

Threads of Social Pillar: A textual Analysis of SDG 5, 8 and 10 in Apparel Industry

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Abstract: *The present paper examines the social dimension of business models with a particular focus on human rights, aligning the analysis with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This study explores how three major European companies – Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy SE (LVMH), Industria de Diseno Textil SA (INDITEX) and H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB (H&M) address social issues within their business models, as reflected in their annual reports and publicly available statements. These companies were selected based on their size, specifically the number of employees. Recent literature on social responsibility in the apparel sector has increasingly investigated the consequences of poor applicability of policies and the lack of understanding human rights, which have led to negative outcomes for companies, industry, workers and communities. Despite this, there is a notable gap in research regarding how companies report their actions, especially when aligning their activities with the SDGs. This paper aims to provide a comparative analysis of major industry actors' commitments and identify patterns in the companies' reporting. The methodology of the study involves text mining techniques, conducted through R Studio statistical software. This analysis focused on the frequency of key terms, as well as bigrams and trigrams to create an understanding of the patterns of reporting and how the narratives reflect companies' real efforts. The findings reveal various focus points, with each of the companies demonstrating unique approaches. This paper contributes to the field by offering an assessment of social impact reporting and provides recommendations for a better, transparent and heightened responsibility toward the 2030 Agenda and activities that respect human rights in the Apparel industry.*

Keywords: SDG, diversity, inclusion, equality, European Union.

Introduction

The business environment is defined not only by financial and economic results, but also by social and ethical aspects (McPhail and Adams 2016). These have become more sensitive and the subject of new standards, frameworks, and regulations (Methven O'Brien and Dhanarajan 2016). The business environment also contains stakeholders which are not only the shareholders of the company but other groups and persons that are involved in or affected by the company (Abraham 2024). In many studies, the natural environment is also considered part of the business model of companies (Rubino and Mastrorocco 2025). Human rights represent the social pillar of ESG under the triple bottom line and create a challenge in the companies' operations and business relationships (Bağlayan et al. 2018). It is important for companies to understand the necessity of pursuing human rights to be lawful, protect their workforce, satisfy consumers' concerns and build community goodwill, promote compliance in the supply chain, improve risk management, keep markets open, improve workers' productivity and retention, and improve the corporate strategy (United Nations 2000).

The triple bottom line represents the strategic connection between creating profit by also demonstrating social and environmental commitment (Javed et al. 2020) which stands on leaders' responsibility. In this case, leaders should understand the needs, ideologies, and values of the community to create and apply a business model that is favorable to all stakeholders, creating economic value and improving human rights commitment. Respecting the human rights of workers, consumers, minorities or vulnerable groups is an important tool for companies' success, but cases where human rights were violated to enhance profits were reported in industries such as manufacturing and agrifood (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2017; Perkiss et al. 2021). Human rights applications extend into multiple categories: principles regarding employees, principles that involve partners and their employees in the supply chain, principles that refer to the community and consumers. Companies made significant steps towards the issues identified by integrating international principles and guidelines (OECD 2023) in their decision making, overseeing policies, training for human rights, addressing the needs of minorities, creating impact assessments, supporting standards, ensuring compliance, and supporting ethical decision making in the supply chain.

The current research contributes to the understanding of social reporting models in the apparel industry through text mining performed on public reports and statements of H&M, LVMH, and Inditex. The analysis shows how companies communicate their commitments and alignment with SDGs 5, 8 and 10. The research question is: *How do leading apparel companies report their social commitments and how are these reflected in their activity in relation to the SDGs?* The study proposes a relevant methodology by calculating word frequencies and discovering bigrams and trigrams to understand the main themes of the reports.

In the following sections, the literature review links the SDGs to human rights in the apparel industry. The research question proposed in the literature review is related to the methodology, followed by the results of the text mining on reports from three multinational apparel companies on human rights. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and future research proposals.

Literature review

The case of the apparel industry

The apparel (fashion, textiles, shoes) industry employs 11.9% of the global force (Cardona 2024). Due to the high number of employees, violations toward human rights have continued in the past years (Stauffer 2022), with deeper roots in scandals that created the need for auditing, certifications, and codes of conduct (Jestratijevic, Uanhoro, and Creighton 2022; LeBaron et al. 2022). Low-skilled individuals are the first-line workforce in this industry. The need and dependence of their employment status leads to tolerance of low wages because fast fashion puts pressure on suppliers to lower costs and increase output. The workforce in developing nations such as India, China, Pakistan, Thailand, Mexico and Vietnam comprises mainly women and children (Boersma et al. 2025; Thakker and Sun 2023), while poor work conditions lead to violence and lack of health and safety protections (EarthSight 2021). Other risks in this area are: lack of freedom of association or limitations to the right to collective bargaining, discrimination, child labor, exploitation of vulnerable individuals, low wages, long working hours, and unsafe conditions (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2021). The industry extends globally, therefore increasing the challenge to observe breaches in policies. Companies must rationally engage in collaborations with supply chain actors

to create a positive impact and eliminate all violations of human rights (Benstead, Hendry, and Stevenson, 2018).

SDG 5 – Gender equality – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Gender equality represents a fundamental human right (United Nations, 1948). The goal observes slow progress towards the 2030 targets (United Nations, 2023), if the same rate is maintained it would take another 140 years for women to be represented equally and 286 years in order to fill-in the gaps of legal protection when it comes to discriminatory behavior. In 2021, women represented 40% of total employment in the member countries of the United Nations, but held 28.2% of management positions, with only 1% increase comparing to 2015.

As evidence from the Eurostat statistics, in the European Union, for which Turkey was also included, in 2023 there was an average 10.2% difference in employment rates between men and women (Eurostat, 2023). Positions held by women in senior management rate were reported at an average of 33.8% in 2023 (Eurostat, 2024a). The gender pay gap was calculated on average at 12.7% in 2022 (Eurostat 2024b). Statistical indicators can be directly linked to specific targets of the same goal: an increase in the participation of women in the workforce can impact various pillars of the business (Saeed et al. 2022). Sustainable business models rely on the SDGs and their specific targets (Beloskar, Haldar, and Gupta 2024): an increase in women's participation in the workforce can benefit society toward greater economic growth (SDG 8) (Winkler, 2022). Gender equality depends partly on the national culture, leaving the rest to be decided by companies through their business models (Bairroh, 2024).

The barriers companies face regarding women's status can be diverse and include defective recruitment practices and workplace cultures (Beloskar, Haldar, and Gupta 2024); therefore, the business models should be analyzed in depth. In the apparel industry, women take multiple roles: from being the face of the brands to occupying most jobs in the designing and manufacturing phases (CareerExplorer 2025), factories (International Labour Organization 2023). Women are also an important category of customers, generating 52.3% of the total revenue in the apparel industry in 2023 (Statista 2024). At the corporate level in multinational corporations in this industry, the presence of women is substantial with the exception of upper management roles that are held predominantly by men (Wadham 2022). No matter the role, the stakeholders are more conscious of the business models of the companies, therefore, to attract partnerships, workforce, and consumers, prioritization is needed in aligning the business model with the SDGs.

SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

SDG 8 represents economic growth with social justice and inclusive employment as the base concepts. The progress of the goal faced challenges during and after COVID-19 years due to tensions, rising conflicts, vulnerabilities in human rights policies, increased unemployment and poor work conditions worsening the labor market (United Nations 2023). In 2023, the employment rate in the European Union was 75.3%: 80.4% were represented by the male population and 70.2% represented by the female population (Eurostat 2024a).

The apparel industry is a major employer, with a significant percentage of employment in developing countries (ApparelScience 2023) that lack strong labor laws. Apparel industry workers are treated unequal and exploited, companies providing low wages in hard working conditions (Sain

2022), because of fast fashion and hyper consumerism. Workers are considered “slaves to fashion” or “victims of slavery” and even referred to as “working in sweatshops” (Peake and Kenner 2020).

SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities – Reduce inequality within and among countries

For UN members, reducing inequalities represents a call for action in regard to human rights development, creating equality for all human beings and removing any social factors (Oestreich 2018). SDG 10 targets the equality of individuals in benefiting of economic growth and access to opportunities regardless of gender, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, caste, and origin (Blaise 2022; Cojocaru et al. 2022). Under the influence of the goals and the increase in number of incidents affecting diversity, equity and equality (García-Sánchez et al. 2024) companies have to understand the matter (Hessekiel 2020) and commit (Shohaieb, Elmarzouky, and Albitar 2022) to enhance their corporate culture and business model (Hunt et al. 2018).

Discrimination causes economic inequalities, statistically observed in 2023 due to the income distribution indicator (Eurostat 2024c) which at the European level has a proportion of 4.72%. “Risk-of-poverty people” represents another indicator. For the year 2023, the percentage is 23% in the European Union (minimum 14% in Belgium and maximum 37.4% in Romania). On the same approach, 21.6% of the European population (minimum of 10.8% in Poland and maximum of 28.5% in Belgium) is at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat 2024d).

DEI represents the abbreviation for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Diversity represents various subcategories such as gender diversity, age diversity, ethnic diversity, physical ability, and neurodiversity. Ethnic diversity is under-represented or even has zero members in most senior roles across multinational companies. Equity represents the fair treatment of all people and ensuring that their identity does not affect opportunities or workplace outcomes. Inclusion refers to how the workforce is given a voice in the workplace; in recent years, the LGBTQ+ community inclusion has become of higher importance (McKinsey&Company 2022). We can observe the DEI to create appliances in more than one area of the company, but in various areas, such as workforce, supply chain, management, and products through marketing.

Apparel represents a form of self-expression, with a higher importance for under-represented groups (FAAR 2020; Neha Suradkar, 2024). Therefore, companies can maintain a high and positive impact by increasing employee engagement. The workforce in the industry is a relevant aspect for pursuing this SDG, as 50% of employees of color consider that a career in the industry is not equally accessible to all candidates, while 68% agree that the industry is not accessible for them (Talent Solutions 2024). There have been multiple violations of labor rights, occurring prior to the pandemic and worsening in the pandemic period due to inflation, leading to what is called modern slavery, such as forced labor, child labor, slavery, and abuse against female workers (Elladex 2024). One of the solutions already implemented under French law is to hold legally responsible the directors of the companies for the abuses identified in their supply chain (Crumbie and Mahmood 2021). As this is not enough for a company to eliminate abusive behaviors (see Table 1 for more details), top management should arrange external audits, active engagement with workers and communities, creating safe spaces, and getting involved by developing inclusive events and training for employees (McKinsey&Company 2021).

Research has provided evidence that some consumers prefer companies that represent their values and identity (Mintel 2024). Companies should also be careful in the ways they implement the values of diversity, equity, and integrity (DEI) outside the workforce, for example, in their community sponsorships. Such situations could be observed in the appearance of brands and

companies that stated their commitment, because DEI becomes effective only when it is developed as part of the business model.

In the results and discussion section of the article, three companies will be analyzed regarding their reporting on SDGs 5, 8 and 10 in connection with what each company identifies as important for their social commitments.

Methodology

The study utilizes a mixed methods approach, both quantitative data analysis and qualitative text analysis.

The initial database was extracted from the Refinitiv Eikon database in January 2025 consisting of 11,602 entries. Data collected refer to the financial year 2023 and are represented by the name of the company, country of headquarters (limited to those countries that are UN member states), TRBC industry name, number of employees, and the reporting status of SDG 5 and SDG 10 – indicating whether the company does or does not report on the two SDGs. The data set was first filtered to include only TRBC activity names that contain the word “Apparel,” limiting the sample to 87 companies. Companies for which data was not collected by Refinitiv were also excluded from the sample, leading to a final sample of 17 companies. Based on the employee count that exceeded 100,000 for each of the companies, the first three were selected for further analysis: LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE, France (LVMH) – 192,287 employees, Industria de Diseno Textil SA, Spain (INDITEX) – 161,281 employees and H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB, Sweden (HM) – 101,103 employees.

The methodology applied in this paper is textual analysis. Exemplified in Table 2, the relevant textual data was extracted from 2023 reports and statements publicly available on the companies’ website that were related to social matters and SDG 5 and 10. The word “social” was used to identify the relevant paragraphs and was further excluded from the text analysis.

Table 2. Text sources for the analyzed companies

Company name	Text source
HM	Human Rights Policy (H&M Group 2025c), Group Annual and Sustainability Report (H&M Group 2023a), Group Responsible Business Conduct Policy(H&M Group 2023c), Group Social Policies(H&M Group 2023b), Group Sustainability Disclosure(H&M Group 2023d), Modern Slavery Statement (H&M Group n.d.)
INDITEX	Annual Corporate Governance Report (Inditex 2023a), Group Annual Accounts(Inditex 2023c), Diversity and inclusion Policy(Inditex 2023b), Statement on diversity, inclusion, equality, and work-life balance(Inditex 2023b)
LVMH	Social and environmental responsibility report (LVMH 2023c), Universal registration document (LVMH 2023e), Code of conduct (LVMH 2023a), Supplier code of conduct (LVMH 2023d), Diversity&Inclusion statement (LVMH 2023b)

The “TidyText” version 0.4.2 (Silge, Robinson, and Hester 2016) package in R Studio (version 2024.12 and R version 4.4.2) was used in the most recently developed version that creates text mining tasks (Silge and Robinson 2017). Text mining offers the opportunity to retrieve facts from text in order to explore them with data analysis methods (Ben-Dov and Feldman 2009).

Text preprocessing included filtering out stop words, numbers, and other words that were considered meaningless for the analysis. Considering the cleaned text to be analyzed, the research results can be observed in the following section:

- The most frequent individual word when considering social aspects of the company;
- The most frequent pair of two words (bigram function in R Studio) when considering social aspects of the company;
- The most frequent pair of three words (trigram function in R Studio) when considering social aspects of the company;
- Reporting of SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 10 and the relationship between reporting and identified frequencies.

Results and discussions

H&M Case

H&M began its history in Västerås, Sweden, first under the name of “Hennes” which represents the Swedish word for “Hers”, in the future changed to “Hennes & Mauritz” – the short version being H&M (H&M Group 2025b). H&M is one of the most present fast fashion retailers worldwide, employing over 180,000 individuals and reporting to contribute to 1.6 million jobs in the supply chain (Tarnovskaya, Hånell, and Tolstoy 2022). Due to the characteristics of fast fashion characteristics and the number of employees, it was frequently accused of poor labor practices (Center for alliance of labor and human rights 2024; Doherty and Toh 2023; Guilbert 2018), despite H&M claiming their ethical and responsible model of business, which is entitled the “H&M way” (H&M Group 2025d).

Keyword frequencies identified in H&M’s report

For the financial year 2023, we have observed the way H&M presents the social pillar, from various sources detailed in Table 2. The bar chart in Figure 1 represents the frequency of an individual word appearing in the retrieved text. The x-axis labelled as “n” indicated the count of each word, while the y axis represents the words themselves. We took into consideration the first 10 words by frequency. The most frequently used word is “rights” which appears significantly more than any other word, having over 150 appearances. The second word is “human”, which together with “rights” creates the key theme of the social concerns of H&M, the “human rights”. Other high-frequency words such as “chain”, “supply”, “labor” and “workers” indicate the interest of the company in the supply chains and the labor conditions of workers, creating a common basis with human rights. “Policy” is the next word that is found to be frequently used as a tool for companies that implement a business model that can have a positive impact on the company’s development. “People” extends the subject of human rights to anyone affected or interested in the company. Not only are workers affected or benefit from the company’s behavior, but all stakeholders. “Wage” tackles one of the human rights issues, as employees have the right to fair and equal remuneration for their work (UN Guiding principles 2017). The last word identified is “risk” in the same context as the words mentioned above, pointing to risks around workers’ safety, vulnerabilities in the supply chain due to unethical and non-compliant labor practices, and reputational risk in case of failures in labor practices. The bigger picture of the reporting should consider the importance of human rights in labor and supply chain contexts.

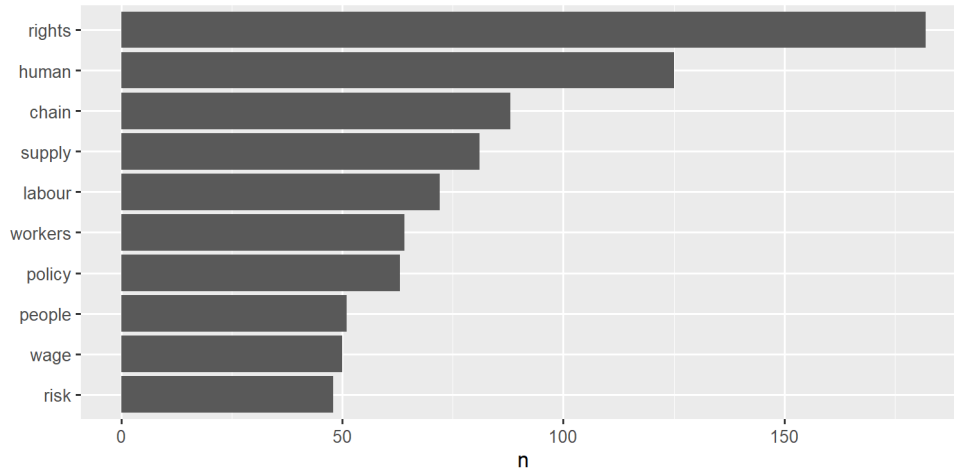


Figure 1. Word Frequency in H&M's sustainability report

Source: Authors' research, generated with R Studio.

Note. *n* represents the number of appearances of the presented word in the analyzed text.

To enhance the meaning of individual words and create a broader analysis of how companies report social aspects, Figure 2 presents a network diagram of word bigrams, the words that appear together the most. The Supply chain (upper left corner) presents the context in which companies have a direct impact on ethical labor practices. Negative impacts could be modern slavery (middle-up) representing a significant concern for the company because forced labor and child labor (down right corner) continue to exist. Laws and supply chain policies protect labor rights and reduce salient risks. The existence of this connection links reporting to the importance of human rights in labor matters in H&M. The links between "management", "wage" and "minimum" may suggest a connection between labor management and minimum wage policies. To understand workers' concerns, the grievance mechanism (upper right corner) plays an important role in addressing labor issues and ensuring that workers are heard. Another way of making their voice heard is through collective bargaining (middle left) and H&M reports on the right of workers to organize and negotiate.

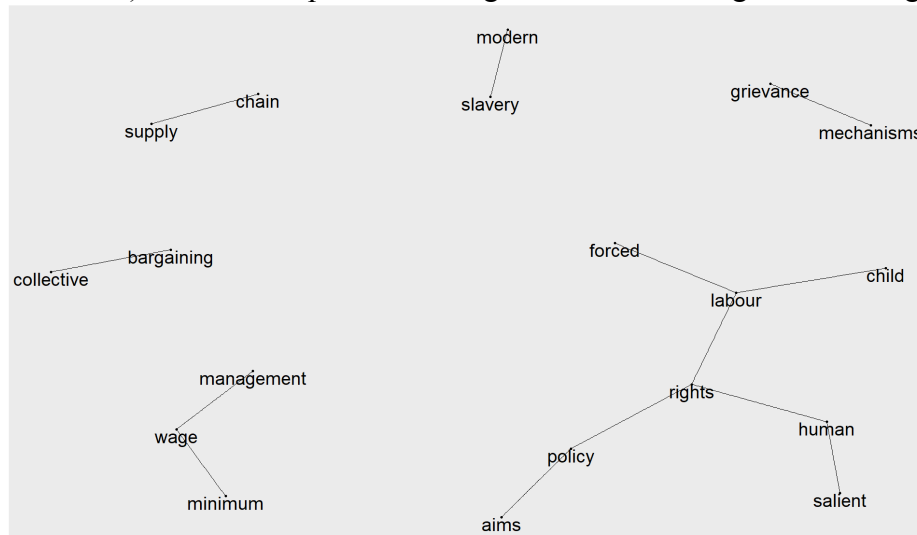


Figure 2. Words bigram in H&M.

Source: Authors' own research, generated with R Studio.

The trigrams in Figure 3 provide more context and reduce the ambiguity of individual word frequencies and bigrams. The most frequent trigram, with 15 appearances, is “human rights policy” indicating one of the dominant topics in H&M’s social reporting, ensuring that workers are not subject to forced labor or unsafe conditions. The policy represents a key contribution to corporate reporting and is essential in protecting workers. Policies usually focus on “salient human rights”, second trigram, answering the most significant ethical issues of the company: in H&M’s case, these might refer to child labor or forced labor. The following trigram is also presented in Figure 2 as a bigram, referring to the company’s way of regulating wages: minimum wage, overtime pay, bonuses, and fair remuneration. Beyond wages, companies should address gender-based violence, the fourth trigram, a subject that was not present in the individual word frequencies or in the bigrams; gender-based violence represents a barrier for equality in the workplace.

In another context, supply chain management refers to the critical area of logistics, sourcing, production, and distribution that represents the main opportunity for employment. Furthermore, supply chains carry the highest risks of unethical behavior in the domain of human rights. In answering the identified issues, the company points to, in the next trigram, modern slavery regulations often guided by international frameworks, including the International Labor Organization (ILO) which establishes global labor standards. To assist multinationals, human rights defenders, activists, NGOs, journalists, advocate for human rights, expose negative treatments, and protect vulnerable groups from exploitation and discrimination. One of the most observed issues in Europe is the gender pay gap, which means that women are often paid less than men, as a form of discrimination. To maintain trust in the business game, equality, inclusion, and diversity represent the three principles for a fair, representative, and equal workplace (often under the form of DEI). By integrating each of these reported elements, H&M could move toward a more ethical labor system that respects human rights in all forms and creates a good reputation for the company.

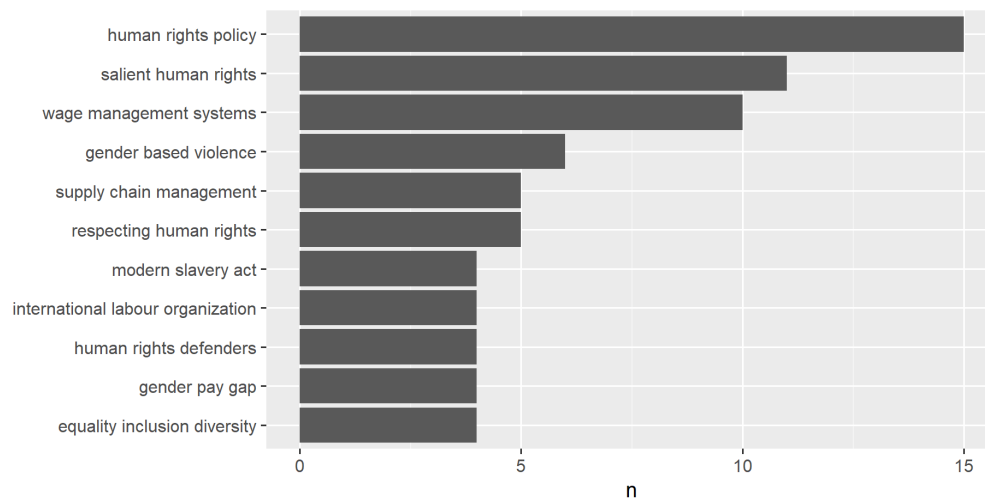


Figure 3. Words trigram in H&M

Source: Authors’ own research, generated with R Studio.

Note. N represents the number of appearances of the presented word in the analyzed text.

SDG 5, SDG 8, and SDG 10 reporting at H&M

H&M reports on all three SDGs, all of them considered by the company as a “Social impact” area. Under SDG 5, H&M has signed the Women’s Empowerment Principles: high-level corporate

leadership, treat all women and men fairly at work without discrimination, employee health, well-being and safety, education and training for career advancement, enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices, community initiatives, advocacy, and reporting (H&M Group 2025a).). H&M acknowledged the challenges related to gender issues also observed in the trigrams: gender-based violence and harassment (GBHV). In 2018, H&M has appointed a Global Leader for Diversity and Inclusiveness.

H&M undertakes actions in each of the three relevant SDGs: a high proportion of colleagues are female, including management and board of directors. The company raises awareness and supports charities through International Women's Day and joined the TENT initiative (Tent 2016) for refugee women in Europe and partnerships with Clothes to Good (CTG) to help women out of poverty (Impakter 2023). H&M extended their commitment to responsible recruitment and set targets for 2025 for the employment of 2,000 refugees within the Turkish supply chain, under SDG 8. The main H&M actions of H&M under SDG 10 seek a more equitable workplace. H&M focuses on under-represented racial and ethnic identities and works together with the World Economic Forum. H&M supports the Free & Equal campaign of the United Nations for LGBTQIA+ equality, giving voice to the community and its colleagues. It also supports thematic campaigns, and its head office was recertified by Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Right (RFSL). Together with Better Work and USAID Mitra Kunci Initiative, they took part in the workplace inclusion of workers with disabilities. These H&M initiatives align with their reporting themes, yet no initiatives on modern slavery were observed.

LVMH case

LVMH is a French luxury company that was established in 1987 as a merger between Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennesy. It activates in 75 *Maisons* through various brands like Christian Dior, Fendi, Givenchy, Guerlain and more (Lewis, Kim, and Ozturk 2025). For the social component of the company, LVMH states "Diverse by essence and inclusive by choice – It's everyone's business" (LVMH 2024). Through the statement, LVMH views DEI as a source of creativity and performance (Birch 2024).

The frequency of individual words for LVMH presented in the bar chart in Figure 4, observes words such as "people" and "employees" as the most referenced, indicating a human-centered approach, either by committing to the workforce and recognizing the success driven by the talent and well-being of the employees, or by committing to customers and communities impacted by the company's operations. The following words, "initiatives" and "responsibility" highlight the dedication of LVMH to ethical sourcing and their responsible role in the apparel industry. This is in line with the commitments of the group. Words like "health", "support" and "training" highlight the investment in employees as a commitment to their well-being, professional development, and career. The inclusion of "code" and "conduct" suggests the baseline of corporate governance, ethical practices, and adherence to compliance frameworks. "Inclusion", as part of DEI, enhances the company's efforts to promote and support people and create an inclusive environment within the *Maisons*, sustaining their statement regarding DEI as a source of creativity and performance. The frequency of the terms indicates a focus on employee engagement, ethics, and responsibility and sustains the vision of the company to continually create through their core values.

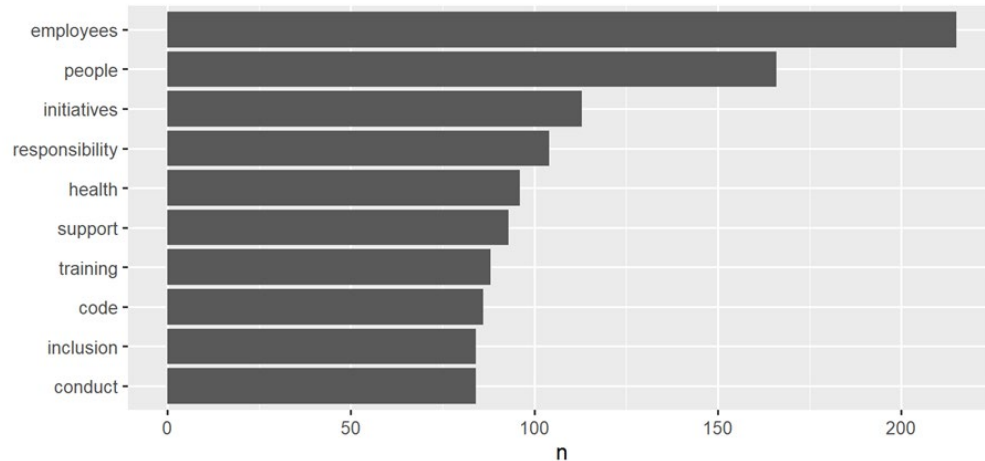


Figure 4. Word frequency in LVMH

Source: Authors' own research, generated with R Studio.

Note. n represent the number of appearances of the presented word in the analyzed text.

The key terms interconnected in the LVMH reporting highlight the commitment to social responsibility. The emphasis on “mental health” and “workforce related” bigrams reflect the commitment to a supportive work environment and the well-being of employees. Similarly, “inclusive culture” and “inclusion index” understand the company’s focus on DEI. The presence of “human rights” and “resources” aligns with the commitment of LVMH to ethical and fair labor practices, including those established by the United Nations. “Partner” and “code” suggest the ethical collaboration for responsible business conduct, ensuring compliance throughout the supply chain. “Heart fund” and “pension supplementary” highlight LVMH’s commitment to the security of employees offering support initiatives and financial security, strengthening its reputation as a responsible employer, extended to “school”, “students”, “professional”, “development” sustaining the commitment to investments in education and skills development initiatives.

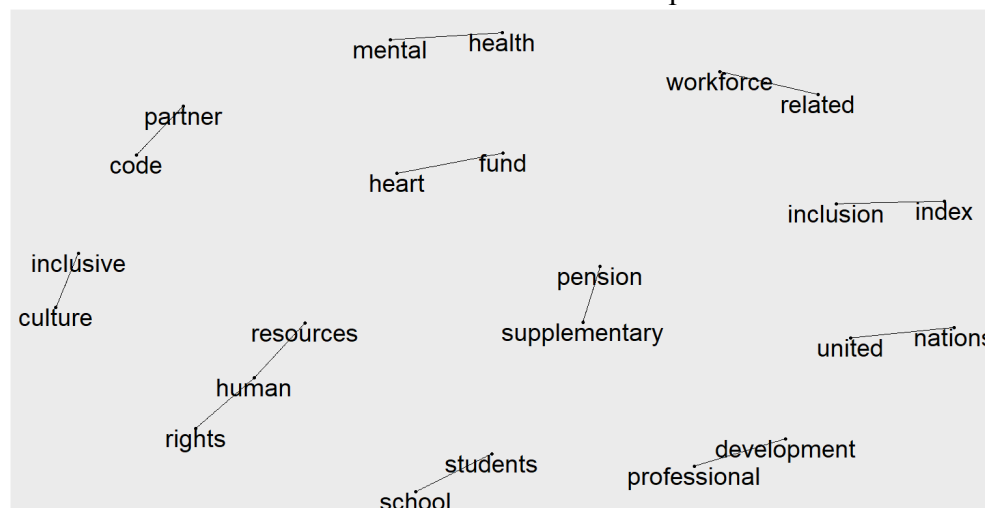


Figure 5. Words bigram in LVMH

Source: Authors' own research, generated with R Studio.

To understand and put in a larger picture the individual words and bigrams, the trigram bar chart in Figure 6 highlights the main points of the corporate reporting of LVMH. The “sustainable development committee” represents the most frequent trigram, reflecting LVMH’s commitment to both environmental and social issues. Additionally, “human resource teams” is the second trigram and strengthens employee engagement, development, and workplace well-being created through “supplementary pension benefits”, “external pension plans”, “gross annual bonus”, “annual base pay” and “bonus performance shares”. DEI is highlighted using trigrams such as “inclusive culture based”, “inclusion index awards”, which present the efforts of the company to promote fair and equitable work. These results highlight the achievements in diversity, under a strong framework emphasized by “ethics compliance correspondent”. LVMH strategically focuses on important issues such as employee well-being, competitive compensation, and improving ethical business practices in the apparel industry.

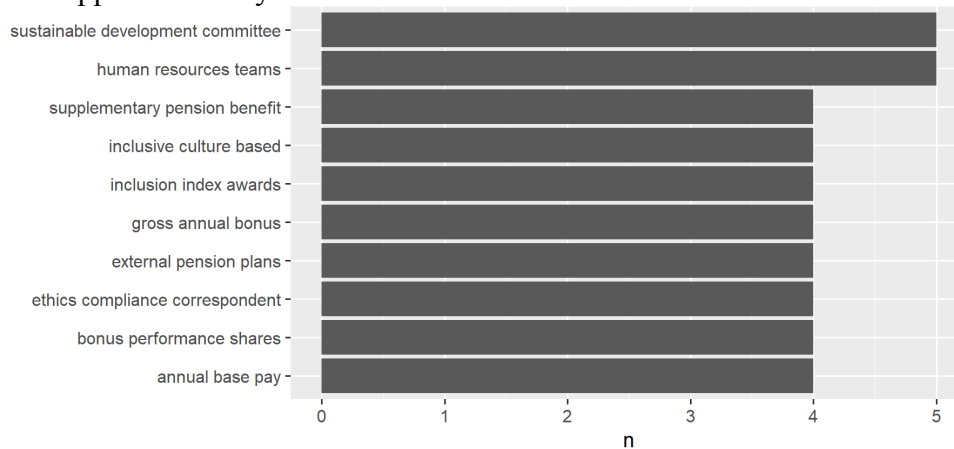


Figure 6. Words trigram in LVMH

Source: Authors’ own research, generated with R Studio.

Note. n represent the number of appearances of the presented word in the analyzed text.

SDG 5, SDG 8, and SDG 10 reporting in LVMH

LVMH reports on the three SDGs and establishes the contributions of each: contribution to respecting everyone’s individuality and dignity – SDGs 5, 8 and 10, taking action to ensure the well-being of employees – SDG 8, passing on the savoir-faire required to achieve excellence – SDG 8 and SDG 10 and making commitments for a better society – SDGs 5, 8 and 10. LVMH sets targets so that by 2025: 50% of the group key position will be held by women, 30% by black, indigenous, and people of colour and 2% of the employees will consist of people with disabilities (Birch 2024). Taking into consideration the inclusion awards given to various brands of the LVMH group in 2023, the following initiatives should be mentioned: Louis Vuitton encourages young girls by organizing high school internships in engineering roles, in 2023 all LVMH networks supported the LGBTI+ community by participating in Pride Walks, Christian Dior Couture increased the recruitment of employees with disabilities and put in place an ambitious disability inclusion policy, the Talent Incubator Programme held by Sephora in North America introduced mentoring and coaching programmes for future generations of leaders, Chaumont created “Club 55” to bring together ten employees over the age of 55 years and create a dedicated environment for senior employees, and Loewe proposed an inclusion programme to provide inclusive experience for both clients and employees. Aligned with SDGs 5, 8 and 10, LVMH fosters diversity, supports employees at all career stages, and sustains ethical standards across all the creative *Maisons*.

INDITEX case

Inditex was founded in 1963 as a small family business (Rađenović et al. 2023). Currently, the company owns various brands such as: Zara, Stradivarius, Bershka, Pull&Bear, Massimo Dutti etc. (Inditex 2024) and has activities in 96 countries.

Starting with the first word of the individual frequency in Figure 7, Inditex is a people-centered company. “People” is the most frequent word, having a frequency (more than 200 instances) that is twice that of the following observed words. “People” is a key word for Inditex, and all other words identified are related to it. The commitment to the well-being of employees is highlighted by the following word, “health”, commitment to the employees development by “training” and “programme” which creates the context of learning and skill development, presents opportunities for employees, a term with similar frequency. The terms “community” and “inclusion” suggest the company’s commitment to apply responsible DEI principles. Furthermore, the presence of “teams” and “workers” indicates the focus on collaborations at all levels of the organization, creating a better work environment for employees. “Safety” is the last of the top ten words by frequency, suggesting a general safe zone for the company’s stakeholders.

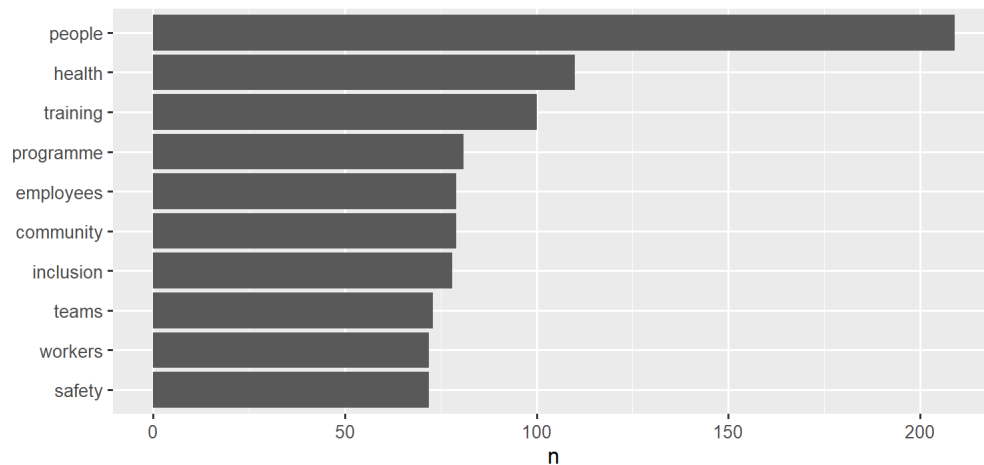


Figure 7. Word frequency in INDITEX

Source: Authors’ own research, generated with R Studio.

Note. n represent the number of appearances of the presented word in the analyzed text.

As noted previously, Inditex is a people-centered company, and Figure 8 highlights additional key areas regarding the company’s commitment to fair labor, equality, and employee well-being. Inditex reports on “living wages”, “professional development”, “collective bargaining”, “life-balance” and “trade unions” referring to the prioritization of worker rights to receive fair wages, well-being, and career, and to have a voice in negotiations. Additionally, “occupational health” indicates an emphasis on occupational safety and health standards, protecting and supporting the work environment. “Gender equality” refers to the dedication to diversity and inclusion, and from a corporate responsibility perspective, Inditex promotes “investment in community”. The supply chain represents an important resource in company’s activities and is crucial to provide the best “customer services”. “Advisory board”, “agreement framework” and “priority impact” point to decision-making bodies that guide the company to ethical, responsible, and sustainable actions. In times of crisis, the company could sustain challenges with “emergency relief” practices, such as humanitarian actions and risk response.



Figure 8. Words bigram in INDITEX

Source: Authors' own research, generated with R Studio.

Inditex reinforces corporate responsibility through investment in the corporate community, this being the first frequency trigram in Figure 9. The commitment to social development aligns with the labor standards set by the International Labor Organization (ILO) which ensure workers' rights, fair wages, and ethical labor practices. "Sustainable fashion school" promotes education in the apparel industry and addresses the gender pay gap, ensuring that the disparities between gender payments are addressed, and women have equal opportunities. The trigrams make reference to the SDGs related to human rights and their applicability to policies. Inditex engages in human rights alliances, collaborating with nongovernmental organizations. Inditex addresses "gender-based violence" which in the apparel industry may occur frequently, especially due to the substantial activities in countries where labor rights may be at risk. "Ethical trading initiative" applies in the supply chain and ensures transparency, ethical sourcing and responsible activities among suppliers. Additionally, as observed in the bigrams in Figure 8, the "emergency relief programme" helps communities in need, further developed through the community investment policy that formalizes these commitments as part of a sustainable business model.

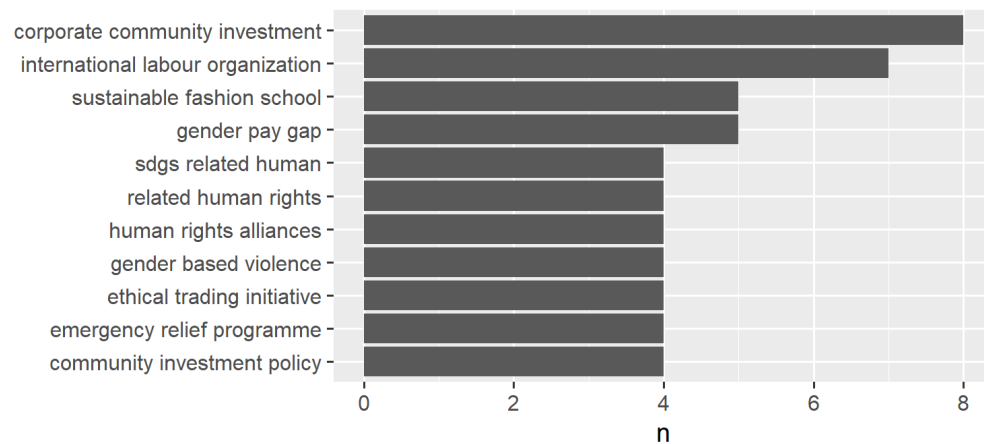


Figure 9. Words trigram in LVMH

Source: Authors' own research, generated with R Studio.

Note. n represent the number of appearances of the presented word in the analyzed text.

SDG 5, SDG 8, and SDG 10 reporting in INDITEX

INDITEX reports on the commitment to the 2030 Agenda for each of the three relevant SDGs. When it comes to gender equality (SDG 5), Inditex states that “women empowerment” is written in the company’s strategic model. Inclusion is important in all workplaces; in Spain, the group has created an Equality Plan and publishes the Diversity and Inclusion Manifesto together with obtaining the Gender Equality European & International Standard (GEEIS) certification for each subsidiary. This commitment extends to the supply chain and the community through partnerships with organizations such as “Every Mother Counts” or Entreculturas (Inditex 2023c). SDG 8 creates a safe work environment that supports the inclusion and diversity of the company and is based on equal opportunities and development paths for everyone. SDG 10 represents the engagement with the community through initiatives in collaboration with the Red Cross, Caritas and Red Crescent and, for the fourth year, with UNHCR for the donation of 1.2 million articles to refugees from countries that have vulnerable individuals.

Conclusion

The current study provides the textual analysis of the social reporting models of three fashion companies: H&M, LVMH, and Inditex and highlights their commitments to ethical labor actions, social responsibility, and alignment with SDGs 5, 8 and 10. By examining word frequencies, bigrams, and trigrams in the reports and statements, the research identifies the key themes tackled by the companies and their perspectives on labor rights, human rights, and DEI.

The position of companies with respect to social issues can be observed in the general themes of the reports and in their behavior and activities in society. H&M’s main topic is human rights, and the company focusses on supply chain management, which could also be observed in its commitment to the achievement of the SDG. The luxury apparel company LVMH prioritizes employee well-being and diversity, and Inditex puts people at the core of the business. The various business themes observed could be constructed because of various factors: corporate structures, other priorities of the company, stakeholder feedback and expectations on what was done and what can be done better, history of the company linked to social responsibility, different regulatory environments, corporate cultures and positioning on the market.

As observed in various situations (BBC 2018; Conlon 2019; Wang 2019) stakeholder engagement plays a critical role as customers, investors, and groups that militate for societal welfare have high expectations and react proportionally to the actions of the company. H&M focuses on transparency due to their fast fashion business model and cares more about the supply chain as the risk is higher due to the expectations of customers. LVMH focuses more on its employees due to its tradition of excellence, which is highlighted through its SDGs and long-term commitments. Inditex considers employees, society, and strong collaborations in the achievement of SDGs such as the Red Cross and Every Mother Counts. These differences represent a challenge, but they are necessary to observe industry progress.

The findings of the study have several implications regarding the emphasis on key social issues and the connection between corporate policies and SDG reporting, to understand the efforts of companies to align with international standards. The variations in our sample suggest that there is no universal framework regarding how companies in this industry should report their impact. The textual analysis itself represents one of the limitations, as there is no assessment of how the policies were observed in practice. Another limitation is the retrieved text, as it is represented by publicly available reports which do not capture the reality of what is happening in the industry and

do not disclose supply chain practices. Future research could extend to stakeholders' perspectives and the real-world impacts versus what the companies present. Companies address social issues in their reports in presenting internal impact, as well as external impact, but further analysis on the practices needs to be done to understand the progress of the companies on social responsibility and with respect to human rights.

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