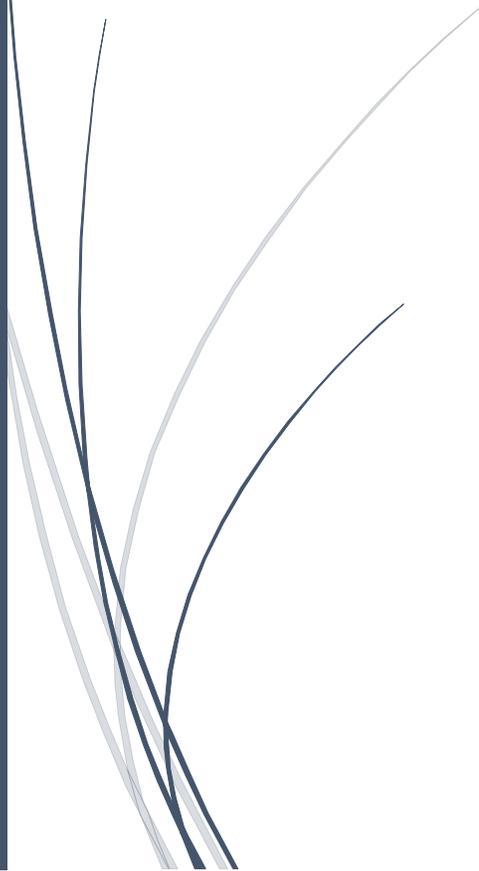




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# Green Marketing: Patagonia vs. Nike

Senior Capstone Research Proposal



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## Abstract:

Green marketing has become more relevant in the last decade. Consumers are more observant and knowledgeable nowadays, with social media playing a significant factor. Corporate responsibility has forced companies to be accountable for their actions. People are starting to be more conscious of the environment, meaning they eat healthier and purchase sustainable products. The consumer has the ultimate choice on what product they want. With a wide variety of products, competition is at an all-time high. Sustainable companies, products, and initiatives have gained popularity because of their environmental benefit. People want to help the environment, especially by purchasing something they need. Patagonia and Nike have realized this and have put in significant work to become more sustainable. Although this is great, people may never know the contribution to environmental sustainability the company made without proper marketing. Green Marketing effectively promotes companies' sustainable efforts to attract more customers. This case study covers Patagonia's successful green marketing and how Nike has fallen short of marketing its environmental efforts. Patagonia's perception is solely focused on sustaining the environment. Nike's environmental efforts are extensive and detailed but have not been marketed very well. In order to reap the profit potential that environmental initiatives can have on a company, green marketing tactics must be used to advertise it.

## Introduction

Capitalism around the world has been very positive for economic growth but negatively affects the natural environment. Large corporations use planned obsolescence to increase profitability by making the consumer reliant on buying new products. These corporations have designed their products to be single-use, not durable, and decline in performance from the day it is bought. This forces the consumer to spend more money and throw away old products. Most products have some kind of plastic in them; unfortunately, plastic does not decompose. This means plastics can stick around indefinitely, wreaking havoc on marine and land ecosystems. (National Ocean Service par. 6).

A few companies stand apart from these profit-driven counterparts. Patagonia, in particular, has set an example for other companies. They donate tremendous amounts of money to preserve the natural environment and make sustainable, long-lasting products for their customers. Throughout the early '70s and '80s, Yvon Chouinard (Patagonia Founder) would consistently look for new and improved fabrics for certain outdoor activities. An example of a donation Patagonia has recently made; in addition to its \$10 million donation match, Patagonia will donate, as it has for more than 30 years, one percent of its 2019 sales to nearly 1,200 grantees. To date, the company has donated more than \$110 million to nonprofits working on environmental problems facing communities and the planet (Simpson par. 9). How successful is their sustainable marketing on consumers? Can other companies, such as Nike, use Patagonia's sustainable marketing methods to increase their profit margins? Can green marketing significantly decrease our environmental impact?

### Research Questions:

This capstone answers to following questions through a literature review and survey:

1. What green marketing strategies and initiatives does Patagonia use to increase its success?
2. How has Patagonia's brand perception affected their business?
3. Why do people purchase Patagonia products, and what factors influence them?
4. How does Nike advertise their positive environmental contribution, and do people recognize it?
5. What is the comparison between Patagonia and Nike's marketing/environmental contribution? Can it be measured

### Literature Review

The research conducted for this review was found at the University of Arizona Library through online databases. In addition to online articles and studies found through search engines. Multiple articles regarding green marketing strategies will be discussed to gather evidence supporting Patagonia and showing an example of their high level of success due to sustainable advertising. In addition, other companies such as Nike will be directly compared to Patagonia.

Greenwashing is unacceptable. To successfully maintain sustainable marketing tactics, the company must prove donation/commitment to their consumers. Greenwashing is when a company states they are acting sustainably when they are not. Many companies also exaggerate their sustainable measures. For example, a company could claim they are using recycled material but state the percentage, which is often very low. The statement "made with recycled material" makes consumers feel positive about their purchases even though they are unaware that most of the product is made with virgin material. Statistical analysis is necessary to check up on the company's sustainable measures to ensure accuracy. Only when they are verified should they be

marketed to consumers. There is no current system to punish greenwashing or analyzing companies, but hopefully, soon, there will be.

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century attitude has recently shifted towards environmentalism. Companies have taken notice and began to change their marketing strategies to accommodate and increase their consumer base. Environmental companies led the charge by advertising their product and encouraging people to go outdoors more often. By going outdoors, you are more likely to purchase products from those outdoor companies. Other companies have emerged from this new idealism, such as reusable water bottle companies like Hydro flask<sup>®</sup>. Another great biodegradable and sustainable product are golf balls invented by Albus Golf<sup>®</sup>, which biodegrade into fish food to restore fish populations.

The marketing of sustainable products must increase their sales volumes, allowing the budget to donate to environmental organizations. These companies are different from Patagonia. Their products reduce the amount of waste and eliminate pollution in an exciting way. While Patagonia has great clothing, it is a product that does not actively decrease pollution. Therefore, they choose to make all business operations sustainable and also donate to environmental/wildlife organizations. Product packaging and manufacturing have to be environmentally friendly but still draw in consumers. Combining all these factors is necessary to create a truly sustainable brand image that will increase sales volume. Creating a trustable brand that is consistently backed up by facts is very important to get consumers to support your cause.

Patagonia's sustainable marketing techniques represent its values as a company and its mission. They sell durable activewear to promote outdoor activities while creating minimal waste. The correlation between Patagonia's sustainable marketing and sales volume is important for the continuation of this. The increase in sales each year allows Patagonia to continue and

donate to environmental organizations. If their sustainable marketing is proven successful, other companies will follow their business model towards a zero-impact business. Patagonia does extensive research into organizations to ensure their donations are being used effectively. Although this is a great way to be environmentally friendly, it is not the only way.

Dedicating funding to environmental efforts to cancel out a company's carbon footprint is another way to be sustainable. Advertising the company's donation to the environment will improve the perception around them. This will lead to more sales of all products. To maintain a competitive advantage, all companies will have to decrease their environmental impact and increase their sustainable marketing. Patagonia has the most successful sustainable marketing, which directly correlates to higher sales volume.

Patagonia's marketing/brand culture is unique because they have gone above and beyond traditional environmental standards. The company donates large amounts of money to environmental organizations, increasing its brand image and decreasing its negative impact. The founder of Patagonia, Yvon Chouinard, also founded the environmental organization 1% for the planet. Companies who commit to this organization give 1% of all their revenue to this organization that disperses it amongst smaller environmental organizations that help ecosystems. Patagonia's self-imposed Earth tax, 1% for the Planet, supports environmental nonprofits working to defend our air, land, and water around the globe (Patagonia Website). An Earth tax should be required for all companies in order to preserve the environment. This may not seem like a lot, but in 2017 Patagonia made \$800 million in revenue. This means Patagonia donated eight million just to this organization last year, not to mention the other sustainability work they do. Although this is a significant amount of money, companies need to acknowledge the causes of degradation and work towards a net-zero impact. Donating money to environmental

organizations and working towards net-zero encompasses pure sustainability. This is one of the main reasons consumers perceive Patagonia to be more sustainable than its competitors, such as The North Face, Columbia, and REI. The high perception of Patagonia leads to more sales/taking away sales from competitors. The problem with capitalism is the low-level of responsibility that companies take advantage of. Sustainable-focused companies are paving the way to increase responsibility and be proactive about environmental protection.



*Figure 1. Patagonia's marketing for 1% for the planet*

The life-cycle of a product is very important when making a purchase and the raw materials used to produce that product. A long life-cycle and minimal raw material usage are very sustainable. Planned obsolescence is the opposite, it takes advantage of consumers, and the only goal is to increase profits. For example, water bottle companies such as Aquafina or Dasani produce billions of plastic bottles a year. According to the Container Recycling Institute, 100.7 billion plastic beverage bottles were sold in the U.S. in 2014, and more than 8 million tons of plastic are dumped in our oceans every year (Plastic Oceans par. 11). A consumer will use plastic once then throw it away, that trash finds its way into the ocean or landfill. An alternative to this

is a reusable water bottle that can help fight against single-use plastics. Single-use products are detrimental to the environment, and consumers must choose sustainable alternatives to stop this negative trend. Companies must stop planned obsolescence and promote sustainable business practices/products through strategic marketing in a world of extreme pollution.

The new era of environmental awareness and sustainable business practice is slowly becoming more relevant. Consumers can partially control how companies operate and act. Companies rely on consumers to purchase their products. If most consumers decide only to purchase sustainably made products, other companies will be forced to make their products more environmentally friendly. Patagonia was created around one goal: In business to save the environment. Their products encourage people to experience the amazing natural world, and then they use the profits to donate to environmental conservation efforts. In order for companies to invest in environmentally friendly solutions, there must be an incentive or profit. If sustainable marketing campaigns show large sales volume increases, businesses will be incentivized to adopt environmental efforts.

Patagonia's sustainable marketing is leading to higher profit margins. In 2011, Patagonia put out a Black Friday advertisement with a picture of a jacket, saying, "DON'T BUY THIS JACKET." The purpose of this was to remind people not to buy things they do not need. Patagonia would rather you not buy their product if you do not need it. Coincidentally Patagonia's revenue growth equaled 40% between 2011 and 2013, while The North Face only grew 18% (Simoes pg. 43). If similar marketing plans were presented to other businesses that worked efficiently and effectively, the businesses might adopt this to increase profits—creating a mutually beneficial relationship between business and the environment. This would create minimal pollution, and our environment could begin to recover from the damages already

caused. This message was meant for people to pause and reflect but did not work. A change in green marketing could portray a different message not associated with sales.

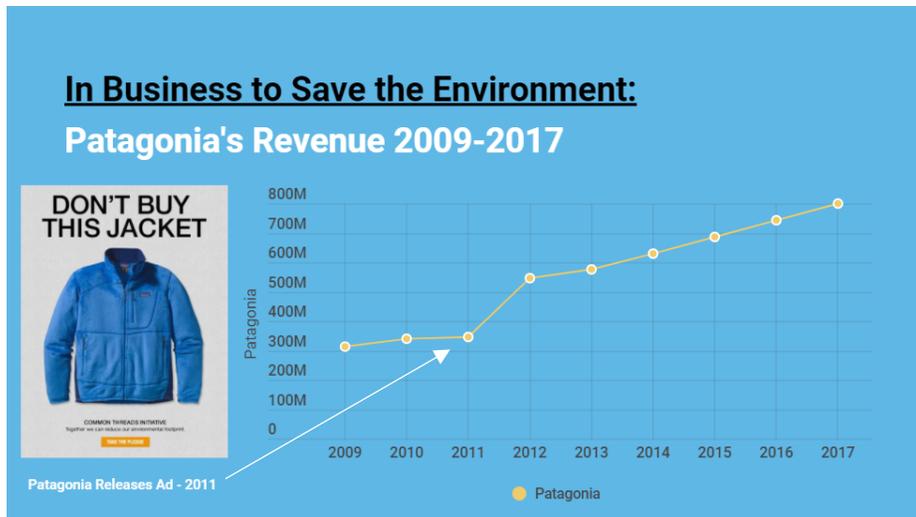


Figure 2. Patagonia's revenue post Black Friday ad.

Green Marketing may work for Patagonia's Competitors but not every business. Patagonia and its competitors sell similar outdoor products. Regular corporations that sell products must increase their marketing to spread the word effectively. Labeling on products and social media advertisements are important. Products at the store need effective labeling to outsell their competitors on the same shelf. Eco-consumers will look for products that have sustainable labeling. This is another target market to increase sales for a company. Patagonia's market advantage leads to higher revenues earned, then directly to higher donation amounts to nonprofit organizations. Patagonia cannot help its competitors with green marketing because it will lose business. However, it could help companies in other industries. Research will have to be further in-depth on other companies that do not mainly sell outdoor gear. This is the only way to provide a relationship between the two companies.

Private companies have stronger values and goals than public companies due to investors. Public companies are strictly profit-driven; their investors influence their decision-making towards higher profit ratios/return on investment for themselves. Because of public company's greed, showing that environmental contribution can lead to profits could work beneficially for both parties. On one side, the company is making more profit on sales due to sustainable commitment advertisements. On the other side, the company is donating significant funding to organizations that reverse environmental degradation. Private companies maintain their ethics and core values; the owner/board controls what the company does. Although not strictly influenced by profits, this is still an important part of the business. Patagonia has been privately owned and operated since its founding in 1973. Profit drives everything; if environmental sustainability can lead to profits, it will be adopted by every business.

On the other hand, Nike has been significantly decreasing their environmental impact since 2012. Every five years, they do an extensive report summarizing their accomplishments and areas they failed. Being transparent to their customers while also proving their continued commitment to reduce their impact on the environment is essential. In the same report, they describe their plan to meet environmental goals over the next five years. Nike has three categories they focus on, with multiple subsections to each category. Sustainability is the first. Nike is working towards decreasing its environmental impact while improving its supply chain's social/labor standards. Next, diversity and inclusion in their corporate setting. For example, more stores and factories are being built-in low-income areas to increase the economy and supply more jobs for people in those communities. Last, community benefits are achieved by putting programs in place to get kids active (Nike Impact Report Pg. 11). Not only does Nike focus on decreasing their environmental impact, but it targets all three elements of sustainability. Social,

economic, and environmental factors are all considered to improve the natural environment and the built environment. Nike's impact report and goals help tremendously, and its business performance is great. The only adjustment I could see for Nike is the increase in Green Marketing. Effectively advertising these accomplishments could help Nike increase sales that could assist with meeting its goals.

Nike began its commitment to environmental design in 2012. They launched their first sustainable product in 2012: the Nike Fly knit running shoe. They worked with Stoll, the leading flat knitting machine supplier) to produce millions of pairs of these shoes. The fly knit technology saved 2 million pounds of waste in 2012 (Nike Sustainable Business Report 2014-2015). This led Nike to continue refining the shoe's performance, and they released 28 different models across 6 categories in 2015. These new sustainable running shoes contributed to a large growth of the company. It also boosted Nike's partner's innovation in sustainable fabrication technologies (Fung Chap. 22). Nike significantly supported sustainable businesses by purchasing this fly knit material. This allowed them to be more successful and expand. It also gathered the attention of other companies to purchase this recycled plastic material to create shoes.

Nike is a publicly-traded that has great leadership that continuously innovates products. They have consistently created new eco-friendly shoes to sell and reduce their waste. Since 2015 they released a large set of sustainable development goals- not just for designing shoes, but to decrease their impact as much as possible. They continue to update and report on their progress towards becoming net-zero in all aspects of their business. The **Nike Circularity** campaign is their marketing advertisement. Circularity, guiding the future of design. This is Nike's sustainability side. They are focused on decreasing their impact on the planet while maximizing their innovative design in a sustainable way. Their marketing campaign is robust and inspiring.



Figure 3. Nike's Space Hippiie shoe

An increase in advertisements would help their image significantly, as not many people know about their sustainability. This image is a newly released shoe called the “Space Hippiie.” Most of the shoe is made out of recycled trash. This is just one way Nike is improving their sustainability.

Nike and Patagonia are two of the most recognizable corporations in the world. Nike is known for its shoes and sportswear, while Patagonia is known for its sustainable outdoor wear. Most people think of Patagonia as environmentally friendly and high-quality material. While people think Nike is all about sport, fashion, and performance. Nike has a large sustainability branch, but they are not advertising it frequently. Nike ads are all over the place, but very few are about sustainability. If Nike increases their ads about Circularity and corporate responsibility, they may see increased sales volume. Green Marketing is essential to show the public what measures the company is taking to protect the environment and decrease the negative impact. Performing the action is fantastic, but marketing the action effectively can lead to an increase in sales. Green Marketing has become much more influential to consumers and their view of brands.

## Methodology

I administered a survey to 30 people asking questions related to Patagonia and Nike. The survey was dispersed to determine people’s perspectives and general knowledge on Patagonia, Nike, and sustainability. The gender of participants was half male and half female, and the age of participants was 20-24 years old, with 2 participants aged 45 and 51. Two different surveys were used in this study, with one focusing on Patagonia, and the other, compared Patagonia to Nike to

prove that Patagonia's green marketing has led to its increased sales volume and public perception. This would provide an example of successful green marketing. The example could be used to persuade other companies to increase their green marketing. While Nike has been pursuing environmental offsets and other measures, their green marketing advertisements have not been as successful as Patagonia. The questions asked people about their general knowledge of Patagonia, Nike, and sustainability. Survey results showed that Patagonia's brand image is strong with consumers, while Nike may be falling short.

## Results

Patagonia's marketing is still proven to be successful based on the acknowledgment of its brand image. The bar graph in [Figure 1](#) shows consumer's initial thoughts when they think about Nike Versus Patagonia ([Figure 2](#)). Most people immediately see Nike as a sports gear supply company. Patagonia is seen as a sustainability company most often (46%). This shows that green marketing ads are effectively reaching consumers. The table in [Figure 3](#) states that 83% of participants would pay more money for a durable product. Patagonia products are priced high for each article of clothing. Seeing that customers are willing to pay more for a better product is beneficial. Due to Patagonia's innovative technology, they constantly test new products. They also offer a wear and tear policy for used shirts and repairs, encouraging reuse and recycling. The promotion and commitment Patagonia has for the environment are unmatched by any other company. The pie chart in [Figure 4](#) illustrates that consumers would rather purchase a sustainable product (93%). The competition between outdoor companies is very high, and Patagonia has better marketing than its peers.

Green marketing requires many advertisements to evoke the public about a particular company or product. Consistent advertising will remind the consumer of the sustainable

product/company. When consumers are shopping for a product, they will remember the sustainable product they saw in the advertisement and choose that one over another. Nike has phenomenal advertisements that air on multiple different platforms. Patagonia has fewer ads. I asked the survey respondents how often they saw ads of each company. When asked how often they see Nike advertisements, 66% said “often” over sometimes or rarely (Figure 5), suggesting they see Nike advertisements daily. When asked how often they see Patagonia advertisements, 80% said “sometimes or rarely” (Figure 6). Nike has more advertisements running than Patagonia due to their large product selection and wide target market. Although Nike has numerous advertisements, when survey respondents were asked who they thought the more sustainable company was, 100% said Patagonia was. Patagonia has established its perception of being a sustainable company through green marketing while Nike has not.

Figure 1:

Q2 - What is the first thing you think of when you hear Nike?

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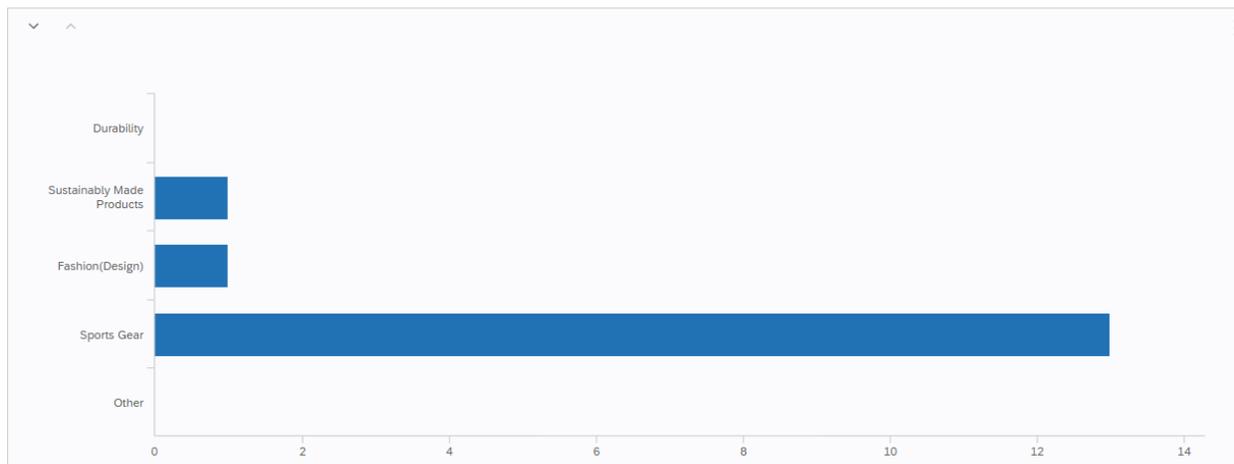


Figure 2:

Q1 - What is the first thing you think of when you hear Patagonia?

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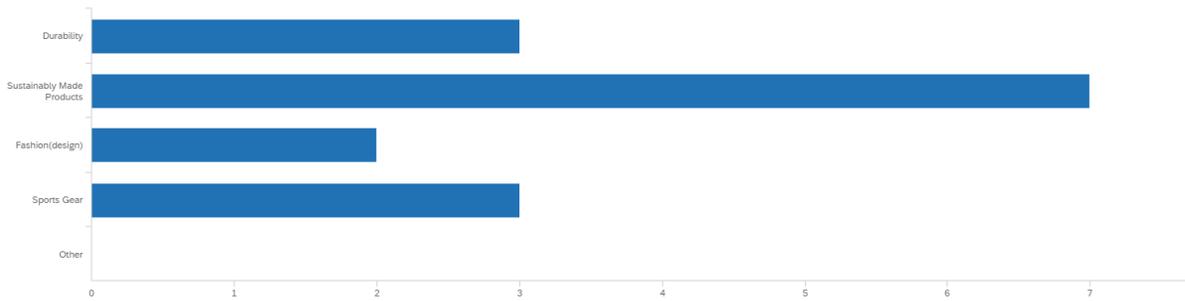


Figure 3:

Q4 - Would you pay more for a product with high durability(Lifespan)?

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	82.35% 14
2	Maybe	17.65% 3
3	No	0.00% 0
		17

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Figure 4:

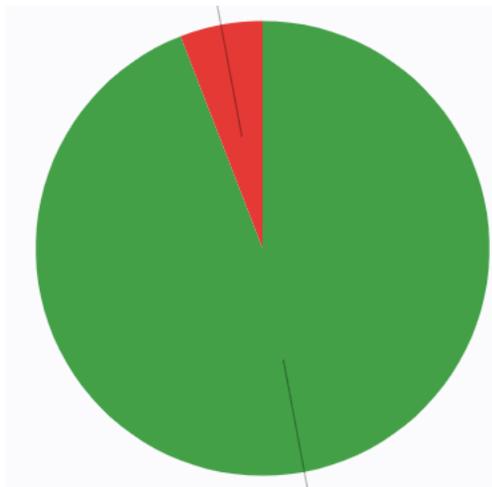


Figure 5:

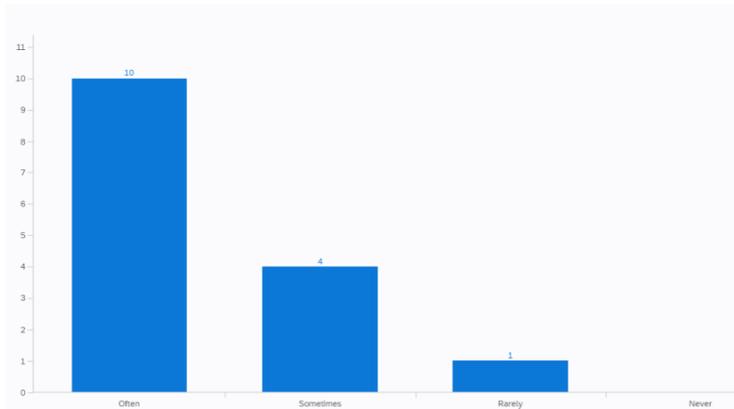
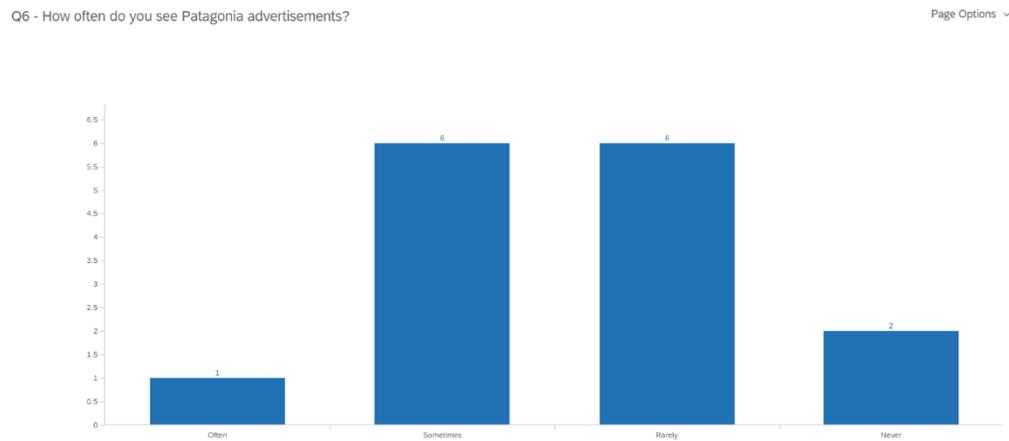


Figure 6:



### Discussion:

Patagonia has established itself as the predominant sustainable company over Nike. Their mission, products, and business plan are centered around their commitment to making the natural environment better through business. Their recycled shirts and gear are non-harmful or wasteful to the environment. They completely follow through with their mission statement, “In business

to save the environment.” The public perception around Patagonia is very high. This is another reason they can charge a high price for their products. People feel good about buying them, knowing some proceeds will go towards helping restore our natural environment.

Patagonia has a unique business model that is difficult to understand from the outside due to the minimal financial data available. Regardless of the product Patagonia sells, its core values are to protect the environment. Just because companies do not sell outdoor equipment or clothes does not mean they cannot help out in the journey to become carbon neutral. Patagonia could offer a patented business plan that can help businesses succeed in profit and carbon offsets. Patagonia currently offers assistance to start-ups to encourage small businesses. This helps the economy and does not allow large corporations to run everything.

Nike’s sustainability plan is very well developed and thought out. Using the three pillars of sustainability, social, economic, and environmental, they have significantly reduced their impact. While simultaneously improving hundreds of communities around the world. They spend most of their marketing budget on advertisements focused on communities or diversity or new technology in their products. This helps sell their products and promote their brand. The social and economic side is being included in their advertisements, but the environmental side is missing. Nike just released a couple of advertisements regarding their new Space Hippy shoe made out of recycled material. This is a positive start, but their green marketing still has room to improve. Nike should air three different advertisements on a platform per day rather than continuously repeat the same one. An advertisement of their social benefit, economic benefit, and environmental benefit. I believe this would help build their perception around the brand higher than it currently is.

## Conclusion:

Patagonia and Nike both contribute significantly to the environment. They recognize that they must take the necessary steps in protecting our natural world as a large corporation. Both of their production methods create pollution and waste one way or another. Many factors are out of a business's control. This does not mean there is nothing to be done about it! Any and every step towards a less harmful impact will provide relief from environmental degradation. Patagonia focuses heavily on cash donations to environmental organizations. These organizations perform tasks that Patagonia is not capable of doing. They also focus on making reusable/recycled clothing and gear to sell to their customers. Through science and design, they continue to create more efficient and recycled products for the future.

Nike is similar in many ways to Patagonia. They also use science and design to create new innovative materials and products. Nike uses quite a bit of recycled material to create new shoe designs. This keeps this material from going into landfills or the ocean. On top of just reusing and recycled, Nike has an assigned biology lab to create new materials to use in their products. These products/scientists go hand in hand. The scientist develops a new way to reuse or make a product less impactful. Then the company approves and sells the product. Nike leads the charge in diversification, whether that be in the workplace or for social justice. They consider all parts of sustainability. Their impact report that is located on their website is extremely detailed on their previous, current, and future goals and initiatives. The environmental protection side is rarely seen from Nike. Patagonia always remains consistent with its green marketing throughout their company. Nike has a sustainability plan but fails to advertise it correctly. Nike continues to increase its efforts but still lacks green marketing skills. I believe Nike will soon improve their green marketing to increase its target markets and follow its sustainability report.

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