corporate Websites of *Gap Inc.* and *House of Hermès*

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Abstract

This paper looks into the impact that business model, history and corporate culture might have on sustainability communication (Dunphy et al. 2000) and transparency (Wehmeier 2018; Rawlins 2009; Graafland and Nihof 2007; Graafland et al. 2004) in the fashion industry (Koskela and Crawford Camiciottoli 2020). The aim of this study is to identify (dis)similarities in selecting, presenting and communicating online contents about corporate sustainability on Gap Inc.'s international corporate website and House of Hermès, or Hermès International A.S.'s e-commerce and corporate website. In their sectors and segments (middle-mass/trendy vs. old luxury-super-premium/classic) Gap Inc. and Hermès are among the relatively high scoring companies on the Fashion Transparency Index 2020 (FTI 2020); the former is based in the USA, the latter in France. Whereas the analysis is embedded in the context of current discussion on organizational and communication transparency in business settings, we set the groundwork for a unified account of transparency in corporate website communication. Accordingly, we bring together insights from discourse studies, the tools of corpus linguistics for the digital written text around *sustainability* and related words in the domains of *social equity* and *environmental protection* on the one hand, and insights from research in webpage usability (Nielsen-Norman group) and multimodal studies (Bateman 2014) for content- and interface-design features, layout and text-image meaning co-construction on the other.

1. Introduction

The present paper contributes to the growing literature on the transparent communication of corporate sustainability in separate sectors and segments of the fashion industry. Corporate sustainability, broadly defined as the capacity for environmental and socio-economic long-term quality of life improvements (WCED 1987), has become a business imperative. The development of a comprehensive sustainability strategy is of paramount importance for doing good business (Dunphy and Benveniste 2000, 8-10). But the ability to communicate said strategy effectively, and thus implement communicative and organizational transparency (Rawlins 2009), is equally

important. In particular, our focus is on the discourse-linguistic dimension of transparency, which in turn contributes to *organizational transparency* (Koskela and Crawford Camiciottoli 2020), i.e. to openly transfer knowledge about the organization's operations. Considering that transparency can generate good value to organizations (Wehmeier 2018) in terms of trust generation and trust reinforcement (Röttger 2018; Graafland and Nihof 2007; Graafland et al. 2004), we carry out an exploratory study into transparent communication of sustainability-related content on Gap Inc.'s international corporate websites and Hermès International A.S.'s e-commerce and corporate website, House of Hermès. In their sectors and segments (middle-mass/trendy vs. old luxury and super-premium/classic), they are among the highest scoring corporate websites on the Fashion Transparency Index 2020 (FTI 2020).

While research on sustainability content on the corporate websites of fashion brands has been conducted from a business and marketing perspective (see, e.g., Jestratijevic, Uanhoro and Creighton 2022; Jestratijevic, Rudd and Uanhoro 2020), the linguistic and (hyper-) multimodal dimensions have yet to be explored. We therefore argue for an integrated framework of analysis that can account for the double focus on both sustainability-related vocabulary in the digital written text and the strategies that work towards the transparent presentation of visual and written content in hyper-multimodal environments. Section 2 introduces the words and designated concepts concerning environmental protection, social equity and economic viability. Section 3 proposes a consideration of transparency in hyper-multimodal ICT environments (Bondi and Cacchiani 2021; Maier and Engberg 2021), through the lens of usability research and multimodal discourse studies. Section 4 then addresses corpus selection and methods of analysis. In Section 5, we take the first steps towards comparing Gap Inc. and House of Hermès's sustainability-related pages in terms of aboutness and content, content design, layout arrangements and website structure. Section 6 provides some concluding remarks.

2. Sustainability in the fashion industry

2.1 Sustainability-related lexis and concepts

Corporate sustainability, broadly defined as the capacity for environmental and socio-economic long-term quality of life improvement (WCED 1987), has become a business imperative (Dunphy et al. 2000). Roughly, sustainability can be decomposed into *ecological* – which refers to “redesign[ing] organizations to contribute to sustainable development and renewal of the biosphere” – and *human* – “referring to building human capacity and skills for sustainable high-level organizational performance and for community and societal well-being” (Dunphy and Benveniste 2000, 6). Together, these dimensions encompass the main tenets of sustainability and its economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Sustainability practices are implemented through the so-called ESG pillars (Environmental, Social Responsibility, and Governance practices). This involves, among others, efforts towards reducing the environmental footprint of an organization, or accomplishing other objectives that can benefit society, as well as Social Responsibility Investing (SRI) on the investors' end. The three pillars are also informally known as People, Planet, Purpose and Profits. People regards the impact of operations and products on employees, customers, and the community; Planet involves safeguarding the environment; Purpose calls for motivating mission and implementing operations toward sustainability; Profits must be pursued within an integrated Compliance, Risk management and Governance (CRG) system.

Generally, the *environmental (protection)* domain ties to discourse about reducing carbon footprints, (packaging) waste (e.g., zero-waste initiatives, sourcing from recycled and reused materials), water usage, other damage to the environment, while improving fuel efficiency (e.g., by sourcing locally). For the *social (equity)* domain, we expect reference to what we might call the Social License ICM (Lakoff 1987, 68-114: Idealized Cognitive Model), or those practices that organizations implement to seek and secure approval and support from employees, stakeholders, the territory, and local and global communities at large. Locally, this incorporates work towards treating employees fairly, giving back to the local community via sponsorships, scholarships, investments in local public projects. On a global social scale, objectives comprise promoting fair work practices and supply chain sustainability and profitability in sourcing and procurement, manufacturing, logistics and distribution. As regards the *economic (viability)* domain, being profitable should pair with implementing governance practices that align the interests of boards of directors and management with those of shareholders, community, value chains and customers.

We are interested in words whose meanings are paradigmatically related (Murphy 2003) or can be associated based on external relations within Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) (Lakoff 1987) that can be identified in relation to corporate sustainability practices, and the social and environmental pillars in particular.¹

2.2 The Fashion Transparency Index

Related to the Environmental, Social Responsibility, and Governance pillars (Section 2.1), the Fashion Transparency Index (FTI) provides a yearly review of the world's 250 largest fashion brands and retailers ranked according to the level of public disclosure on human rights and environmental policies, practices and impacts. The Index, published by non-profit Fashion

¹ Paradigmatic relations cover hyperonymy and (co-)hyponymy, synonymy and antonymy. Examples of external relations in the ICM are, among others, action types (e.g., purposive 'is used for') and process types (e.g., originary 'originates/is converted into').

Revolution, is “a tool to push and incentivise the world’s largest fashion brands to be more transparent about their social and environmental efforts.” It assesses 250 indicators in 5 key areas: 1. Policies and commitments; 2. Governance; 3. Supply chain traceability; 4. Know, show and fix; 5. Spotlight issues, which may vary over subsequent editions.² From the point of view of the fashion organization, ranking high on the FTI can help build a better company image, enhance reputation and develop trust and loyalty with customers.³

The companies under scrutiny in the present paper are Gap Inc. and House of Hermès, which operate in distinct sectors and segments of the fashion industry. Gap Inc. was founded in 1969 in California, USA, with the intention of making it easier for non-standard heights and sizes to fit in their jeans. Over 50 years since, it has grown into an international company and a family of four brands (Old Navy, GAP, Banana Republic, Athleta),⁴ which provide fast fashion on the trendy side of the middle-mass market. On the other hand, Hermès is a French luxury design house. Established in 1837 as a harness shop, it has cultivated a reputation for specializing in lifestyle accessories and ready-to-wear, home, outdoor and equestrian accessories, jewelry, watches and fragrances;⁵ it is a traditional old-luxury and super-premium brand (Silverstein and Fiske 2003) that falls into the classic category, with statement designs and staple items.

In their sectors and segments, Gap Inc. and Hermès are among the relatively high scoring companies on the transparency-pct measure of the Fashion Transparency Index 2020 (FTI 2020). The overall score (50 and 30 percent of 250 final points, respectively) is calculated based on the disclosure outlets that are accessible through the corporate website (corporate website pages, corporate social media pages, publications such as Corporate Social Reports pdfs and e-reads). According to Jestratičević, Rudd and Uanhoro (2020) and Jestratičević, Uanhoro and Creighton (2022), the results appear to reflect the general tendency for the luxury sector to lag behind brands in the mass market.

3. Transparency

Effective corporate communication (*communicative transparency*) appears to be a necessary tool for building organizational transparency (i.e. transferring knowledge about the organization’s operations) and, for that matter, organizational reputation and trustworthiness (Koskela and Crawford Camiciottoli 2020). Transparency, then, involves strategically using text and images

² For example, spotlight issues selected for analysis in FTI (2020, 4) comprised comprised working conditions, consumption, product/material composition and climate.

³ Importantly, transparent disclosure of information is not to be confused with sustainability. Yet, transparency is needed to achieve a sustainable, accountable, and fair fashion industry where anyone can scrutinize brands’ policies and hold them accountable for their claims. (<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/transparency-index-2021/>.)

⁴ <https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/about/history>. All websites were last visited on 01/10/2023.

⁵ <https://www.hermes.com/us/en/content/271292-contemporary-artisans-since-1837/>.

(Hopp and Fisher 2021; Albu and Wehmeier 2014) to create effective and trustworthy communication while fostering ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders and the public. The practice is seen as generating good value for corporations (Wehmeier 2018) in that it demonstrates the organization's commitment to honesty, social responsibility, and sustainable and ethical business operations (Ball 2009), while also serving as a marketing strategy to differentiate the organization from its competitors (Koskela 2018).

For the purpose of this paper, we view *transparency* as the perceived quality of the information intentionally shared from a sender to their recipient. The construct is evaluated along the dimensions of *disclosure* (or availability of relevant information), *clarity* (i.e. comprehensibility, also covering linguistic and semantic coherence), and *accuracy* (or the perception that the information is the most precise as necessary considering the relationship between sender and receiver) (Schnackenberg et al. 2021).

From a discourse-linguistic perspective, an important question is how to operationalise and measure these constructs with reference to online communication on corporate websites. Whereas we cannot even hope to flesh out all relevant aspects and indicators, we will call attention to the need for (hyper-)multimodal analysis (Bondi and Cacchiani 2021; Maier and Engberg 2021), integrating notions that we adapt from usability research and multimodal discourse studies.

3.1 Usability research

We borrow from usability research (Nielsen-Norman Group – NN/g) the notion of websites that deliver good value to both end users and principal organization in *mature information formats* (Farrell 2014). They adopt easy (*usable*) user interfaces to effectively transmit accessible *utility content*. That is, they mediate knowledge that is *useful* as it meets the information needs of stakeholders and the public at large, and is adequate to their varied background and search skills.

Over the years, NN/g has identified a set of actions that are essential to develop positive user experiences on corporate websites (e.g., Loranger 2015; Nielsen 2015), but are also understood to make up better website experiences in general (Nielsen 1995). We see the following actions and dimensions as working towards communicative transparency.

A first dimension concerns *plain language*, in relation to writing digital content for clarity, brevity and scannability. Generally, *clear communication* and plain language in online copy benefit organizations and users, including international audiences. They are for everyone, even domain experts and highly educated online readers – who want clear, concise information devoid of unnecessary jargon or complex terms. Long sentences and big words in online copy result in

great sacrifices to readability and credibility, and do not make the principal organization sound smarter (Loranger 2017).

Since online users only read about 20% of the words on a page, writing digital content for brevity is critical for online copy. Pertinent useful heuristics comprise using short sentences and paragraphs, removing dependent clauses, doing away with unnecessary words (redundancies, idioms, optional modifiers, generalities), discarding cleft sentences and passive voice (Dykes 2023; Loranger 2017). Moreover, each paragraph should communicate one idea (Moran 2016), and contain up to two sentences, with no more than 15-20 words each. In terms of *readability* – which measures the complexity of the words and sentence structure in a piece of content – writing at the 6-8th grade reading level is recommended for general audiences, while pages for an educated audience, domain experts, professionals and B2B transactions should aim at the 10-12th grade reading level (Nielsen 2015).

Another way to achieve readability of online copy is to adhere to well-established web structuring strategies and formatting techniques that layer content, disclose information progressively and attract attention to the most important elements (Huei-Hsin and Chan 2023; Loranger 2017). To that end, information should be structured hierarchically in relatively flat and wide hierarchies (e.g., organized on three layers), with items that do not overlap conceptually within each (sub-)category, and which provide access to sitemaps that can guide navigation (Whintenton 2013). Useful techniques here are itemized lists of hyperlinks, FAQs and jump links that separate questions and answers (Farrell 2015), as well as in-page links that offer direct access to specific sections (Huei-Hsin and Chan 2023, with attention to long-form text).

Usability can also benefit from improved in-page *scannability*. For instance, an inverted pyramid style allows writers to start content with the most important piece of information, and readers can get the main point, regardless of how much they read. This boosts comprehension and decreases interaction costs (Shade 2018). Using formatting techniques in a systematically consistent combination of functions and content levels is also recommended for comprehension and content accessibility: these include bolding and highlighting, applying color and high contrast, white space and indentation, and variation in typeface and size, or blue for clickable links (Tognazzini 2014).

Another dimension of scannability is to move away from cumbersome linear reading. For example, by chunking content by topic in visual representation tools such as bullets, callouts and tables (Huei-Hsin and Chan 2023; Loranger 2017; Nielsen 1995), by using meaningful (i.e. descriptive and informative, as against clever) headlines and subheadlines, and by offering highlights and summaries that are concise and to the point (Tognazzini 2014). More generally,

related content should come together, within chunks, paragraphs, or bullet and numbered lists, for comprehension (Moran 2016).

3.2 Multimodal discourse studies

We see multimodal discourse studies as a necessary complement to usability approaches for the study of transparency in webpage layouts.⁶ Particularly, we consider webpages and sections/modules in the page as joint compositions of visually instantiated and intentionally co-present texts and images (Barthes 1977).

In Bateman's (2014) Grammar of Visual Design, text and images can be related in different ways. *Close relation* encompasses expansion, exemplification and extension:

- *expansion* from text to image, and from image to text: here, *elaboration* restates explanations in *expositions* where text and image hold the same degree of generality,
- *exemplification*, where either text or image are more general;
- *extension*, which adds intrinsically unrelated information; *enhancement* refers to circumstantial information (e.g., time, place, reason/purpose).

For *little relation* to the text, we can draw a line between decoration and control:

- *decoration* makes the text more attractive but does not produce real effects on the reader's understanding or memory;
- *control* involves schemes that encourage some kind of emotional or non-emotional response from the reader (*engage* and *motivate*, respectively).

Last, *interpret* encompasses relations that take scope *beyond the text*:

- stirring emotions (*emphasize*), or
- providing factual and substantial support (*document*).

4. Corpus data and methodology

4.1 Corpus data

Our sources of evidence are the sustainability-related pages of the international corporate websites of Gap Inc. (TrGAPweb; GAP) and Hermès International S.A.'s House of Hermès (TrHERMESweb; HER).

Regarding website structure and the written digital text, pages from the corporate websites were automatically collected between October 2022 and May 2023 based on parameter definition (sustainability-related content). After extracting webpage URLs and downloading

⁶ For the advantages of adopting a multimodal perspective in the study of fashion discourse, see Creighton (2023).

webpages as HTML files, HTML files were converted to .xml format.⁷ All pages were then scrutinized manually, and discarded if they did not contain sustainability content.^{8,9} For reflection on the (hyper-)multimodal dimension of transparency, remote resources were downloaded from said URLs to get offline copies using Wget.

Though comparable, Gap Inc. and House of Hermès are not analogous regarding size and site structure: TrGAPweb consists of 611 files, 274.431 running tokens and 12.309 types; TrHERMESweb contains 32 files, 23.397 running tokens and 3.995 types. That is, they differ in the number of pages, paths and exact location of pages within the information hierarchy.

4.2 Methodology

The assumption behind this paper is that (dis-)similarities regarding the inclusion of sustainability-related vocabulary in the digital written text reflect varying corporate cultures, histories, and business models. To investigate this point, Gap Inc. and House of Hermès are compared and contrasted in terms of content and aboutness, in connection with type and frequency of vocabulary, and therefore with reference to the entities and concepts that are designated in the semantic field of sustainability (cf. Section 5.1). To that purpose, we use the tools of #LancsBox v. 6.x (Brezina, Weill-Tessier and McEnery 2021) to process and analyze text contents in .xml format. The Words tool allows us to produce and search frequency lists of types and lemmas, and compute frequency and dispersion measures for the top-11 words and bigrams in the wordlists of Gap Inc. and House of Hermès. Additional information comes from the top positive keywords that were extracted using the two corpora, as well as from their collocations and extended concordances. The keywords for each corpus were extracted using the other ones.

Dealing with aboutness and content inclusion naturally raises questions about usability. Using selected corporate pages (e.g., About; About Hermès), in Section 5.2 readability is briefly addressed using WebFX's Readability Test Tool, based on Flesh Kincaid and Gunning Fog text scores.¹⁰ Section 5.3 then turns to discussion of dilution and layering of content in information

⁷ At this stage of corpus creation, .xml content is being semi-annotated for Part-Of-Speech and lemma, and tagged using PyMUSAS (Python Multilingual Ucler Semantic Analysis System: <https://ucler.github.io/pymusas/>).

⁸ The lightweight data-interchange format JSON (JavaScript Object Notation) was used for website structure and website map (<https://www.json.org/json-en.html>).

⁹ TrGAPweb and TrHERweb are part of a larger corpus of content that is currently being finalized at the University of Calabria, Italy. The corpus brings together digital written texts from websites, social media pages and online sustainability reports of companies selected from the Fashion Transparency Index 2020.

¹⁰ WebFX's Readability Test Tool is available on <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>. It provides text scores for the most used readability indicators: Flesh Kincaid Reading Ease and Flesh Kincaid Grade Level; Gunning Fog Score; Coleman-Liau Index; Automated Readability Index; Smog Index.

hierarchies, and, more generally, layout arrangements and the co-construction of meaning in text-images pairs on Gap Inc. and House of Hermès.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Content inclusion and aboutness

As we look at sustainability communication and transparency on the corporate websites of Gap Inc. and The House of Hermès, marked differences come to the fore regarding sustainability-related contents. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the 11 most frequent words and bigrams in the semantic field of *sustainability* for TrGAPweb (GAP), along with a measure of relative frequency (Freq: 01_Freq) and of the coefficient of variation (01_CV). The higher the coefficient, the greater the level of dispersion (Disp) and, accordingly, the wider the degree of spread of a word or bigram. Table 3 provides the same information for TrHERMES (HER). All entries in the tables are further specified for the domains *environmental (protection)* (EP), *social (equity)* (SE), and *economic (viability)* (EV). Tables 2 and 4 identify positive keywords in TrGAPweb and TrHERMESweb – words that appear significantly more often in TrGAPweb compared to TrHERMESweb in Table 2, and words that appear significantly more often in TrHERMESweb compared to TrGAPweb in Table 4. The selected statistical measure is the keyness score: higher-frequency words (more common words) have a higher N value; low-frequency words have a lower N value. In this section, discussion of data from Tables 1 to 4 (*italics in the body of the text*) is further corroborated making reference to KWIC concordances.

Wordlist (GAP)	Freq 01_ Freq	Disp 01_CV	EP	SE	EV	Bigrams (GAP)	Freq: 01_ Freq	Disp: 01_CV	EP	SE	EV
People	891.00	0.989948		√	√	Equal pay	255.00	1.251387		√	√
Equality	868.00	1.160433		√		Empowering women	249.00	1.245190		√	√
Women	850.00	1.235227		√		Enriching communities	238.00	1.267239		√	√
Team	635.00	0.973087			√	Enabling opportunity	238.00	1.302726		√	√
Water	531.00	4.992860	√			Inclusion program	232.00	1.278316		√	√
Communities	528.00	1.189722		√		Opportunity enriching	232.00	1.278316		√	√
Sustainability	400.00	1.157331	√	√	√	Human rights	74.00	6.338044		√	√
Equal	346.00	2.151558		√	√	Renewable energy	38.00	9.732128	√		
Inclusion	339.00	1.325064		√		Water stewardship	26.00	8.747725	√		
Resources	306.00	1.210106	√			Gender equality	24.00	10.184686		√	√
Environmental	290.00	1.182192	√			Climate change	23.00	7.763494	√		

Tab. 1: Top-11 words and bigrams in the semantic field of sustainability – TrGAPweb

Keywords	Freq1 GAP	Disp1 GAP	Freq2 HER	Disp2 HER	Statistic – simple maths	EP	SE	EV
Rotational	482.00	1.258166	0	0	18.563613			√
Equality	868.00	1.160433	4.00	5.567764	12.041935		√	√
Empowering	282.00	1.184908	0	0	11.275807		√	√
Coronavirus	242.00	1.263399	0	0	9.818246			
Women	850.00	1.235227	7.00	2.757949	8.009639	√		
Black	181.00	4.503386	0	0	7.595465		√	
Inclusive	163.00	3.200146	0	0	6.939562		√	√
Community	270.00	2.706115	2.00	5.567764	5.941705		√	
Talent	315.00	1.277139	3.00	3.872993	5.4676...			√
Communities	528.00	1.189722	7.00	2.843805	5.070299		√	
Pride	111.00	5.070700	0	0	5.044733		√	
Council	276.00	1.252795	3.00	5.567764	4.810606		√	
Safe	76.00	5.403400	0	0	3.769366		√	√
Inclusion	339.00	1.325064	0	0	3.131663		√	√
Labor	89.00	5.915797	0	0	4.243074		√	√
Water	531.00	4.992860	20.00	4.483395	2.1312...	√		

Tab. 2: Top positive keywords in EP, SE and EV – TrGAPweb

Broadly, sustainability encompasses the entire supply chain across the company, demanding accountability from the first level, through the suppliers, to the retailers, and benefits to the *community*. As far as Gap Inc. is concerned, the main emphasis lies in communicating content about corporate pledges and actions around the social equity pillar (*people, equality*), in the workplace and in the local *community* and globally (*enriching communities*). Another cultural keyword for GAP is *belonging* (1). The concepts come together as *Equality & Belonging* in the *Values* subdirectory (2).

- (1) ... are committed to enable a culture of **belonging** for our **teams** and our customers. (220eCl-J-p4V1D47_G_lt.xml)

- (2) ***Equality & Belonging***. (pqXNYApd4MYCZ6p_lt.xml)

Gap Inc. is committed to drive a culture of *inclusion*. Consider, in this respect, example (3), from the Equity & Belonging subdirectory, and examples (4) to (7).

- (3) ... its values of **inclusion**, **equality**, and **belonging**. **Inclusivity** ... (Ublh0x8XdPrmmhlU_lt.xml)

- (4) ... Gap's core values of **individuality** and **inclusivity**. (Ztu9PdYJgtcvMACq_lt.xml)

- (5) through our Imagine Mission's three pillars: **inclusivity**, **opportunity** and **sustainability**, ... (lUcHbtesDisLYqpg_lt.xml)

- (6) the brand's ongoing commitment to championing **diversity, inclusivity** and **community**. (mZ-QR8ZoJeEMC8t6_lt.xml)

Inclusion programs involve building *gender equity/equality*, with special attention to women of all minorities (*empowering women*), but also to *pride* categories, and racial equity/equality (see *black* in the keyword list), as well as pay equity/equality (or *equal pay* for *equal* work). This is part of an overall drive towards *Enabling Opportunity* and *Enriching Communities* (subdomain names). The opening statement in the *Inclusivity & Belonging* subdirectory (7) points exactly to that.

- (7) We are **Inclusive**, by Design.

In 1969, **inclusivity** meant not just finding a pair of jeans that fit Don's 6'4 frame, but creating a retail experience for **all**.

It meant **Doris** having the **same equity stake** in the company as her husband, back when most **women** weren't expected in the building, let alone the board room. It meant standing up for **LGBTQ rights** decades before the world woke up to it. Or insisting on **color palettes** that work for the true breadth of **skin tones**, and on **size positivity** that celebrates more **human dimensions**. And ensuring the **people who make our clothes are empowered to raise their voice** and be **included in conversations** about their positions, their conditions, and their careers.

We believe that when you decide that **inclusion** isn't optional, not only do the **gaps between us close**, but a whole new world of **possibilities** opens. This simple idea – that we all deserve to **belong**, and on **our own terms** – is core to who we are as a company and how we make decisions. We began by hoping to **bridge a generation**.

Fast fashion is commonly associated with unskilled *labor*, low wages, gender gaps, low salaries, few safeguards and even fewer opportunities, as well as issues with work protection law. Communicating about sustainable practices and initiatives that make Gap Inc. accountable is critical to generating positive attitudes in stakeholders and customers. Hence the emphasis on *labor* rights, including minimum wage, *safe* and fair working conditions, positive employee experience, *team* work, workforce engagement and *rotational* programs, *talent* and apprenticeships. Or the prompt communication of Covid-19 supply chain updates during the pandemic.

Other initiatives, actions and practices that resonate with stakeholders and customers concern *environmental sustainability* through the entire supply chain, and more particularly

climate, *water* and waste (8), as well as natural resources like *water*, and sources in general, all intended to reduce Gap Inc.'s carbon footprint (9) in the context of *climate change*.

- (8) approach focuses on addressing **climate**, **water**, and **waste** issues where we [Gap] see significant potential to ... (EU-RwbUP0_85_7Rd_lt.xml)
- (9) carbon footprint, use less **water**, create less **waste**, and support efforts to protect biodiversity. (EU-RwbUP0_85_7Rd_lt.xml)

Examples (10) to (13) foreground Gap Inc.'s drive towards *renewable energy*, renewable fibers, organic sources.

- (10) ... are committed to reaching 100 % **renewable energy** across our facilities and distribution centers from our by 2030. (2015 SS25V2x8r8JPLiTr_lt.xml)
- (11) many of its products, using high – quality **renewable** and **recycled fibers** to create performance fabrics (RWviPmqnDVvC6Qyg_lt.xml)
- (12) it will derive 100 % of its **cotton** across all brands from **sustainable sources** by (6SuUiWkj5TwX1wGi_lt.xml)
- (13) also continuously working to source more **sustainable cotton**, including **recycled** and **organic cotton** (A7WXW3m8K-_21Ua2_lt.xml)

Most importantly, however, Gap Inc. goes quite a long way towards arguing for the part they are doing in *resources* management and, particularly, in reducing industrial *water* pollution in the apparel industry – notoriously one of the most intensive users of *water* in the world (examples 14 and 15) – as well as participating in programs that help build *community water* resilience globally, like *Water Stewardship*.

- (14) Our **environmental** targets are focused on building **water resilience**, ... (dpiVuDLK1INrEvU_lt.xml)...
- (15) milestone in our ongoing efforts to end **water** wasting processes and reduce our **environmental** impact ... (0BdhQ7wgTKI5l42t_lt.xml)

Let us now turn to communicating sustainability in TrHERMESweb. Tables 3 and 4 clearly highlight the importance of sustainable development, practices, programs and initiatives that address climate change. Social equity issues share the limelight with environmental protection.

Wordlists (HER)	Freq 01_Freq	Disp 01_Dis	EP	SE	EV	Bigrams (HER)	Freq 01_Freq	Disp 01_CV	EP	SE	EV
Employees	48.00	2.153253		✓	✓	Sustainable development	25.00	1.969796			✓
Sustainable	37.00	1.732623	✓	✓	✓	Animal welfare	20.00	5.567764	✓		
Waste	33.00	4.670757	✓			Human rights	13.00	3.976373		✓	✓
Human	30.00	2.435627		✓	✓	With disabilities	13.00	4.781878		✓	✓
Rights	30.00	2.435627	✓	✓	✓	All artisans	8.00	1.790944		✓	✓
Biodiversity	29.00	4.980751	✓			Social dialogue	7.00	5.567764		✓	✓
Energy	28.00	1.157331	✓			Industrial waste	7.00	6.567764	✓		
Local	24.00	2.578560	✓	✓		Climate change	6.00	4.107282	✓		
People	23.00	2.367752		✓	✓	Greenhouse gas	6.00	3.882133	✓		
Environmental	20.00	1.973550	✓			Fundamental freedoms	6.00	4.201061		✓	✓
Water	20.00	4.483395	✓			Water consumption	6.00	4.201061	✓		

Tab. 3: Most frequent words and bigrams in the semantic field of sustainability – TrHERMESweb

Keywords	Freq1 HER	Disp1 HER	Freq2 GAP	Disp2 GAP	Statistic – simple maths	EP	SE	EV
Biodiversity	29.00	4.727487	6.00	10.694571	10.9916...	✓		
Animal	26.00	7.937254	8.00	21.921457	9.3082...	✓		
Welfare	22.00	7.577007	6.00	24.882973	8.4655...		✓	
Waste	33.00	6.680714	29.00	12.281253	7.3334...	✓		
Craftspeople	15.00	3.215802	0	0	7.3247...		✓	✓
Consumption	17.00	7.937254	10.00	14.831109	6.0214...	✓		
Disabilities	16.00	6.343393	10.00	13.842080	5.7106...		✓	
Craftsmanship	11.00	4.975592	2.00	25.656791	5.2628...		✓	
Artisanal	9.00	3.734286	0	0	4.7947...		✓	✓
Electricity	9.00	5.720849	7.00	18.589740	3.8372...	✓		
Carbon	13.00	5.821677	23.00	12.334591	3.5614...	✓		
Remuneration	6.00	6.531969	0	0	3.529831		✓	✓
Reserves	6.00	4.855796	2.00	31.649335	3.2949...	✓		
Farming	7.00	4.113341	8.00	10.632053	3.0908...	✓		
Emissions	16.00	4.696024	44.00	15.444381	3.0109...	✓		
Disability	8.00	5.567764	16.00	16.599136	2.7916...		✓	✓

Tab. 4: Top positive keywords in EP, SE and EV – TrHERMESweb

Environmental communication covers resources management in relation to *water consumption*, *energy* and *electricity*, *industrial waste*, *carbon emissions* and the effects of *greenhouse gas* (examples 16 to 18).

(16) **Resources management (water, energy, waste)**. In keeping with the spirit of
(8M8Zrju2hVnUhSZe_lt.xml)

(17) **Environmental** matters, in particular **water, energy** and **waste**, are overseen by the
(8M8Zrju2hVnUhSZe_lt.xml)

(18) ... able to develop while maintaining a low and low levels of **water consumption**
(8M8Zrju2hVnUhSZe_lt.xml)

Championing *sustainable development* amounts to working towards safe *farming*, protecting nature and *biodiversity*. Promoting the conservation of species and *animal welfare*, as well as assistance to populations (19) are important considerations for Hermès, and a necessary counterpart to using leather, silk, and other animal products in manufacturing (as opposed to cotton for Gap Inc.).

(19) ... performance and **safety on farms**, promotion of **biodiversity**, conservation of species and **assistance to populations** ... (Cxy81tMnGycU1OT4_lt.xml)

In this regard, it is interesting to note that, for fabrics and raw materials, *cotton* is among the top positive keywords in TrGAPweb (Stat_CV: 5.16800...) as compared to TrHERMESweb; the top negative keywords are *leather* (Stat_CV: 0.0969...) and *silk* (Stat_CV: 0.2313). Moving beyond hypernyms and general categories associated with social equity at work and in *local* communities (*employees, people, human rights, social dialogue, fundamental freedoms*) in TrHERMESweb, there is no reference to inclusion, equality, belonging, or empowerment – which are of particular concern in TrGAPweb. Because Hermès relies on an *artisanal* manufacturing model, the work scenario involves highly specialized craftsmanship. This removes the social issues and governance problems associated with industrial production for the mass market by unqualified workers. At the same time, it enables Hermès to turn attention to actions such as providing work opportunities, integrating people with *disability* / disabilities (20), or tailoring initiatives that benefit the disabled in *local* communities, based on company tradition and iconic products such as the horse gait (example 21).

(20) ... which provides employment to people with **mental disabilities**, some 30 craftspeople perpetuate the tradition involving ... (hzxT3VicWkp23b1O_lt.xml)

- (21) function in people with motor or **mental disabilities**, using the **horse's gait** [sic]: the human brain ... (Gemhl48eav4nNB07_lt.xml)

Throughout the corpus, however, there is no mention of the ways in which Hermès responds to the kind of immediate demands posed by a social emergency in the supply chain or in the community – including the Covid-19 pandemic. For comparison, it should be noted that *coronavirus* (Stat_CV: 0.2313...) is among the top positive keywords in TrGAPweb. Importantly, up-to-date contents are published regularly on the *Covid-19 Supply Chain Update* pages, and information about Gap Foundation's *Covid-19 Resilience Fund* can be accessed through *ESG Resources*.¹¹

5.2 Readability

Shifting attention from aboutness to readability as a measure of transparency in the digital written text, Gap Inc.'s webpages around sustainability turn out to be more readable. As an illustration, let us consider Gap Inc.'s *About* page.¹² Direct input into WebFx, with exclusion of section headings, returns 155 words, 8 sentences, and 19.38 words per sentence on average. Taking the Flesh-Kincaid score, the text has an average reading ease of about 55.1 of 100 – which should make it easy for 16 to 17 year olds to understand. Regarding grade level indicators, this would align with a Gunning Fog score of 13.2 and require 9.7 years of education to be comprehended.

On the other hand, the modules *An Entrepreneurial Spirit*, *Creative Freedom* and *A House of Artisans and Human Values*, from *About Hermès*,¹³ consist of 243 words, 9 sentences and 27 average words per sentence. Overall, the pages make recourse to long-winded sentences, with dependent clauses (examples 22 and 23) and accumulations (example 23), which increase the word count.

- (22) A HOUSE OF ARTISANS AND HUMAN VALUES Driven by its manufacturing model, Hermès has strengthened its regional presence in France with production sites and job creations. The company is attentive to ensuring that its economic development is respectful of people and nature.

¹¹ <https://www.gapinc.com/fr-fr/values/sustainability/esg-resources/covid-19-supply-chain-update>.

¹² <https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/>.

¹³ <https://www.hermes.com/us/en/content/271292-contemporary-artisans-since-1837/>.

- (23) For six generations, Hermès has been an independent, family-owned French house, artisanal, creative, innovative and responsible, whose entrepreneurial spirit has become its business model. (*About Hermès*; `ess1zJfjpBxDrKVF_It.xml`)

This runs contrary to usability recommendations for brevity (Dykes 2023; Loranger 2017; Nielsen 2015). Also, the average reading ease is about 30.8 of 100: the text has a Gunning Fog score of 20.3, and should be easily understood by 22 to 23 year olds, with 14.6 years of formal education (as against the recommended grades 6-8 for a general audience, and no higher than 12 for an educated audience; Nielsen 2015).

5.3 Layout arrangements and content dilution

Albeit differently and to diverse extents, the webpages under discussion show visual consistency for transparency throughout directories and across panes and pages – which increases scannability – for comprehension. Specific colors and color combinations and font sizes, grid layouts, spacing and positions, co-compositions of headings, text and image, with specific typefaces and sizes, spacing and positions are consistently used for dominant and secondary texts and images, as well as for selected functions, including navigation (Tognazzini 2014). That is, all directories are consistent with the conventions established by the parent directory.

The window on Gap Inc. is organized around one- or multiple-column rows. The top horizontal module has still images or clickable video thumbnails. The primary purpose of the images is decorative (Figures 1, 2, 3, 5), though they may also help with specifying and illustrating (Figures 3, 4); the primary purpose of thumbnails is to engage (Bateman 2014).

As we scroll down the page, the most common clusters are co-constructions of header and body text in the left column and image to the right (Figure 1, Figure 4), and top-down arrangements of image-caption-text clusters (Figure 2). In top banners, images may also serve as a background to page header and body text (Figure 3). The inverted pyramid style (Schade 2018) is prominent, as are meaningful headings (Figures 1, 3, 4, 5), which work towards scannability and comprehension (Tognazzini 2014).

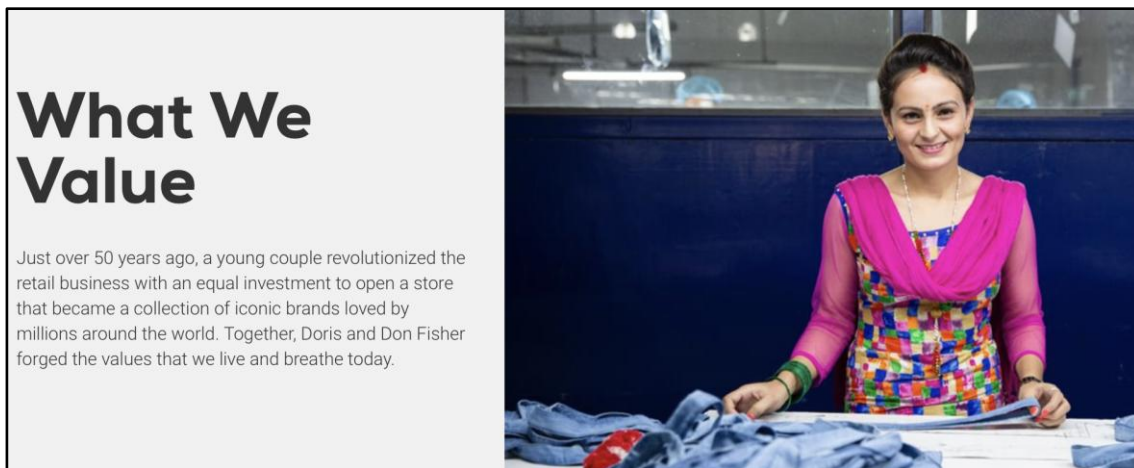


Fig. 1: Values (<https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/careers>)

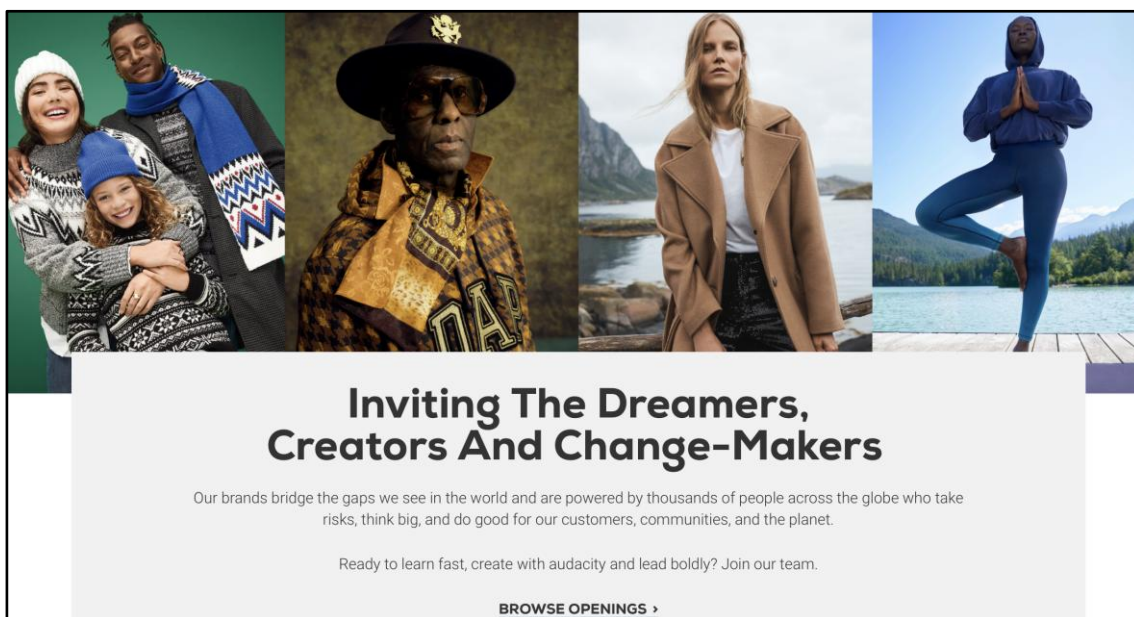


Fig. 2: Careers (<https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/careers>)

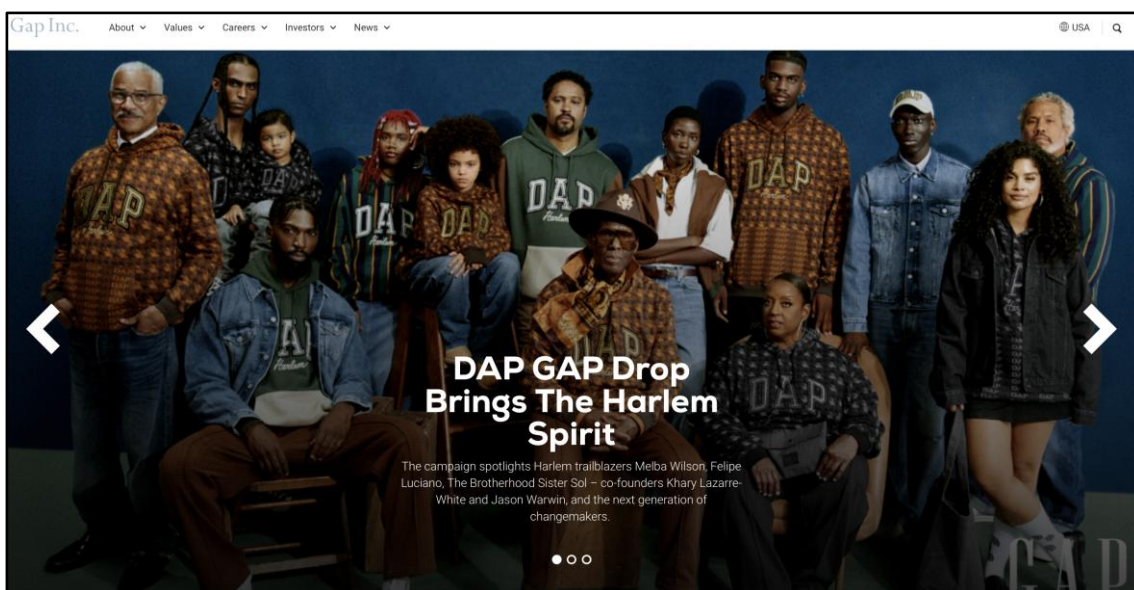


Fig. 3: Parent directory (<https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/careers>)

In accord with Gap Inc.'s flagship color (which is blue), a blue to greyish color palette is consistently used in the images, for font, and to mark modules or margins. The main content area is a white panel: white flowlines and margins frame modules that use meaningful (Tognazzini 2014) topic-giving headlines and font sizes to fix content (examples 24 and 25).

(24) We Grow Purpose-Led, Billion-Dollar Brands That Shape Peoples' Way Of Life [page name, on banner with dynamic images]

Our History; Inclusive, By Design; Our leadership [section headings, for subdirectories one level down the hierarchy] (*About*; plQq11_WUxhn3FJI_It.xml)

(25) What We Value [page heading] (Figure 1)

Equality and Belonging; Gender Equality & Empowerment; Sustainability [page name, for subdirectories one level down the hierarchy] (*Values Overview*, https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/values; 4WccdXlvJowLeDMD_It.xml)

Most clusters in the main content area of the parent directory and of one- to three-level deep child directories come with internal links (e.g., *Learn more*, Figure 4).

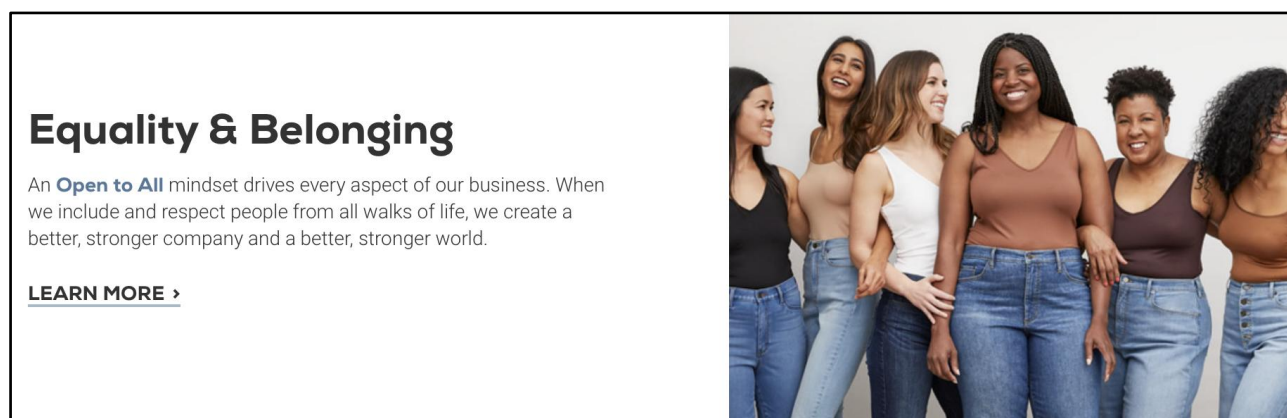


Fig. 4: Equality & Belonging (<https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/careers>)

Internal linking for dilution of information proceeds through 4 to 6 levels down the website hierarchy, with itemized lists of keywords and blue for clickable links – a layout arrangement that works towards achieving content accessibility. For example, *Supply Chain Act disclosures* (landing on a pdf for content elaboration and enhancement); *our Human Rights Policy*; *our COCV*, in the long-form text of Figure 5.

Child Labor And Young Workers

Creating – and enforcing – strict protections.



Child Labor and Young Workers Discrimination and Harassment Wages and Benefits Fire, Building and Electrical Safety Grievance Mechanisms Short-Term Contracts Human Trafficking and Forced Labor Working Hours Humane Treatment Freedom of Association Foreign Contract Workers and Recruitment Unauthorized Subcontracting	Under no circumstance is it acceptable for child, forced or trafficked labor to be employed within our operations or used in the production of any Gap Inc. product. Recent legislation has supported global awareness and we annually report our actions to uncover and protect against these issues within our U.K. Modern Slavery Act and California Transparency in Supply Chain Act disclosures. While we have not discovered instances of forced or child labor in our supply chain in recent years, we remain vigilant about these issues and detail our comprehensive management approaches to both. We do recognize that it is a deeply complex issue that is inextricable from the broader issues of poverty and economic development. Our Human Rights Policy and our COVC explicitly prohibit the use of child labor. We require our supplier facilities to establish robust age-verification processes to prevent employment of children or underage workers. We also work to ensure that facilities respect local laws and international standards related to employing younger workers who are not children. During facility visits, our Supplier Sustainability team interviews workers and managers about recruitment and hiring, labor practices and working conditions for young workers. They check for lawful, unaltered documents to verify workers' ages, since workers can go to great lengths to obtain counterfeit documents. Our teams also monitor whether facilities are upholding labor laws and standards for legal young workers.
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Fig. 5: ESG Resources (<https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/values/sustainability/esg-resources/human-rights-and-labor-issues/policies-and-approaches-for-human-rights/child-labor-and-young-workers>)

Besides chunking into paragraph by topic, the content area may also be structured into tables and bullet points, for concise presentation of information and scannability (Nielsen 1995; Loranger 2017; Huei-Hsin and Chan 2023). Example (26) illustrates the case of bullet points in long-form text.

(26) Working Hours.

Establishing Clear and Reasonable Standards

[...]

We impose several requirements that address working hours:

- Workers must be allowed to refuse overtime without any threat or penalty of punishment.
- Workers must not be required to work more than six days in a row.

- Facilities must take corrective actions to limit excessive overtime, which can include analyzing the root causes of issues, adjusting production schedules and improving management systems. (*Working Hours*)¹⁴

Bullet points and helpful visuals, however, are most often a feature of updates about initiatives, programs, and outcomes of specific policies on the directory *ESG Report*, which is accessible through the drop-down menu of the *Impact* button on the navigation bar.¹⁵

House of Hermès paints a very different picture. All the pages use beige for the leaderboard and main content area. Decorative images may follow the text, and are not consistently arranged in two symmetric columns. For instance, center-aligned company logo, headings and subheadings (examples 27 and 28), as well as copy text are organized in manuscript grids on the directory *About Hermès* (Figure 6).

(27) About Hermès.

Hermès, contemporary artisans since 1837 [page name]

An entrepreneurial spirit; Creative freedom; A house of artisans and human values;
Hermès around the world: CUSTOMERS AT THE CORE OF AN OMNICHANNEL
NETWORK; Six generations of artisans (*About Hermès*; `ess1zJfjpBxDrKVF_It.xml`)

(28) About Hermès.

Hermès, contemporary artisans since 1837 [page name]

A HOUSE OF ARTISANS AND HUMAN VALUES [page name] (Figure 6)

High quality jobs; Production sites in France; Training and transmission of know-how;
Responsible development [subsection headings] (*A House of Artisans and Human
Values*)

Importantly, while images tend to have a decorative function, thumbnails and pictures with an enhancing and engaging function are also possible (Bateman 2014), as in Figure 6. However, decorative images and generic graphs may move the digital written text – hence hiding and reducing accessibility to useful content (Schade 2015). This is the case of *Key Figures*,¹⁶ a child directory of *Finance* and *Investors*.

¹⁴ <https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/impact/esg-resources/human-rights-and-labor-issues/policies-and-approaches-for-human-rights/working-hours>.

¹⁵ <https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/impact/esg-report>.

¹⁶ <https://finance.hermes.com/en/key-figures/>.

Where available, useful visuals are most often a feature of the *Finance & Governance* pages. For instance, a table (Huei-Hsin and Chan 2023) on *Key Figures* offers the details of key consolidated data about Hermès International S.A. The table explains concisely, with enhancements (Bateman 2014), more general figures about the company's recurring operating profitability, investments and free cash flow.



Hermès, contemporary artisans since 1837

A HOUSE OF ARTISANS AND HUMAN VALUES

Driven by its manufacturing model, Hermès has strengthened its regional presence in France with new production sites and job creations. The company is attentive to ensuring that its economic development is respectful of people and nature.



THE ATELIERS DE FITILIEU TRAINING HUB
© BENOÎT TEILLET

High quality jobs

As at 31 December 2022, Hermès employs 19,700 people, 7,025 of whom are artisans. 62% of employees work in France. Over the course of the year, close to 2,100 people have joined the Hermès community. Hermès objects are manufactured mainly in France, across 54 production sites located in 11 different regions. Hermès is looking to the future with confidence and continuing to expand its production capacity by opening new sites, each on a human scale and creating 250 jobs on average.

Hermès contributes to significantly regenerating the regions in which it opens production sites. The resulting local socio-economic development makes it possible to provide staff with comfortable working conditions combining proximity with stable employment.

Production sites in France

Fig. 6: A House of artisans and human values (<https://www.hermes.com/us/en/content/271246-responsible-and-sustainable-development/>)

Other important differences to Gap Inc. concern systematic recourse to pdf enhancements and documents (Bateman 2014) as the final landing site of internal links, and little structuring of long copy (including lack of internal linking), along with a general tendency for long scrolling. Zooming in on sustainability, users can access information via the dropdown menu (*Menu*) on the navigation bar of *About Hermès*. They have to scroll up to three screens for general content about brand values (*A House of Artisans and Human Values*; Figure 6)¹⁷ and up to 11 screens for below-the-fold contents (Schade 2015) about sustainable initiatives and responsible manufacturing on *Footsteps Across the World*.¹⁸ The films are also accessible one level down *Sustainable Development*,¹⁹ and two levels down *Finance & Governance*.²⁰

5. Conclusions

The goal of this paper was to investigate the diverse ways in which sustainability is represented and communicated in the fashion industry. Special attention was devoted to the disclosure (or availability) of content about environmental protection and social equity words. Clarity (or comprehensibility) was discussed in terms of readability, content dilution, webpage arrangements and layout. Although the study is still in its initial stages, we hope we brought home some major points.

Content-wise, Gap Inc. regularly publishes up-to-date information about sustainability issues, championing *inclusion*, gender *equality* and equal *opportunity*, and supporting and enriching *communities*, locally and globally. Fast fashion is commonly associated with unskilled labor, low wages, gender gaps, low salaries, few safeguards and even fewer opportunities, as well as issues with work protection law. Communicating about sustainable practices and initiatives that make Gap Inc. accountable is therefore critical to generating positive attitudes in stakeholders and customers. Hence the emphasis on *labor* rights, including *minimum wage*, *safe and fair working conditions*, positive *employee experience*, *team work*, *workforce engagement* and *rotational programs*, *talent* and *apprenticeships*, or the prompt communication of *Covid-19 supply chain updates* during the pandemic. House of Hermès has a narrower focus on sustainability, which may depend on its primary use as a retail website. Additionally, social equity communication concentrates on *disabilities*. Because Hermès relies on an *artisanal* manufacturing model, the work scenario involves highly specialized craftsmanship. This removes the social issues and governance problems associated with industrial production for the mass market by unqualified workers. Thus, House of Hermès can afford to turn attention

¹⁷ <https://www.hermes.com/us/en/content/271246-responsible-and-sustainable-development/>.

¹⁸ <https://www.hermes.com/us/en/content/135446-footsteps-across-the-world-collection>.

¹⁹ <https://www.hermes.com/us/en/content/134986-sustainable-development/>.

²⁰ <https://finance.hermes.com/en/a-value-creating-and-sustainable-french-model/>.

to providing work opportunities and integrating people living with *disabilities*, or tailoring initiatives that benefit the disabled in local communities, based on company tradition and iconic products like their *horse gait*. Some overlap in aboutness can be observed in the environmental protection domain, around the word *water*. Yet, only Gap Inc. – which is a major user of *cotton* as against silk or leather – goes to great lengths to promote its contribution to reducing industrial water pollution and build community *water resilience* globally.

Dissimilarities have been also observed regarding readability. The selected pages from Gap Inc. appear to be easy to read for 16 to 17 year olds. They are relatively more readable than the digital written text on House of Hermès, which makes recourse to long-winded sentences, with dependent clauses and accumulations.

A third dimension of variation concerns layout arrangements and content dilution: the websites are not analogous in the number of sustainability-related pages, paths and exact location of pages within the information hierarchy. Generally, both platforms can be said to be transparent in so far as all pages adopt the conventions established by the parent directory. Yet, only Gap Inc. appears to have worked on content accessibility – e.g., using itemized lists of keywords for enhancement, color for clickable links, and internal linking that proceeds 4 to 6 levels down the website hierarchy. Conversely, House of Hermès has a very narrow and shallow hierarchy, issues with long scrolling, very little internal linking, and pdfs as final landing sites. On corpus completion, we will be able to verify this claim borrowing from Network Accessibility Analysis such practices as ‘shortest path’ and ‘centrality’ (Di Cristofaro 2023).

Regarding images, Gap Inc. consistently uses leaderboards with text-image co-constructions to frame the main content area. As users move down the path, a shift can be observed from a mix of manuscript and 2-3 column grid with text-image co-constructions, to content areas that are structured into a table for concise presentation of information, often updates on initiatives and programs. While manuscript and 2-3 column grids alternate on the pages on House of Hermès, recourse to images is erratic. Additionally, decorative and engaging images above the fold may be prominent, and push useful digital written text below the fold.

Overall, the analysis seems to point to significant differences in transparency and sustainability communication. Future research could complement these findings with an in-depth analysis of the impact of these communications on public perception and corporate image.

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Bionote

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