

Postgraduate Dissertation: Developing an Environmental Social Governance (ESG) Framework for Internationally Operating Activewear Brands with Application to Sweaty Betty Limited

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Submission Date: 8th September 2023

Abstract:

Internationally operating fashion brands often struggle to effectively implement the Environmental Social Governance (ESG) management approach, especially in the activewear category, as shown by Good on You's sustainability ratings. While frameworks exist to help fashion brands assess and improve their ESG, there is a notable gap for activewear. This study proposes a framework to help internationally operating activewear brands assess and improve their ESG approaches by combining existing research on ESG, activewear, international fashion and existing ESG frameworks. The framework is applied to British internationally operating activewear brand, Sweaty Betty Limited, revealing a high ESG risk, predominantly due to insufficient governance along its supply chain. For effective application, testers should ideally collaborate with internationally operating activewear brands and multidisciplinary specialists to navigate ESG's complex, multifaceted nature and the particularly challenging trade-offs brands face between financial and ESG performance resulting from:

- Extensive, costly international supply chain management
- Limited affordable, sustainable options to create performance wear
- Pressure to maintain a competitive advantage in an increasingly saturated market

Further framework testing is advised against other types of internationally operating activewear and sportswear brands.

Tasks:

1. Compile a Literature Review on:
 - a. The evolution of corporate responsibility
 - b. ESG
 - i. Drivers for increased business uptake
 - ii. Advantages and disadvantages
 - c. ESG challenges/trends of internationally operating activewear brands
 - d. Existing general and fashion industry ESG frameworks
2. Based on the Literature Review findings, define a framework to help internationally operating activewear brands assess/improve their ESG strategies/performance
3. Explain the rationale and functionality of the framework.
4. Identify the key features of Sweaty Betty Limited's ESG proposition via a customer survey, employee interview, 'secret shopper' review, and primary/secondary publicly available online sources
5. Critically evaluate the key features of Sweaty Betty Limited's ESG proposition against the framework, proposing recommendations for improvement where necessary
6. Consider the framework's suitability and its potential for application to other internationally operating activewear brands

Summary of Outputs:

[ESG Framework for Internationally Operating Activewear Brands with Application to Sweaty Betty Limited](#)

Outcomes:

The project yielded substantial insights into Sweaty Betty Limited's ESG proposition through comprehensive data collection efforts, encompassing 240 responses from an international customer survey, a thorough 2-hour interview with a UK retail employee, and a meticulous 'secret shopper' review of 2 UK stores. The researcher shared this data and their ESG strategy recommendations with Sweaty Betty's head office in London, aiming to inspire improvements in the brand's ESG and sustainability strategies.

The project was awarded [The Professor Robert D. Pearce Prize](#) at Henley Business School for its innovative ideas on sustainable development. This research prize was established in memory of the world-renowned scholar who had a particular interest in the socio-economic field. For further information or to donate to the prize fund, click [here](#).