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**Corporate Social Responsibility in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in the
Fashion Industry in South-East Europe:
Organisational Practices and Consumer Behaviour**

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**Corporate Social Responsibility in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in the Fashion
Industry in South-East Europe:
Organisational Practices and Consumer Behaviour**

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To **Mom**, the woman who made me who I am,
all the while never ceasing to amaze me.

You live within me...

To **Dad**, whose belief in me knows no bounds.

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ABSTRACT

This research responds to CSR scholars, who called for future research to investigate the concept of CSR and CSR implementation across different contexts. Accordingly, this research enhances the understanding of CSR in small and medium-sized enterprises in the fashion industry across four South-East European (SEE) countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. It depicts the multifaceted reality of the social phenomenon of CSR through two social entities – owners/managers and consumers. It shows that the region does not embrace an inclusive CSR mentality. Yet, the interviewed SME owners and managers are familiar with the concept, and they implement CSR activities to a certain extent. The focus group participants and online community members/commenters are not as well-informed as the interviewed SME owners and managers. The responses demonstrate differences at the national level. Accordingly, this research also presents the cross-national differences in CSR and CSR implementation between the above-mentioned SEE countries through the institutional and stakeholder theory lenses. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first research to identify CSR differences between EU and non-EU member countries. It shows that the presence or lack of the EU as an institutional actor changes the application of CSR in the investigated countries. Based on the institutional pressures, this research creates a four-level conceptual framework, which presents CSR processes taken at four different actor levels: (1) company, (2) national, (3) regional and (4) international. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on CSR in SMEs, CSR in developing countries and CSR in the fashion industry. It also enriched the literature on CSR implementation by differentiating the CSR implementation steps for (a) small-sized and (b) medium-sized companies. It identifies five idyllic CSR implementation steps: (1) CSR Awareness, (2) CSR Understanding, (3) CSR Embedding, (4) CSR Communication and (5) CSR Evaluation. Lastly, it adds to the knowledge of the impact of CSR on consumer perceptions and behaviours. Methodologically, it contributes to qualitative research by employing qualitative methods in a field dominated by quantitative research. It also advances the CIS and netnographic approaches in the CSR field. Practically, this research provides clear guidelines to unaware and inexperienced SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece willing to embrace CSR.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

In the present era, the responsibilities of business enterprises go beyond the profit motives for their sole benefit. They involve organisational practices and activities that consider social and environmental concerns to all parties (stakeholders) that business enterprises affect (Loison et al., 2018; Carroll, 2021). These responsibilities have been subsumed under the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Pieces of evidence of this concept can be marked out for centuries (Sheehy, 2015). The footprints of the modern era of CSR transpired at the beginning of the 1950s. Since then, CSR has become one of the most orthodox concepts in contemporary agendas (Grimstad et al., 2020; Jamali et al., 2020; Carroll, 2021; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). The multiple benefits of CSR (corporate reputation, customer loyalty and satisfaction, operational cost savings, company innovation and better economic performance, among others; Ho et al. 2021; Khan et al. 2021) have led numerous businesses to adopt this concept (Luo and Du 2015; Story and Neves, 2015; Donia et al. 2019; Edinger-Schons et al., 2019). Besides businesses, CSR has grabbed the attention of scholars, media, civil society and national, regional and international actors (Jamali et al., 2020).

Pressured by the societal demand for socially responsible practices, CSR has transferred from an incidental idea to a global concept (Carroll, 2021) that should not be neglected by companies (Grimstad et al., 2020). In particular, large and multinational companies in developed countries have been put under the spotlight of such pressures. Most of them have adopted CSR, as they possess resources, time, and knowledge (Jamali et al., 2017; Dey et al., 2018; Sendlhofer, 2019). With the increasing global relevance of CSR, the stakeholders' expectations have spurred towards all companies. In the current landscape, companies – regardless of size, country position or industry – are expected to adhere to CSR practices (Jamali et al., 2020; Carroll, 2021; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023).

1.2 Justification, Originality and Importance

To this day, little research has been conducted on the implementation of CSR in SMEs (Hamann et al., 2017; Lythreatis et al., 2019; Sendlhofer, 2019). There is a need to understand how SMEs understand and implement CSR (Magrizos et al., 2021; Oduro et al., 2021). The reason is two-fold. First, SMEs are the backbone of the world economy (Jamali et al., 2017; 2020). SMEs have a crucial role and impact on the national, regional and global economy (Spence, 2016); they dominate the global population of corporations – by more than 90% (Lythreatis et al., 2019) and offer more than three-quarters of employment (Jamali et al., 2017; Courrent et al., 2018). Thus, understanding how SMEs perceive and implement CSR is crucial. Second, scholars such as Lähdesmäki et al. (2019) and Magrizos et al. (2021) have recommended investigating SMEs apart from large companies and acknowledging SMEs' particularities in terms of CSR arguments, practices and theories. They have suggested recognising distinctive organisational structures and features in the CSR application. Accordingly, this research followed their suggestions.

Additionally, studies “have fallen short in terms of a more nuanced analysis of how CSR manifests itself in markets outside the developed core (Jamali and Karam, 2018, p. 32)”. Up until now, CSR studies in developing countries have been conducted mainly in Africa and Asia, and very few studies have focused on developing countries located in other regions, such as South-East Europe (SEE). SEE as a region has a unique composition; it is composed of developed and developing countries. It has been undergoing a dynamic process of social, political and economic transformation for the last two decades (Koleva and Meadows, 2021). SMEs in the region account for 99,8% of active enterprises and generate 75% of employment (EC, 2023; OECD, 2023). SEE has an immense involvement of regional and international actors in developing a sustainable region and raising CSR awareness, yet SEE follows a slow pace in adopting a CSR culture (UNIDO, 2012; Barić et al., 2021). Managers and consumers are unaware of CSR activities; in particular, SMEs in the SEE are unfamiliar with CSR and do not report their practices (Pitoska et al., 2018; Mijatovic et al., 2019; Butković et al., 2021). This research considered that SEE provides a thought-provoking case for investigation. Therefore, it deemed it relevant to ask what CSR looks like in SMEs among SEE countries, how SMEs in SEE understand and implement CSR and how consumers understand CSR activities implemented by SMEs. Additionally, Hamann et al. (2017),

Jamali et al. (2017; 2020) and Khan and Lockhart (2022) recommended developing the existing knowledge on CSR by studying the impact that different economic and institutional conditions have on CSR's understanding and practices in SMEs.

Consequently, this research explained CSR in SMEs among four South-East European countries: Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, and Greece. This research investigated these four countries, as up until now, the majority of studies researching the region have taken place only on a single-state level or included different SEE countries in their cross-national research. These countries, among others, offered the researcher the opportunity to address the CSR differences in terms of its understanding and implementation at the national and regional level between EU (Croatia and Greece) and non-EU (Kosovo and Albania) member countries in SEE.

This research focused on the fashion industry, as it is among the three most developed industries in SEE (annually growing by 4%), and it is composed predominantly of SMEs – 90% (EC, 2019b; Statista, 2019). In the last decade, it has increasingly prevailed in the SEE region (Lu, 2019; Nutall, 2019), and thus, it provided a fertile ground for research. The current literature on CSR in the fashion industry is developing, yet scholars call for future research to contribute to it (Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Gazzola et al., 2022; Kim and Kim, 2023). The majority of CSR studies investigating CSR focused on fast-fashion and luxury companies (e.g., Diallo et al., 2021; Diallo et al., 2021) and neglected commercial and social enterprises, and most of them neglected SMEs (Colucci et al., 2020; Szegedi et al., 2023). In addition, Jiang (2022) and Kim and Kim (2023) called for future studies to investigate the impact of CSR activities on consumer purchasing preferences in the fashion field. Given the above-mentioned justifications, this research focused on the fashion industry.

The literature on CSR has expanded and diversified (Jamali and Karam, 2018; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Yet, several scholars have heightened the importance of exploring CSR through distinct contexts and social entities (Jamali et al., 2020). They argue that such peculiarities lead to different manifestations of CSR (Jamali and Karam, 2018). Consequently, this research investigated the phenomenon of CSR through three previously emphasised contexts: (1) company size, (2) country

and (3) industry. Specifically, it portrays CSR through (1) SMEs in the (2) South-East Europe in (3) the fashion industry through two social entities – owners/managers and consumers.

This research has important implications for several stakeholders, particularly for SME owners/managers and policymakers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. While SME owners and managers around the world have started embracing CSR, SME owners and managers in SEE countries have just embarked upon a CSR mentality. This research has important implications for Kosovar and Albanian fashion SMEs, as no previous study has investigated the perception of fashion SME owners/managers and consumers on CSR and CSR practices. This research implies that owners and managers would gain from CSR as it provides organisational value, contributes to competitive advantage, creates a positive impact on brand value, gains loyal employees and positively influences the company's environment (Stojanović et al., 2021). By exploring the in-depth understanding of CSR among fashion SME owners/managers and consumers (a multiple perspective), this research provides new insights for future SMEs willing to initiate or improve their adoption of CSR, as it informs them on their two salient stakeholders – other (competitor) fashion SMEs and their (potential) consumers, among others. This research has implications for national and regional policymakers in the region as it provides a well-informed baseline for creating and shifting guidelines and regulations for fashion SMEs from both owners'/managers' and consumers' perspectives.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The main question that drives this research is – (RQ) How is CSR perceived across SEE countries? Its subsidiary research questions are the following: (RQ1) How do fashion SME managers/owners from South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand and implement CSR? and (RQ2) How do fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumer behaviour affected by CSR activities?

This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of CSR in SMEs. In particular, it intends to enrich the knowledge of this topic by researching CSR's perceptions, processes and activities

of SMEs. It aims to (1) investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion SME managers/owners from SEE countries about CSR, (2) understand the process of CSR implementation by fashion SMEs in SEE countries, (3) identify CSR practices/activities employed by fashion SME in SEE countries, (4) identify the main CSR drivers/motives of fashion SME in SEE countries, (5) uncover the opportunities CSR practices/activities present to fashion SME in SEE countries and (6) investigate the level of operation of CSR practices/activities among fashion SME in SEE countries.

Secondly, it aims to contribute to the consumer behaviour literature. To attain that, it pursues to (1) investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion consumers from SEE countries about CSR, (2) understand the perceptions of fashion consumers from SEE countries about CSR activities implemented by fashion SMEs in these countries, (3) uncover the impact of CSR on the purchasing intention and behaviour of fashion consumers from SEE countries and (4) interpret the perceptions of fashion consumers from SEE countries about their (potential) impact on the CSR of fashion SMEs from these countries.

1.4 Theoretical and Methodological Decisions

Given the lack of studies applying theoretical perspectives when dealing with CSR in SMEs (Faller and Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2018; Wang et al., 2020), this research adopted a multi-theory approach – stakeholder theory and institutional theory. First, stakeholder theory helped explain how SME owners/managers in the fashion industry support and balance stakeholders within their companies and in different institutional settings and how stakeholders impact CSR activities. This approach was used to comprehend consumer (a crucial stakeholder) perceptions and behaviours towards CSR and CSR activities. Overall, stakeholder theory contributed to researching the relationship between an SME and SME owner/manager and an SME and consumers. Institutional theory, on the other hand, helped understand CSR perception and CSR activities in different institutional contexts across the four chosen SEE countries (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016; Jamali et al., 2017). It helped shape the four-level conceptual framework, which explains the role of different actor levels (company, national, regional and international) in CSR practices. Most importantly, this perspective contributed to the understanding of the differences between the EU (Greece and

Croatia) and non-EU (Kosovo and Albania) member countries of SEE in terms of CSR and its implementation.

In terms of methodology, this research adhered to a qualitative approach as, according to Lee et al. (2017), this method is effective when investigating the perceptions of owners/managers and consumers within the CSR field. Initially, this research presented a review of corporate social responsibility across four South-East European (SEE) countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece, through critical interpretive synthesis (CIS). Secondly, it employed face-to-face and online semi-structured one-to-one interviews with SME owners/managers in each of the chosen SEE countries to understand SME owners'/managers' perceptions of CSR and CSR practices. To understand CSR understanding and perception of fashion consumers in SEE, this research conducted face-to-face and online semi-structured focus groups with fashion consumers in each country. Lastly, netnographic research was conducted in each of the four SEE countries. This method helped to understand the consumption processes, CSR perceptions and consumers' behaviours towards socially responsible SMEs. Most importantly, this method provided this research with the opportunity to understand the multifaceted reality of CSR and offered unobtrusive research.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of **eight chapters**.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter, which introduces the reader to the investigated research topic. Initially, it shows the background of this research. Afterwards, it discusses the rationale behind this research and justifies the contexts by identifying the literature on the topic. It presents the research questions and objectives and the theoretical and methodological decisions that led this research. Lastly, it outlines this research through a brief description of each chapter.

Chapter 2 details the academic literature on the topic. Initially, it critically discusses the literature on the CSR concept and conceptualisation; it presents the definitions and evolution of the concept. It depicts the work of CSR scholars on the manager and consumer perceptions of CSR. Afterwards,

it provides an understanding of the CSR implementation process. It details the academic literature on this process. This chapter presents the process through the perspectives of owners/managers and consumers. Then, it focuses on CSR drivers, CSR activities and policies (their level of operation, their nature and their benefits and critics) and the impact of CSR activities on consumer behaviour. It introduces the work of CSR scholars across countries and puts emphasis on the discussions around two topics: CSR in developed countries and CSR in developing countries. It presents an introductory overview of CSR in SEE and further justifies the countries' choice. The next sub-chapter presents the academic literature on CSR in SMEs. This sub-chapter critically discusses all the above-mentioned topics from the lens of the SMEs. Afterwards, it shows the current research on CSR in the fashion industry and introduces the reader to the current situation of the fashion industry in each of the four SEE countries. Lastly, it presents the main CSR theories adopted by CSR scholars. It critically discusses their role in CSR debates and justifies the choice of this research in terms of theory selection. Throughout this chapter, this research pinpoints the research gaps and supports the identified research questions and objectives.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this research. It discusses in detail and justifies every methodological decision. It reflects on the researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. It explains the research approach, its purpose and its time horizon. It illustrates and discusses in detail the research process and design. The data collection sub-chapter explains and justifies the four chosen methods: (1) critical interpretative synthesis (CIS), (2) face-to-face and online semi-structured one-to-one interviews, (3) face-to-face and online semi-structured focus groups and (4) netnographic research. It describes the data analysis process for each of the above-mentioned methods. It shows the main ethical challenges. Lastly, it reflects on the methodological limitations and challenges.

This research organises the findings into three chapters: **Chapter 4**, **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6**. Each chapter answers each research question, respectively.

Chapter 4: (RQ) How is CSR perceived across countries?

Chapter 5: (RQ 1) How do fashion SME managers/owners from South-East Europe understand CSR and its implementation?

Chapter 6: (RQ 2) How do fashion consumers from South-East Europe understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumer behaviour affected by CSR activities?

Chapter 4 presents the CIS review of 39 CSR studies conducted in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Initially, it depicts the descriptive findings of the review. Then, it critically discusses the key themes (subjects) identified from the reviewed articles. It presents the awareness and perception of CSR and the level of operation of CSR in these four SEE countries. Most importantly, it develops a typology of company, national, regional and international levels, and it adapts this typology into a four-level conceptual framework that contributes to academia and practice. Lastly, it identifies additional research gaps that further support the identified gaps in the literature review.

Chapter 5 presents the perceptions of fashion small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) owners and managers from each chosen SEE country on CSR and its implementation. It consists of several sub-chapters, which align with the CSR implementation steps recommended by Fatima and Elbanna (2023). It presents the findings on CSR awareness, CSR understanding, CSR embedding, CSR communication, and CSR evaluation. It portrays each sub-chapter through the lens of the chosen SEE countries. It also provides an initial discussion of the findings (in the form of an overview) for each sub-chapter. Lastly, grounded on the findings, this chapter illustrates two empirical frameworks on (1) CSR awareness and (2) CSR communication, respectively.

Chapter 6 shows the CSR perceptions and purchasing behaviours of fashion consumers, who mainly purchase from SMEs. It is structured around two parts: (1) findings from the focus groups with fashion consumers and (2) findings from the netnographic research of fashion consumers. Both parts are organised similarly. Initially, each presents the consumption process of fashion consumers. The first part illustrates the consumption process of consumers from the four SEE countries through an empirical framework. Afterwards, each sub-chapter shows the awareness and understanding of CSR. The first part also depicts the CSR awareness of fashion consumers in an empirical framework. The sixth chapter, throughout the first and second parts, depicts fashion consumer purchasing behaviour and intention and discusses the impact of CSR activities on their

purchases. Lastly, it shows the consumer perceptions about the process of CSR communication and CSR communication tools applied by fashion SMEs that embrace CSR. The focus group and netnographic findings provide a multifaceted reality of CSR. The latter findings show the perceptions and behaviours of fashion consumers from the four SEE countries in an unobtrusive manner. Similar to Chapter 5, this chapter offers a brief discussion of the findings (in the form of an overview) for each sub-chapter.

Chapter 7 provides a detailed discussion of the main themes investigated throughout this research. Initially, it shows the multifaceted reality of CSR through the perspective of SME owners/managers and consumers. It highlights the impact of context on CSR understanding and CSR implementation. This chapter provides a context-specific conceptualisation of CSR and suggests the same abbreviation and new designation for the CSR concept. Most importantly, it presents and discusses the CSR implementation steps amongst small-sized and medium-sized companies in the chosen countries. Ultimately, it emphasises the impact of the regional actor of the EU in the CSR understanding and implementation among fashion SME owners/managers and consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Lastly, it highlights the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions.

Lastly, **Chapter 8** summarises the answers to the three research questions. It also shows the limitations of this research and recommends future research to scholars interested in investigating the social phenomenon of CSR.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction of the Chapter

This chapter presents the reader with the phenomenon of Corporate Social responsibility (CSR). This chapter adopts the inverted pyramid style; it moves from general to specific knowledge of CSR. It attempts to present the researcher's knowledge of the field and identifies research gaps that directed this research's focus. Initially, it critically discusses the definition and evolution of CSR. It presents the perceptions of managers and consumers about the concept. It discusses the process of CSR implementation and presents different views on the implementation steps. It briefly addresses the influence of CSR implementation on consumers purchasing behaviour and intention. It discusses in detail the CSR drivers and CSR practices and activities. It reviews the literature on the country context. It presents the academic work on CSR in developed countries and CSR in developing countries. Afterward, it narrows its focus to CSR in SEE. It provides a brief explanation of the current CSR situation in the region, and it justifies through literature the region's choice. It tackles in detail the CSR in SME literature. It also addresses the literature on CSR in the fashion industry. It presents the latest work of scholars in the field. It introduces the reader to the current situation of the fashion industry in each country, and it rationalises the industry choice. The penultimate sub-chapter explains the main CSR theories and justifies the adoption of multi-theory (stakeholder and institutional theory) in this investigation. The last sub-chapter provides a conclusion of this chapter.

2.2 The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

Throughout the last decades, only a few notions have captured the attention of scholars and practitioners, as much as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Carroll, 2021; Roth et al., 2020). CSR has become “one of the most important issues and developments of the 21st century (Horrigan, 2010, p. 3)”. Since the 1950s, it has become prevalent in business research and theory building, and accordingly, it has developed into a well-researched area (Lee et al., 2017; Jamali and Karam, 2018; Pitoska et al., 2018). According to Carroll (2021), CSR is a mature concept in academia. Besides scholars, CSR has been embraced by businesses (micro, small, medium, large and

multinational), consumers, employees (Carroll, 2021), media, civil society (Gatti et al., 2019), governments (Jamali et al., 2020) and international actors (non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations and international standard-setting bodies) (Frynas and Stephens, 2015; Gatti et al., 2019; Grimstad et al., 2020). Today, CSR is considered a global concept (Carroll, 2021) that should not be neglected (Grimstad et al., 2020).

2.2.1 The Definition of CSR

Given its importance, there have been numerous attempts to create a better understanding and a more robust definition of CSR (Taneja et al., 2011; Malik, 2015). These attempts have come from different angles and various actors (such as academic researchers, practitioners and international actors; Ferrell et al., 2019; Gatti et al., 2019). Scholars argue that the complex nature of CSR enhances these variations in CSR conceptualisation (Carroll, 2020; Gatti et al., 2019; Horrigan, 2010). In particular, the multi-dimensional (economic, social and environmental) and cross-disciplinary (business, management, law, economics, ethics and sociology) nature of CSR contributes to the concept diversities (Carroll, 2021). In addition, Gatti et al. (2019) claim that this variety in the definition “reflects the diversity of political agendas, management concepts, and economic approaches involved (pg. 962)”. The abundance of endeavours in conceptualising CSR resulted in opposing, complementary and overlapping terms, such as Corporate Sustainability, Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Corporate Social Performance, which proliferated since the 1960s (Strand et al., 2015; Gatti et al., 2019). Due to an inextricable linkage between the economic, social and environmental dimensions and the perplexity of separating them in practice, these terms have been used interchangeably on numerous occasions (Garriga and Melé, 2004; Carroll, 2021).

Several researchers use the concept of CSR synonymously with sustainability. Similar to Montiel (2008) and Sheehy (2015), the researcher believes that it is incorrect to equate the two. The interchangeability mainly occurs due to the range of constructs (Montiel, 2008; Elmualim, 2017) and similar conceptualisations of CSR and sustainability about social, economic, and environmental pillars (GreenKPI, 2020). Carroll (2021) states that “sustainability is embedded in CSR, and they are interrelated (p. 9)”, yet, sustainability does not hold as much responsibility as

CSR. Sustainability scholars argue that these three dimensions are interconnected, and their main focus lies in environmental sustainability. On the other hand, CSR scholars view these pillars as independent components driven by the stakeholder approach (Faller and Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2018). Scholars like Basiago (1996) and Sheehay (2015) point out that sustainability came from the environment and international relations disciplines, while CSR originated mainly from management studies. This research considers that CSR and sustainability are different, yet, they share an inseparable linkage, as, besides companies, national, regional and international actors sometimes create overlapping legislation and guidelines (Carroll, 2021; Ingram, 2018; GreenKPI, 2020). Thus, this research adopts the CSR term and literature, and it carefully differentiates between CSR and sustainability concepts and policies.

This research tackled the CSR concept through the management lens. Like this research, other studies have addressed CSR through management literature (see Lockett et al., 2006; Tata and Prasad, 2015; Reimer et al., 2018; Pham et al., 2020). This research adopted the definition provided by Aguinis (2011) and the European Commission (2011; the new version). Aguinis (2011), who underlined that contexts are imperative to the CSR understanding, defines CSR as “context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance (Aguinis, 2011, p. 855)”. In a similar vein, the European Commission states CSR is “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” which “outlines what an enterprise should do to meet that responsibility (p. 6)”. In their view, “enterprises should have a process in place to integrate social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close cooperation with their stakeholders (p. 6)”.

This research adopted these definitions, as they identify CSR as a context-specific process and help the researcher comprehend the impact of contexts in shaping CSR. They, among others, fit this research’s philosophical views. Other scholars also considered these definitions suitable for their research (Aguinis and Glava, 2017; Carroll and Shabana, 2010; Sheehy, 2015). This research considered these definitions the right ones, as they are neither too broad nor too narrow. Many scholars criticise CSR definitions for being wide-ranging and neglecting specific contexts (Dahlsrud, 2008; Gatti et al., 2019; Sheehy, 2015). This research deemed that the CSR definition

should not be a “one-size-fits-all”, and scholars should not attempt to agree on a general explanation. Both, Aguinis’ (2011) work and the European Commission’s (2011) memo state that their definitions do not attempt to be all-inclusive, as they accept the impact of various contexts in the CSR understanding. These chosen definitions might not be explicit to the contexts of this research, yet, they acknowledge that CSR is socially constructed in different contexts. They encompass all three dimensions of CSR, economic, social, and environmental. In addition, the researcher deemed that they accept the theoretical and practical sides of CSR; thus, in the researcher’s view, these definitions present a quasi-practitioner view (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). The practical side of CSR is crucial to this research, as it determines and shapes the actions of every actor involved (Aguinis and Glava, 2017).

2.2.2 The Evolution of the CSR Concept

Initial shreds of evidence of the modern concept of CSR can be traced since the 1930s (e.g., Clark, 1939). However, it was not until the 1950s that scholars and practitioners recognised the importance of CSR. The discussion of Frank Adams about the responsibility of businesses towards society put the CSR concept in the spotlight (Carroll, 2021). Howard Bowen’s (1953) book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* officially marked the earliest effort into conceptualising CSR. His question, “What responsibilities to society may businessmen reasonably be expected to assume? (p. 11)” made him the most eminent supporter of CSR. According to him, CSR refers to “the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society (Bowen, 1953, p. 6)”. Bowen’s (1953) conceptualisation endured throughout the succeeding decades. Considering that, Carroll (1999) suggested Bowen as the ‘Father of CSR’. To this date, scholars cite Bowen as the ‘Father of CSR’ (Carroll, 2021). During the 1950s, academics initiated the CSR discourse. They attempted their first articulation of the CSR concept (Carroll, 2021). During the 1960s and the 1970s, scholars kept on trying to establish a better understanding of the social duties of firms towards society and raise awareness of CSR – they depicted CSR as a philanthropic concept (please refer to Appendix 2.1 for a detailed review of the development of CSR definitions throughout the years). Davis (1960) and Frederick (1960) predominantly contributed to the debate over the social responsibilities of firms. Milton Friedman (1962) started

the case against CSR in his book “Capitalism and Freedom”. Friedman (1962) claimed that the sole responsibility of corporations is “to make as much money for their stockholders as possible” (p. 133). He referred to CSR as “a fundamentally subversive doctrine (1962, p. 133)”. His remark heated the CSR debate. Since then, his views have thoroughly altered the path of CSR understanding.

Despite the 30-year-long attempts to establish a CSR definition, Zenisek (1979) claimed that the CSR notion is deficient in theoretical and empirical support. Given that, Carroll (1979) articulated a CSR definition according to which “corporate social responsibility encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time (p. 500)”. Carroll’s definition gained immediate attention and was accepted by scholars and practitioners (Kanji and Agrawal, 2016). It recommended a stakeholder standpoint. Similar to Carroll (1979), other scholars (from this period) explained the concept from the stakeholders’ perspective (Freeman, 1984; Johnson, 1971; Jones, 1980). Freeman’s (1984) work on stakeholders “helped to re-conceptualize the nature of the firm (Jamali, 2008, p. 217)” and generated discussions within the field of CSR. His work encouraged the still-going ‘Friedman vs. Freeman’ debate (Evans et al. 2013; Loison et al. 2018), which brought further public awareness of the CSR concept.

In the 1980s-1990s, scholars focused on setting CSR models (see Strand, 1983; Swanson, 1995). The most prominent work of all was provided by Carroll (1991), who depicted his four-part CSR definition into a pyramid. The pyramid consists of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions. Carroll (1991) positioned the economic element at the end of the pyramid. This element is the basis of all the other responsibilities, as enterprises should consistently generate profit to attain the following dimensions in the pyramid. Legal responsibility is the second element. According to Carroll (1991), enterprises must obey the law and regulations at all levels. Ethical responsibility is the third element of the pyramid. It refers to the enterprises’ obligations “to do what is right, just and fair (Carroll, 1991, p. 42)”. Predominantly, it implies moral principles, values and social norms that society expects from enterprises. Philanthropic responsibility is the fourth element of the pyramid, positioned at the top. To reach the highest level of the pyramid, enterprises should improve community life (Carroll, 1991). This model gained immediate acceptance and has

remained the centrepiece of all other models in the academic and practical worlds (Meynhardt and Gomez, 2019; Carroll, 2021). It provides systematical thinking of CSR for scholars while it also offers a comprehensive framework, which aids managers in identifying and dealing with the social issues faced by their organisations (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). This concept has been cited 17379 times; it has been discussed, criticised and remodelled several times for different contexts from different angles. Today, it remains as relevant as ever because it reflects the practical application of CSR and embraces the progressive evolution of CSR (Carroll, 2021).

While in the early stage of CSR, the majority of initial conceptual work refrained from practitioners' views (Carroll, 1999), in the later phase, scholars moved towards a more organisation-level of CSR analysis – they were predominantly focused on CSR's process and its performance on organisations (Lee, 2008; Maon et al., 2009). In the early 2000s, the work of Marsden (2001), McWilliams and Siegel (2001), Hopkins (2003; 2006), Williamson et al. (2006) and Hopkins (2006) helped to gain further knowledge about CSR, its processes and procedures. These scholars' work presented CSR as a strategic tool, highly institutionalised, transparent and accountable, and they mainly focused on environment protection (Marsden, 2001; Hopkins, 2003; 2006). Since then, the environment protection has become an important facet of CSR (Kolk, 2016). The early 2000s concept transitioned significantly to alternative themes, which were built on the definitions of CSR. The tendency to use such terminologies in a broader sense emerged, resulting in the creation of umbrella terms (Gond and Crane, 2010; Strand et al., 2015). While the initial intent was to create the most recognised and widespread notion, scholars could not help but create further variances, such as Social Responsibility, Corporate Social Performance, and sustainable development (Blowfield and Frynas, 2005). But most scholars settled that CSR was the umbrella term (see Strand et al., 2015; Roth et al., 2020). Carroll (2015) even conceded it to be the “centerpiece of these competing and complementary frameworks (p. 87)”. On the other hand, the business community started embracing CSR activities and pursuing legitimisation of them (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). Accordingly, CSR was no longer an ideology - CSR was a reality (Maon et al., 2009).

In the late 2000s, scholars began considering the role of CSR on finance performance (Habaragoda, 2018), civil society organisations (Ali et al., 2017) and customer loyalty (Martínez and Bosque,

2015). Researchers like Spence (2007; 2016) recommended a new focus – CSR in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Until the early 2000s, most researchers and practitioners included only large, multinational businesses in CSR discussions. In the last decade, the attention of CSR scholars shifted from large to small and medium-sized companies when international actors, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations (UN) and the European Commission, and scholars, such as Spence (2007; 2016), Hamann et al. (2017), Jamali et al. (2017) and Sendlhofer (2019) emphasised the importance of SMEs. They acknowledged SMEs' importance in CSR (Arend, 2014; Jamali et al., 2017), particularly their wide-ranging impacts on the economic, social and environmental landscape at the national, regional, and global levels (Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017).

Scholars did not offer alternative definitions of CSR for SMEs; nonetheless, lately, several scholars, such as Courrent et al. (2018) and Lähdesmäki et al. (2019), recommended differentiating SMEs from large companies in terms of CSR practices, theories and arguments as according to them, the current definitions neglect SMEs particularities (such as, distinctive organisational structure and features). They even recommended new CSR models that attempt to adapt to SMEs. Spence (2016), for instance, suggested four new specific pyramids with altered domains, each directed to different stakeholders. Regardless, there is limited research on this area, which is inconsistent with the significant collective impacts of SMEs (Sendlhofer, 2019). Scholars recommend future CSR scholars to focus on SMEs, as there are overlooked areas that need researchers' attention (Magrizzos et al., 2021; Oduro et al., 2021). Besides SMEs, CSR scholars in the last decade shifted their focus from developed to developing countries (Lythreatis et al., 2019; Jamali et al., 2017). According to Khan et al. (2021), CSR in developing countries “provides fertile grounds for testing, refining and developing new theories” (p. 3). Thus, this study's central purpose is to research CSR's understanding and practices among SMEs in developed and developing countries.

2.2.3 CSR Concept from Managers' Perspective

Since its recognition in the modern era until today, CSR has faced increased acknowledgement from managers (Hine and Preuss, 2008; Iglesias et al., 2020). In the 1990s, Wood (1991) stated

that managers are important actors in the implementation of corporate social responsibilities. In the same vein, in the 2020s, Úbeda-García et al. (2021) claim that managers “play a critical role when it comes to making their organization more socially and environmentally responsible by applying the concept of CSR (p. 60)”. Accordingly, several scholars have focused on understanding managers’ perceptions of the CSR concept throughout the years, as they considered managers’ perceptions important for understanding the nature of CSR (Lindgreen et al., 2009; Úbeda-García et al., 2021). Lindgreen et al. (2009) claim that the managers' perceptions are significant because of the managers' impact in positioning the enterprises and taking decisions. Iglesias et al. (2020) state that the significance consumers place on the CSR concept also enhances the importance of managers’ perceptions in the CSR field. Lu et al. (2020) note that company nature influences managers’ CSR awareness and understanding. Along the same lines, Zu and Song (2009) claim that a company’s productive features, rather than the personal characteristics of managers, impact managers’ CSR perceptions. Contrary to them, findings of Paoloni et al. (2023) revealed that gender impacts CSR perception and awareness of owners and managers.

Scholars who researched the perceptions of management typically focused on large and multinational companies (e.g., Cacioppe et al., 2008; Chaudhri, 2016; Osagie et al., 2016). These managers understood the CSR concept through distinctive lenses (Lee, 2022). Typically, they defined the CSR concept through the volunteer or legal lens (Dahlsrud, 2008). Osagie et al. (2016) state that the managers’ competencies impact the understanding of the concept. Other scholars mention the size and type of the enterprise and the embeddedness of CSR practices (formal or informal) into the organisations’ practices (Lindgreen et al., 2009; Chaudhri, 2016). Managers of SMEs differ from managers of large and multinational companies, as SMEs have different organisational structures and features (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019) and face other issues and barriers (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016). Elhajjar and Ouaida (2020) and Thanh and Podruzsik (2018) claimed that SME managers’ understanding of the concept differs from managers of large and multinational companies. Literature shows fewer studies focused on managers’ perceptions in small and medium-sized enterprises (Li et al., 2016; Stoian and Plakoyiannaki, 2023). Scholars like Stoian and Plakoyiannaki (2023) and Szegedi et al. (2023) highlight that SMEs provide a thought-provoking ground for future studies focusing on managers' perceptions of CSR. Accordingly, this

research considered this call and decided to investigate the understanding of SME managers about the CSR concept in different contexts.

2.2.4 CSR Concept from Consumers' Perspective

Besides managers, consumers' perceptions of CSR have also gained the attention of scholars and practitioners since the early 2000s (Arlu and Lasmono, 2009; Palihawadana et al., 2016; Ramasamy and Yeung, 2008). Consumers are imperative stakeholders in the CSR concept. They significantly impact companies' CSR practices (Harrison and Huang, 2022). In recent years, consumers' interest towards CSR has rapidly increased (Harrison and Huang, 2022; Lee et al., 2012; Vuković et al., 2020). Most of them consider CSR practices in their buying behaviours (Vuković et al., 2020); thus, their perceptions of CSR are essential to scholars and practitioners (Brunk and Boer, 2020; Harrison and Huang, 2022; Öberseder et al., 2013). Brunk and Boer (2020) call on other scholars to investigate further the perceptions of consumers about CSR, as most of the studies focus on attitudes and behavioural intentions, and “little research attends to perceptions (p. 444)” of CSR.

According to Öberseder et al. (2013), consumers perceive CSR as “a multidimensional, hierarchical construct (p. 1857)” which includes “responsibility towards the local community, society, employees, the environment, shareholders, customers and suppliers (p. 1857)”. Palihawadana et al. (2016) state that idealistic and egoistic ideologies impact the consumers' perceptions of the CSR concept. Vuković et al. (2020) claim that factors like “gender, age, earnings, and attitude toward CSR (p. 535)” impact the consumers' perceptions of the CSR concept. For instance, younger generations perceive CSR as a trend and a publicity stunt compared to older generations, who perceive CSR as an approach to improve performance and market positioning. Harrison and Huang (2022) state that “not all types of CSR are seen the same way by consumers who may have various orientations toward CSR (p. 494)”. Brunk and Boer (2020) argue that consumers' perceptions vary based on their perceptions about brands “as either “ethical” or “unethical” (p. 448)”.

Other scholars argue that consumers' perceptions differ across countries. For instance, Vuković et al. (2020) claim that post-socialist countries have a different CSR understanding when compared

to other countries; Palihawadana et al. (2016) state that consumers in collectivistic nations perceive CSR differently. They recommend that future studies investigate consumers' conceptualisation of CSR across countries (Vuković et al., 2020). Besides, few studies have focused on perceptions of CSR from consumers of small and medium-sized enterprises (Safeer and Liu, 2023). Most studies have researched CSR perceptions of consumers from large or multinational companies and have neglected SMEs. Studies that focused on SMEs provided CSR conceptualisation of consumers from managers' perspectives (Musso and Risso, 2013; McCaffrey and Kurland, 2015) or did not highlight the company size (Bui, 2010). Given the lack of research in this context, this research decided to understand the CSR perceptions of SME consumers.

2.3 CSR Implementation

A decade ago, Angus-Leppan et al. (2010) referred to CSR implementation as a 'black box' in the literature. Since Lindgreen et al. (2009) paved the way for CSR implementation in a *Journal of Business Ethics* special issue, several scholars have embraced it (Osagie et al., 2022; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023; Yang and Jiang, 2023). In the last decade, they have investigated the process across different organisations and ownership structures (Garanina and Aray, 2021). Scholars have recognised the impact of distinct contexts and organisations' constraints on implementing CSR (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). They have claimed that CSR implementation should fit the organisational identity, organisational culture, strategic goals and social norms (Tourky et al., 2020).

Regardless of the embracement of this process from academia, Fatima and Elbanna (2023) claim that the CSR field lacks the conceptualisation of CSR implementation. They call future scholars to attempt conceptualising it, as most studies have sidestepped the conceptualisation of this process. Helmig et al. (2016) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023) are among the few scholars who have defined CSR implementation in their work. Helmig et al. (2016) have described it as "the managerial perspective of how to put a certain CSR strategy into practice" (p. 155)". While Fatima and Elbanna (2023) have referred to it as the "process that an organization undertakes to increase the awareness levels of CSR issues and CSR strategies, embed CSR values within the organization,

communicate CSR initiatives internally and externally, and evaluate the progress of CSR strategies (p. 106)".

Scholars recognise the impact of distinct contexts and constraints of organisations on implementing CSR (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). They claim that CSR implementation should fit the "organizational culture, business rationale, and strategic goals" (Lindgreen et al., 2009, p. 252) and "respect social norms, values and expectations" (Kim et al., 2013, p. 2583). In terms of implementation, several scholars have discussed and investigated implementation steps. Maon et al. (2009) state that CSR implementation constitutes nine steps: (1) raising CSR awareness, (2) assessing organisational purpose in a societal context, (3) establishing a CSR definition and vision, (4) assessing the current status of CSR, (5) developing a CSR strategy, (6) implementing the CSR strategy, (7) communicating about CSR strategy, (8) evaluating CSR strategy, and (9) institutionalizing CSR policy. Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013) consider CSR implementation to comprise three dimensions: commitment to CSR, embedding CSR, and external collaboration. Fatima and Elbanna (2023) take into account the steps of both Maon et al. (2009) and Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013). They recommend four dimensions: (1) CSR awareness, (2) CSR communication and (3) CSR embedding, and (4) CSR evaluation (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023, p. 107). Kim et al. (2013) state that companies should consider three aspects when implementing CSR: (a) CSR intentions (whether they are short-term or they intend to promote the company), (b) CSR practices (whether they are normative or instrumental to the strategic needs of the company), and (c) CSR nature (whether it should be explicit or implicit).

Up until now, most CSR scholars have focused on CSR awareness or CSR communication (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2019). They consider CSR awareness the bedrock of the CSR implementation process (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). According to Lee et al. (2019), CSR awareness refers to familiarity and knowledge of the company about CSR and its practices. Maon et al. (2009) and Van and Nguyen (2019) also emphasised the role CSR understanding plays in the CSR implementation process. To the researcher's knowledge, Maon et al. (2009) are the only scholars to include it as a step in the CSR implementation. As depicted in the preceding paragraph, they refer to it as 'CSR definition and vision.' Besides, scholars claim that it is significant for companies to communicate their CSR activities actively

(Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013). Communication of CSR practices is challenging as consumers tend to become suspicious about the information and sceptical about the motives (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009). Companies, therefore, need to invest strategically in CSR practices. They need to modify their internal policies and genuinely implement CSR practices to gain widespread support from their stakeholders (Zerbini, 2017), engage with their stakeholders, gain loyalty and establish credibility (Lee et al., 2019). Most CSR scholars, however, have neglected the other dimensions of CSR implementation, precisely CSR embedding and CSR evaluation (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Scholars like Graafland and Smid (2019) and Carroll (2021) stated that CSR should be well-embedded into the company. Graafland and Smid (2019) suggest that CSR policies, practices and programs are aligned with the management to reduce decoupling. Other scholars, such as Maon et al. (2009), Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013), Helmig et al. (2016) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), accentuated the importance of CSR evaluation irrespective of company size. Maon et al. (2009) claimed that this step helps companies understand if the applied activities were effective. Regardless of its importance, Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013) noticed that small-sized companies neglect the evaluation mainly due to the lack of economic resources. In view of that, Fatima and Elbanna (2023) suggest that future studies explore these two dimensions.

This research adopted the definition and process of CSR implementation that Fatima and Elbanna (2023) recommended. Their definition and explanation appeared suitable to this research's aims. While Fatima and Elbanna's (2023) explanation has enriched the literature in this field, they suggest CSR scholars should investigate the process of CSR implementation through multi-level analyses, theoretical underpinnings and diversification of the geographical location through different regions in future research (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). This research followed Fatima and Elbanna's (2023) recommendation and decided to investigate this issue through multi-level analysis (individual (owners and managers), company (SMEs) and country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) levels), theoretical underpinnings (institutional and stakeholder theory) and diversification of the geographical location (four SEE countries). Lastly, Fatima and Elbanna (2023) suggest focusing on more dimensions of CSR implementation, precisely on CSR embedding and CSR evaluation, as most CSR scholars tend to neglect these dimensions. Most studies focused on the managers' perspectives when exploring CSR implementation. According to Fatima and Elbanna (2023), managers' perspectives tend to be considered because studies found

that managers and their characteristics play a significant role in this process. The researcher noticed a lack of studies understanding consumers' perceptions of CSR implementation process. Yet, several studies investigated the influence of CSR activities on consumers' behaviour (Abdeen et al., 2016).

2.3.1 The Influence of CSR Implementation on Consumers' Responses

Studies suggest that CSR initiatives positively affect consumers' attitudes towards the organisation (Öberseder et al., 2013), build strong loyal consumers (McFadden et al., 2013), and enhance consumer-company identification (Öberseder et al., 2011). Primarily, they influence consumers purchasing behaviour (Mohr et al., 2001), in particular, the behaviour of consumers, who appreciate socially responsible actions; such consumers purchase from firms adopting CSR strategies, and they are even eager to pay a premium price to support and reward the company's actions (McFadden et al., 2013) as concurrently they are engaging in a socially responsible behaviour (Abdeen et al., 2016). A survey of 6000 consumers by Accenture (2019) found that more than half of consumers would pay more for such products; nonetheless, they are not willing to pay a premium price, as quality and price remain their main indicators when purchasing. Such purchase decisions influence the profits of the company and its opponents and impact the course of the economy (Pomering and Dolnicar, 2009).

2.4 CSR Drivers

Nowadays, CSR is increasingly embedded into the operations of organisations – it has been established as a priority (Jamali and Karam, 2018; Khan et al., 2021; Pitoska et al., 2018). Companies adopt CSR for manifold reasons (Donia et al., 2019; Edinger-Schons et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2021). Scholars have investigated these reasons and have identified various CSR drivers/antecedents (Dhanesh, 2015). They claim that CSR drivers are complex, multifaceted (Miska et al., 2016) and overlapping (Dhanesh, 2015). Scholars identify the individual (Bolívar et al., 2015; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023), organisational (Miska et al., 2016), market (Helmig et al., 2016; Lindgreen and Swaen, 2009) and institutional CSR drivers (national and international;

McWilliams and Siegel, 2011; Miska et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2006), among others. This research also acknowledged the multifaceted and overlapping nature of CSR drivers.

Porter and Kramer (2006) are among the first scholars to identify motives for organisations to align with CSR. Their perspectives dominate the discussion of CSR drivers in the field (Dhanesh, 2015). According to Porter and Kramer (2006), companies employ CSR to 1) differentiate their firms from their competitors while still being compatible with the strategies of the organisation (strategic CSR) and 2) diminish adversative activities of the firm by creating goodwill and enhancing their relationships with stakeholders (responsive CSR; Fombrun, 2005; Zerbini, 2015). Strategic perspective refers to CSR adoption by companies “for its reputational, financial, and relational benefits (Dhanesh, 2015, p. 6)”. Responsive perspective, on the other hand, refers to CSR adoption by companies to respond towards external pressures, such as stakeholder pressures, expectations and regulatory requirements (Zerbini, 2015). Lindgreen and Swaen (2009) mention four drivers “economic, social, political, and individual (p. 81).” Fabrizi et al. (2013) and Hemingway and MacLagan (2004), who focus on the individual driver, highlight managers’ personal values as the main CSR driving forces.

Angus-Leppan et al. (2009) underline the impact of institutional drivers on the interpretation of the CSR concept (from the organisations) and implementation of CSR practices. Matten and Moon (2008; 2020) also emphasise the importance of institutional drivers in CSR understanding and application. They identify two main CSR drivers – explicit (“incentives and opportunities are motivated by the perceived expectations of different stakeholders of the corporation (Matten and Moon, 2008, p. 410)”) and implicit CSR drivers (incentives and opportunities are “motivated by the societal consensus on the legitimate expectations of the roles and contributions of all major groups in society, including corporations (Matten and Moon, 2008, p. 410)”). Like Matten and Moon (2008; 2020), Kim et al. (2013) highlight the relevance of explicit and implicit CSR during the CSR implementation. Cruz and Boehe (2010) also emphasise the cost-benefit driver. Among many other scholars, Arena et al. (2009), Lamberti and Lettieri (2009), Maignan et al. (2005) and Papasolomou-Doukakis et al. (2005) accentuate several stakeholders as key CSR drivers; they mention the consumers, shareholders, employees, suppliers, the community, government and environment. Since the late 1980s, scholars have considered the impact of stakeholders in shaping

the CSR notion and implementation (Carroll, 2021). Nowadays, “they are virtually inseparable from the CSR discussion (Carroll, 2021, p. 5)”, and they are considered the central CSR drivers by most scholars (Carroll et al., 2018).

CSR drivers shape the nature and operations of the companies (regardless of the company size, industry and culture; Dhanesh, 2015). They are decisive to the nature of CSR and its process (Darmenova, 2019). They shape the implementation of CSR; precisely, they impact CSR policies, activities and practices (Carroll, 2021; Matten and Moon, 2008). While CSR drivers have an all-embracing impact on the nature and operations of the companies, they differ across company sizes (Miska et al., 2016), industries (Zhang et al., 2014), countries (Bhatia and Makkar, 2020; Albareda et al., 2008; Dhanesh, 2015) and regions (Matten and Moon, 2020). Accordingly, CSR drivers are embedded within specific contexts (Carroll, 2021). Several scholars differentiate the CSR drivers in macro, small and medium-sized enterprises (Achi et al., 2022; Oduro et al., 2021), large companies (Colucci et al., 2020), multinational companies (Li and Cuervo-Cazurra, 2022; Rhee et al., 2021), developing and developed countries (Bhatia and Makkar, 2020; de Oliveira et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2019), food industry (Zhang et al., 2014) and the fashion industry (Rienda et al., 2022), among other contexts. Given the impact of the contexts on the shaping of the CSR driving forces, this research investigated and identified CSR drivers across the different contexts it was focused on, specifically across SMEs, SEE countries (developed and developing countries), and the fashion industry. This research discusses the CSR drivers across different contexts later in this chapter. Before identifying the literature on CSR drivers across these contexts, this research reviewed the literature on CSR policies, activities and practices.

2.5 CSR Policies, Activities and Practices

CSR policies, activities and practices have gained the attention of most CSR scholars (Lamberti and Lettieri, 2009; Graafland and Smid, 2019). They have encouraged and contributed to several debates in the CSR field (Thorne et al., 2016). Most importantly, they have helped scholars and practitioners understand the concept of CSR (Carroll, 2021), identify the implementation process and the recognise the impact of CSR (Graafland and Smid, 2019). They are closely interrelated with one another. According to Graafland and Smid (2019), “first, companies set CSR policies;

second, they make decisions about the implementation of CSR programs; and third, the CSR programs may lead to certain desirable CSR impacts (p. 234)”.

While a few scholars differentiate among CSR policies, activities and practices, most scholars use them interchangeably or adopt an umbrella term (Kim et al., 2013). Zerbini (2017), for instance, embraces the term CSR initiatives; Kim et al. (2013) use CSR practices; Muller (2006) refers to them as CSR strategies; and Graafland and Smid (2019) and Rhee and Lee (2003) adopt the term CSR policies. This research used the terms CSR activities and CSR practices to refer to “policies, processes, and specific practices including reporting and disclosures (Kim et al., 2013, p. 2)”. Scholars have identified numerous CSR practices (Spiller, 2000). Spiller (2000), for instance, attempted to distinguish an all-encompassing list of CSR practices. In their research, Spiller (2000) identifies sixty CSR practices. Ozdora-Aksak and Atakan-Duman (2016) also identify several CSR activities but categorise them into two groups: (1) core business-focused CSR activities and (2) discretionary CSR activities.

Other scholars have attempted to classify CSR practices. Matten and Moon (2008; 2020) distinguish between explicit and implicit CSR – CSR practices, which are taken voluntarily, and CSR practices, which consist of values, norms and rules that are codified and mandatory. Jamali and Karam (2018) and Matten and Moon (2020) reflected and added to the explicit-implicit framework. They identified the hybrid CSR practices composed of implicit and explicit CSR. Jamali and Karam (2018) claimed that developing countries adopt hybrid CSR. Matten and Moon (2020), in particular, suggested implicitisation (explicit CSR is adopted in implicit CSR; common among developed countries) and explicitisation (implicit CSR is adopted in explicit CSR; common among developing countries). Mory et al. (2017) identify two categories of CSR practices: internal and external CSR practices. Internal CSR practices refer to the actions of the organisations in the internal environment to tackle CSR issues (typically towards their employees, e.g., diversity, inclusion and fair practices, among others). On the other hand, external CSR practices refer to the organisations' actions aimed towards “channel partners, consumers, government, institutions, media or the general public” (p. 146) to address CSR (e.g., partnering with NGOs, adopting environmentally friendly processes).

Russo and Tencati (2009) identify formal and informal CSR practices. Their classification has been embraced by several CSR scholars throughout the years (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2017; Russo and Perrini, 2010). Formal practices refer to institutionalised and systematically integrated practices into the companies' operations, "such as codes, reports, and social, environmental, and ethical standards (Russo and Tencati, 2009, p. 340)". Typically, these practices require a time investment, financial resources, and capabilities to effectively carry out them. Informal practices, on the other hand, refer to less institutionalised operations, policies, and strategies; they are less visible and less transparent (Russo and Tencati, 2009). Scholars argue that formal practices prevail among large and multinational companies (Halme et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2004), whereas informal practices predominate micro, small and medium-sized companies (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Davis and Crane, 2010).

When investigating CSR practices, scholars emphasise the differences in CSR practices across countries (Hah and Freeman, 2014; Kanji and Agrawal, 2016; Kim et al., 2013; Yang and Rivers, 2009). In their research, Matten and Moon (2008) investigated how and why CSR practices differ between the US and Europe. Jamali et al. (2020) investigated the differences in CSR practices between the Middle East and North Africa. Fassin et al. (2015) explored CSR practices across six European countries. Ozdora-Aksak and Atakan-Duman (2016) focused on CSR practices in Turkey; Muthuri and Gilbert (2011) in Kenya; Robertson (2009) in Singapore, Turkey, and Ethiopia; and Mazboudi et al. (2020) in Brazil and Sweden. The previously-mentioned scholars agree that CSR practices differ across different countries and recommend future CSR scholars to explore CSR practices and activities through cross-country CSR studies (Mazboudi et al., 2020). Correspondingly, this research compared CSR practices among four SEE countries. Before identifying the differences across countries, this research deemed it crucial to distinguish between different levels of operation of CSR practices. Accordingly, similar to the previously mentioned scholars, the next sub-chapter acknowledged these differences.

2.5.1 Levels of Operation of CSR Practices

The voluntarily-set practices taken by companies refer to voluntary disclosure of CSR policies (corporate reports, press releases; Simaens and Koster, 2013), the implementation of codes of

conduct and standards (Weber and Wasieleski, 2013), the accomplishment of incentive plans and control systems that encourage ethical values within the company (Zerbini, 2017), and cause-related marketing programs (donations to social causes; Nan and Heo, 2007). Besides voluntarily-set practices, numerous standard-setting practices have been established to persuade businesses to employ CSR policies by governments, local non-governmental organisations and national regulatory groups (Fombrun, 2005). A few examples of these are legislation (e.g., “Accounting Acts 1999” law, which requires all Norway/Sweden businesses to submit an annual environmental report), prizes and awards (e.g., France, Greece and Croatia give yearly awards for successful CSR management), national codes, guidelines, and forums (e.g., CSR Hellas, CSR Kosovo; Martineau et al., 2017). CSR practices need “to respect social norms, values and expectations (Sethi, 1975), so national normative pressures lead to different CSR practices in different countries” (Kim et al., 2013, p. 2583).

In recent years, regional and international actors have also developed CSR practices. A few examples are labels and standards (SA 8000 Workplace/Employee Relations, ISO 9000 Organisation and Governance), forums (CSR Europe), awards (CSR Europe Award), guidelines (EU CSR and Responsible Business Conduct; The 2030 Agenda; OECD Guidelines) and legislation (Directive 2014/95/EU; Aguinis and Glava, 2012; Kanji and Agrawal, 2016). According to Phillips (2020), “[t]oday’s CSR practices have become rigid, standardised, and overly ‘Westernized’” (p. 208). Several scholars have noticed that binding standards drafted by regional and national bodies impact the application of CSR activities (Kanji and Agrawal, 2016; Chen et al., 2018). This discussion initiated the discourse on voluntary versus binding CSR practices, which resulted in several well-known conceptual frameworks (like Matten and Moon’s (2008) framework). This research also contributed to the voluntary versus mandatory nature of CSR practices by exploring these practices and investigating the different levels of operation of CSR practices.

2.5.2 Voluntary and Mandatory CSR Practices

Starting in companies, CSR has gradually spread to numerous international organisations and governments, which have begun to develop mandatory CSR schemes and policies (Waddock,

2008; Pissani et al., 2017). Consequently, scholars have initiated an ongoing discourse on voluntary-versus-binding CSR practices (Matten and Moon, 2008; Sheehy, 2015; Arora et al., 2020). Over the last few years, CSR has faced a level shift – from an individual (voluntary) level of operation to a national, regional, and international (mandatory) level. Most CSR definitions and theories (instrumental, political and ethical theories) imply the principle of voluntarism in CSR practices (Gatti et al., 2019). However, studies in the last decade lean towards an institutionally embedded nature of CSR practices (Arora et al., 2020). The emergence of mandatory CSR was predicted long ago (see Horrigan, 2007; Selznick, 1957). But scholars, practitioners and other interested parties began embracing it only after noticing the impact of binding standards (drafted by national, regional and international bodies) on the application of CSR (Kanji and Agrawal, 2016; Chen et al., 2018). Scholars consider that, at present, CSR is institutionalised (Bice, 2017). For instance, India became the first country to introduce mandatory CSR practices in 2013 (Hickman et al., 2021).

The voluntary-versus-mandatory discourse has produced several influential studies in the CSR literature. The debate has reflected the diversity of agendas involved (Papazolomou et al., 2018; Gatti et al., 2019). Studies highlight effective CSR-binding (Chen et al., 2018), less effective or window-dressing mandatory CSR practices (Wang et al., 2016) and ineffective CSR-binding practices for irresponsible actions (Jackson et al., 2020), among others. Gatti et al. (2019) consider the mandatory system “a revolutionary advancement in the conceptual debate about the nature and implications of CSR” (p. 968). Scholars have different theoretical views. Fundamental theories, like stakeholder theory and shareholder theory, dominate the discussion of the nature of CSR practices (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). Institutional and political theorists endorse the mandatory nature of CSR practices (Brammer et al., 2012); normative theorists support voluntary practices (Harjoto and Jo, 2015); neo-institutionalist theorists, on the other hand, consider that the combination of mandatory and voluntary aspects in the formation of CSR leads to constructive CSR practices (Bice, 2017; Gatti et al., 2019). International actors, such as the EU, follow a neo-institutionalist mindset. EU deems that the best route for successful CSR adoption is the combination of voluntary measures and complementary regulations (EU, 2022).

2.5.3 Benefits and Critics of CSR Practices

According to Aguinis and Glava (2012), CSR practices benefit three levels: institutional, organisational and individual. A company can greatly gain from CSR activities as they offer better organisational value, contribute to competitive advantage, and positively impact brand value, particularly brand image and brand loyalty (Nareeman and Hassan, 2013; Singh and Verma, 2017). Besides, a company can gain loyal employees, as these practices positively influence companies' environment and create a strong fit/identification between employees and the organisation (Kim et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2018). These practices make employees attain positive attitudes towards the company, the job and job performance (Aguinis and Glava, 2019; Donia et al., 2019). Most importantly, they create job satisfaction (Glavas and Kelly, 2014), which attracts employees and increases employees' productivity and commitment (Lee et al., 2018). Numerous practitioners, such as Avlonas (2017) and Half (2019), agree along similar lines. Half (2019) believes such practices attract loyal employees (a desirable group). According to Mory et al. (2017) and Lythreatis et al. (2019), further research is required to understand the internal practices and their role in the success of the firm. Subsequently, this study investigated the CSR practices and their benefits by interviewing SME owners/managers.

Despite numerous actors attempting to encourage CSR practices, various scholars have criticised CSR practices due to businesses' insincerity and hypocrisy. They have regarded such practices as superficial window-dressing (Weaver et al., 1999; Fatma and Rahman, 2015; Connors et al., 2017) and have rejected their justifications on normative grounds (Pomering and Dolnicar, 2009). Particularly, advocates of agency theory condemn these practices. They consider that managers employ CSR practices for a personal agenda – to gain individual benefits and attain a good reputation (Barnea and Rubin, 2010; Zerbini, 2017). Similarly, stewardship theorists agree on the ineffectiveness of these activities but consider that the motive driving managers to implement them is 'the right thing to do' even if the company's performance is affected negatively (Davis et al., 1997). Institutional theorists, on the other hand, perceive CSR practices as an adaptive response to regulations, norms and values set by non-governmental actors and institutions, and managers utilise them only to gain consensus (Campbell, 2007).

2.6 CSR across Countries

Scholars and practitioners have highlighted the importance of country context in shaping CSR understanding (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023; Jamali and Karam, 2018; Matten and Moon, 2008; Ozdora-Aksak and Atakan-Duman, 2016). The country-specific characteristics impact CSR awareness and application (Helmig et al., 2016; Oduro et al., 2021). According to Oduro et al. (2021), the “cultural and contextual aspects of the country (Oduro et al., 2021, p. 7)” influence CSR. Matten and Moon (2008) highlight the impact of the political, financial, educational and labour systems. Besides them, Ozdora-Aksak and Atakan-Duman (2016) emphasise the local business environment’s influence on CSR agendas. Consequently, through the years, CSR research papers have focused on different countries (Jamali and Karam, 2018). The United States and European countries have grabbed the attention of most scholars (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Countries from Asia and the United Kingdom have also gained ground in CSR literature (Chapple and Moon, 2005; Khattak et al., 2019; Moon, 2005). In recent years, scholars have brought attention to developing countries, such as African countries (e.g., the Middle East and North Africa (Hennekam et al., 2017; Jamali et al., 2020), South Africa and Morocco (Khlif et al., 2015) and Uganda (Nkiko, 2013)). Yet, CSR literature presents a “low level of research being conducted in developing regions” (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023, p. 115).

Several empirical research and reviews have been published, focusing on different countries (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023; Jamali et al., 2020; Jamali and Carroll, 2017). Some scholars have compared countries within the same region (e.g., Chapple and Moon (2005) studied seven countries in Asia; Jamali et al. (2020) reviewed twenty countries in Africa). Others have compared countries across different regions. Matten and Moon (2008) provided one of the most influential works in cross-country CSR research. They investigated “how and why CSR differs among national settings (Matten and Moon, 2008, p. 406)” through the implicit-explicit framework in the United States and Europe. Brammer and Pavelin (2005) researched the United States and the United Kingdom; Brammer et al. (2006) investigated twenty countries (from Australia to South Korea); Gallén and Peraita (2016) investigated forty-four countries; Mazboudi et al. (2020) studied Brazil and Sweden, and Forreggiani and De Giacomo (2022) studied France, Germany and the

United Kingdom, among others. In recent years, scholars, like Jamali and Carroll (2017), compared CSR practices across developed and developing countries.

2.6.1 CSR in Developed Countries

Country-wise, most CSR scholars have focused their research on developed countries (Bhatia and Makkar, 2020). Several of them argue that developed countries introduced the CSR concept, and, to date, they drive the CSR agenda (Demuijnck and Ngnodjom, 2013; Tran and Jeppsen, 2016). Hence, scholars consider CSR a Western idea, which is largely unknown to many but not all developing countries (Fayyaz et al., 2017; Jamali and Carroll, 2017; Lythreathis et al., 2019). Developed countries promptly follow and implement CSR and CSR practices, and consumers in these countries are well-informed of the concept (Bhatia and Makkar, 2020). Accordingly, businesses, typically large businesses in these countries, have immersed CSR into their core (Jamali and Carroll, 2017). They refer to CSR as “an indispensable way of business (Sharma, 2020, p. 7)”. In their review, Bhatia and Makkar (2020) show that up to 97% of companies in developed countries, such as the US, UK, Japan, Australia and Western Europe, implement and disclose CSR practices.

Scholars argue that another temptation to focus mainly on developed countries is the “ascendancy of international institutional pressures for CSR in recent years and the salience of government-related institutional factors in a developed country context (Jamali and Carroll, 2017, p. 322)”. Besides, studies have shown that managers and customers in developed countries are more aware of and participate in CSR practices than in developing countries (Sharma, 2020). CSR is followed and implemented largely by companies in developed countries. Accordingly, Jamali et al. (2017) stated that it is salient to CSR literature to investigate CSR and its implementation outside developed countries.

2.6.2 CSR in Developing Countries

Scholars and practitioners have recently shifted their focus towards developing countries (see Jamali and Karam, 2018). Developing countries play an important role – they are a significant

source of import demand and increasing purchasing power, and they account for 63% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Jamali et al., 2017; Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017). Several international actors, such as OECD, United Nations (UN) and European Commission, have also recognised the importance of developing countries. Accordingly, they have attempted to enhance such countries' roles by reshaping their agendas or creating new ones, arranging ministerial-level meetings, and providing annual reports on developing countries (OECD, 2020). Several scholars have called for studying the institutional context of CSR in developing countries (Jamali and Karam, 2018; Khan et al., 2021).

Yet, there is limited research on this area, which is inconsistent with the significant collective impacts of developing countries (Khan et al., 2021). Overall, very few studies have focused on CSR in developing countries (Jamali et al., 2017), and most of them have been conducted in Africa (Hamann et al., 2017; Lythreatis et al., 2019) and Asia (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016; Fayyaz et al., 2017). Scholar contributions in this ground are only starting to gain appreciation in the last decade. Thus, CSR in developing countries “provides fertile grounds for testing, refining and developing new theories (Khan et al., 2021, p. 3)”. Studies have found that, compared to developed countries, CSR in developing countries lacks institutionalisation (Jamali and Neville, 2011; Soundararajan *et al.*, 2018), is less formalised and experiences greater institutional complexity (Marquis and Raynard, 2015; Khan *et al.*, 2021). It is typically at a lower level of application but tends to be largely philanthropic in nature. It is also deeply rooted in religious and cultural values (Jamali et al., 2017). Until recently, international journals have not primarily focused on developing countries (Pisani et al., 2017). Accordingly, Fatima and Elbanna (2023) stated, “future research needs to study the less researched regions to better understand the role of context in CSR implementation (p. 109).” This research, thus, focused on a less investigated region, in the South-East Europe region.

2.7 CSR in South-East Europe

2.7.1 What is SEE?

South-East Europe (SEE) is a geographical area of Europe that consists of several sovereign states: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia,

Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia and Romania (OECD, 2020). This region has been known for its conflictual nature and economic hardships. In recent years, SEE countries have gone through transitional processes; thus, they have encountered incompatible economic and social contexts. The high unemployment rates, specifically among youth (over 50%), and low activity rates show that the region provides a challenging business environment (Sanfey and Milatovic, 2018).

2.7.2 An Overview of CSR in SEE

This literature review showed that very few studies focused on South-East Europe (SEE). The few studies conducted in SEE have mainly focused on a single state. The countries that have gained the most interest from scholars are Greece (Vlachos et al., 2017), Croatia (Dropulić and Čular, 2019), Bulgaria (Koleva and Meadows, 2021) and Serbia (Mijatovic et al., 2019). Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia have been rarely covered by researchers (Habibi, 2021; Elezaj et al., 2019). These studies examined various topics, such as CSR's concept and practice from a post-communist society (Koleva and Meadows, 2021), CSR reporting (Dropulić and Čular, 2019) and the company-employee relationship from a CSR perspective (Vlachos et al., 2017), among others. Regardless of the topic of study, such studies came to a similar agreement. CSR is at an embryonic stage in the region (Koleva and Meadows, 2021). Companies follow a slow pace in implementing CSR strategies; thus, CSR implementation is absent among SEE states (Sanfey and Milatovic, 2018). This outcome is unexpected as regional and international actors have undertaken numerous actions to promote sustainable development in the region (RCC, 2018). The few companies employing CSR have shown that CSR initiatives have brought multiple benefits to their organisations (Dropulić and Čular, 2019; Mijatovic et al., 2019). Nonetheless, they apply CSR only because they are obliged by law; they reduce the managerial involvement in the definition and design of CSR programs (Wang et al., 2016). According to some authors, this, in turn, reduces corporate engagement in CSR in terms of creativity and investment, leading to less effective CSR programs (Reid and Toffel, 2009).

2.7.3 Why SEE?

SEE offers a thought-provoking context for investigation for the following reasons. It is important to advance CSR discourse by exploring how CSR and its practices differ across developing countries (Hamann *et al.*, 2017; Jamali *et al.*, 2017). SEE provides the opportunity to understand such differences as SEE is composed of several countries, each with peculiar contexts – (1) EU and non-EU member states and (2) post-communist and post-conflict societies. Second, there is a huge involvement of regional and international actors in raising CSR awareness; regardless of that, SEE is at an early phase of CSR development. SME owners/managers and consumers, in particular, are uninformed of CSR practices (RCC, 2018). Therefore, it is relevant to ask what CSR looks like in SMEs in SEE, and how do consumers understand CSR activities implemented by SMEs. Thirdly, SMEs constitute 99,8% of businesses and account for 75% of employment in SEE. This offers a rich pool of data, which eases the process of data collection and helps the researcher understand the implementation of CSR in SMEs in SEE.

2.8 Corporate Social Responsibility in Small and Medium Enterprises

Since the 1950s, the majority of studies in the CSR literature have shared a common focus –large companies in advanced economies (Carrigan *et al.*, 2017; Sendlhofer, 2019). Scholars discuss that the temptation to focus exclusively on large businesses is rooted in the crucial role that such firms play in the global economy, in their powerfulness and visibility (Amaeshi *et al.*, 2016; Spence, 2016; Sendlhofer, 2019), and in the inconsistent definition of CSR (some scholars and practitioners perceive that ‘corporate’ in CSR refers solely to large, multinational businesses, when certainly, corporate notion comprises various companies, regardless of size; see Jenkins, 2004 for a detailed consideration of the issue).

While the far-reaching impacts of large companies cannot be overlooked, SMEs are the backbone of the world economy (Jamali *et al.*, 2017). They are defined by the European Commission as having more than 10 and fewer than 250 employees, a turnover of up to €50 m and a total balance sheet of less than €43m (EC, 2019). SMEs comprise more than 95% of private businesses in the world and account for 90% or more of all businesses in an economy (Spence 2016; Lythreitis *et*

al., 2019). They are a significant factor in job creation and poverty reduction, as they provide approximately 60–70% of employment among both developed and developing countries (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Jamali et al., 2017). South-East Europe, for instance, generates more than three-quarters of employment from SMEs (OECD, 2016). Statistics might vary across countries, or industries, nonetheless, since the turn of the millennium, the importance of SMEs in the global, regional and national economic growth and vitality has begun to be acknowledged by both scholars and practitioners (Jamali et al., 2009; Tran and Jeppesen, 2016). Besides in economy, SMEs play a central role in the social and environmental landscape (Arend, 2014; Spence, 2016). SMEs have wide-ranging impacts in environment in both industrialised and developing countries (Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017) – they are responsible for 70% of industrial pollution, approximately 60–70% of CO₂ emission, commercial waste and pollution incidents (Courrent et al., 2018; Higgs and Hill, 2019). Besides all of these, there is, surprisingly, a scant amount of research on this ground (Jamali et al., 2017; Lythreatis et al., 2019). The limited research on this area is inconsistent with SMEs’ substantial impacts (Carrigan et al., 2017; Egels-Zandén, 2017; Sendlhofer, 2019). Consequently, a large group of scholars has called for a shift in the focus of CSR research agenda – from large companies to SMEs (Jamali et al., 2017; Lythreatis et al., 2019; Sendlhofer, 2019).

SMEs might have not been in the spotlight as much as large companies (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013), nonetheless, they are increasingly expected to implement CSR strategies and adhere to CSR policies (Hamann et al., 2017). According to Sendlhofer (2019), SMEs comprise “a crucial gateway” (p.1) to positively impact the social and environmental dimensions. Consequently, Hamann et al. (2017) indicate that “understanding why and how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) respond to environmental and social concerns is vital” (p. 24). Several other scholars agree along the same lines (Spence, 2016; Jamali et al., 2017), accordingly, more scholar attention is required to grasp the contribution of SMEs to the CSR field.

The majority of researchers perceive SMEs as small versions of large firms (Russo and Perrini, 2010). SMEs, however, differ greatly from large firms (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019) and the CSR lessons that are applicable for large companies, are not considered relevant to SMEs (Hamann et al., 2017). SMEs have different organisational structure and features – they typically have less formal managerial approaches and strategies, limited number of resources available, few

hierarchical levels, proximity with the local community and a different level of stakeholders' involvement (Demujinck and Ngnodjom, 2013; Courrent et al., 2018; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019). Overall, they face different issues and barriers when compared to large companies, especially in terms of CSR. It is then crucial to study SMEs 'in their own right', apart from large companies (Magrizos et al., 2021). Consequently, CSR theories and arguments applied to SMEs should not be adopted by large companies (as several studies have done so far), but account to SMEs particularities (Mayson, 2011; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013). Future studies should shed light into the CSR activities taken by SMEs, the reasons managers/owners employ those specific types of activities and the implications of such actions, for as up to today, there is little information about them (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016). This study's initial aim was to address the afore-said recommendation. This was also depicted in the first subsequent research question – **(RQ1)** How do fashion SME owners/managers from South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand and implement CSR?

Several studies have described the process of CSR in SMEs as much more complex than in large businesses (Morsing and Perrini, 2009; Jamali et al., 2017). The CSR in SMEs distinguishes between formal and informal activities. Formal activities encompass adhering to codes, and social, ethical, and environmental standards, providing annual sustainability reports, and/or participating in CSR agreements (Russo and Tencati, 2009; Lund-Thomsen et al., 2016), whereas informal activities, which are influenced predominantly by cultural norms and values (Vives, 2006), include donating charity to local communities or giving loans to workers. Scholars believe that SMEs have a less formalised application of CSR. SMEs are less likely to generate codes of conduct or adhere to CSR agreements and standards (Spence, 2007; Egels-Zandén, 2017). SMEs implement such informal activities because, initially, integrating CSR practices is expensive and their budget is limited, thus, it is easier to share and discuss such activities in informal settings. Secondly, SMEs lack the economic resources to ensure proper documentation of their CSR practices; they have low visibility, low media attention and receive less criticism (Gamerschlag et al. 2011; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Jamali et al., 2017).

2.8.1 CSR Drivers in SMEs

According to Jeppesen (2004) in Tran and Jeppesen (2016), SMEs are influenced or pressured to implement formal and informal CSR practices by internal factors of the firm, such as resources, capabilities and manager-employee relationships, and external firm factors like clients, government, industry, norms, and values. Other scholars have noticed other factors that drive SMEs and their owners/managers to implement CSR in their organisations. Hamann et al. (2017) recognise the role of governmental laws, traditions and privacy regulations in convincing SMEs to engage in CSR activities, and per se they recommend such legitimacy-seeking drivers to be the primary influencers of SMEs. Given that, Amaeshi et al. (2013) consider SMEs' implementation of CSR practices as *ad hoc*.

Nonetheless, SMEs are less influenced by institutional pressures, as they are not in the spotlight of public or media, they hardly grab the attention of activists' campaigns, and they are rarely targeted by domestic and international NGOs (Jenkins, 2004, 2006; Egels-Zandén, 2017). Scholars, therefore, have explored several other factors that drive SMEs to implement CSR practices, such as managers/owners' personal conviction, competitiveness, environmental responsibility, employees' pressure, customer demand, and the business case including the financial performance, such as return on sales, return on investment and cash flow (tangible benefits) and goodwill development (intangible benefits); Panwar et al., 2017; Sendlhofer, 2019).

Typically, SMEs owners/managers employ such practices due to ethical motives rather than profit (Vives, 2006; Jamali et al., 2009; Dincer and Dincer, 2013). The ethical motives are rooted in their personal beliefs and attitudes about this matter (Hamann et al., 2017). Overall, the attitudes and views of managers/owners are a major driver in the implementation of CSR strategies in SMEs; they feel that CSR is the 'right thing to do' (Egels-Zandén, 2017). The size of the company and the manager-stakeholders relationship (informal and more trusting) provide owners and managers of SMEs the potential to easily stress CSR activities into day-to-day business (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Egels-Zandén, 2017). Besides, the fact that the staff is from the local community impacts CSR activities, as the owner feels responsible towards their community (Demujinck and Ngnodjom, 2013). It can be seen that various motives interact with one another to persuade SMEs

owners/managers to employ CSR activities. At large, managers' attitudes as a driver of CSR implementation in SMEs has been researched by scholars in recent years, yet, scholars suggest that future empirical studies should focus on the role of SME managers/owners' characteristics and attitudes on companies' CSR practices (Faller and Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2018; Çera et al., 2022). Employees also play a crucial role in enacting CSR within the business (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Sendlhofer, 2019), mostly because of the proximity in employee-manager relations, less formal managerial approaches and informal communication channels (Fassin, 2008; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019). Therefore, SMEs do not need to prevail over formal hurdles to transform the organisations' processes (Sendlhofer, 2019).

CSR drivers in SMEs differ across countries and regions (Hamann et al., 2017; Rienda et al., 2022). For instance, a few countries voluntarily take responsibility for employees' health and security, while others (like EU-28) are obliged by national or regional regulations to perform the afore-said activities (Demujinck and Ngnodjom, 2013). In their review of CSR drivers in SMEs, Oduro et al. (2021) stated that it is crucial to understand that CSR drivers in SMEs differ across countries (regions) and industries. Accordingly, they call future scholars to add knowledge to the CSR drivers in SMEs across different contexts. This research followed their recommendations, and it enhanced the understanding of CSR drivers in SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece in the fashion industry.

2.8.2 Consumer Responses to CSR Activities Implemented by SMEs

SMEs might impact consumers' attitudes and behaviour by employing CSR strategies (Hamann et al., 2017; Oduro et al., 2021). Nonetheless, very few scholars have explicitly explored the impact of CSR programs taken by SMEs in consumers' behavioural responses. Bui (2010) implicitly considered consumers' behaviour towards CSR practices in SMEs, but their major focus was on large firms. Rodrigues and Borges (2015), on the other hand, explored the relationship between consumers' perceptions of CSR and consumers' buying behaviour, but their focus was on one single SME, Salsa. Their study confirmed a positive relation between CSR perception and buying behaviour – consumers prefer to purchase from socially responsible brands, but often doubt the nature of CSR activities. Rahman and Norman (2016), among others, found out that consumers

prefer to purchase from smaller firms applying CSR activities, rather than from large firms, whereas consumers' attitudes remain the same regardless of firms' size.

Although the aforesaid researchers have provided a grasp of this matter, the existing knowledge on consumers' responses to CSR strategies implemented by SMEs is mainly based on consumers' perceptions and behaviours of CSR activities taken by large firms (Du et al., 2010; Chernev and Blair, 2015; Park and Ghauri, 2015) – large companies present a very different context from SMEs. Current knowledge may not readily explain consumers' responses, as several scholars have pointed out that SMEs are not small versions of large firms and the arguments and theories applied to large firms are not relevant to SMEs (Hamann et al., 2017; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019). Therefore, this research explored the following research question – **(RQ2)** How do fashion consumers from SEE countries understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities? This research question benefited practitioners as well, as understanding consumers' responses towards CSR activities will aid SME managers to structure effectively future CSR strategies.

2.8.3 CSR in SMEs across Countries and Cultures

The prominence of CSR in SMEs across developed countries has started to be noticed among researchers and practitioners since the aughts of the third millennium (Spence, 2007; Sendlhofer, 2019). For instance, Itotenaan et al. (2014) researched the CSR frameworks applied in the developed countries, by focusing on the case of Netherlands and Sweden; whereas, McCaffrey and Kurland (2015) contributed to the CSR literature by exploring the case of U.S. localism networks (SMEs) in CSR. Besides scholars and managers, several international actors, such as OECD, United Nations (UN) and European Commission, have recognised the importance of SMEs and accordingly they have attempted to enhance SMEs' role by re-shaping their agendas or creating new ones, arranging ministerial-level meetings, and providing annual reports on SMEs (EC, 2019b; OECD, 2023). For instance, the UN's "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" covers sustainable development issues of SMEs and places SMEs as significant actors in delivering its seventeen goals (UN, 2023). While the aforementioned contributions to attain a more advanced understanding of CSR in SMEs in advanced economies cannot be overestimated, scholars

emphasize the need for directing future studies in another expanse – CSR in SMEs in developing countries (Jamali et al., 2017, 2019; Le Thanh et al., 2023).

Since the 2000s, the interest in CSR in developing countries has resulted in several studies that dealt with the topic (Jamali, 2010; Jamali and Neville, 2011). The majority of these studies neglected the importance of SMEs in developing countries – SMEs contribute significantly to the employment growth rate and reduction of poverty, moreover, they account for greenhouse gas emission (Jamali et al., 2017; Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017). Besides scholars, multilateral institutions, such as UN, World Bank and International Labor Organisation, have begun to consider issues that tackle SMEs in developing countries; for example, SDGs, besides developed countries, provide solutions to sustainable development concerns faced by SMEs in developing world (Jamali et al., 2017; UN, 2019).

Overall, very few studies have focused on SMEs and CSR in developing countries (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2016; Jamali et al., 2017; Le Thanh et al., 2023), and most of them have been conducted in Africa (Hamann et al., 2017; Lythreatis et al., 2019), and Asia (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016; Fayyaz et al., 2017). Even fewer studies have been placed in other regions, such as South-Eastern Europe, which, in addition to developed countries, consist of developing countries (Badulescu et al., 2018; Sanfey and Milatovic, 2018). This research, thus, decided to understand CSR in SMEs in developed and developing countries, and SEE provided the ideal ground for such research.

2.8.4 CSR in SMEs in South-East Europe

Although the majority of studies investigating CSR's impact on SMEs has been focused on other countries apart from the SEE region, a few scholars, like Badulescu et al. (2018) and Sanfey and Milatovic (2018), have been attracted to explore the role of CSR in SMEs across SEE countries. Studies investigating this region have been mostly focused only on a single state, such as Greece (Apospori, 2018), Croatia (Kori an and Jelavi, 2019), Serbia (Mihic et al., 2015), and Albania (Çelo et al., 2015). Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia have been neglected in academia when exploring this matter.

To this point, there is only one study including a larger number of states from SEE – Rogošić's investigation (2014), which examines the CSR reporting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. Besides scholars, managers/owners of SMEs lack interest in CSR activities. They are unfamiliar with CSR notion and its activities, and the ones aware of the concept rarely implement CSR initiatives or report their CSR practices (as they perceive them expensive; Dey et al. 2018; Pitoska et al. 2018). Overall, it can be concluded that current knowledge on this matter is not sufficient, and future studies should be done to enrich the CSR in SMEs literature in this region.

2.9 CSR in the Fashion Industry

The importance of context in CSR has been highlighted by several CSR scholars (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). To gain a deeper understanding of how context affects CSR, scholars recommend future research exploring CSR through industry context (Apaydin et al., 2021; Bhattacharya et al., 2021). Industry context has proved to be a salient factor in CSR processes (Cordeiro and Tewari, 2015; Jain et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2018; Apaydin et al., 2021; Bhattacharya et al., 2021). Accordingly, it has gained substantial attention among scholars (Cordeiro and Tewari, 2015; Dabic et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2021). CSR scholars have focused on different industries (Lu et al., 2021), such as banking (Li et al., 2023), automotive (Russo-Spena et al., 2018), construction (Xia et al., 2018), gambling (Leung and Snell, 2017), and energy (Agudelo et al., 2020), among others. Given the heterogeneous nature of industries, scholars have claimed that CSR and its processes differ across industries (Apaydin et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2021). Thus, it is salient to investigate the impact of the industry context on CSR (Apaydin et al., 2021). Among the industries that have grasped the attention of scholars in CSR discourse is fashion (Colucci et al., 2020).

The fashion industry is a significant contributor to global economics (Pedersen and Gwozdz, 2014), as it is one of the largest industries in the world (Szegedi et al., 2023). Due to its unethical and non-ecological activities (such as air pollution, water waste and landfill waste; Ferioli et al., 2022; Fan and Chang, 2023), it is deemed one of the main contributors to environmental issues (Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022). It is the second largest contributor to air pollution (Fan and Chang, 2023; Szegedi et al., 2023). Besides, it is negatively associated with human rights, labour standards and wages (Colucci et al., 2020; Osburg et al., 2021; Castillo-Abdul

et al., 2022). Several global scandals, such as the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020) and the unethical labour practices of Nike in Indonesia (Colucci et al., 2020), put the fashion industry under the spotlight. Vatamanescu et al. (2021) claimed that as a result of that, this industry has been highly criticised and has faced public scrutiny.

Fashion companies have responded to the critics (mainly because of stakeholders' pressure) by incorporating CSR and implementing CSR practices (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022; Szegedi et al., 2023). In recent years, CSR has become a trend among these companies (Henninger et al., 2016; Todeschini et al., 2017). Scholars like Lee and Lee (2018), Colucci et al. (2020) and Castillo-Abdul et al. (2022) show that fashion companies have embraced the CSR mentality. Other scholars, like Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020) and Ferioli et al. (2020), oppose them and claim a lack of socially responsible activities in this industry.

2.9.1 CSR Concept in the Fashion Industry

The trend of CSR in the fashion industry has been reflected also in academia. Consequently, scholars have investigated the social responsibilities of companies in the fashion industry (e.g., Pedersen et al., 2018; Ferioli et al., 2022; Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022). The researcher observed three occurrences among CSR scholars investigating this industry. First, scholars tend to overlap and synonymously use the concepts of CSR and sustainability (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020). Second, scholars put CSR and sustainability under one umbrella term – sustainability (e.g., Chan et al., 2020). Third, scholars focus exclusively on sustainability (e.g., Solino et al., 2020) or CSR (Rienda et al., 2023). These occurrences result from the inseparable linkage of CSR and sustainability among scholars, practitioners and policymakers, which makes it challenging for them to distinguish between the two terms. Considering that this research does not equate these two terms, the researcher focused only on the CSR literature in the fashion industry. The researcher noticed that while scholars embracing sustainability practices have constructed or adopted terms such as fashion sustainability and slow fashion (e.g., Henninger et al., 2016), CSR-focused scholars have not provided a fashion-specific definition of CSR (Nguyen et al., 2021).

This literature review showed that several scholars have investigated CSR in the fashion industry through the company lens (Halme et al., 2020). They have looked into CSR awareness (Nayak et al., 2022), drivers (Agudo-Valiente et al., 2017; Colucci et al., 2020; Rienda et al., 2023), activities (Colucci et al., 2020; Szegedi et al., 2023), barriers (Agudo-Valiente et al., 2017), report practices (Pelikanova et al., 2021) and communication (Mickelsson et al., 2023; Quiles-Soler et al., 2023), among others. Other CSR scholars have investigated consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviours about CSR practices of fashion companies (Amutelli et al., 2018; Bartikowski and Berens, 2021; Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Vock, 2022; Wei and Jung, 2022; Kim and Kim, 2023). They have looked into the consumer perceptions of fashion companies implementing CSR initiatives (e.g., Amutelli et al., 2018; Vock, 2022), consumer perceptions of the fashion companies' CSR messages (e.g., Kim and Kim, 2023) and consumer attitudes and their purchase intentions towards fashion companies adopting CSR (e.g., Bartikowski and Berens, 2021; Lu et al., 2022), among others. They have focused on luxury fashion companies (Amutelli et al., 2018; Diallo et al., 2021) or fast fashion companies (Diallo et al., 2021). For instance, Jiang (2022) has investigated the impact of CSR activities on consumption practices in the fast fashion industry. Other scholars have compared consumer perceptions of luxury and fast fashion companies (Vock, 2022) and consumer perceptions of slow and fast fashion companies employing CSR (Kim and Kim, 2023).

2.9.1.1 CSR in the Fashion Industry in Country, Size and Segment Context

Literature shows that the adoption of CSR and its activities depends on several contexts, such as country (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020), company size (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020; Szegedi et al., 2023) and market segment (Colucci et al., 2020), among others.

Country-wise, scholars have investigated CSR practices in the fashion industry in Nordic countries (Pedersen and Gwozdz, 2014), Italy (Feroli et al., 2022; Vatamanescu et al., 2021), Vietnam (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016; Minh and Khan, 2022), Middle East and North Africa (Jamali et al., 2020), Pakistan (Yunis et al., 2017) and China (Zhang et al., 2019). Developing countries have received more consideration from scholars as companies in this field have transferred to the developing world, given their cheap workforce and dense population (Giesen, 2008; Laudal, 2010; Yunis et

al., 2017). While African and Asian countries have dominated the field (Jamali et al., 2020), other developing countries, such as countries in the SEE region, have rarely been studied. Previous studies investigating CSR in SEE countries neglected the fashion industry. Therefore, this research encompassed this region and advanced further the literature on CSR and the fashion industry.

Size-wise, CSR scholars investigated the fashion industry across micro, small, medium, large and multinational companies (Colucci et al., 2020; Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020; Szegedi et al., 2023). Most CSR scholars focused on large or multinational fashion companies (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022). Until now, few studies have investigated CSR in the fashion industry through the lens of small and medium companies (with a few exceptions, such as Moraes et al. (2017) and Szegedi et al. (2023)). Colucci et al. (2020) stated that it is imperative to differ among company sizes when investigating CSR in the fashion industry, as the size of the company impacts the engagement of CSR. In their research, Colucci et al. (2020) claimed that small fashion companies engage less in CSR activities than large companies, as small companies have resource constraints, receive little recognition for CSR activities and have less pressure from stakeholders than large companies. Yet, Colucci et al. (2020) and Szegedi et al. (2023) claimed that the literature on CSR and the fashion industry should be further developed by investigating CSR practices across different-sized companies, especially among small and medium-sized ones.

Segment-wise, scholars focused on various market segments of the fashion industry, from luxury to the mass market (Osburg et al., 2021; Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022; Youn and Chon, 2022). A few scholars focused exclusively on luxury companies (Carrigan et al., 2013; Pelikánová et al., 2021; Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022; Youn and Chon, 2022); other scholars investigated mass-production companies (mainly associated with fast fashion; Liu et al., 2020; Mickelsson et al., 2023). Some other scholars, like Colucci et al. (2020) and Vock (2022), compared the segments. Colucci et al. (2020) identified five segments in the fashion industry: “luxury (that comprises also haute couture), ready-to-wear, diffusion, bridge, and mass” (p. 3). The fast fashion (mass market) segment, which refers to low-cost, low-price mass production and throwaway consumerism, has spread globally (Colucci et al., 2020; Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020; Wagner and Heinzl, 2020; Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Fan and Chang, 2023). In the last three decades, CSR among fast-fashion companies has received attention from academics and practitioners (Thorisdottir and

Johannsdottir, 2020; Mickelsson et al., 2023), mainly because of the impact of this segment on the environmental footprint and consumption practices (Ferioli et al., 2022; Lee and Lin, 2022). Consequently, fast fashion companies have engaged in CSR activities (Colucci et al., 2020). Luxury fashion companies, on the other hand, have neglected responsible practices (Vock, 2022). Another segment that has received the attention of the CSR discourse in the fashion industry is slow fashion (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020). Slow fashion, which refers to lasting high-quality production and slow consumerism, is often considered the opposite of fast fashion (Kim and Kim, 2023). This segment provides fewer collections, minimises waste and advocates environmental and ethical justice (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2019; Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020). It mainly responds to consumers' concerns about fast fashion (Kim and Kim, 2023). This literature review showed that a limited number of studies focused on commercial and social SMEs. The researcher, thus, decided to fill the gap and include these types of companies in their research.

2.9.2 CSR Drivers among Fashion Companies

Fashion companies implement an array of CSR activities (Rienda et al., 2023). According to Colucci et al. (2020), the CSR activities of fashion companies are influenced by three factors: (1) the company size, (2) the market segment and (3) the core business. Compared to large fashion companies, fashion SMEs are less likely to engage in CSR activities as they face fewer pressures (Deogracias et al., 2021). According to Colucci et al. (2020), fashion SMEs are pressured only to integrate CSR into their organisation if a contractor requires it. Similar to Rienda et al. (2023), Colucci et al. (2020) state that the market segment (luxury, ready-to-wear, mass, diffusion and bridge) influences CSR decisions. Several scholars highlight that the mass segment is more predisposed to implement CSR as they are under the radar of an immense consumer base and are conspicuous to public scrutiny (Colucci et al., 2020; Wei and Jung, 2022; Kim and Kim, 2023). Regarding the core business factor, Colucci et al. (2020) found that shoe, leather and sportswear companies engage in CSR mostly to compensate for the unethical behaviour that characterises them. Rienda et al. (2023) identified social media as another CSR driver for fashion SMEs. Agudo-Valiente et al. (2017) noted managers' subjective understanding of CSR as an imperative influencer in the CSR application of fashion companies. Van and Nguyen (2019) and Szegedi et al. (2023)

claimed that managers' perceptions of CSR particularly impact CSR adoption in fashion SMEs, as this impact is vaster among small and medium-sized than large fashion companies. Other scholars revealed that fashion companies implement CSR activities because of the economic benefits (Agudo-Valiente et al., 2017; Van and Nguyen, 2019), reputation (Rienda et al., 2023), increased business value (Van and Nguyen, 2019), better relationship with stakeholders and mitigation of risks (Rienda et al., 2023), among others. While these scholars identified various CSR drivers, they all agreed that the consumer is the main CSR driver for all fashion companies (regardless of size or market segment). Consumers have the power to evaluate, monitor, apply sanctions and, most importantly, purchase (Colucci et al., 2020; Deogracias et al., 2021).

2.9.3 CSR Implementation and CSR Activities among Fashion Companies

As a result of these drivers, fashion companies integrate CSR into their core and apply CSR activities. Van and Nguyen (2019), Pelikanova et al. (2021) and Rienda et al. (2023) have stated that CSR embeddedness and implementation depend on the country context and industry characteristics. Fashion companies in developed countries fully commit to CSR activities (Szegedi et al., 2023). Fashion companies in developing countries are pressured to adopt the CSR culture from social influences and competitive contexts (Singh and Mittal, 2019; Van and Nguyen, 2019). They face high pressure from international partners (with whom they share economic transactional relations), mainly due to the exporting nature (export-manufacturer) of such companies (Singh and Mittal, 2019; Van and Nguyen, 2019; Li et al., 2020). Rienda et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of conducting an analysis of CSR practices across countries. Accordingly, this study investigated the embeddedness of CSR among four countries with unique industry characteristics. Given that this research focus is the fashion industry, the researcher considered it relevant to provide the reader with an overview of the fashion industry in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece (the overview is presented in the next sub-chapter). The researcher also noticed that in recent years, scholars have preferred to investigate the CSR practices of fashion companies by focusing on secondary data (e.g., Pelikanova et al., 2021; Mickelsson et al., 2023) rather than primary data; the lack of primary data supports the decision of this research to focus on primary data.

The findings of White et al. (2017) showed that fashion companies adopt mimetic isomorphism; companies in this industry mimic activities from competitors or other industries. CSR activities in the fashion industry encompass a wide range of efforts aimed at addressing social, environmental and ethical challenges. The key CSR activities are centered around fair labor practices, environmental protection (reduction of carbon emission, waste minimisation, ethical production), inclusive organisational culture (skills development and career training), local community, empowerment of marginalised groups and sustainable development, among others (Feng and Ngai, 2020; Colucci et al., 2020; Deogracias et al., 2021). Most companies engage in these CSR activities (Colucci et al., 2020), even during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Khanchel et al., 2023; Szegedi et al., 2023).

Scholars highlight the importance of communicating such practices in the fashion industry due to the growing consumer demand for socially responsible practices and increasing stakeholder scrutiny (White et al., 2017; Colucci et al., 2020). Feng and Ngai (2020), Falchi et al. (2020) and Rienda et al. (2023) claim that, due to this scrutiny, fashion companies should communicate every socially responsible behaviour and avoid greenblushing. The predominant communication tools among fashion companies are company website (Pelikanova et al., 2021; Rienda et al., 2023), social media (Arrigo et al., 2022; Low and Bu, 2022), product labelling, advertising and CSR reports (Tschopp and Huefner, 2015; Colucci et al., 2020). Standalone CSR reports have become particularly popular among fashion SMEs (Colucci et al., 2020). Arrigo et al. (2022) have stated that fashion companies have started to use social media to transmit their CSR activities; however, its usage remains limited due to the fear of these companies to meet their followers' needs. Arrigo et al. (2022) have called future scholars to investigate social media as a tool for displaying CSR activities. Regardless of the communication tools, several scholars concluded that fashion companies that communicate these practices have a better level of performance (Colucci et al., 2020; Rienda et al., 2023). Effective communication will positively impact all core stakeholders, particularly consumers and improve the relationship between the company and stakeholders, which in turn increases the business value (Rienda et al., 2023).

2.9.4 Fashion Managers'/Owners' Perceptions of CSR and CSR Practices

Given the mounting pressure from consumers, activists and regulatory bodies, studies have shown that managers and owners of fashion companies (regardless of size and country) have become well aware of CSR, CSR practices and their importance to society at large (Rienda et al., 2023; Szegedi et al., 2023; Singh, 2024). Accordingly, some scholars have investigated CSR in the fashion industry through the perceptions of managers and owners (Fassin et al., 2015; Rienda et al., 2023; Szegedi et al., 2023). They have looked into their understanding of CSR (Nayak et al., 2022). A few scholars have focused on managers of large companies; others have studied micro, small and medium-sized fashion companies (Fassin et al., 2015; Rienda et al., 2023; Szegedi et al., 2023). Some other scholars have looked into all company sizes (e.g., Nayak et al., 2022). Szegedi et al. (2023), who focused on fashion SME owners and managers, found that the majority of owners and managers in Europe tend to interweave and overlap CSR and sustainability. Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020), on the other hand, claimed that fashion managers lean towards sustainability and incorporate sustainable practices in their organisations. This preference occurs due to the emerging trend of sustainability among fashion companies (Carrigan et al., 2013; Deogracias et al., 2021; Szegedi et al., 2023). Even practitioners highlight the tendency of fashion companies to overlook the differences between these two concepts (Singh, 2024). According to Szegedi et al. (2023), most fashion owners and managers view CSR as voluntary in nature, and according to their perceptions, they emphasise the importance of stakeholders. Yet, when revealing the main CSR barriers, owners and managers in the fashion industry emphasise the lack of stakeholder awareness (Shen et al., 2015; Agudo-Valiente et al., 2017). Shen et al. (2015) identified other barriers that owners and managers deal with; “lack of regulation, standards and diversity, lack of revision, and lack of management commitment (p. 3506)” are among the most common barriers in this industry.

2.9.5 Consumer Perceptions, Attitudes and Behaviours towards CSR Practices of Fashion Companies

The findings of Kim and Kim (2023) reveal that consumers perceive CSR as fit for luxury companies and unfit/inconsistent for fast fashion companies. They have claimed that consumer

perceptions rely on their incremental mindsets. Accordingly, consumers with a weaker incremental mindset are sceptical towards the CSR activities of fast fashion companies. Contrary to Kim and Kim (2023), Vock (2022) found that consumers perceive CSR as fit for fast fashion companies, but such perceptions depend mainly on the consumer relationship with the brand. Other CSR scholars, like Wei and Jung (2022), have claimed that fast fashion consumer perceptions of CSR activities rely on the company's communication strategies. Consumers prefer companies that use 'other-benefit' and avoid using 'self-benefit' appeals (other-benefit appeal: actions directed towards others; self-benefit appeal: actions directed towards consumers). Vatamanescu et al. (2021) did not differentiate the company types but distinguished the perceptions of consumers based on their age. They have stated that young consumers (Gen Zers and Millennials) pay attention to CSR practices; Gen Zers and Millennials are more concerned about the social and environmental responsibilities of fashion companies than older consumers (Vatamanescu et al., 2021). Generally, fashion consumers have been concerned about the price (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Jiang, 2022), the quality of the product(s) (Vock, 2022), durability (Vatamanescu et al., 2021), fit (Kim and Kim, 2023), availability (Vock, 2022), style (Colucci et al., 2021) and the latest trends (Jiang, 2022). In recent years, their consumption practices have changed (Garcia-Ortega et al., 2023). Fashion consumers, particularly the ones from developed countries, have become aware of the consequences of overconsumption and the importance of fashion companies' CSR to this issue (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020; Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Garcia-Ortega et al., 2023). Consequently, their consumption practices have transformed towards sustainable (Lim, 2017; Mukendi et al., 2020; Dabas and Whang, 2022), slow (Jung et al., 2014; Domingos et al., 2022), sufficient consumption (Freudenreic and Schaltegger, 2020; Frick et al., 2021; Garcia-Ortega et al., 2023) and conscious consumption (Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Kim and Kim, 2023). Conscious consumption, in particular, has grabbed the attention of academics focusing on the fashion context. This consumption type refers to consumers who take into account environmental protection, ethical production, quality of product and philanthropic activities (Kim and Kim, 2023). Among others, Ferioli et al. (2022) and Lee and Lin (2022) claimed that consumption is crucial to CSR understanding and CSR-impacted consumption practices.

Studies have shown that Gen Zers and Millennials, in particular, care about such responsibilities (Vatamanescu et al., 2021). Because of the awareness of the consequences of their consumption

(Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019; Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2019), young consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental impact, animal welfare and ethical wages (Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Gazzola et al., 2022). According to Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019), they purchase socially and environmentally conscious fashion products/services because of their self-identity, values (pro-environmental and pro-social values) and emotional intelligence. Vatamanescu et al. (2021) have claimed that after COVID-19, the attention of young consumers towards the CSR practices of fashion companies has increased. Young consumers have become “more conscientious, quality-focused, and responsible in their spending” (Gheorge and Matefi, 2021, p. 9) and require transparency in the production processes (Gazzola et al., 2022). Regardless of age, fashion consumers are sceptical of CSR actions applied by fashion companies (Achabou, 2020) and believe that fashion companies engage in CSR washing (Halme et al., 2020). Such scepticism has impacted consumer purchasing decisions (Garcia-Ortega et al., 2023). Some consumers perceive CSR activities as window-dressing (Connors et al., 2017; Kim and Kim, 2023); thus, they reduce their purchases (enthusing anti-consumption; Achabou, 2020). Nevertheless, Kim and Kim (2023) have claimed that conscious consumers can differ between sincere and window-dressing CSR activities.

In recent years, scholars have investigated the impact of CSR practices on consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in the fashion industry (Achabou, 2020; Kim and Kim, 2023). The current literature is developing, yet scholars call for future research to contribute to the CSR literature in the fashion industry by investigating the impact of CSR and its initiatives on consumer perceptions, attitudes and purchasing preferences (Lee and Lee, 2018; Zhang and Cui, 2018; Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Gazzola et al., 2022; Kim and Kim, 2023). Although scholars who have paid attention to this topic in the fashion industry focused on different countries, most scholars did not accentuate the national context (with few exceptions). For instance, Vatamanescu et al. (2021) studied Italian fashion consumers; Huo et al. (2022) focused on Pakistan consumers; Diallo et al. (2021) differed among French and Tunisian consumers. CSR scholars, such as Vatamanescu et al. (2021) and Huo et al. (2022), recommended focusing on other countries to see the impact of the national context. Since the current state of the literature is scarce in South-East Europe, this research focused on Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece (SEE countries). Vatamanescu et al. (2021) also called for future scholars to complement “the findings with investigations conducted with company

representatives to round off the overall pictures (p. 10)". This research responded to their call as it investigated consumers and managers/owners of fashion companies. Lastly, this research looked into consumer perceptions of communication tools fashion companies use to convey CSR activities, as Kim and Kim (2023) recommended investigating such perceptions.

2.10 Fashion Industry in SEE: Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

The fashion industry in SEE is among the three most developed industries in the region. In the last few years, its market value has increased by 30% and is anticipated to grow by 16% by 2027 (IndustriALL, 2019; Statista, 2023). This industry employs around 600,000 people from SEE (IndustriALL, 2019). It operates in the textile, clothing, footwear and leather sectors (IndustriALL, 2019). It offers the lowest prices in clothing and footwear across Europe (CBI, 2022). The industry is characterised by “old traditions and new technologies” (Nutall, 2019). It is mainly composed of small and medium-sized enterprises – around 90%. It is impacted by the individual (such as employees and owners), national, regional and international actors (IndustriALL, 2019); the EU, in particular, influences the industry in the region. Accordingly, in recent years, the fashion industry in the region has focused on the environmental, social and economic aspects (Nutall, 2019; USAID, 2023).

In Albania, the fashion industry has dominated the economy since the 1990s. In the last 20 years, this industry has faced a steady increase (AIDA, 2023). In 2021, it had around 57,330 employees (95% women and 5% men) and 684 active companies (AIDA, 2021). In 2023, it has 700 active companies (PEA, 2023). Three company types characterise this industry: (1) companies that manufacture and export all their products (77%), (2) companies that manufacture and export part of their products (18%), and (3) companies that produce and sell locally (5%) (AIDA, 2021). They are involved in five types of procedures: (M) make, (CM) cut and make, (CMT) cut, make and trim, (FP) final product and (OB) original brand (AIDA, 2021). Companies receive incentives from the government (e.g., the textile and footwear industry package; AIDA, 2023), NGOs (such as AIDA; the “fason” package) and international actors (IndustriALL, 2019). They are expected to implement ISO (e.g., ISO 9001 and ISO 14001), GOTS and OEKO-TEX standards (AIDA, 2021).

In Kosovo, the fashion industry used to dominate the country's economy. After the war in 1999, this particular industry was damaged massively (FEGO, 2022). Since then, NGOs and international actors (such as UNDP, USAID, FEGO and SwissContact) have invested and allowed for a comeback of this industry (FEGO, 2022; USAID, 2023). In the last 20 years, the fashion industry has had steady growth (KIESA, 2019; FEGO, 2022). In 2019, it had around 1,864 employees and 350 active companies. It had a turnover of €31.04 million (KIESA, 2019). The fashion industry in Kosovo includes three sub-sectors: textile, clothing and leather products (KIESA, 2019). Clothing and leather companies belong to one of the categories: cut, make and trim companies, local retailers, and fashion designers. In 2019, the clothing sector had 210 active companies and 856 employees; it generated €8.51 million. Women dominate the workforce and own most clothing companies in Kosovo (KIESA, 2019).

In Croatia, the fashion industry has a turnover of €778 million. In 2023, the fashion industry has 857 registered companies and 16,972 employees (Croatian Chamber of Economy, 2023). It involves four sectors: textile, clothing, shoes and leather (IndustriALL, 2022). The clothing and footwear sectors count for €270,8 million and have 262 active companies and 2,309 employees (IBISWorld, 2023b). In the last five years, the clothing and footwear sectors faced steady market growth of 2.0% but had a decline in employment and business growth (IBISWorld, 2023b). A decade ago, the fashion industry was one of the main pillars of the Croatian economy (Simonds, 2023). It was composed mainly of factories. In 2023, its structure has changed; small and micro companies dominate the industry (Simonds, 2023). By 2030, it intends to become sustainable and provide decent working conditions to its workforce. To attain that, it follows the guidelines and strategies of the government, unions and EU (IndustriALL, 2022; Simonds, 2023). The government provides several stimuli for the companies, such as tax incentives, employment grants, and education grants (Croatian Chamber of Economy, 2023).

The fashion industry is imperative in the Greek economy (FEA-VEE, 2023). This industry is valued at €685,8 million. It has grown annually (on average, 11.3% per year). However, due to COVID-19, it faced a difficult period in 2020, which recovered in the second quarter of 2021 (FEA-VEE, 2023). The clothing and footwear sectors have revenue of €1.5 billion. It has 8,280 employees and 2,196 active companies (IBISWorld, 2023a). During the last 50 years, the fashion

industry has transformed massively because of globalisation, technological advancements, increased competition and textile liberalisation (SEPPE, 2023). Today, Greece is one of the Europe's largest producers of ready-to-wear clothes (FEA-VEE, 2023). Micro and small companies predominate the industry.

Each of the abovementioned industries (fashion industry in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) offers a unique context for investigation. While all are located in and present the SEE region, each has its characteristics (as seen above). Each industry has different manufacturing and consumption practices. Each has diverse stakeholders and deals with unique policies. Each has various structures, yet all four mainly consist of small and medium-sized enterprises (around 90%; IndustriALL, 2019). This industry has rarely been covered by CSR scholars investigating the region. Thus, this research focused on the fashion industry across these four countries. It focused on the clothing (garment) sector. Precisely, it focused on fashion companies that design, cut, make and sell their products (clothes) through their stores or online. This type of fashion company has been widespread across SEE in recent years (Lu, 2019; Nutall, 2019). Besides, this type has not been covered by CSR scholars. CSR scholars have mainly focused on fast-fashion and luxury fashion companies (as previously presented).

The afore-said sub-chapters presented the literature review on topics that guided this investigation. In addition to them, this chapter depicted also the CSR theory. The CSR theory is presented separately from the rest of the chapter in order to pinpoint the importance of theory in this research. The researcher considered it important to highlight that, although CSR theory is presented lastly, it largely helped this research understand the CSR literature and gain insights into the topic. The following sub-chapter, first, introduces the theory in the CSR field. Second, it discusses the CSR from the SMEs' lens. Lastly, it critically discusses the theory application in this research.

2.11 CSR Theories

Over the last fifty years, scholars have sought to build, develop, and verify a rich stream of theories on the field of CSR (see Secchi, 2007; Brammer et al., 2012). Their proliferation mainly transpired after the 2000s, as scholars commenced acknowledging the importance of theories in

conceptualising CSR (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). This theorisation has intended to help CSR gain scholarly rigour and simplify its empirical complexity (Unerman and Chapman, 2014). All of the applied theories by CSR scholars have contributed to the field. Yet, the growing attention to CSR theories has brought huge heterogeneity among CSR studies (mainly due to the multi-disciplinary meaning of CSR). Several CSR specialists attempted to classify theories in the CSR field. Their classification focused on different criteria. Kolonski (1991) focused on the role of the firm; Garriga and Melé (2004) on the aspects of social reality; Secchi (2007) on managerial autonomy; and Aguinis and Glavas (2012) and Frynas and Stephans (2015) on the level of analysis, among others. Garriga and Melé (2004) identified them as instrumental, political, integrative and ethical theories; Secchi (2007) as utilitarian, managerial and relational theories; Aguinis and Glavas (2012) into institutional, organisational, and individual levels of analysis; and Frynas and Stephans (2015) into macro, meso, micro and multiple levels (from the political CSR perspective). Their identification helps scholars understand the structure of CSR literature and gain insights into their study.

Some of the main contributing theories are stakeholder theory, agency theory, institutional theory, and resource-based view theory (Montiel, 2008; Omran and Ramdhony, 2015). In particular, stakeholder and institutional theory have dominated the CSR literature (Martínez et al., 2016). According to Frynas and Yamahaki (2016), during the last twenty-five years, these two perspectives have comprised 76% of published articles in CSR. These theories “have helped to develop, consolidate and internalize this concept ... as a necessary and crucial for organizational success (Mertínez et al., 2016, p. 9)”.

2.11.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory has established itself as a well-known theoretical perspective on economics, marketing, and finance. Its contribution to the management field remains the most salient of them all. This scholarship provides a lens for investigating the complex relationships between a company and its stakeholders (Faller and Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2018). Stakeholder, as a concept, gained acknowledgement in academia after the seminal work of Freeman (1984). Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement

of an organization's objectives (p. 52)". Most scholars agree that the key groups are employees, shareholders, consumers, media, local community and interest groups; these stakeholders differ across different company sizes (Sen and Cowley, 2013). SMEs, for instance, add their families as their stakeholders as the majority of them are family-owned businesses (Freeman et al., 2010).

Stakeholder theory explicitly tackles the morals and values of managing an organisation and claims that company intentions go beyond the maximisation of shareholders' wealth (Hah and Freeman, 2014). Thus, shareholders are merely one of the stakeholders, and the business enterprise should pay attention to all the parties that help or impede its objectives (Freeman, 1984; Cordeiro and Tewari, 2015). Most importantly, the manager should serve the interest of the company – they should balance and maximise stakeholders' interests. Accordingly, scholars have classified stakeholders into primary (crucial for the company's existence) and secondary stakeholders (not crucial for the company's existence; Clarkson, 1995), normative and derivative stakeholders (Phillips, 2003), or based on three factors: power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). According to Hamidu et al. (2015), managers should develop objectives and business strategies to support stakeholders' interests. This perspective, known as the stakeholder's view of Freeman, has questioned the classical view of Friedman (1962) – the sole duty of a business is to maximise economic efficiency – and it has prompted the well-known Friedman vs. Freeman debate (Evans et al. 2013; Loison et al. 2018). This research follows Freeman's standpoint (see Freeman, 1984), which was presented above.

Since the beginning, stakeholder theory has been associated closely with CSR research. This association occurs due to the stakeholders' role in the CSR concept and the common moral and ethical principles underlying the CSR and the stakeholder perspective (Jamali, 2010; Russo and Perrini, 2010; Reimman et al., 2012). Additionally, this is a suitable theoretical framework for CSR-related studies as it investigates the relationship between the company and society (Cordeiro and Tewari, 2015). According to Frynas and Yamahaki (2016), over the period 1990–2014, 206 articles in the literature have discussed CSR-related issues by applying stakeholder theory, and these studies have offered rich empirical data in the CSR literature. Several scholars have implemented it to explain the company adoption of CSR practices across different countries (Yang and Rivers, 2009; Hah and Freeman, 2014). Some others have considered the stakeholders'

attributes on CSR strategies and activities, and they have analysed the impact of their pressure on such activities (Surroca et al., 2013). A few have investigated their impact on environmental policies (Darnall et al., 2010), while others have investigated the relationship between CSR and organisational performance (Barnett, 2014).

The literature review showed that the categorisation of primary and secondary stakeholders from Clarkson (1995) demonstrated usefulness among several CSR scholars identifying stakeholders (e.g., Change et al., 2014; Thijssens et al., 2015; Shubam et al., 2018; Mu et al., 2024). Rhee et al. (2021) claimed that consumers, employees and suppliers are the primary stakeholders impacting CSR activities. Mu et al. (2024) perceived employees as the main priorities of companies. Thijssens et al. (2015), who investigated primary and secondary stakeholders, stated that secondary stakeholders (such as NGOs, community groups and religious groups) are also influential in CSR application. In addition, the findings of Thijssens et al. (2015) showed that primary and secondary stakeholders' characteristics are also imperative for CSR understanding and implementation.

Overall, stakeholder theory has been used as a *descriptive* theory, to describe and explain the nature of the company, how the company is managed and the way its managers treat stakeholders; as *instrumental* theory, to explain the results of stakeholder principles and practices in performance objectives of the company; and as *normative* theory, to understand the purposes of the company through the moral and ethical lenses (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Barnett, 2016). Some researchers have employed them separately, while others have combined two or three approaches (Sweeny and Coughlan, 2008). Some scholars argue that this perspective mirrors the image of CSR, but it portrays only a part of the social responsibilities of companies – stakeholders (Surroca et al., 2013). Given the gained knowledge about CSR through this approach, most scholars argue that it remains the most suitable and used perspective in CSR-related studies.

2.11.2 Institutional Theory

Although the majority of its work was established at the beginning of the 20th century (*old institutionalism*), the institutional theory became dominant among sociological, economic and organisational studies at the end of the 20th century and thenceforward, it became recognised as

neo institutionalism (Suddaby, 2010; Beddewela and Fairbrass, 2016). Institutional theorists have provided different definitions for *institutions*. Old institutionalists, such as Selznick (1949), refer to the organisation as a whole when applying such terminology. Contemporary institutionalists, like Meyer and Rowan (1977), use it to denote specific organisation practices. Whereas March and Olsen (1989, p. 160) employ the term ‘institutions’ to describe “collections of rules and routines that define actions in terms of relations between roles and situations.” Such rules, routines and beliefs can be regulative (required by law), normative (imposed by a common sense of what is permissible) and cognitive (taken-for-granted models that guide the behaviours of individuals and firms) (Scott, 1995;2001).

This scholarship explores “processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemas, rules, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior” (Scott, 2002, p. 1). It deals with questions, which ask how the institutional environment impacts the organisational structures, practices and choices (the way they are created, conveyed and channelled; Campbell, 2007; Beddewela and Fairbrass, 2016). The research agenda in organisational studies has been dominated by isomorphism and decoupling (structural and procedural elements of neo-institutional theory). Isomorphism claims that all strategies and activities of organisations will be the same because similar organisations encounter similar institutional pressures (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Cohen, 2012; Fransen, 2013; Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) recognised three isomorphic processes – coercive, mimetic, and normative – which have been embraced by CSR scholars to understand the factors (institutional conditions) that shape CSR and CSR practices across different contexts. Among scholars, Matten and Moon (2008; 2020) adopted these processes to understand how and why CSR differs between the US and Europe. Coercive isomorphism refers to formal and informal pressures used to compel the organisation’s behaviour and structure to conform to socially accepted rules, norms or laws (Matten and Moon, 2008). Mimetic isomorphism encompasses organisational practices intentionally and unintentionally modeled on other organisations as a response to uncertainty (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Normative isomorphism includes organisational practices implicitly or explicitly impacted by professional and educational authorities (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Matten and Moon, 2008). Decoupling, on the other hand, occurs when the organisation’s structure and practices do not comply with its external image (Fernando and Lawrence, 2014).

Institutional theory, aside from stakeholder theory, plays a crucial role in the CSR literature. It is a suitable perspective to explain CSR activities given the influence of institutional settings on an organisation's norms and standards of behaviour (Fransen, 2013; Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016); according to Campbell (2007), this impact is a result of firm's embeddedness in a set of economic and political institutions. By adapting institutional theory, scholars can better understand CSR diversity and dynamics (Brammer et al., 2012). In terms of diversity, this theory provides a lens for understanding cross-national differences in CSR activities, whereas, in terms of dynamics, it helps explain how and why CSR differs across contexts. Overall, institutional theory contributes to understanding CSR at an instrumental/managerial level and explaining the concept of CSR by raising important questions regarding institutional settings (Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Institutional theory's application has been very vigorous within CSR studies (Campbell, 2007; Hotho and Pedersen, 2012). 141 scholars have integrated this perspective within their CSR research from 1990 to 2014 (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). According to Brammer et al. (2012), institutional theory matured among CSR scholars in the mid-2000s. CSR scholars adopted institutional theory to identify the institutional factors and their effects on socially responsible behaviours (Campbell, 2007), theorise external drivers of CSR and analyse organisations and macro environments (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016).

2.11.2.1 Explicit-Implicit Framework

One of the articles that has fundamentally altered the CSR literature is the seminal article by Matten and Moon (2008). Matten and Moon (2008) adopted institutionalism to propose a theoretical assumption stating that CSR is attributable to national business systems (NBSs). They refer to NBSs as an institutional approach in which companies are embedded. Their main contribution is the identification of two CSR forms – explicit and implicit CSR, which stem from the NBSs (Matten and Moon, 2020). The way CSR is governed (explicit or implicit) is influenced directly by two contexts: (1) the national institutional framework and (2) the organisational field of the company (Matten and Moon, 2008). The former context encompasses (a) a political system, (b) a financial system, (c) an education and labor system and (d) a cultural system. These four institutional constructions (the national institutional framework) underpin the (i) nature of the

company, (ii) the organisation of market processes (“how the economic relations between actors are organized and coordinated (Matten and Moon, 2008, p. 408)”) and (iii) the coordination and control systems (the way companies are governed) (Matten and Moon, 2008). Each of them influences the company decisions and subsequently influences the CSR decisions (explicit or implicit). On the other hand, the second context, the organisational field of the company (which directly influences CSR decisions), is produced by three key factors: (i) coercive isomorphism, (ii) mimetic processes and (iii) normative pressures (Matten and Moon, 2008). Matten and Moon (2008) adopted these isomorphisms to “explain why and how explicit CSR is gaining momentum as a new management concept (p. 411)”. These three isomorphisms were appropriated from the neo institutionalism approach (they were explained thoroughly on the previous page). All of the previously mentioned factors influence the company and, in turn, influence the process of CSR decision-making – the explicit and implicit CSR. This conceptual framework – explicit and implicit CSR – has been invoked worldwide by CSR scholars (Hofman et al., 2017; Matten and Moon, 2020). In their 2008 paper, Matten and Moon explained them as mutually exclusive CSR types. Accordingly, explicit CSR refers to CSR activities undertaken voluntarily by the company and resulting from key stakeholder pressure. Implicit CSR encompasses CSR activities adopted by the company to express the codified and mandatory values, norms and rules, which are derived from institutionalised actors (Matten and Moon, 2008; Matten and Moon, 2020).

While this dichotomic categorisation prevailed among CSR scholars (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016), Jamali and Neville (2011) and Jamali and Karam (2018) observed a different form of CSR expression – heterogenous hybridisation of CSR. According to them, CSR is not merely explicit or implicit but combines both. They alluded to this form of CSR in developing countries. In their reflective paper, Matten and Moon (2020) admitted to having viewed explicit and implicit CSR as an inverse relationship. They acclaim now that, due to the changing CSR dynamics, CSR (besides explicit and implicit) takes hybridised forms, namely explicitisation and implicitisation. Explicitisation “is the adoption for explicit CSR purposes of underlying societal norms and regulators’ policies that had hitherto governed the wider institutions in which corporations participate (p. 22)”. Implicitisation is the adoption of practices and policies related to explicit CSR into the everyday regulations within the organisation. In their reflective paper, Matten and Moon (2020) claimed to move from the NBSs specifics to three key relationships: (1) CSR and core

stakeholders, (2) CSR and societies at large and (3) CSR and regulators. They consider that these three types of relationships will feature and inform any organisation about CSR decisions (explicit-implicit).

2.11.3 Other Theories

Besides the aforementioned theories, several CSR scholars have applied agency theory (Bear et al., 2010). Agency theory is a useful perspective when examining the role of the individual in shaping CSR (Friedman, 1962; Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016), however, a combination of this and another theoretical perspective would be required to gain a holistic picture (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). Stewardship is an alternative to agency theory; it presents a positive approach of organisational dynamics, and it shows that managers, who are stewards, set goals that satisfy the interests of all stakeholders (Davis et al., 1997). Not many scholars applied it, yet it proved to be useful to those who employed it (Ghosh and Harjoto, 2011; Godos-Díez et al., 2011). On the other hand, signaling theory assumes that organisations increase organisations value and invite investors by voluntarily disclosing their CSR reports (signals) (Mahoney, 2012; Omran and Ramdhony, 2015).

The large number of these theories reveals CSR as a complex phenomenon. Accordingly, a couple of researchers recommend using a multi-theory approach as it allows explaining the complexity within the CSR activities (Faller and Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2018). Up to now, only 21% of articles in CSR literature have adopted multiple theories (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016).

2.11.4 Stakeholder and Institutional Theoretical Approaches in Studying CSR in Specific Contexts

As mentioned at the beginning of this sub-chapter, stakeholder and institutional theories have dominated the CSR literature (Martínez et al., 2016; Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). These theoretical approaches have been particularly prevalent among CSR scholars investigating (1) CSR in small and medium-sized enterprises (Oduro et al., 2024), (2) CSR across countries (e.g., Matten and Moon, 2008) and (3) CSR in the fashion industry (Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir, 2020).

CSR theory, among others, has been profoundly challenged by the smaller gears of the economy, as the current knowledge of CSR largely derives from large firms and neglects SMEs, which is ironic given their joint footprint (Carrigan et al., 2017; Egels-Zandén, 2017). Several academics have contested this transferability, as it cannot apply to SMEs as they acquire different characteristics (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Carrigan et al., 2017). Consequently, CSR scholars called for the re-application of theoretical perspectives in future studies investigating the role of CSR among SMEs (Spence, 2016; Jamali et al., 2017). Oduro et al. (2024), who recently analysed the divergent literature on CSR in SMEs, concluded it to be atheoretical. In this predominantly atheoretical literature, institutional theory (Tran and Jeppesen, 2016; Carrigan et al., 2017; Jamali et al., 2017) and stakeholder theory (Jenkins, 2006; Fisher et al., 2009; Tang and Tang, 2012) remain the main theories applied from scholars. The institutional theory offered scholars analytical tools to understand how different institutions impact SMEs and their practices. For instance, Tran and Jeppesen (2016) created an analytical framework to investigate how regulatory, normative and cognitive institutions affect SME managers and workers in Vietnamese textiles, garment and footwear companies. Carrigan et al. (2017) utilised it to understand the institutional forces causing harm in the fine jewellery industry in the UK; besides, they argue that the theory is useful in explaining drivers, processes and actions causing these harms. On the other hand, several scholars have attempted to theorise CSR in SMEs through stakeholder theory. Tang and Tang (2012) proved stakeholder theory to be effective when studying the stakeholder–firm power difference, specifically when investigating the effects of this power difference on the environmental performance of Chinese SMEs and the CSR orientation of their stakeholders. Similarly, Jenkins (2006) found stakeholder theory applicable to his research; in fact, he stated that this theory is a “key component of how SMEs frame their understanding of CSR” (p. 253). Despite the afore-said theoretical endeavours, scholars believe that SME studies in CSR are deficient in the application of theory (Carrigan et al., 2016; Spence, 2016; Jamali et al., 2017). Future studies should employ theoretical perspectives, as according to Spence (2016), this theorisation “enables engagement with the mainstream of CSR research as well as making a contribution to small business studies in scholarly, policy, and practice terms.” (p. 23).

Scholars investigating CSR through the country context have predominantly employed institutional theory (Jamali and Karam, 2018). The application of institutional theory in this

context has produced imperative advancement in CSR research. It has extended the understanding of the countries as contextual factors that shape CSR. For instance, Matten and Moon (2008), who employed institutional theory to understand how and why CSR differs between the US and Europe, created the conceptual framework of explicit-implicit CSR. Jamali and Neville (2011), who drew upon Scott's multi-level model of institutional flows (2008) and Matten and Moon's (2008) explicit-implicit framework to investigate the Lebanese context, compiled a multi-layered institutional framework. Other scholars have applied it to investigate how and why CSR practices differ among countries. Sison (2009) used it to investigate how the national institutional context of CSR impacts different states. Aggarwal and Jha (2019) invoked institutional theory to identify the pressures driving CSR in India. Among others, Khan et al. (2021) used it to explain how and why institutional conditions impact CSR in Pakistan. On the other hand, several scholars applied stakeholder theory when investigating CSR through a country context (Jamali and Carroll, 2017). Jamali and Carroll (2017) emphasised the position of stakeholder theory as a normative foundation of theoretical frameworks when scholars invoke it to investigate CSR across different countries. The researcher noticed that in several cases, stakeholder theory was either blended with institutional theory (see Vashchenko (2017)) or served as a supporting approach to institutional theory or any other theory (see Baranova and Meadows (2017)). Jamali and Carroll (2017) claimed that multiple theoretical approaches are successful for scholars aiming to study CSR in a country context and recommended future scholars blend institutional and stakeholder theories for valuable insights.

Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020) claimed that institutional and stakeholder theories are the most used theoretical approaches for investigating CSR in the fashion context. Several scholars used them separately to explore the fashion context. White et al. (2017) appreciated the role of stakeholder theory in CSR in the fashion industry literature. Paik et al. (2017) were among the scholars who adopted this theory. In particular, Paik et al. (2017) investigated the case of the clothing factory disaster in Bangladesh through the lens of stakeholder theory. On the other hand, Tran and Jeppesen (2016) grounded their analysis on the institutional theory to create an analytical framework to investigate how regulatory, normative and cognitive institutions affect SME managers and workers in Vietnamese textiles, garment and footwear companies. Alblowi et al. (2022) invoked the institutional theory to identify isomorphic pressures on the supply chain during

COVID-19 in the Australian and Saudi Arabian fashion industries. A few scholars, such as Pedersen and Gwozdz (2014), deemed it constructive to blend institutional and stakeholder theories for exploring the institutional pressures for CSR in the fashion context.

2.11.5 The Rationale for Adopting Stakeholder and Institutional Theories

Since the turn of the century, CSR scholars invited their fellow scholars to advance the integration of theory in CSR studies (Campbell, 2007; Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). Fallor and Knyphausen-Aufseß (2018) recommended adopting a multi-theory approach to understand the complex nature of CSR. Accordingly, this research employed institutional and stakeholder theory. Broadly, these perspectives served as lenses to explain CSR and its activities in SMEs in SEE, as both are core to the understanding of CSR (Brammer et al., 2012).

Stakeholder theory presided over this research as it offered a lens for researching the relationships between each SME and its stakeholders – SME managers/owners and consumers, in particular. It helped tackle the first and second research questions as each dealt with one stakeholder (the first research question also indirectly informed about other stakeholders). Initially, this perspective was used to identify the main stakeholders of each chosen fashion SME. Secondly, it helped understand how SME managers/owners consider their stakeholders by applying Clarkson's (1995) (primary vs secondary stakeholders). Mainly, this theory helped understand the underlying principles of SMEs by delving deep into SMEs' CSR practices and drivers. It also helped the researcher understand the stakeholders' impact on SMEs' CSR activities and the way SMEs support stakeholders in different institutional settings. Yang and Rivers (2009) particularly recommended employing this approach when investigating stakeholders across different countries, especially among emerging countries. Lastly, this theory was used to understand a specific stakeholder's – consumers' – understanding, attitudes and behaviour towards CSR activities. Overall, this research combined the three aspects of the stakeholder theory – descriptive, instrumental and normative – as Donaldson and Pretson (1995) and Barnett (2016) recommended, as it believed that they are nested within each other, and each of them applied to a specific objective of the research.

Institutional theory, on the other hand, provided a lens for addressing the first research question. In selecting this theoretical approach, the researcher considered the following reasons. As previously stated, CSR takes various meanings when placed in different institutional contexts; thus, in this research, institutional theory descriptively helped understand CSR's meaning (e.g., voluntarily or law-triggered) across each chosen SEE state. Secondly, through this theory, this research explained how different level institutions shape the understanding of CSR and CSR practices in each of the chosen SEE countries. The researcher drew upon this theory to create the four-level (company, national, regional and international) conceptual framework, which depicts the level of operation of CSR in the four SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). The CIS findings (presented in Chapter 4) were also grounded in Matten and Moon's (2008) explicit-implicit framework. Overall, the institutional perspective aided this research in investigating how institutions impact the CSR understanding and implementation of SMEs across different SEE countries in the fashion industry. In particular, Matten and Moon's (2008) explicit-implicit framework and Matten and Moon's (2020) three key CSR relationships served as the backbone of this research. In addition to the CIS findings, the researcher adopted the explicit-implicit framework to explain the CSR activities taken by fashion SMEs in SEE (refer to sub-chapter 5.5); the researcher invoked this framework to illustrate all internal and external CSR activities revealed by the interviewed fashion SME owners and managers. This research also implicitly considered Jamali and Karam's (2018) hybridisation framework, as the researcher deemed it applicable to study dynamic institutional contexts. The main contribution of this perspective to this study was the identification of cross-national CSR differences within SEE, specifically, the variances between non-EU and EU member countries of SEE regarding CSR understanding and implementation. It helped identify institutions, institutional pressures and the different institutional settings (which influence CSR application) across countries.

Both theories are interconnected, and they possess similarities in terms of CSR and CSR practices (Fernando and Lawrence, 2014); thus, they appear complementary to this study. Each of them, separately or merged, played a crucial role in exploring the organisational practices of SMEs in terms of CSR and understanding consumer behaviour.

2.12 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter presented the main work of CSR scholars in a few CSR areas: (1) CSR concept, (2) CSR implementation, (3) CSR in developed and developing countries, (4) CSR in SEE, (5) CSR in SMEs, (6) CSR in fashion industry and (7) CSR theory. The researcher highlighted the aforementioned areas because each of them shaped the rest of this research. Based on the research gaps identified in each of these areas, this research made theoretical and practical contributions. This chapter helped formulate and shape the research questions and research objectives. It served as the foundation of this research. It shaped the researcher's understanding of the CSR, and it helped conduct the research successfully.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction of the Chapter

The following chapter presents the research process of this study. Initially, sub-chapter ‘**3.2 Research Philosophy**’ discusses the research philosophy (ontology, epistemology and methodology) of the research. It explains and justifies the researcher’s ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. Sub-chapter ‘**3.3 Research Approach, Purpose, Choice and Time-Horizon**’ rationalises the research approach (inductive top-down), its purpose (exploratory), choice (multimethod qualitative study) and time horizon (cross-sectional). Sub-chapter ‘**3.4 Research Process and Design**’ presents and discusses the research process through Figure 3.5. Sub-chapter ‘**3.5 Data Collection**’ discusses the data collection process (primary and second-hand data collection). Initially, it justifies the sample (country selection) for this research. Afterwards, it explains the critical interpretative synthesis approach adopted for reviewing secondary data. It discusses the pilot study and its impact on the primary data collection process. It justifies the three primary qualitative methods (fundamental to this research): (1) face-to-face and online semi-structured one-to-one interviews, (2) face-to-face and online semi-structured focus groups and (3) netnography. Sub-chapter ‘**3.6 Data Analysis**’ explains the data synthesis of critical interpretive synthesis and reflexive thematic analysis of interviews, focus groups and netnographic research. Sub-chapter ‘**3.7 Ethical Consideration**’ presents the ethical challenges this research faced. Lastly, the sub-chapter ‘**3.8 Reflection: Methodological Limitations and Challenges**’ discusses the study’s limitations and challenges the researcher encountered.

3.2 Research Philosophy

When conducting research, it is crucial to undertake philosophical commitment as it determines the research path (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Gill and Johnson, 2010; Mingers, 2003). It provides implications about what, why and how research is conducted (Carson et al., 2001; Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012). Accordingly, the researcher pursued philosophical commitment in this exploratory research. The researcher argued that the importance of the philosophy of research for this research is five-fold. (1) The research philosophy gave the researcher a clear idea of her reflective role in the study; (2) it helped her clarify the research design; (3) it helped her identify the most suitable

research design, (4) it helped gain knowledge outside her experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Johnson and Clark, 2006; Morgan and Smircich, 1980), and (5) it aided her in making an original contribution to the field as philosophical assumptions “increase[d] the quality of [this] research and contribute[d] to the creativity of the researcher (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p. 47)”.

Several scholars from social sciences are conducive to the philosophical assumptions (see Burrell and Morgan (1982); Creswell (1994) or Creswell and Creswell (2023), Crotty (1998), and Collis and Hussey (2003), among others). Their focus lies on explaining the behaviour/action of people (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Scholars from the management discipline are also instrumental in the research philosophy discourse (like Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Fleetwood, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007; Van Aken, 2004). Since the 1950s, this discipline became a ‘scientisation’; it legitimised “itself within the context of the social sciences” (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006, p. 214). In the last few years, scholars from responsible management have also contributed to this discourse (Crane et al., 2018; Pirson, 2020; Schoeneborn et al., 2020). The previously mentioned scholars agree on the placement and importance of philosophical assumptions in research and call scholars to pay attention to them. Fleetwood (2005) states that the lack of philosophical positions creates issues for the investigation. The researcher responded to the call of these fellow researchers and focused on these assumptions and their impact on this exploratory path.

Researchers must make philosophical decisions concerning ontology, epistemology and methodology (Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Each decision influences the research process (Bansal et al., 2018) as each brings a viewpoint towards the research process that influences how researchers carry out the research (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). According to Johnson et al. (2006), differences among these decisions arise “over the significance of human inter-subjectivity in explaining behaviour and its appropriateness to scientific investigation (p. 135)”. Yet, internal coherence should be demonstrated among these three decisions (Sutrisna, 2009) as each decision directly influences the development of the other (Fleetwood, 2005). Ontology and epistemology refer to the “nature of reality and the nature of knowledge (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.12)”, while methodology refers to the combination of approaches used for investigating a situation (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

These decisions served as the foundation of this research; they underpinned the development of this research from the beginning (starting with the research proposal) and throughout its process. This research complied with the recommendations of Carson et al. (2001), Creswell and Creswell (2023), Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), Guba and Lincoln (1994), Johnson et al. (2007) and Morgan and Smircich (1980), among others. Their work is well-known in the field and has received support from other scholars. Their explanation of research philosophy is clear and straightforward. Like them, this research reckoned the philosophical assumptions of **ontology**, **epistemology** and **methodology**.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology deals with the nature of reality (Mingers, 2003) and the researchers' postulations about how the (social) world operates (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It influences what and how reality can be investigated (Fleetwood, 2005; Tsang, 2017). Scholars refer to it as the central core of the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), as it inevitably shapes the epistemology and methodology (Carson et al., 2001; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Given its importance, this research was attentive to the ontological decision and addressed it from the beginning. Initially, the researcher considered their preconceptions about how they view the world. Factors like “education and training, personal values, disciplinary perspectives” (Fleetwood, 2005, p. 75) impacted the researcher’s assumption. The researcher was aware of the influence of philosophical commitment on understanding the phenomenon and the means used to investigate it. Therefore, the researcher identified the ontological positions and selected the most suitable one.

Scholars discuss different ontological positions (Tranfield et al., 2003). They mainly identify two dichotomic views – objectivism and subjectivism (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). They label them differently, yet they describe them similarly (e.g., Carson et al. (2001) refer to them as positivism and interpretivism). (1) Objectivism (positivism or functionalism) refers to the world as external and objective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). It claims a ‘single’ truth and views social phenomena as independent from social actors (Carson et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2006). Objectivist scholars argue that the studied phenomena are viewed as objective social entities (Bansal et al., 2018). (2) Subjectivism (interpretivism) refers to the world as subjective. It states there is no ‘single’ external

reality (Carson et al., 2001), as reality is socially constructed (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). It claims that social “reality is an output of human cognitive processes” (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 136). Thus, scholars (from this domain) deal with how people create different versions of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, a few scholars argue that these positions do not fully depict the nature of the study. Aram and Salipante (2003), Niglas (2010) and Weber (2004) criticise such traditional dichotomies, as such positions neglect the multiplicity of approaches (this criticism goes for all levels, not only ontology). They take an anti-dualistic stance (or ‘synechism’ as Johnson and Gray (2010) call it). They argue that researchers should conceptualise research philosophies via multidimensional continua instead of dichotomies. For instance, Morgan and Smircich (1980) acknowledge several assumptions between the subjectivist and objectivist end of the continuum. Guba and Lincoln (1994) distinguish naïve realism, critical realism, historical realism and relativism. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) identify realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism. Carson and his colleagues (2001) acknowledge an interpretivist continuum composed of critical theory, realism, constructivism, hermeneutics, humanism, natural inquiry and phenomenology. Yet, subjectivism and objectivism remain the dominant philosophical positions for understanding management phenomena among these scholars (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016; Weber, 2004), as they are widely accepted in academia, and their impact on methodology is established.

Accordingly, the researcher identified the different ontological positions (from the beginning of the PhD studies). When considering the dichotomic views (subjectivism and objectivism), the researcher followed subjectivism (interpretivism), as the researcher’s perception of reality aligns with this position. In the subjectivist-objectivist continuum (adopted by Morgan and Smircich (1980)), the researcher positioned herself towards the end of the subjectivist assumption (see Figure 3.1) because the researcher believes that the nature of the world is subjective and that reality is socially constructed. The previously mentioned factors by Fleetwood (2005; education, training and personal values) impacted the researcher’s ontological decision. Besides them, other factors, such as discipline orientation, the research community, past research experiences and supervisors, determined this decision. During the Research Methods class in bachelor and master studies, the researcher became aware of the work of Carson et al. (2001), Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Morgan

and Smircich (1980), among others. Since then, the researcher has employed a subjectivist (interpretivist) position. During the PhD, the researcher attended several training and workshops to develop a further understanding of the research philosophy. The researcher also participated in and co-lectured the Research Methods class (qualitative part) from the first year with her supervisor.

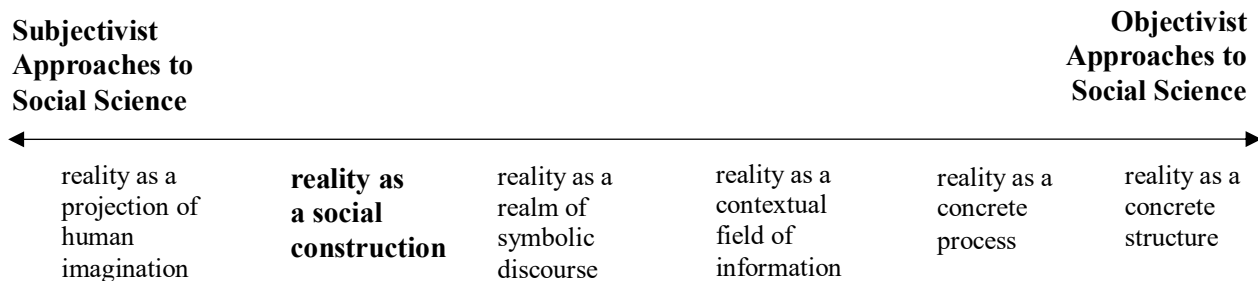


Figure 3.1 Subjectivist-Objectivist Continuum by Morgan and Smircich (1980): Researcher's Ontological Position in Bold Font Style

Every step of the research reflected the researcher's ontological position. In this research, corporate social responsibility was socially constructed by two distinct social entities, managers and consumers (as shown in Figure 3.2 below). This reality is multifaceted because each social entity (managers and consumers) portrays CSR differently. By exploring these realities, this research understood the social phenomenon of corporate social responsibility in three different contexts: (1) company size, (2) country and (3) industry contexts. Precisely, CSR in (1) SMEs, (2) South-East Europe (which resulted in CSR in (2a) developing and developed countries, (2b) EU and non-EU countries) and (3) the fashion industry. Each context added up to the reality investigated by this research. In particular, the research questions depicted the ontological position of this research (as Johnson et al. (2006) recommended). Each research question reflected each social entity's understanding of the phenomenon. The first research question – **(RQ 1)** How do fashion SME owners/managers from South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand and implement CSR? – depicted the managers' understanding of CSR and its implementation (in all three previously mentioned contexts). The second research question – **(RQ**

2) How do fashion consumers from South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities? – depicted the consumers' understanding of CSR and CSR activities (refer to Figure 3.2).

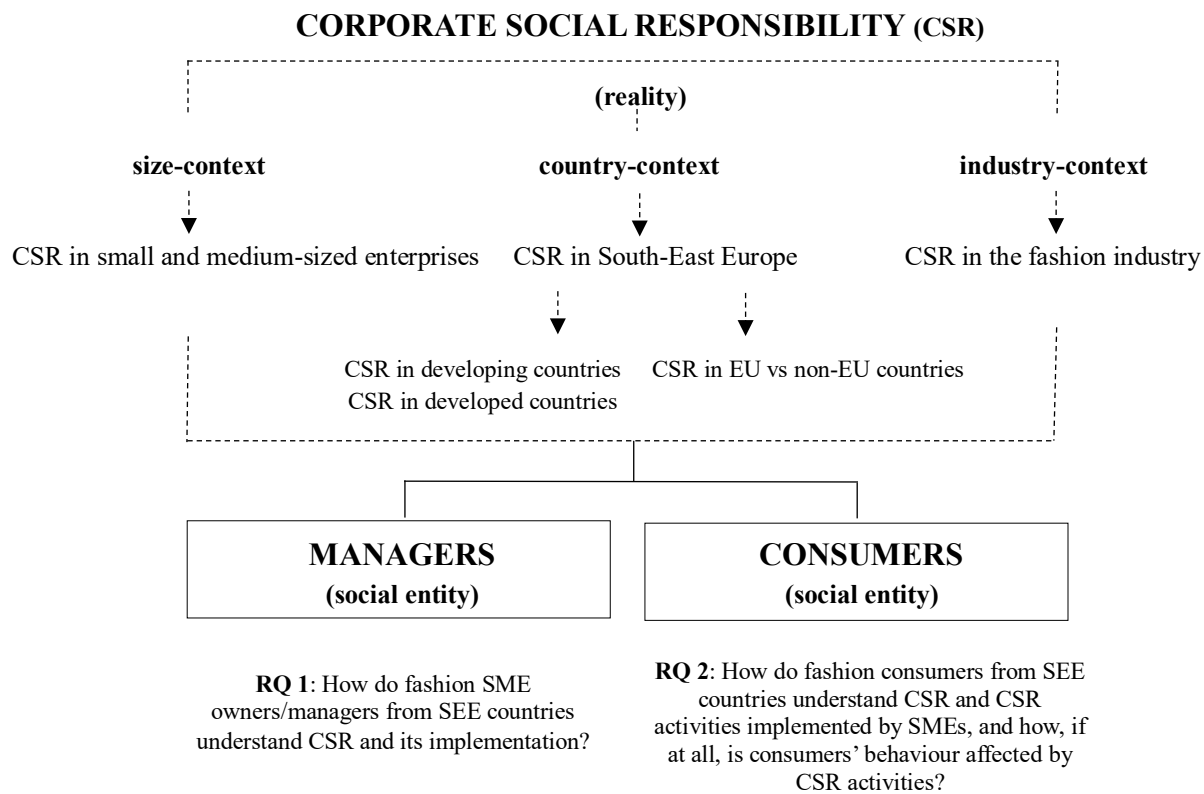


Figure 3.2 The Multifaceted Reality of CSR in the Research

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This philosophical assumption helps researchers understand how knowledge is obtained (Carson et al., 2001; Mingers, 2003). Specifically, it answers the following question: “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108). Ontological positions impact the answers to these questions (Tsang, 2017); thus, scholars

argue that the ontological assumption provides the basis for epistemology (Carson et al., 2001; Crotty, 1998). According to Fleetwood (2005), “the way we think the world is (ontology) influences: what we think can be known about it (epistemology); and how we think it can be investigated (methodology and research techniques)” (Fleetwood, 2005, p. 197). By determining the epistemological position, researchers can effectively design the methodology and research methods (Henry and Pene, 2001; Thompson, 2011); thus, epistemology is embedded in the methodology (Bryman, 1984; Crotty, 1998). Given the impact of this assumption on the research philosophy, this research carefully considered epistemology and its positions.

Similar to ontology, scholars identify two dichotomic positions (Johnson et al., 2006). Epistemology’s main perspectives are constructivism (subjectivism or interpretivism) and objectivism (positivism) (Crotty, 1998; Gialdino, 2009; Johnson et al., 2006; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Constructivism in epistemology deems that the relationship between the researcher and the social reality is reliant; the researcher is part of the social phenomenon being researched (Creswell and Creswell, 2023; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This view claims that “the social world is essentially relativistic and can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities which are to be studied” (Burrell and Morgan, 1982, p. 13). Thus, objectivity cannot be achieved; the researcher intends to achieve an individual understanding of different perspectives (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007). Researchers that follow this position focus on the specific and concrete (Carson et al., 2001); they intend to interpret how social reality is constructed (Creswell and Creswell, 2023; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). On the other hand, positivism refers to the researcher and social reality relationship as independent (Carson et al., 2001). Researchers that follow this position claim that reality can be observed, examined and shaped and focus on generalisation and abstraction (Burrell and Morgan, 1982; Carson et al., 2001). Other scholars identify different epistemological positions. For instance, Gephart (2004) discusses positivism and postpositivism, interpretivism and critical postmodernism. Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify dualism/objectivism, modified dualism/objectivism, transactional/subjectivism and constructivist transactional/subjectivism. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) distinguish strong positivism, positivism, constructionism, and strong constructionism, and Morgan and Smircich (1980) acknowledge seven epistemological positions in their continuum.

This research followed a constructivist (commonly referred to as subjectivist or interpretivist) epistemology, as the researcher's understanding of the nature of knowledge aligns with it. Scholars consider this stance suitable for understanding new sub-fields of management, such as corporate social responsibility (Bass and Milosevic, 2018; Crane et al., 2018). Like in the ontological decision, the researcher positioned herself towards the end of the subjectivist assumption in the subjectivist-objectivist continuum adopted by Morgan and Smircich (1980) (see Figure 3.3). Accordingly, this research aimed to understand how social reality (CSR) is constructed. It achieved that by concentrating on and pursuing concrete and specific contexts. As previously portrayed in Figure 3.2, this research focused on particular contexts – company size, country and industry. It aimed to understand the CSR concept and implementation by SMEs among SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) in the fashion industry.

This research reflected the constructivist epistemological position in its guiding values (Carson et al., 2001), the relationship with the researcher and the applied language (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Mainly, this position dictated the way the knowledge was obtained. Knowledge was obtained as Ritchie et al. (2014) recommended, “by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied, focusing on their meanings and interpretations (p. 11)”. The researcher constructed participants' understanding of the phenomenon based on their interpretations. The research followed an inductive logic; precisely, it employed a ‘soft’ inductive approach to obtaining knowledge (Ritchie et al., 2014; see Subchapter 3.3 for a detailed explanation).

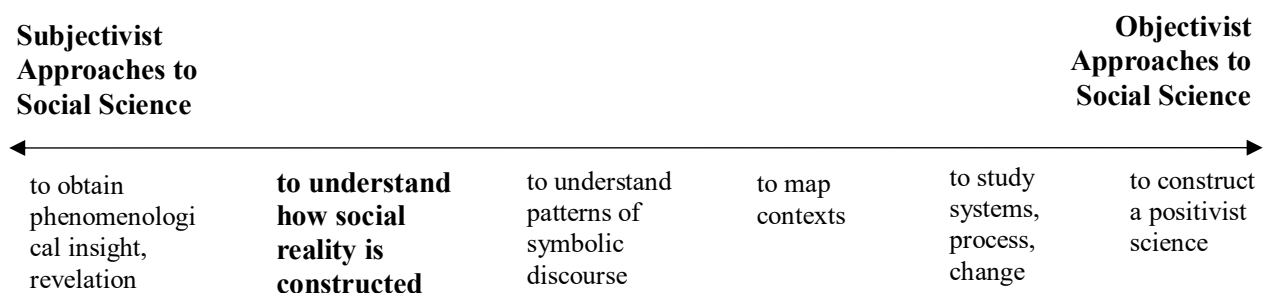


Figure 3.3 Subjectivist-Objectivist Continuum by Morgan and Smircich (1980): Researcher's Epistemological Position in Bold Font Style

3.2.3 Methodology

Among the philosophical choices, the methodology is the most noticeable and developed assumption in the management discipline (Crane et al., 2018; Mingers, 2003; Tsang, 2017). By identifying the ontological and epistemological position, researchers determine the methodological choice that suits their research (Thompson, 2011; Tsang, 2017). Scholars argue that methodology has an immense impact in the research (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). It is a blueprint that helps researchers structure an effective research process and justify researchers' choices regarding data collection and analysis (Bell et al., 2017; Tsang, 2017). Specifically, it refers to the approaches and methods used to investigate social reality (Carson et al., 2001; Mingers, 2003; Punch, 2014). According to Bell et al. (2021), "knowledge about phenomena is accomplished (p. 259)" by adopting methodological assumptions. Thus, this research paid attention to the methodology and its positions. This assumption helped the researcher to successfully plan and conduct this research (as previously-mentioned scholars recommended), and it helped to position their views.

Scholars identify two fundamental paradigms – positivism and interpretivism (Barker et al., 2001; Carson et al., 2001). Positivism and interpretivism are commonly referred to as quantitative and qualitative research (among other names; Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012) and are mainly associated with quantitative and qualitative methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Scholars have an ongoing debate about which position is the most suitable for research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). Positivism is an objective stance that concentrates on description and explanation (Carson et al., 2001). The researcher is independent/detached from the social phenomenon investigated and intends to study the external reality (Carson et al., 2001). Positivism aims to simplify and generalise the phenomenon mainly through statistical and mathematical methods (Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2013). Its followers consider it the most trustworthy source of knowledge due to its accuracy (large samples) and confidentiality (Thamhain, 2014).

Followers of interpretivism, however, raise objections to these assumptions as they believe such an approach would fail to capture the complexity of a phenomenon (Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012). Interpretivism is a subjective stance which focuses on understanding and interpretation (Carson et al., 2001). It "uses social actors' meanings to understand the phenomena (Gephart, 2004, p. 455)",

and it relies on “words, talk and texts” (p. 455). The researcher is part of the social reality and intends to construct the phenomenon and its meaning (fully or partially). Interpretivists state that interpretivism is better than positivism at understanding social reality because it explores and searches deep into the phenomenon (Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012). According to Gephart (2004), it “offers holistic depictions of realities that cannot be reduced to a few variables (p. 455)”. Positivism has historically dominated the management discipline (Johnson et al., 2006; Crane et al., 2018). In the last two decades, interpretivism has started considerably contributing to the management field (Johnson et al., 2006), predominantly to “new and emerging subfields (Crane et al., 2018, p. 4)”, such as business ethics, corporate social responsibility and social and ethical entrepreneurship (Bass and Milosevic, 2018; Crane et al. 2018; Wang et al., 2016).

This research followed an interpretivist approach. This approach offered the opportunity to gather more comprehensive insights and understand new knowledge (Gephart, 2004; Garcia and Gluesing, 2013; Zachariadis et al., 2015) about the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility. Scholars in the field of CSR perceive the interpretivist approach as informative (Crane et al., 2018), yet, they argue that its application is scarce. They state that positivism still dominates the CSR literature (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Crane et al., 2018; Fatima and Elbana, 2023; Zaman et al., 2022). The latest findings of Fatima and Elbana (2023) state that 36% of the published articles in CSR literature have followed interpretivism. The utilisation of interpretivist research has increased when considering Aguinis and Glavas’ (2012) findings (according to them, only 11% of CSR studies followed interpretivism). Nonetheless, Fatima and Elbana (2023) state that interpretivist studies, regardless of their increasing trend during 2009-2013, have proceeded with a decreasing trend. On the other hand, the positivist investigation of CSR has shown a constantly increasing trend. The interpretivist studies are, therefore, desired because academia lacks their utilisation, and, first and foremost, they “yield interesting insights on the individual experience of CSR (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019, p. 20)”, especially when considering managers’ and consumers’ perceptions and behaviour (Lee et al. 2017).

Similar to other interpretivist researchers (like Barker et al. (2001), Kapoulas and Mitic (2012) and Pratt (2009)), the researcher perceived the interpretivist approach as suitable for obtaining rich and deep insights into the three different contexts of the phenomenon of CSR and for co-constructing

the multifaceted reality of the phenomenon of CSR through the lenses of managers and consumers. Scholars deemed this approach successful in investigating three of these contexts – CSR in SMEs (Carrigan et al., 2017), CSR in the fashion industry (Arrigo, 2013) and CSR in SEE (Koleva and Meadows, 2021). According to Black (2006), “the power of the interpretivist approach lies in its ability to address the complexity and meaning of situations (p. 319)”. Another advantage of this approach is the concentration on the individual (Mayrhofer, 2009) and their experiences (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007). Thus, this approach enabled this research to attain its main aims – understanding the views of owners/managers towards CSR and its practices and exploring consumers’ perceptions and responses towards CSR activities. A positivist approach (due to its characteristics) was unlikely to help this study achieve such aims (Barker et al., 2001). According to Pratt (2009), the interpretivist approach “is great for addressing “how” questions (Pratt, 2009, p. 856).” As presented in the literature review, this research asked two “how” questions. This approach also provided insights into the working practices of the phenomenon under investigation (Andriopoulos and Slater, 2013). This benefit aided this study with the understanding of CSR activities implemented by SME owners/managers in SEE, which subsequently provided practical implications/guidance for companies in SEE, especially newly established ones, willing to embrace CSR.

The interpretivist approach, nonetheless, has been criticised for the lack of “validity, generalisation, reliability and verification (Hogg and Maclaren, 2008, p. 132)”, which are criteria generally employed by positivists “to convince readers of the soundness of conclusions drawn from research (Hogg and Maclaren, 2008, p. 132)”. Several interpretivist scholars argue that interpretivist research should not conform to positivist criteria (Black, 2006; Gephart, 2004; Symon et al., 2018) nor a single boilerplate (Pratt, 2009). This study agrees with the previously mentioned scholars. Another issue for interpretivist researchers is the heterogeneity of philosophical commitments in interpretivist research. This diversity creates difficulties in the assessment and generates numerous evaluation criteria (Johnson et al., 2006). Thus, scholars recommend qualitative-suitable evaluation criteria (Johnson et al., 2006).

Interpretivist scholars offer several assessment criteria (Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012; Symon et al., 2018). For instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend trustworthiness criteria of credibility,

transferability, dependability, and conformability (often referred to as parallel criteria of validity, generalisation, reliability and verification). Guba and Lincoln (1989) recommend authenticity criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educate authenticity, catalyst authenticity and tactical authenticity. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) suggest the dimensions of “authenticity, plausibility and criticality” (p. 595). Several management scholars, such as Bansan and Corley (2011; 2012), Gephart (2004), Johnson et al. (2006), Lee (2001), Pratt (2009), and Symon et al. (2018), recommend or discuss other criteria or strategies for interpretivist research. This research followed the three evaluation criteria of Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) (they are relevant for a few types of interpretivist research; Johnson et al. 2006; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008). Precisely, this research tackled the three dimensions of “authenticity, plausibility and criticality” (p. 130) through the analytical framework recommended by Hogg and Maclaran (2008). This research considered these three criteria straightforward for the assessment and most appropriate for the ontological and epistemological paradigms it follows. In addition, it deemed the strategies helpful for dealing with the struggles of interpreting and presenting qualitative findings, as they provided this research with transparent and explicit findings, and did not create a prescriptive (non-creative) writing style. Please refer to Table 3.1 to see how this study addressed them. Table 3.1 shows Golden-Biddle and Locke’s (1993) criteria and Hogg and Maclaran’s (2008) strategies and their implications for this research.

Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993)			Hogg and Maclaran (2008)	
Criteria	Descriptions	Strategies	Strategies/ Questions Addressed	Implications for the Research
Authenticity	It focuses on the setting studied.	The interpretation comes from the data. The researcher is present and has first-hand experience with the members’ understanding. The researcher grasps and	Has there been a sufficient immersion in the field? Has the author been genuine to the field experience?	The interpretation originated from the data the researcher collected first-hand (see Data Collection sub-chapter). The researcher immersed in the fieldwork of the interviews, focus groups and netnographic research (see Data Collection sub-chapter). In the netnographic research in Kosovo and Albania, the researcher spent three months with each online community to

		understands the members' world according to their construction.		familiarise herself (refer to Netnography sub-chapter). The researcher reported the research design using the three techniques recommended by Hogg and Maclaran (2008): “the type of data collected; the processes of data collection; and the systemic movement between collection and analysis (p. 136)” (see Data Collection and Data Analysis subchapters). The researcher provided a thick description and included several quotations in the Findings subchapter.
Plausibility	It focuses on the readers and their relationship with the subject.	The researcher provides a justified ‘fit’ between the information and the interpretation.	Does the study make sense to the reader? Has the study something distinctive to offer?	The researcher explained every process that followed the data collection and data analysis in the Methodology chapter. By explaining it, the reader presumably easily understood it. The research presented its distinctiveness by portraying the quest, presenting the research gaps (see Research Gaps subchapter) and presenting original contribution (derived from the findings; refer to the created frameworks throughout the three findings chapters).
Criticality	It focuses on the readers' reflexivity.	The researcher provokes the reader to reflect, recognise and imagine new possibilities from the findings.	Is the text able to provoke a re-examination of underlying assumptions?	The research provided room for reflection in every chapter and it encouraged readers to re-consider their views.

Table 3.1 Evaluation Criteria (adopted by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993)), Strategies by Hogg and Maclaran (2008) and their Implications for the Research

Rhetorical-wise, this research employed rhetorical strategies to construct (1) the theoretical purpose and (2) the theoretical contribution of this study. It used Welch et al. (2013) recommendation to achieve the former and Pratt's (2009) suggestions to achieve the latter. Welch's et al. (2013) work helped this research deal with the stylistic, argumentative and presentational dimensions through the three types of repertoires (modernist, revisionist and subversive). This research employed their recommendation before, during and after fieldwork. Their work helped the researcher identify their style, arguments and presentation and provide consistency among these three linguistic dimensions. Mainly, their work helped the researcher position the theoretical purpose and convince readers of it. According to the rhetorical practices of Welch et al. (2013), this research followed multiple repertoires, the modernist and subversive. This research, thus, was "an endeavour to gain in-depth understanding of an issue or viewpoint and use empirical data to illustrate the theoretical point (Welch et al., 2013, p. 256)" (subversive) and focused on the strengths of its exploratory nature and theory-building (modernist). In addition to that, Pratt's (2009) work helped this research avoid dangerous paths (like the "lack of balance between theory and data and quantifying of qualitative research (p. 857)") and encourage creativity. This research used Pratt's (2009) criteria and strategies to avoid such risks. Please refer to Table 3.2 to see their implementation in this research.

Criteria	Description/Strategies	Implications for the Research
Make sure the methods section includes "the basics"	The research discusses why this research is needed. The research states if it is building a new theory or elaborating existing theory. The research justifies the choice of the context and "unit of analysis". The research describes how it got from data to findings.	Besides in the Literature Review chapter, the researcher explicitly explained why this research was needed throughout the Methodology chapter. It also provided brief justifications in the 'Conclusion' subchapter. The research stated that it elaborated on the existing theory of institutional and stakeholder theory in the Literature Review and Methodology chapter, and it created a new conceptual framework (four-level conceptual framework, presented in Chapter 4). The research explained the research contexts throughout the Literature Review chapter, Ontology and Data Collection sub-chapters. It justified the country context in the Literature

		Review and Sampling sub-chapter (in Methodology chapter). The research explained what data it drew upon (scholar articles, interviews, focus groups and netnographic research). It included the interview and focus group questions in appendices. It provided a coherent story (refer to Findings chapter). The researcher clearly positioned herself in the field in the Methodology chapter.
Show data—in a smart fashion.	The research provides “proof” by offering multiple quotes (in text and tables).	The research presented multiple quotes throughout the three chapters on findings.
Think about using organising figures	The research presents tables and figures to unfold and depict processes.	The research provided several tables and figures in the Methodology and Findings chapters to present the processes it followed and illustrate the findings.
Think about telling a story	The research shows a coherent story of themes (not a description).	The research provided a coherent story of themes throughout the Findings chapter. The researcher deems that the research offered a clear theoretical conversation.
Consider “modelling” someone whose style you like and who consistently publishes qualitative work	The researcher identifies an author who suits their style and publishes qualitative work.	The researcher identified three authors, whose work they appreciate: Robert Gephart, Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki and Robert Kozinets (including the supervisors).

Table 3.2 Evaluation Criteria by Patt (2009) and the Implications for the Research

3.3 Research Approach, Purpose, Choice and Time-Horizon

Scholars state that the researcher should identify the research approach, as such choice justifies the rationale behind the research (Barratt et al., 2011). Two main research approaches dominate management research: deductive (data used to test hypotheses; general to specific; theory falsification or verification; typical in quantitative studies) and inductive approach (data used to explore a phenomenon; specific to general; theory generation and elaboration; typical in qualitative studies) (Barratt et al., 2011; Gill and Johnson, 2010; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011). The abductive research approach is also another form of reasoning in this discipline (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015);

it combines deductive and inductive approach back and forth, and it is common among mixed-methods studies. Scholars, nevertheless, argue that each reasoning approach can be used for qualitative or quantitative research (Eisenhard and Graebner, 2007; Lee et al., 1999). This research followed an inductive approach. The researcher was aware of the misleading simplification of such approaches (as Blaikie (2007) and Ritchie et al. (2014) explained). Thus, this research did not follow the so-called ‘pure inductive’ approach as it was cautious of the impact of the assumptions generated before the researcher started observing the reality. Such assumptions resulted from previous work and prior theory identification (often referred to as ‘idiosyncratic knowledge’; Welch et al., 2013) during the writing of the confirmation review, conference attendance and participation, and course attendance. Thus, this research followed a ‘soft’ inductive research approach (or an inductive top-down approach, as Shepher and Sutcliffe (2011) call it). The researcher started with a “general wonderment”, which induced a search for “a gap in existing theory that does not adequately explain the phenomenon under investigation (Barratt et al., 2011, p. 334)” and a quest for research questions and methods that allowed the data of the phenomenon to make theoretical contributions (Barratt et al., 2011; Eisenhard and Graebner, 2007; Shepher and Sutcliffe, 2011; Welch et al., 2013). Afterwards, the researcher compared the findings generated from themes “with existing theories published in the literature to determine its contribution (Shepher and Sutcliffe, 2011, p. 361)” and to produce or elaborate theorising. During this process, the researcher was open to changes (Shepher and Sutcliffe, 201; refer to 3.4 ‘Research Process and Design’ sub-chapter for a detailed explanation of this process). Scholars argue that this approach is suitable for researching phenomena like CSR (Shepher and Sutcliffe, 2011; Bansal et al., 2018). Bansal et al. (2018) state that inductive theorising is appropriate specifically for research contexts that have been understudied. CSR scholars consider the three contexts of this research understudied (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023; Sendlhofer, 2019). Accordingly, the researcher regarded this approach applicable.

The purpose of this study, as previously explained, was exploratory. The exploratory nature is common across interpretivist studies (Welch et al., 2013). It helps the researcher understand the phenomenon in question (Edmondson and McManus, 2007), gain insights into the topic of interest (Kapoulas and Mitic, 2012) and build or elaborate a theory (Beverland, 2005). Accordingly, the exploratory purpose helped this research gain insights into CSR in SMEs in the fashion industry

in the SEE (the topic of interest), predominantly into the CSR phenomenon. It also helped elaborate the institutional and stakeholder theory. In compliance with Edmondson and McManus's (2007) and Welch's et al. (2013) suggestions, this research reflected its exploratory nature through every chapter (precisely in its linguistic repertoire) and the conducted methods (qualitative methods). The exploratory purpose also guided the research questions. It was advantageous to this research as it provided fruitful and high-quality findings. According to Fatima and Elbanna (2023), CSR researchers have embraced exploratory purpose in the last decade; such studies account for 49% of studies in the CSR field.

In terms of methodological choice, this research adopted multiple methods (a combination of several methods; Mingers, 2003). Precisely, it adopted a multimethod qualitative study. It employed three first-hand and one secondary qualitative data collection method to explore the phenomenon of interest (refer to the Data Collection sub-chapter for a detailed explanation). This choice provided rich and constructive research. It offered a variety of findings and rich data (as Mingers (2003) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) recommended) and a multi-dimensional exploration of CSR (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Scholars emphasise the importance of timing when employing multiple methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Accordingly, this research carefully considered beforehand the time horizon.

In terms of the time horizon, this research was cross-sectional. Cross-sectional research investigates a particular topic at a specific time. Typically, the time constraint of academic projects limits the choice of time. Nevertheless, PhD studies offer the opportunity to choose between cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The researcher purposely followed a cross-sectional path. The cross-sectional approach was time-efficient and less expensive (since this research was conducted in four countries). The researcher planned the time for each method for each country. It was suitable for this research as it helped the researcher answer the research questions and attain research objectives. CSR studies, like management studies, primarily follow a cross-sectional approach (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023).

Figure 3.4 presents an overview of all previously mentioned elements of this research – research philosophy, approach, purpose, choice and time horizon. This research perceived each of these elements as vital to its path. The previous two sub-chapters justified all the decisions taken regarding these elements. Given Pratt's (2009) suggestion, this research unfolded and depicted these methodological processes through the figure above (Figure 3.4). In addition, this figure helped the research achieve plausibility (one of the criteria of Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993)) by trying to make sense of the study for the readers in a presentable way (like Hogg and Maclaran (2008) recommended). After a detailed consideration of all the research decisions about research philosophy, approach, purpose, choice and time horizon, this research reflected the research process and design in the next sub-chapters. All these choices directly impacted the development of the research design.

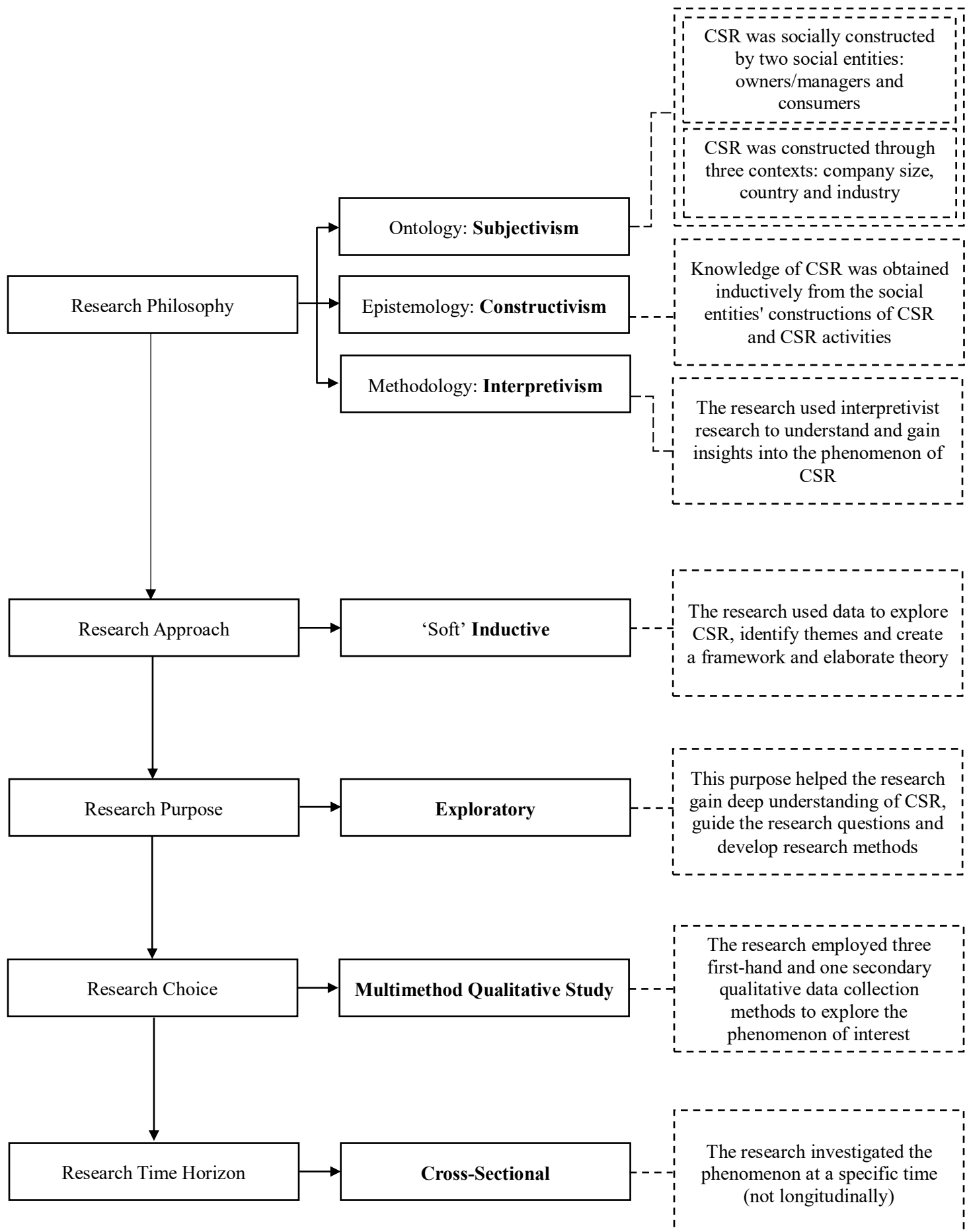


Figure 3.4 An Overview of the Research Philosophy, Approach, Purpose, Choice and Time Horizon

3.4 Research Process and Design

Scholars argue that to create management research that is theoretically, methodologically and practically successful, the researcher has to consider four key elements – prior work (literature), research question/s, research design and contribution to literature (Bansal et al., 2018; Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Edmondson and McManus, 2007). According to Bansal et al. (2018), besides the identification of the main elements, alignment between these elements is required, too (Bansal et al., 2018). Edmondson and McManus (2007) refer to this alignment as the ‘methodological fit’. This research categorised itself as ‘nascent’ among the three archetypes identified by Edmondson and McManus (2007) (nascent, intermediate and mature) in this fit, as it corresponded with the qualitative nature of this research. This research followed iterative instead of linear progress. It employed Edmondson and McManus’s (2007) iterative framework, which follows these steps: “(1) identify target area of interest, (2) read the literature, (3) develop research question/s, (4) design a study, (5) collect and analyse data, (6) write up results and (7) submit (p. 1174)”. This framework served as a blueprint for the research design of this research (refer to Figure 3.5 for the research design). It provided the researcher with the opportunity for feedback and modification at each step, which, in turn, gave the researcher the benefit of a learning process (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Sharp et al., 2017) and the possibility of improving the quality of research (Bansal et al., 2018). The researcher also adopted Rashid’s et al. (2019) recommendation of four iterative phases: (1) foundation, (2) prefield, (3) fieldwork, and (4) reporting phase. This adoption enhanced the research design as it helped the researcher present a straightforward design and include essential steps in this process (such as research philosophy) that were neglected in Edmondson and McManus’s (2007) iterative framework.

Figure 3.5 shows the research design. It reflects the iterative progress and the ‘soft’ inductive nature followed by this research. The research started founding this research by identifying the area of interest – corporate social responsibility. CSR offered the main characteristics of inductive research topics (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Welch et al., 2013); fittingly, CSR is a relatively

new phenomenon and lacks theorising (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). In this phase, the researcher identified the philosophical assumptions (ontology, epistemology, and methodology) and research approach ('soft' inductive). In the prefield phase, the researcher decided on the research purpose (exploratory), choice (a multimethod qualitative study of one secondary and three primary qualitative methods) and time horizon (cross-sectional). At the same time, due to the 'general wonderment', the researcher identified the main work in CSR and the research gaps in the field of CSR. The researcher was aware of the limits that the identification of literature and research gaps provide to inductive research. Thus, it carefully considered them without inclining towards the deductive approach. This induced search resulted in the development of research questions and research contexts (country, size and industry). The philosophical assumptions also shaped the research questions and contexts. Research questions were open-ended and driven by the 'how' question (as Bansal et al. (2018), Edmondson and McManus (2007) and Pratt (2009) recommended); they allowed the researcher to investigate with "an open mind (Edmondson and McManus, 2007, p. 1162)" and generate "rich, detailed, and evocative data (Edmondson and McManus, 2007, p. 1162)". The researcher reconsidered the research questions a few times over the studying years (before confirmation review, after it, during data collection and analysis, and before submitting the thesis). During the inquiry, the research questions changed slightly from their original form. From the beginning, the research question shaped the research design, precisely the methods employed for data collection.

This research (as previously discussed and presented in Figure 3.5) chose a multimethod qualitative approach. It used a qualitative secondary data collection method (critical interpretive synthesis) and three qualitative primary data collection methods (one-to-one interview, focus group and netnography). Besides providing rich and detailed data, the multimethod qualitative approach provided the possibility of exploring multiple perspectives of CSR (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Mainly, it helped with two social entities: owners/managers and consumers, which corresponded with the first and second research questions. Before fieldwork, the researcher applied for ethics approval (see 'Ethical Consideration' subchapter). Once the ethics committee approved the research, the researcher started with the fieldwork phase. This research conducted critical interpretive synthesis (secondary data collection technique). Critical interpretive synthesis provided information about the awareness and implementation of the phenomenon of CSR and its

practices among the four chosen countries of SEE (regardless of the size company and industry). It provided an overview of cross-national differences among these countries regarding CSR implementation. It also offered the opportunity to identify CSR-related information about the company sizes and industry contexts in the region and further justify the focus of this research. It is important to note that while this synthesis argumentation provided an overview of CSR and its practices in SEE, the researcher also conducted a literature review section, which generated a cohesive summary of the field and identified research gaps. After conducting the CIS, this research employed pilot studies in Greece and Kosovo due to the feasibility of utilising interviews and discussions in these countries. It conducted two one-to-one in-depth interviews with fashion SME owners/managers (one in Greece and one in Kosovo) and one focus group with consumers from Kosovo. Besides helping the researcher with possible data collection issues, pilot studies reaffirmed the research questions as appropriate.

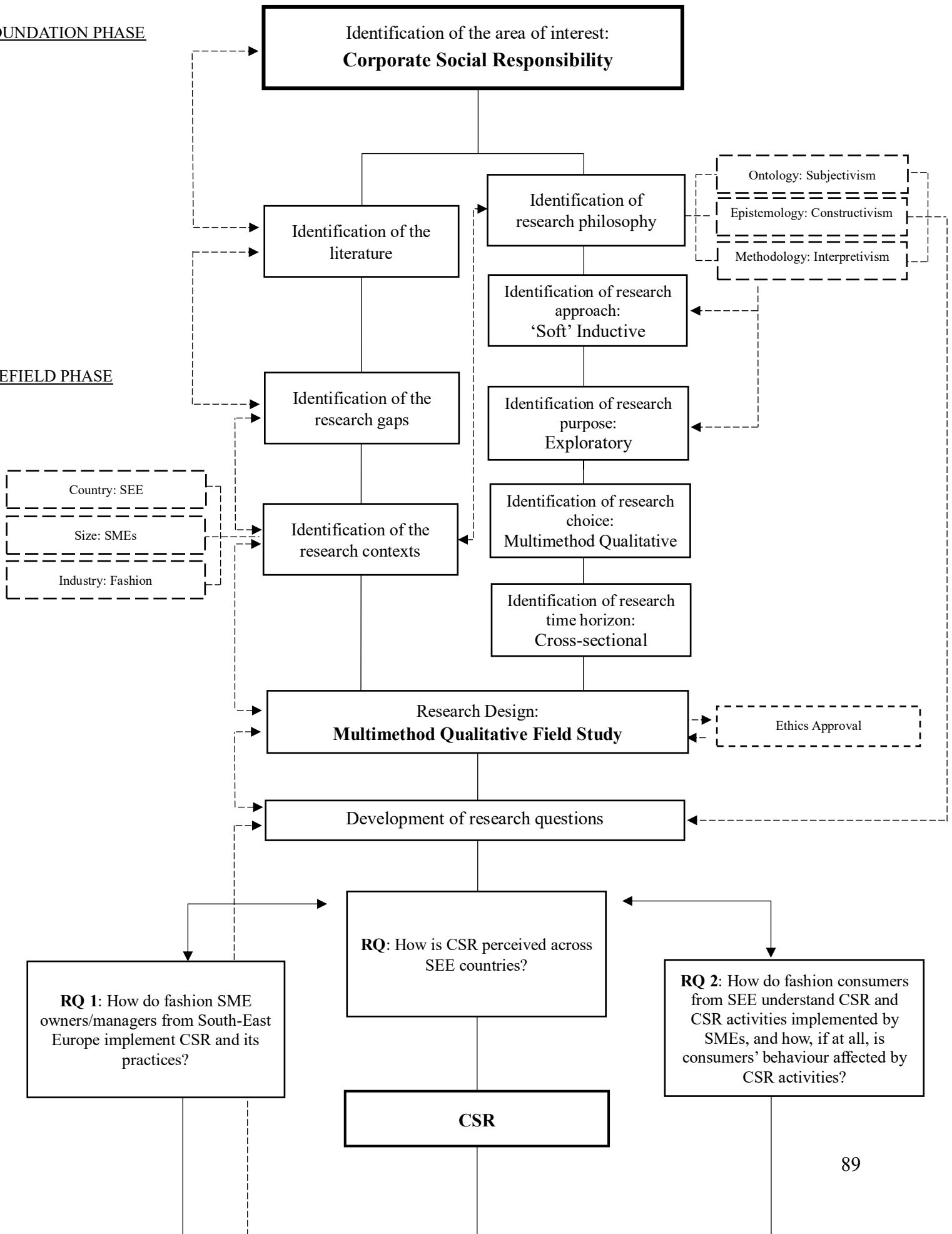
The researcher proceeded with the data collection process for each country – Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia (refer to the next sub-chapters for a thorough explanation of each data method). This process was driven by three research questions (refer to Figure 3.5). The first research question was a broad question focused on CSR and CSR activities across four SEE countries. It served as a leading question for this exploratory research. To answer this question (**RQ**: How is CSR perceived across SEE countries?), this research primarily utilised critical interpretive synthesis; the other methods used for the first and second research questions indirectly helped answer the leading question. To answer the first research question (**RQ 1**: How do fashion SME owners/managers from South-East European countries understand and implement CSR?), this research employed one-to-one interviews (primary data collection technique). One-to-one interviews with fashion SME owners/managers (conducted face-to-face and online) helped this research gain a deep understanding of the perceptions of SME owners/managers about CSR and its activities. They helped the researcher understand the processes undertaken by these companies in different national contexts, among others. To answer the second research question (**RQ2**: How do fashion consumers from SEE countries understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities?), this research employed focus groups and netnography (both primary data collection techniques). Focus groups (conducted face-to-face and online) helped understand the awareness of fashion consumers from

Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia about CSR, their perceptions and conceptualisation of CSR. Additionally, this method understood the consumers' attitudes, consumers buying intentions and behaviours towards fashion SMEs that implement or do not implement CSR activities. Netnography also offered the opportunity to collect such data. Compared to focus groups, it provided a natural context for exploring consumers' perceptions (unobtrusive research) and was free from researcher bias.

During that period, the researcher started with data transcription, translation and analysis (as Sharp et al. (2017) recommended). The data (collected from all methods) were analysed through thematic analysis. Findings triggered a comparison with the existing theory (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011). The researcher turned the findings from the netnography, interview and focus group methods into conference papers and received feedback from participation in several conferences, where she presented. Besides, the supervisors offered feedback throughout the process (during every step). The feedback, as Edmondson and McManus (2007) stated, provided “inputs in a learning process (p. 1175)” and better-quality research. Similar to scholars (like Gephart (2004) and Sharp et al. (2017)), the researcher agreed that these comments improved this thesis. By providing a ‘methodological fit’ through all the previously mentioned fundamental elements of research, this research effectively dealt with theoretical, methodological and practical challenges and disadvantages. Specifically, its iterative nature of conducting research helped deal with them (Bansal et al., 2018; Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Pratt, 2009).

FOUNDATION PHASE

PREFIELD PHASE



FIELDWORK PHASE

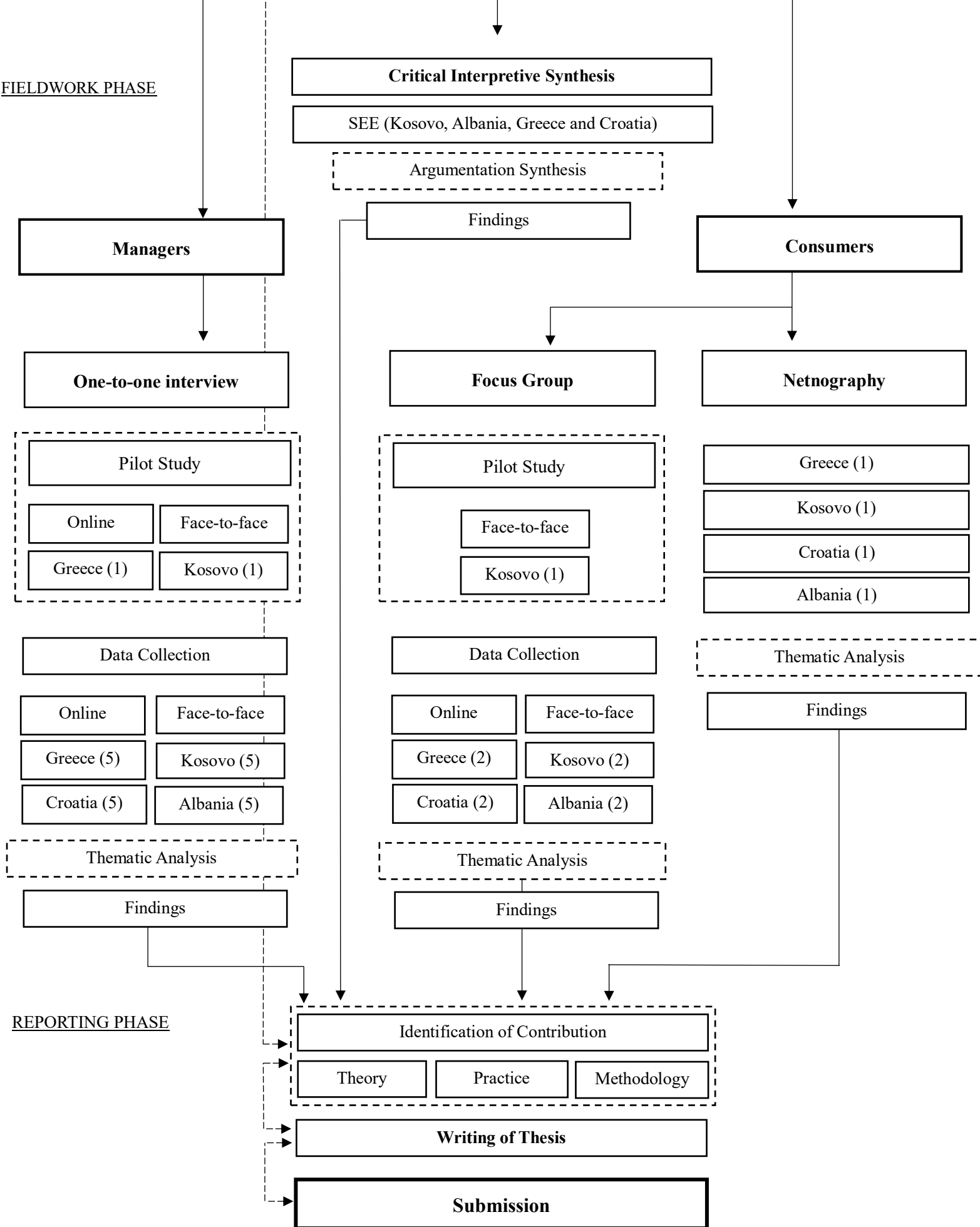


Figure 3.5 Research Design: (1) Foundation, (2) Prefield, (3) Fieldwork and (4) Reporting Phase

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection is a fundamental process in research (Aguinis et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2017). According to Edmondson and McManus (2007), data “should be collected with care for a deliberate purpose (p. 1165)”. As previously explained, this process was driven by the research questions and purposes. The researcher spent considerable time choosing, planning, collecting and analysing data (as Eden and Nielsen (2020) recommended). Before selecting the methods, the researcher carefully considered the pitfalls and challenges of collecting qualitative data. Kapoulas and Mitic (2012) identified several practical challenges that qualitative researchers face when collecting data: “(1) gaining access to the organisation and key participants, (2) ethical concerns, (3) incorporating online technologies, and (4) quality checks” (pp. 363-364).

The researcher was informed of these challenges before collecting the data. Thus, this research considered and addressed each in the following sub-chapters. To help with these and other qualitative challenges, the researcher participated in and attended training sessions, workshops, classes and conferences about qualitative research. The researcher improved her networking skills and expanded the networking to gain access to the SME owners/managers and consumers investigated. To deal with ethical concerns, this research followed the eleven principles recommended by Bell and Bryman (2007) (refer to ‘Ethical Considerations’ for a detailed explanation). Concerning the incorporation of online technologies, recent studies no longer regard online technology as a challenge for qualitative research, as the opportunities offered by online technology surpass their disadvantages (Crane et al., 2018). This research agreed with Crane et al. (2018); nonetheless, it considered the potential challenges of online technologies in the Netnography sub-chapter. Lastly, it provided a quality check for each employed method in the following sub-chapters.

Accordingly, this research selected two types of data collection methods – primary and secondary (as explained briefly in the previous subchapters). It decided on critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) as the secondary data collection method. For primary data collection, it chose the one-to-one interview, focus group and netnography method. CIS helped the research gather insights about the

phenomenon of CSR among four countries in SEE – Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia. Primary data collection methods gained insights about CSR and its processes in fashion SMEs among these four SEE countries. The utilisation of several methods (referred to by Haack et al. (2021) as “methodological pluralism (p. 473)”) helped this research confront the publishing challenges presented by top qualitative journals (Haack et al., 2021) and CSR-focused journals (Crane et al., 2018).

Aguinis et al. (2021) state that qualitative management scholars “do not include sufficient information on precise steps, decisions, and judgment calls (p. 678)” in their research. Accordingly, several qualitative scholars advocate transparency in the qualitative inquiry process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Pratt et al., 2020). It is crucial to state that this research, similar to the previously mentioned scholars, views transparency as a form of showing the honesty and reasonability of the investigation and not as an attempt for replication (which is an applicable practice of quantitative research). Pratt et al. (2020) explain that “qualitative researchers—regardless of method, epistemology, or ontological view—should be clear about what they did and the analytic choices they have made (p. 12)”. Accordingly, the next subchapters provided detailed information and justification for each step and choice.

3.5.1 Sampling

3.5.1.1 Sampling Strategy

Before explaining the data collection process for each research method, this research presented the sampling. Scholars consider the sampling process a vital step in qualitative investigation (Pratt et al., 2019). According to Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar (2021), “sampling is at the heart of theorising from qualitative inquiry (p. 4)”. Thus, this research paid attention to the identification and discussion of sampling. This subchapter focuses on country selection, whereas the following subchapters discuss participant recruitment for each research method. During a qualitative inquiry, sampling, as a process, should achieve a thorough understanding of the topic by reaching various views of the studied reality (Diviani et al., 2019). This research attempted to attain such an understanding through the non-probability sampling technique. Specifically, it utilised purposive sampling (often called judgmental sampling) for the country selection. This technique is common

in qualitative research that studied CSR (Öberseder et al., 2011; Bihari and Shajahan, 2023). The latter scholars claimed this method beneficial, as it successfully served their research purposes. For this research, the researcher deliberately chose four countries from South-East Europe: Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The selected countries fit the study's purposes. First, they helped the researcher understand the CSR phenomenon across different countries. Specifically, they helped understand the perception of CSR and CSR implementation among less-studied countries. The chosen countries provided the researcher with a rich pool of data as SMEs in the region constitute 99,8% of businesses and account for 75% of employment, and the fashion industry in SEE (which is among the three most developed industries) is mainly composed of SMEs – 90% (IndustriALL, 2019; Statista, 2019; EC, 2019b; Statista, 2019). In addition, these countries have been iteratively chosen as they enable the research to compare the CSR practices of SMEs of EU member states (Greece and Croatia) and non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania), a vital objective of this investigation.

3.5.1.2 Sample Size and Characteristics

In terms of sample adequacy, sample size remains an enduring discussion in qualitative research, and there is still no straightforward answer to precise sample size (Van Esch, 2013). It is, however, crucial for the sample size to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest and address the research questions adequately, but not to risk the research by generating repetitive data (Charmaz, 2006). The ideal sample size should be large enough to obtain diverse perspectives but limited at the point of saturation; most importantly, it should be determined by research objectives (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Consequently, this research focused on four SEE countries: Albania, Kosovo, Greece, and Croatia. The number of countries was deemed appropriate, as the researcher answered all research questions, attained all research aims and highlighted the differences between EU and non-EU countries. While the aforementioned points could have been achieved by investigating two or six states, four countries were deemed the ideal number for the following reasons. Each of the chosen countries has its peculiarities regarding economic, social and political context and CSR regulations and strategies at national and international levels. Thus, each of them provided a unique slice of reality, and when put all together, they presented a range of variations of reality and offered new insights. In terms of the regional level of CSR practice, two states were

put under a category (two categories overall: EU and non-EU member states); in such a case, saturation was not reached (see Guest et al., 2006; Hagaman and Wutich, 2006) as each of the countries within the category provided new data, new themes and new codes (Fusch and Ness, 2015) because countries were either old (Greece), new EU member states (Croatia), candidate (Albania) or possible candidate countries (Kosovo). Saturation could have occurred if six states were investigated as data would be gathered, but no new insights would emerge (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Besides, the PhD deadline could have created barriers, and the research would incline towards quantitative inquiry. Lastly, as this investigation uncovered the SEE region, two states were not considered sufficient to show the differences in the region; this sample size would impede gaining a new range of data, and it would cease to encompass the uniqueness of the SEE area. The sampling process for each method is presented separately in each sub-chapter below.

3.5.2 Secondary Data Collection

Once the countries were selected, the researcher conducted a secondary data collection. Scholars argue that the last years have acknowledged a proliferation in secondary data collection (Snyder, 2019), especially in the CSR field (Crane et al., 2018). Snyder (2019) states that literature review as a secondary-data research method, in particular, offers the research “a firm foundation for advancing knowledge (p. 333)” and “a critical component of creating frameworks (p. 333)”. In addition, it provides the research with easy access, cost-effectiveness (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), great accessibility to a broader range of data, and insights on the phenomenon of interest – CSR in the SEE region (in this case). This study adopted the critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) approach. Like Depraetere et al. (2021), the researcher considered CIS a suitable method for interpreting the literature and contributing theoretically and practically. This method provided an overview of the area of interest (Jarvis, 2017) and “an excellent way of synthesising research findings” (Snyder, 2019, p. 333). It offered a review of the CSR practices in SEE, and it created a conceptual framework (the four-level conceptual framework). For a detailed explanation of its utilisation, refer to the following subchapter.

3.5.2.1 *Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS)*

3.5.2.1.1 Justification and Purpose for the Research

This research employed the critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) to interpret the literature on corporate social responsibility in four countries of South-East Europe – Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia. CIS is a suitable approach for reviewing/synthesising secondary data. It is a relatively new approach, yet, social researchers are increasingly employing it (Depraetere et al., 2021). They consider it among the most suitable review approaches for qualitative researchers, as it does not solely summarise the data (Jarvis, 2017) but produces knowledge (Depraetere et al., 2020). According to Depraetere et al. (2021), CIS is the most used synthesis approach. Although it is not common in management research, the researcher decided to bring it to this discipline after considering its benefits. This research employed CIS because CIS is among the few predominantly qualitative approaches that integrate qualitative and quantitative studies into a single review and provide a thought-provoking understanding of the topic (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). In this research, CIS provided an insightful understanding of the phenomena (the concept of CSR and CSR practices in SEE). Like Depraetere et al. 2021, the researcher found CIS beneficial and relevant for practitioners and policymakers. CIS' flexibility created uncertainty sometimes, yet its flexibility allowed the researcher an open and easy-going adaptation of the process.

The researcher deemed it crucial to state that their ontological and epistemological positions largely impacted the integration and implementation of this approach. As previously explained, the researcher, ontologically, followed a soft adoption of subjectivism (the world is socially constructed; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Epistemologically, the researcher came across as a soft constructivist (knowledge is obtained through a 'soft' inductive approach; Barratt et al., 2011). The characteristics of CIS mentioned by scholars who adopted it put CIS as primarily interpretive in core (Depraetere et al., 2021). Depraetere et al. (2021) state that "CIS applies an inductive approach aiming to create an overarching theory by integrating different theoretical categories, generated from the available evidence leading to a more profound understanding of the topic under study (p. 672)". Some of its followers (such as Patey et al. (2018) and Perski et al. (2017)) shifted from the CIS foundation and employed a deductive or mixed approach. This research recognised

the possibility of different partakes in CIS (given the diverse ontological and epistemological positions in research). Nevertheless, it followed the recommendations of its founder, Dixon-Woods et al. (2006), as they fit the ontological and epistemological views of the researcher. This research considered CIS from the interpretivist point of view.

A few CIS followers classify CIS as a systematic review (Perski et al., 2017). The researcher disagreed with them. After considering the overview and guidelines on types of literature review methods by Snyder (2019) and Paré et al. (2016), the researcher deemed CIS an amalgamation of semi-systematic and integrative/critical literature review approaches (given its resemblance with the characteristics of these two approaches). The researcher labelled this merged approach ‘a qualitative semi-systematic’ literature review approach as it partakes in features of both. This approach category was inspired by the literature review categorisation of Snyder (2019) and prompted by Depraetere et al. (2021) findings about CIS’ application amongst 77 CIS articles. Its characteristics are presented in Appendix 3.1; Appendix 3.1 also shows the features of semi-systematic and integrative approaches (as identified by Snyder (2019)). Accordingly, the researcher contributed methodologically to the development of the CIS approach.

The previously mentioned characteristics of CIS were central to this study as they directly helped answer the leading research question of this research and some of its objectives. Specifically, CIS provided information on CSR understanding and its practices in the four chosen countries of SEE (regardless of the company size and industry). It presented an overview of cross-national differences among these countries regarding CSR implementation. It showed the influence of international actors, such as the EU, in CSR implementation. It also offered the opportunity to identify information about the company size and industry contexts in the region and justify the focus of this research. Lastly, it helped create a conceptual framework also suitable for future companies in the SEE region willing to adopt CSR into their organisations.

3.5.2.1.2 Sample: Country Selection

The researcher adopted non-probability sampling (as previously explained). It utilised purposive sampling for selecting countries for the application of the CIS. Accordingly, the researcher

purposely decided to conduct a CIS of articles on CSR within four South-East European countries: Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher deliberately chose these countries as they fit the study's purposes. Similar to the choice of these countries for this research, the researcher justified these four countries for the CIS because they offered the opportunity to understand CSR and its implementation across different countries. They provided a glimpse of less-studied countries such as SEE countries. Each country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) presented unique and peculiar perspectives on CSR and CSR practices at the national, regional and international levels (Stojanović et al., 2021). They showed the uniqueness and complexity of the region, post-conflict (Kosovo and Croatia) and post-communist (all besides Greece) societies. These countries also provided the opportunity to identify differences between EU and non-EU member states as explained previously. Most importantly, when put together, they presented a range of variations of reality with the possibility of offering new insights into CSR. The researcher showed the sampling strategy for this review below in the data collection process because such a decision was part of the CIS process the researcher followed.

3.5.2.1.3 Data Collection Process

Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) recommended the following steps to achieve a successful CIS application: (1) formulation of research question/s, (2) literature search, (3) literature selection/sampling, (4) quality appraisal, (5) data extraction, and (6) utilisation of an interpretive synthesis. Although not all CIS followers implement these steps strictly, Depraetere et al. (2021) advocate following them all for an effective CIS implementation. Among others, Depraetere et al. (2021) argue that following the guidelines of the founder ensures a transparent process (which, according to Templier and Paré (2017) and Snyder (2019), is a crucial evaluation criterion for literature review methods). Accordingly, this research followed the previously-mentioned steps of the CIS recommended by Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) and documented each step (refer to the following paragraphs to see the process). Depraetere et al. (2021) (considering Paré et al. (2016) recommendation) suggested an iterative review approach, a continuous re-planning throughout the review process to attain rich findings. This research followed the recommendation of Depraetere et al. (2021) about the iterative progress of CIS (this research, as a whole, followed this progress).

This review was driven by the leading research question – **(RQ)** How is CSR perceived across SEE countries? The question was modified throughout the analysis “in response to search results and findings from retrieved items (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006, p. 3)”. The selection of studies was based on the recommendations provided by Depraetere et al. (2021) and Dixon-Woods et al. (2006). For six months, potentially relevant sources from 2017 to 2022 (a six-year-long period) were identified by searching through the following electronic academic databases: *Google Scholar*, *EBSCOHost* and *StarPlus*. Other articles of interest were identified through this research’s conventional critical literature review and the employment of reference chaining.

First, the researcher attempted several search terms before narrowing them down to specific ones. The researcher adopted search terms for each academic database for the four countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) (see Appendix 3.2). These search terms identified relevant articles (that were indirectly driven by the purposive sampling discussed below) for each country and helped the research attain the research question and objectives. Afterwards, the researcher limited the results by applying a time frame – from 2017 to 2022 (a six-year-long period). The initial search yielded 15,443 articles. After removing the duplicates and excluding articles after reading the title, abstract and keywords, 3,092 papers remained suitable.

This research followed a purposive selection of articles. It selected articles (1) relevant to the phenomenon of interest – CSR and (2) relevant to the research question and objectives. These two guidelines served as broad base principles for this research. Refer to Figure 3.6 below to see the flow chart of this process. After identifying the articles from the previously mentioned sources (Google Scholar, EBSCOHost and StarPlus, literature review and reference chaining) and removing the duplicates (N=7,395), the researcher used these two guidelines and excluded 4,956 papers. The title and abstract of these 4,956 papers were deemed irrelevant to the research question and purposes. So, 3,092 articles remained relevant for skimming. After skimming, the researcher removed 3,005 articles based on the following exclusion criteria: (a) no inclusion of actual discussion/implementation of CSR or its activities; (b) no actual inclusion of SEE countries and (c) unobtainable full text. The exclusion criteria helped determine the quality of the selected papers (Depraetere et al. 2021). The researcher reviewed the full texts of 87 articles for the final analysis. From these 87 articles, 48 articles were excluded because of quality appraisal. Dixon-Woods et al.

(2006) provide five questions to evaluate the quality appraisal ((1) the aims of the research, (2) the design, (3) the process, (4) data (the amount) and (5) the data analysis). The researcher employed these questions, and, based on them, they first excluded articles that were ‘fatally flawed’ methodologically. But after reconsidering these articles’ value towards attaining the two fundamental purposive guidelines, the researcher, like Dixon-Woods et al. (2006), included a few of them again in the review.

In total, 39 articles were analysed, including 36 journal articles and three conference papers. Like Dixon-Woods et al. (2006), the researcher considered that the interpretive and iterative nature of the research helped the researcher identify as many potentially relevant papers as possible. During the assessment of papers, a data-extraction template was formed. It included the most pertinent components from the chosen articles: author/s’ surname/s, journal or conference title, journal paper’s publication year, country focus, level of analysis, methodological approach and theoretical approach (see Appendix 3.3). This template helped to identify the main concepts/points that this study was interested in. It also provided the pathway for an overall review of SEE. Journal and Conference names were put separately into another table (see Appendix 3.4). These tables were used to identify the sources and the total number of the chosen articles and, most importantly, to provide transparency to the process of CIS (as Depraetere et al. (2021) recommended). The utilisation of interpretive synthesis (especially the formulation of synthesis arguments) is presented later in the ‘Data Analysis’ chapter.

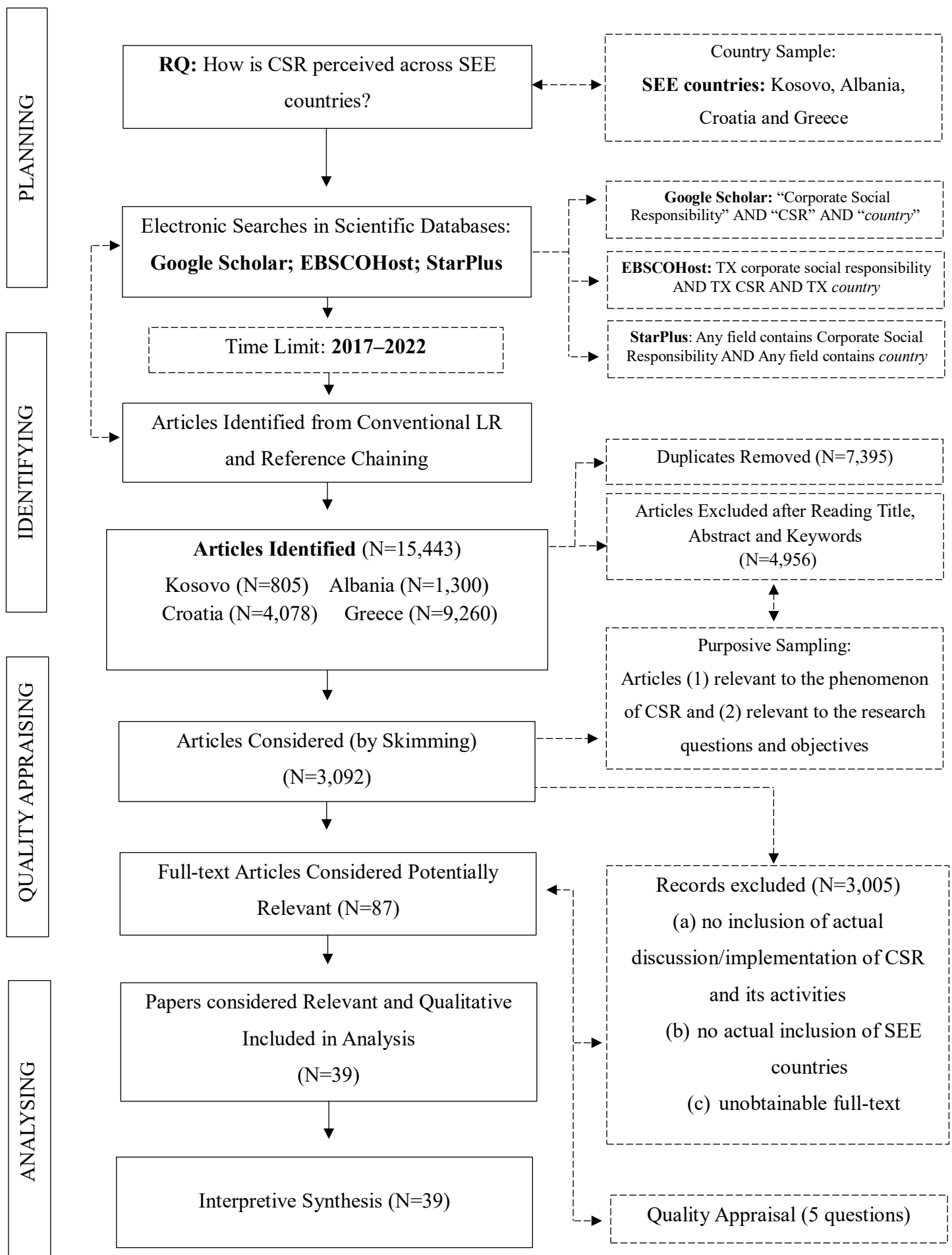


Figure 3.6 Flow Chart of Literature Selection (adapted from Depraetere et al. (2021) and Moat et al. (2013))

3.5.2.1.4 Limitations/Drawbacks of the Method

Despite its valuable contributions, CIS is not without limitations. Although flexibility is considered critical for developing conceptual frameworks and an advantage of CIS, it is also perceived as a drawback as it might create ambiguity in the process (Depraetere et al., 2021). The researcher was aware of this drawback before applying CIS; thus, their mindfulness reduced the risk of ambiguity. Another disadvantage of CIS is the lack of transparency. This research alertly tackled it. It considered the suggestions of Depraetere et al. (2021), Snyder (2019) and Templier and Paré (2017) about transparency and implemented them into the process. As presented above, this research was transparent for every step of the CIS. Another limitation is the literature selection. CIS followers focus predominantly on journal and conference articles. Likewise, this research selected only journal and conference articles for review and neglected individual, national, regional and international CSR reports. Lastly, Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) imply that “questions can be raised about the validity and credibility of the CIS analysis (p. 10)”. Like them, this research did not intend to achieve these criteria. This analysis (similar to the whole investigation) intended to ensure authenticity, plausibility and criticality (the main criteria in CIS, too; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006).

3.5.3 Primary Data Collection

The primary data were collected through three methods: in-depth interviews, focus groups and netnographic research. Each of these methods helped achieve an overall in-depth understanding of the main issues and attain the questions and objectives of the research. These methods offered several viewpoints of CSR reality. Additionally, Bluhm et al. (2011) stated that “the studies that employed multiple data collection methods had a larger influence on the field than single-method studies (p. 1881)”.

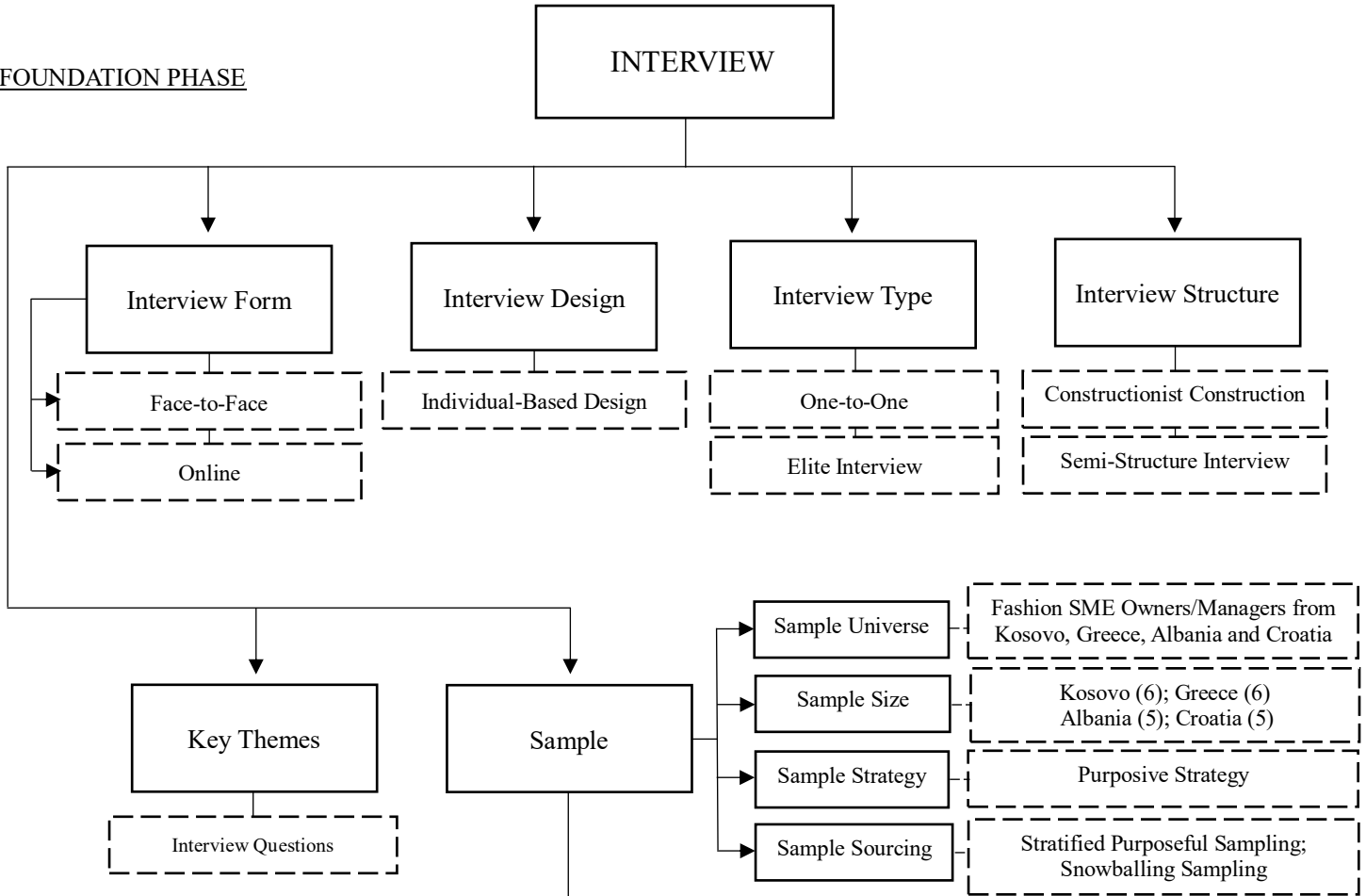
3.5.3.1 In-depth Interviews

3.5.3.1.1 Justification and Purpose for the Research

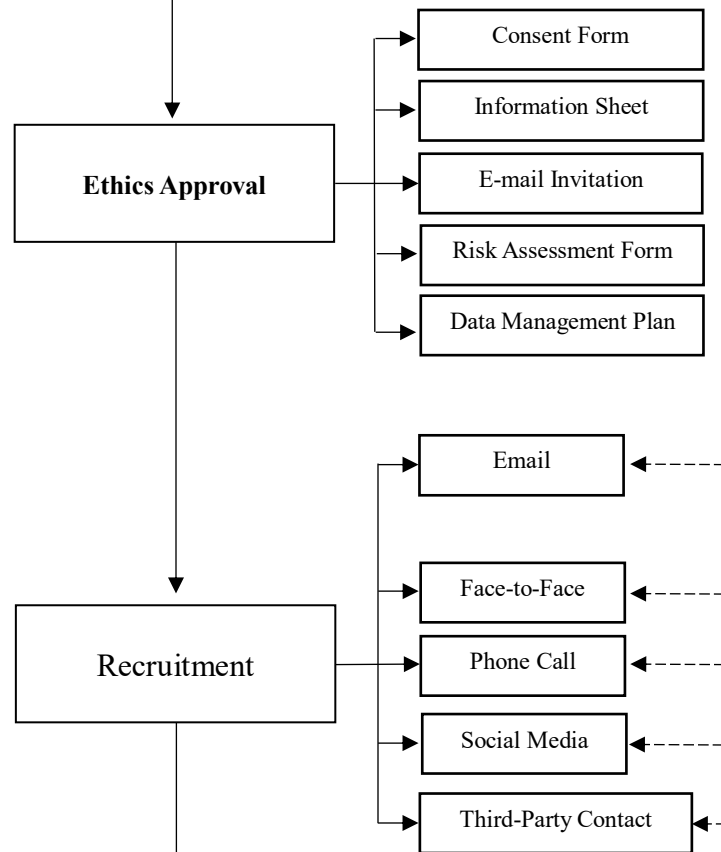
The interview is one of the most frequently used qualitative research methods for collecting data in management (Saunders and Townsend, 2016). Management scholars use this method to produce knowledge (Alvesson, 2003) about various social phenomena (Ma et al., 2021). This method provides the researcher with “a rich account of the interviewee's experiences, knowledge, ideas, and impressions (Alvesson, 2003, p. 13)”. According to Rowley (2005), this method is suitable when the research objectives focus on understanding views, attitudes, values, experiences and processes. An in-depth interview, in particular, is appropriate for understanding phenomena constructed by owners and managers (otherwise known as the business elite; Ma et al., 2021; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021). Scholars refer to this as an in-depth elite interview (Ma et al., 2021; Welch et al., 2002; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021). The distinct advantage of the elite interview is “the actual encounters with people generally considered difficult to reach” who have “the potential to generate information that is novel and insightful (Ma et al., 2021, p. 82)”. According to Solarino and Aguinis (2021), in-depth elite interviews offer a “key data source (p. 649)” for management scholars aiming to elaborate or build theories. They provide exclusive knowledge about the company and the procedures followed by them (Solarino and Aguinis, 2019). Specifically, they offer an “in-depth understanding of decision-making processes, organisational narratives and how certain individual characteristics including attitudes, values, and preferences may have played a role in shaping the informants’ choices related to their organisations (Solarino and Aguinis, 2021, p. 657)”. Elite informants are also appropriate for researchers seeking to understand specific contexts (Goldman and Swayze, 2012). CSR scholars typically adopt this interview type to investigate managers (Eweje and Sakaki, 2015; Khan et al., 2021), as they produce valuable information about CSR practices (Weller, 2020).

The process of conducting the interviews through each phase – the foundation, pre-field, fieldwork and reporting – is illustrated below in Figure 3.7.

FOUNDATION PHASE



PREFIELD PHASE



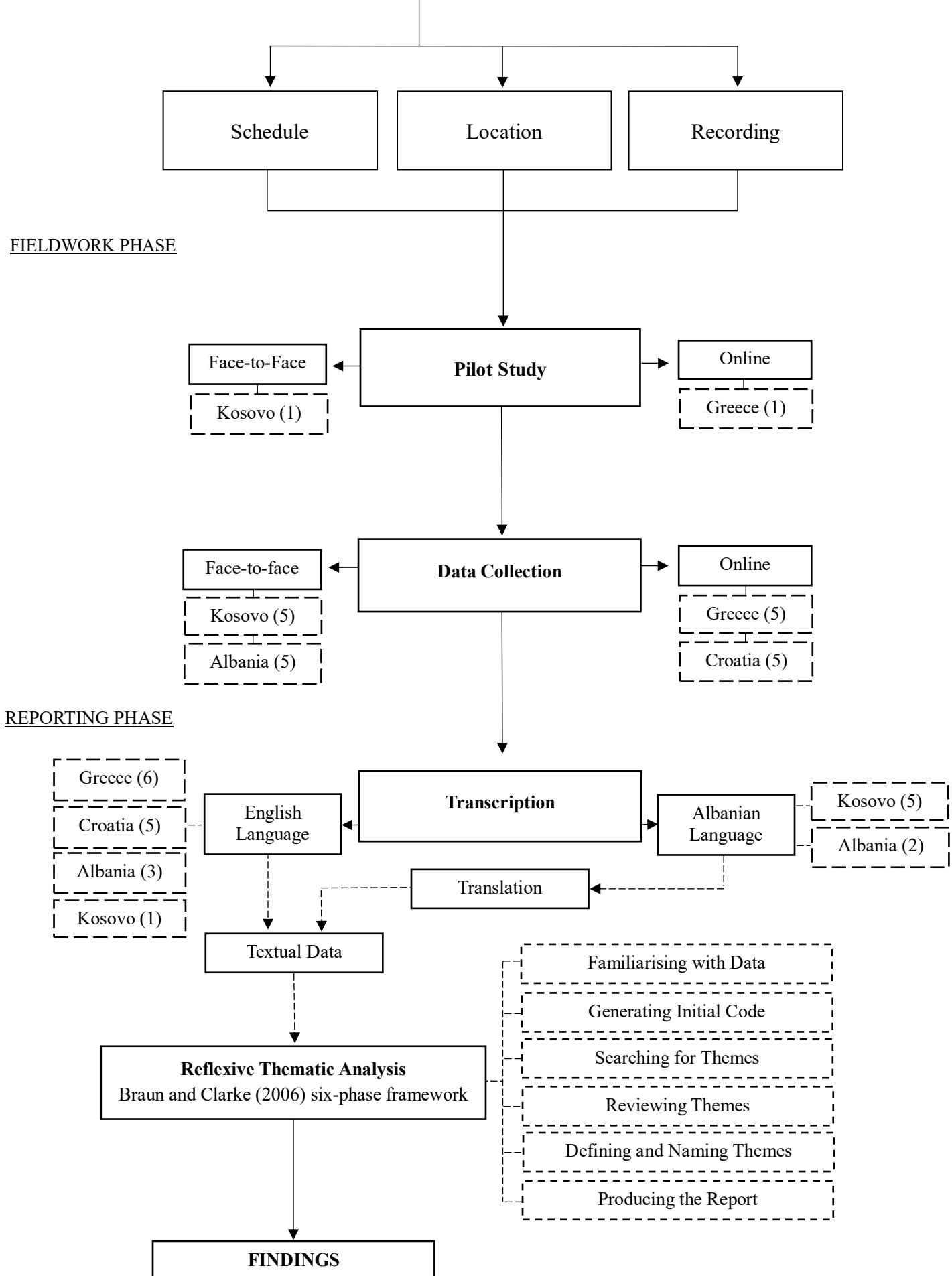


Figure 3.7 The Process of Conducting the Interviews

Accordingly, the researcher considered this method the ideal choice for an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of SME owners/managers about the phenomenon of CSR and CSR practices. The researcher employed elite interviews with owners/managers to understand the perception and procedures within (1) SMEs in (2) the SEE region in (3) the fashion industry (three contexts). They provided this research with a theoretical understanding of CSR as the interviewed elite business presented various theoretical viewpoints. They also helped the researcher understand the institutional impact; in particular, they helped understand how institutions affect the behaviour of SMEs in the SEE region in the fashion industry. The institutional discussion with the elite business helped the researcher recognise and explore the difference between EU and non-EU companies regarding CSR perception and implementation. Overall, this method helped the researcher achieve the following research objectives: (1) investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion SME managers/owners from SEE countries about CSR, (2) understand the process of CSR implementation by fashion SME in SEE countries, (3) identify CSR practices/activities employed by fashion SME in SEE countries, (4) identify the main CSR drivers/motives of fashion SME in SEE countries and (5) uncover the opportunities CSR practices/activities present to fashion SME in SEE countries. Regardless of the afore-mentioned advantages, the researcher faced a few challenges when conducting such interviews. Before collecting the data, the researcher considered the work of several scholars, like Ma et al. (2021), More and Stokes (2012), Welch et al. (2002) and Solarino and Aguinis (2021), who discussed the main challenges of this approach. Their work presented the researcher with four main issues – access to elites, power and openness of the elite interviewees and feedback to these interviewees. Each is discussed below in the data collection section of this subchapter. The researcher also considered several questions recommended by Solarino and Aguinis (2021). These questions helped tackle the abovementioned concerns, design this part of the research, collect the data and report the findings. They also ensured authenticity, plausibility and criticality (the main criteria of qualitative research).

Regarding the interview structure, the researcher followed a constructionist construction (as it fits the research's philosophical assumptions and objectives; Rowley, 2002). Precisely, it employed semi-structured interviews. This structure helped the researcher “collect rich and authentic

interview data (Ma et al., 2021, p. 91)”. Scholars argue that it is the most suitable structure for in-depth elite interviews (Ma et al., 2021; Moore and Stokes, 2012; Saunders and Townsend, 2016; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021) because it provides “the right balance between flexibility and control (Ma et al., 2021, p. 91)”. This structure also helped this research deal with the challenge of domination. It provided a free-flow discussion of the main issues (without restricting the interview; Hermanowicz, 2013; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021), which brought forward notable subjects (such as the impact of EU guidelines), which further enriched the contribution of this research. This structure also provided control, an essential element to balance the power between the interviewer and interviewee (Ma et al., 2021). CSR scholars predominantly apply semi-structured in-depth elite interviews when they delve deep into CSR procedures (Vashchenko, 2017; Sweeney, 2007). For instance, Hundolt et al. (2020) used it to distinguish CSR strategies applied by managers. The researcher also claimed it was convenient for attaining some of the objectives of this research (as previously mentioned).

3.5.3.1.2 Sample: Owners/Managers Selection

This research followed the four-point approach to sampling in qualitative interview-based research by Robinson (2014). Accordingly, the researcher decided upon (1) sample universe (2) sample size, (3) sampling strategy and (4) sample sourcing. The sample universe consisted of small or medium-sized enterprises owners/managers in the fashion industry from four countries of SEE – Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, and Albania. The researcher considered the definition of the European Commission when considering SMEs. To be included in the sample universe, SMEs had more than 10 and fewer than 250 employees, a turnover of up to €50 m and a total balance sheet of less than €43m (European Commission, 2019). They designed, created and sold clothes online or through their stores. For the sample size, the researcher considered the recommendations of Hundolt et al. (2020), Khan et al. (2021) and Weller (2020). According to them, the researcher should decide on the number of interviews that provide them with information power and achieve the research’s set objectives. CSR scholars applied different sample sizes during their research; for instance, Lee and Szkudlarek (2021) interviewed ten managers; Dixon et al. (2019) conducted twenty interviews. The researcher interviewed twenty-two owners/managers in total. The interviewer conducted six interviews in Kosovo, six in Greece, five in Albania and five in Croatia. Refer to Table 3.3 to see

the information about the interview and the interviewees. This research adopted an individual-based design for elite interviewing (as Ma et al. (2021) recommended). It interviewed different managers from different companies. The sampling strategy was purposive (as in every other method employed in this research). This technique helped the researcher identify and select the most suitable SME owners/managers. For this method, the researcher engaged in stratified purposeful sampling as this technique offered the opportunity to capture different sizes of companies (small and medium), different countries (Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia) and different company purposes (commercial, social and sustainable). The researcher had already established a network with fashion designers from the four SEE countries from the previous research. Thus, some of them were easily reached. Besides, the snowballing sampling strategy was applied. The researcher was introduced to members of the desired population from the previous interviews. The researcher initially contacted the elite through phone calls, Instagram messages and third-party contact (researcher's colleagues, friends and family members). They were provided with all the necessary information about the research. In terms of language, the researcher conducted the interviews in the Albanian and English language with owners/managers from Kosovo and Albania (depending on their choice of language) and in English with all owners/managers from Greece and Croatia. The interviewees from Kosovo and Albania could choose between English and their local language. The interviewees from Croatia and Greece were given the same opportunity. Nevertheless, the researcher purposely intended to find fluent English-speaking owners and managers to conduct the interviews herself and not through a subcontractor (given the expenses of hiring).

Interview (Number)	Company Size	Country	Type	Participants	Gender	Occupation	Fieldwork Stage
Interview (1)	Small	Kosovo	Face-to-face	K1	Male	Owner/Manager	Pilot Study
Interview (2)	Medium		Face-to-face	K2	Female	Manager	Main Study
Interview (3)	Medium		Face-to-face	K3	Male	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (4)	Small		Face-to-face	K4	Female	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (5)	Small		Face-to-face	K5	Male	Owner/Manager	Main Study

Interview (6)	Small	Greece	Face-to-face	K6	Male	Owner	Main Study
Interview (7)	Small		Online	G1	Male	Owner/Manager	Pilot Study
Interview (8)	Small		Online	G2	Female	Manager	Main Study
Interview (9)	Medium		Online	G3	Female	Manager	Main Study
Interview (10)	Small		Online	G4	Female	Manager	Main Study
Interview (11)	Small		Online	G5	Male	Manager	Main Study
Interview (12)	Small		Online	G6	Female	Owner	Main Study
Interview (13)	Small	Albania	Face-to-face	A1	Female	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (14)	Small		Face-to-face	A2	Female	Owner	Main Study
Interview (15)	Small		Face-to-face	A3	Female	Owner	Main Study
Interview (16)	Medium		Face-to-face	A4	Female	Manager	Main Study
Interview (17)	Small		Face-to-face	A5	Male	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (18)	Small	Croatia	Online	C1	Male	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (19)	Small		Online	C2	Male	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (20)	Small		Online	C3	Female	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (21)	Small		Online	C4	Male	Owner/Manager	Main Study
Interview (22)	Medium		Online	C5	Female	Manager	Main Study

Table 3.3 Information about Interviews and Interviewees

3.5.3.1.3 Data Collection Process

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher identified the key topics and formed the questions for the interviewees around them (following Ma et al. (2021) and Solarino and Aguinis's (2021) suggestions). The questions presented the semi-structured nature followed by this research. The

researcher started with ‘easy’ questions and moved into more ‘difficult’ ones to avoid infuriating the interviewees (Moore and Stokes, 2012; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021). The researcher asked open-ended questions, as they provided the interviewees with a free expression of their views (Solarino and Aguinis, 2021). Open-ended questions are common among elite interviews (Sinkovic and Penz, 2011) because elite informants prefer open-ended questions instead of closed-ended questions (Ma et al. 2021), as such questions offer the interviewees the opportunity to elaborate their responses and avoid being ‘strait-jacketed’ (Moore and Stokes, 2012). Like Ma et al. (2021), this research noted that most elite informants preferred to talk and express their views and opinions at length. Sometimes, they introduced new discussions, which elicited a further understanding of CSR. Their attentiveness showed that open-ended questions suited this research. The researcher created twelve guiding open-ended questions. Please refer to Appendix 3.5 to see them. The researcher discussed and altered the questions with the supervisors. Given the semi-structured nature, the researcher removed, expanded and reorganised the questions depending on the path of the interview. The researcher asked the elite informants followed-up questions to explore their responses. For instance, the researcher asked questions about concepts the interviewee introduced to the discussion to elicit the interviewee’s understanding and practice of CSR. The researcher perceived that the open-ended questions further enhanced the ‘right’ balance required to deal effectively with the domination challenges. The questions were created in line with the first research question – **(RQ1)** How do fashion SME owners/managers from South-East European countries understand and implement CSR? – and its objectives. Besides them, the questions were linked with the research gaps identified in the reading of the literature review. Refer to Appendix 3.6 for a detailed explanation of the interview questions development.

Initially, the researcher planned to conduct all interviews face-to-face, as such an option offered the researcher the possibility of capturing the richness of conversation and body language. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher was imposed to explore alternative methods (Howlett, 2022). The researcher reckoned online in-depth interview was the best alternative. This research combined face-to-face and online in-depth elite interviews. The first phase occurred online; the researcher employed online interviews in Croatia and Greece. The second phase happened in person; the researcher utilised face-to-face interviews in Kosovo and Albania. This shift occurred because the international restrictions by countries and the University of Sheffield were removed.

This adjustment also allowed the researcher to comprehend this method and identify the characteristics of these approaches and the impact of face-to-face and online interviews. The in-depth online interviews were conducted through Zoom. The researcher considered all the other options (Google Meet, Facebook, Viber, FaceTime and Skype) but decided on Zoom because of its many benefits. Archibald et al. (2019) stated that researchers that employed Zoom as an online interview tool did not experience technical challenges like loss of Internet connection, poor quality or security issues (compared to other online platforms), and participants described it as user-friendly. Overall, the online interviews offered a faster, lower cost, less intrusive, and unconstrained participation of geographically diverse participants (AlKhateeb, 2018; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021). Several scholars recommended embracing this method, given its advantages and opportunities (La Iaciano et al., 2016; Krouwel et al., 2019). Solarino and Aguinis (2021), for instance, encouraged researchers conducting elite interviews to employ remote or online interviews.

This research conducted two pilot interviews (one online with an SME owner in Greece and one face-to-face with an SME owner in Kosovo). Pilot interviews proved that the research design and interview questions were suitable. Accordingly, the researcher proceeded to use them in the succeeding interviews. An issue that the researcher noticed was the participant's experience in Zoom. The interviewee was not extremely comfortable with a few processes of Zoom. For the other online interviews, the researcher sent a short user guide to all the participants (providing instructions about the webcam, audio and environment). On another note, the researcher participated in Zoom training offered by the platform to utilise the platform maximally for research purposes.

As previously stated, the researcher was familiar with the challenges of conducting elite interviews. The researcher conducted elite interviews with fashion designers from SEE in previous studies. Although the fashion industry is a high-profile industry (Xharavina et al., 2020) with a limited engagement of owners/managers in interviews, the access to the elite was manageable for this research as the researcher has networks and possesses third-party connections within the industry. The researcher also reached some of the owners/managers through snowball networking (as explained in the sampling strategy). The researcher shared a similar experience to Welch et al.

(2002); access to SME elites required informal procedures and a high acceptance rate of interviews (if compared to large and multinational companies). In Kosovo, the researcher approached ten owners/managers, and six partook in the research. In Albania, twelve owners/managers were contacted; five participated in the interview. In Croatia, five participated out of thirty people approached. In Greece, six owners/managers were interviewed out of fifteen contacted. The researcher faced no scepticism or suspicion from the elite (different from the experience of other scholars like Moore and Stokes (2012)). The lack of time was the only stated reason for owners/managers rejecting their participation.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the offices of the managers and owners. These interviews were audio recorded by the researcher; the researcher used the latest equipment to ensure the best voice quality. The online interviews were also audio recorded. The recordings were vital for data quality, given their many benefits. Participants were informed in advance as they might felt unpleasant and unwilling to discuss freely the issues asked by the interviewer/moderator. They knew beforehand about the recording through the information sheet and consent form. Thus, initially, the researchers attempted to recruit participants who accepted being recorded. The face-to-face and online interviews varied from 43 minutes to 1h and 20 minutes. In total, they counted for 23 hours and 15 minutes. Data collected were stored on the researcher's personal computer, which was password secured, and the researcher encrypted the data. Data were also backed up on Google Drive and an external drive, which was encrypted through software. The researcher also created the Data Management Plan to deal with such issues.

3.5.3.1.4 Limitations/Disadvantages of the Method

Regardless of its benefits, the researcher faced some challenges during the implementation of this method. The researcher addressed all of the identified limitations of this method (online and offline). A few challenges (such as power dynamics) were discussed in the paragraphs above. The researcher did not face many issues with access to elites compared to other interviewers. The only issues were faced with Croatian interviewees; they were not willing to participate because of the lack of time. The researcher claimed that her previous experience and connections with the industry, well-established networks in these countries and the less formality of SME

owners/managers helped her tackle this challenge. Concerning the openness of elite informants, the researcher attempted to solve it by asking open-ended questions. Additionally, the fact that the researcher was from the region, lived there and understood their languages and cultures provided comfort to interviewees (Welch et al. (2002) claimed the same in their study). Welch et al. (2002) also recommended a female researcher tackle openness; the researcher, nevertheless, cannot confirm that gender impacted the devotion of time from the interviewees. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) mentioned the difficulty to preserve anonymity as another limit. To handle this limit, the researcher did not provide any identifiable information for the interviewees. Besides, the researcher faced some issues with the online interviews. A few times, there were distractions for participants when they were online (calls in their office). The researcher was conscious that these issues could have happened in face-to-face interactions, but in this face-to-face research, they did not. Lastly, the researcher could not capture the richness of body language and face-to-face conversation.

3.5.3.2 Focus Groups

3.5.3.2.1 The Justification and Purpose for the Research

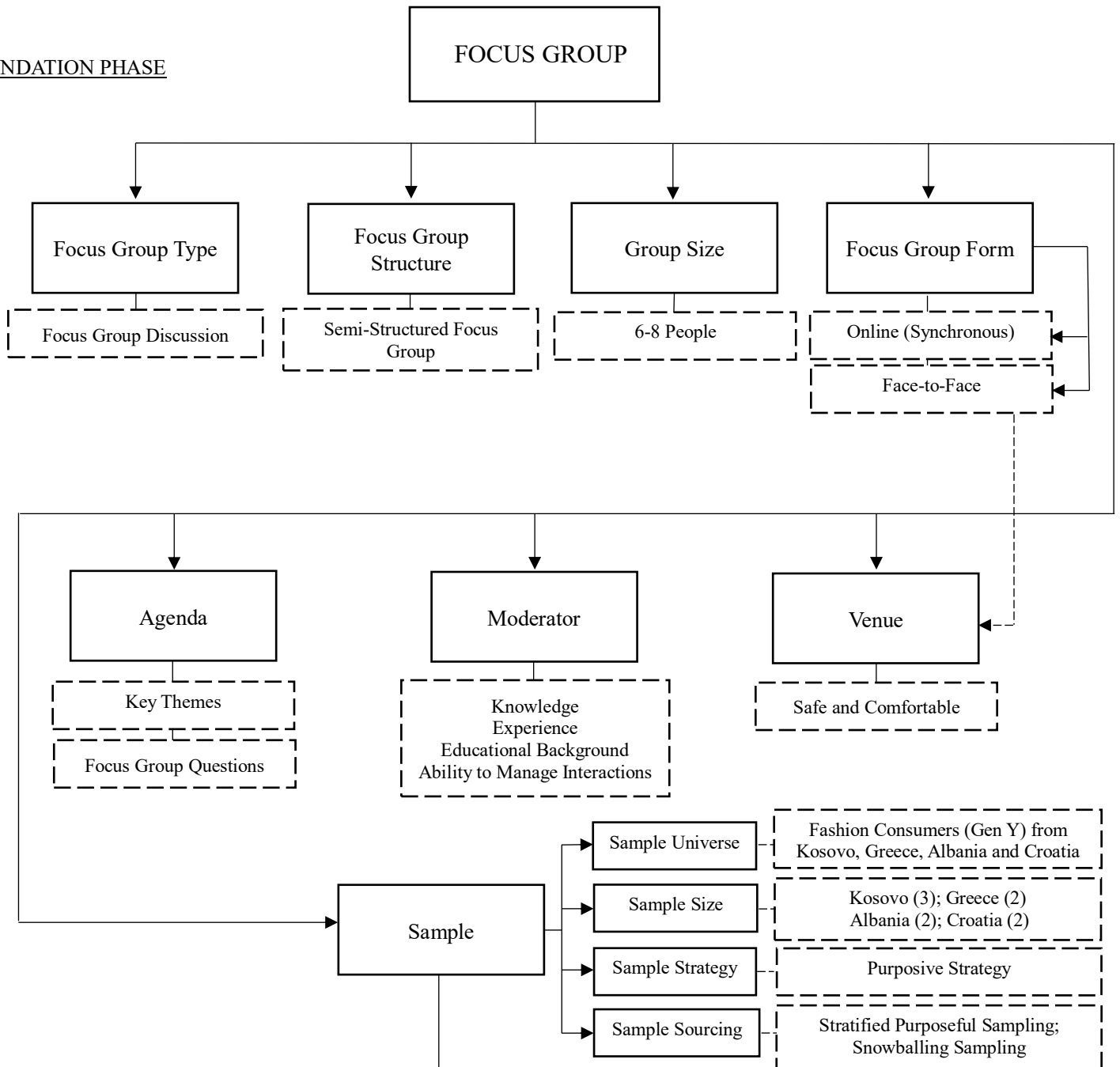
Focus group is one of the most well-established and widely used research methods across different disciplines in social sciences (Easton et al., 2003; Stahl et al., 2011). Given its success, this method received interest and popularity among business and management scholars (Boddy, 2005; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Since the 1990s, the focus group has been regarded as a predominant method in qualitative research (Oates and Alevizou, 2018; Stokes and Bergin, 2006; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Although it can support different philosophical positions in the interpretivist-positivist continuum, it best fits the interpretivist position, which typically generates qualitative data (Oates and Alevizou, 2018; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). This method involves a discussion among a group of people about a particular topic or issue. The group is led by a skilled interviewer or moderator (Krueger, 1994; Boddy, 2005). It is “useful for exploratory research when rather little is known about the phenomenon of interest (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015, p. 41)”. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), a focus group consists of the following characteristics: “(1) a small group of people, who (2) possess certain characteristics, (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest (p. 14).” The focus group is

the most suitable method for comprehending the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of participants’ thoughts (Morgan, 1988; 2019). It helps the research gain in-depth insights into people’s perspectives, experiences, attitudes and behaviours about an issue/phenomenon of interest (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In particular, it helps understand the conceptualisation of the issue from the participants (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

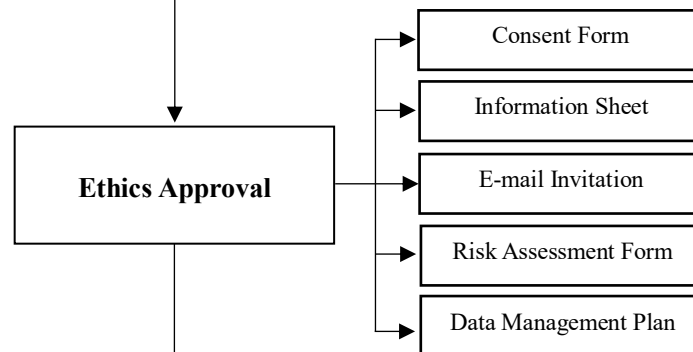
Thus, this research chose and conducted this method. This method helped answer the second research question of this study – **(RQ2)** How do fashion consumers from SEE countries understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers’ behaviour affected by CSR activities? – and it helped attain several of its objectives. At first, this method helped understand the awareness of CSR as a concept from consumers from SEE (Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia). Afterwards, through the focus group method, this research explored consumers’ perceptions and conceptualisation of CSR as a phenomenon. This method also helped this research understand the consumers’ attitudes towards fashion SMEs (in the SEE region) that employ and do not employ CSR activities. Through the shared experiences during the discussion, this study understood the consumers’ buying intentions and behaviours towards fashion SMEs that implement (or do not implement) CSR practices. This method helped explore a glimpse of the CSR drivers of SMEs in SEE from consumers’ perspectives. The group discussions also helped understand the use of CSR and sustainability terms from SEE fashion consumers. This study claimed that the focus group method was a successful method for achieving the previously-mentioned objectives. Thus, it agreed with Krueger and Casey (2015), Oates and Alevizou (2018) and Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), who claimed the same. Like Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), this study considered that the focus group method was helpful when investigating consumers’ perceptions of a phenomenon that little was known about.

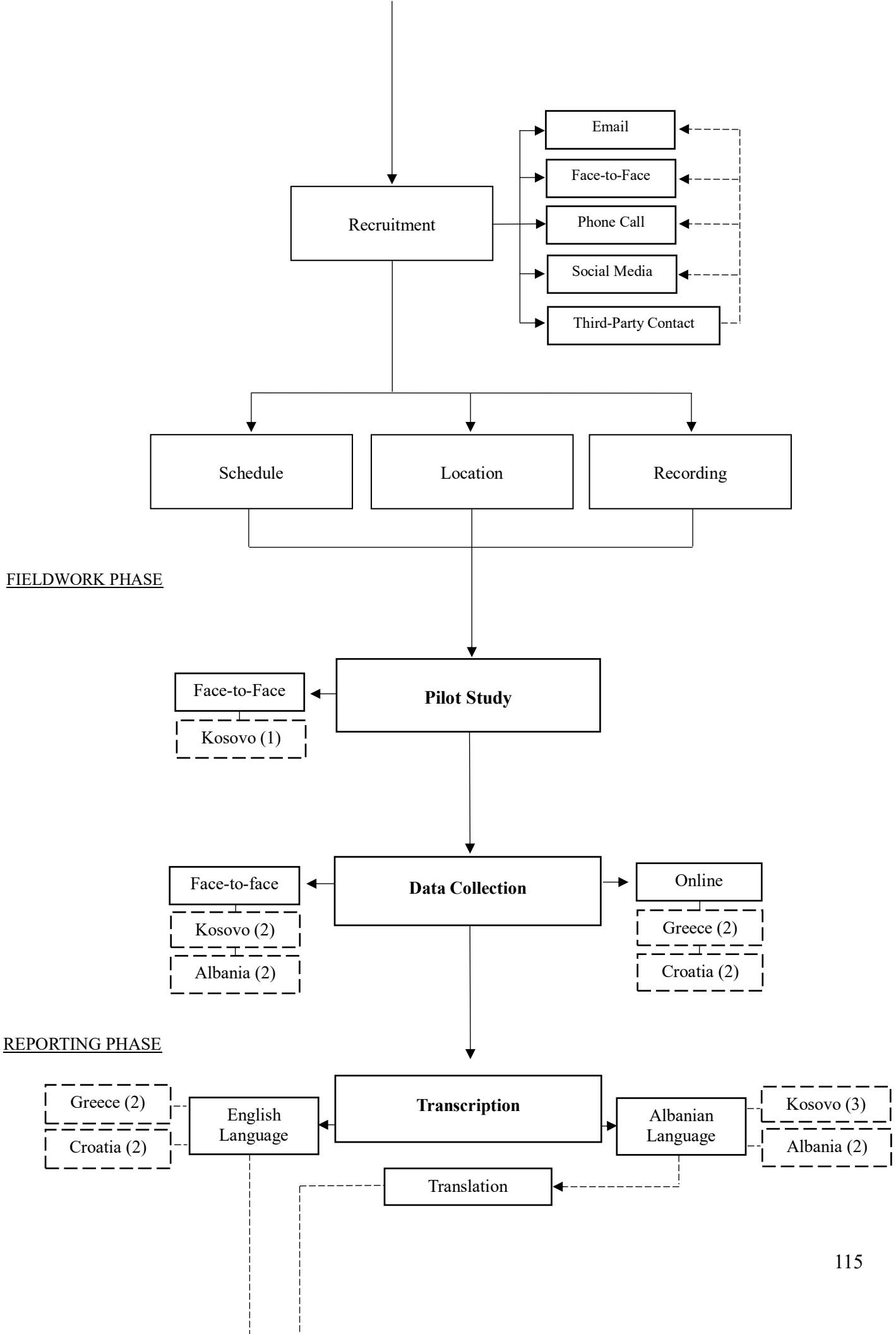
The process of conducting focus groups through the foundation, pre-field, fieldwork and reporting phase is depicted in Figure 3.8.

FOUNDATION PHASE



PREFIELD PHASE





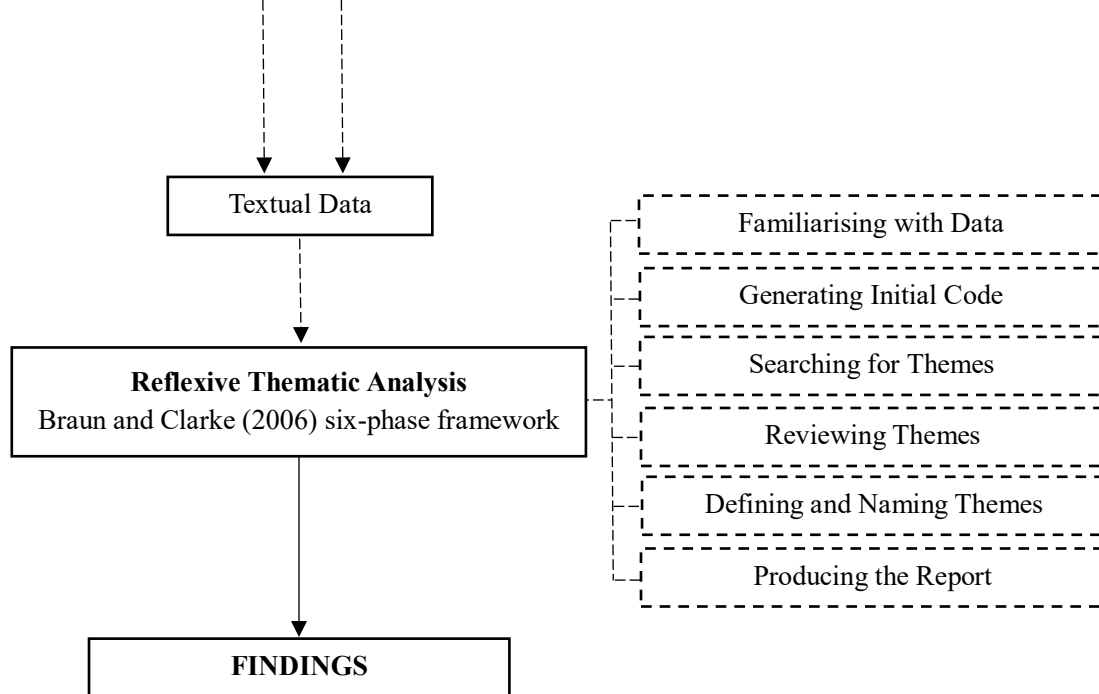


Figure 3.8 The Process of Conducting Focus Groups

Besides offering in-depth insights and interactive discussion, this method offered several other advantages to the researcher. It provided flexibility (Blackburn and Stokes, 2000), cost-effectiveness and time efficiency (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). It engaged more participants at the same time, and it stimulated a wide range and spontaneous responses (Tadajewski, 2016). It encouraged participants to build on each other's ideas, creating the so-called 'synergistic group effect' (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). It offered participants security, as there was less individual pressure (Stokes and Bergin, 2006). According to Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), this leads to a larger and richer dataset (when compared to other qualitative methods). Such a dataset allowed the researcher to obtain greater depths of meaning and establish crucial connections in the interpretation of data (Boddy, 2005). The findings generated from this method were also easy to comprehend and reader-friendly (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Zikmund (1997) referred to the previously-mentioned advantages as the '10Ss': synergy, snowballing, serendipity, simulation, security, spontaneity, specialisation, structure, speed, and scrutiny.

3.5.3.2.2 Sample: Consumer Selection

The same four attributes applied to interviews were applied to focus groups. Accordingly, the sample universe consisted of consumers of fashion products (clothes) from local brands from four SEE countries, Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Consumers belonged to Generation Y (born

between 1982-1996) and bought clothes from SMEs from SEE in the fashion industry. This research conducted three focus groups in Kosovo, two in Greece, two in Albania and two in Croatia. In total, 57 consumers participated from four SEE countries. Table 3.4 below presents the information about the focus groups and participants. The sampling technique was purposive. This subset enabled this research to respond to the second research question and attain the research objectives (mentioned above). The sample universe was deemed appropriate as this generation makes a powerful consumer segment due to its size and spending power. Besides, Generation Y tends to consider CSR attributes in their purchase intentions (Hill and Lee, 2012; Hwang et al., 2015). By using snowballing sampling strategy, the researcher recruited other members of the desired population. The participants were initially contacted through phone calls and social media messages (Instagram and Facebook). They were sent all the necessary information about the research. The research project was also advertised through the researcher's social media accounts. The supervisor also helped advertise the research through word-of-mouth. In terms of language, the main target of this study was people speaking English, as around 70% of SEE citizens communicate fluently in English (SIKKT, 2013). If this was not achieved, then the research would take place in local languages: Albanian, Croatian, and Greek. The researcher is familiar with the spoken languages in the region; however, another researcher should have been employed (preferably another PhD/Master student), who is competent in the native language and their dialects, to attain more accuracy. The researcher followed the original proposal to conduct focus groups in the English language in Greece and Croatia. In Kosovo and Albania, the researcher conducted the focus groups in the Albanian language. Participants recommended the discussion occur in the Albanian language. The researcher claimed that this preference resulted due to the comfort they felt that the researcher spoke fluent Albanian. It is crucial to state that when approaching them the researcher informed them that the preferred language is English, but the focus group could happen in their language. Participants from Kosovo and Albania hesitated to discuss in English. The researcher, nevertheless, noticed that the participant used many English terms in the discussions. On the other hand, participants from Greece and Croatia were enthusiastic to discuss in English. They were reached through the established networks of the researcher and social media; the rest were contacted with the help of the previous participants (via snowballing sampling technique).

Focus Group (Number)	Country	Type	Participants	Gender	Fieldwork Stage
Focus Group (1)	Kosovo	Face-to- face	KP1	Female	Pilot Study
			KP2	Female	
			KP3	Female	
			KP4	Male	
			KP5	Female	
			KP6	Male	
Focus Group (2)	Kosovo	Face-to- face	KP7	Male	Main Study
			KP8	Female	
			KP9	Female	
			KP10	Female	
			KP11	Female	
			KP12	Female	
Focus Group (3)	Kosovo	Face-to- face	KP13	Female	Main Study
			KP14	Female	
			KP15	Male	
			KP16	Male	
			KP17	Male	
			KP18	Female	
Focus Group (4)	Greece	Online	KP19	Male	Main Study
			GP1	Female	
			GP2	Male	
			GP3	Female	
			GP4	Female	
			GP5	Female	
Focus Group (5)	Greece	Online	GP6	Male	Main Study
			GP7	Female	
			GP8	Female	
			GP9	Male	
			GP10	Female	
			GP11	Female	
Focus Group (6)	Albania	Face-to- face	GP12	Female	Main Study
			GP13	Female	
			AP1	Female	
			AP2	Female	
			AP3	Female	
			AP4	Male	
Focus Group (7)	Albania	Face-to- face	AP5	Male	Main Study
			AP6	Female	
			AP7	Male	
			AP8	Female	
			AP9	Male	
			AP10	Female	
Focus Group (7)	Albania	Face-to- face	AP11	Female	Main Study

			AP12	Male	
Focus Group (8)	Croatia	Online	CP1	Female	Main Study
			CP2	Female	
			CP3	Female	
			CP4	Female	
			CP5	Male	
			CP6	Male	
Focus Group (9)	Croatia	Online	CP7	Male	Main Study
			CP8	Male	
			CP9	Female	
			CP10	Male	
			CP11	Male	
			CP12	Female	
			CP13	Female	

Table 3.4 Information about Focus Groups and Focus Group Participants

3.5.3.2.3 Data Collection Process

The outcome of the focus group is influenced by factors such as the size and composition of the group, the level of interaction among participants, the layout of the venue, and the moderator (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Oates and Alevizou, 2018; Stahl et al., 2011). Thus, this study carefully considered these factors before running the focus groups. Scholars recommend different sizes of groups. According to Blackburn and Stokes (2000) and Easton et al. (2003), there seems to be a discrepancy of viewpoints about the ideal number of participants involved in the focus group. The number of participants in a focus group can range from 4 to 12 people. For instance, Boddy (2005) claims that a group should vary between 4 to 12 participants; Krueger and Casey (2015) recommend 5 to 10 participants and Rosenthal et al. (2012) 6 to 8. Scholars agree that the focus group should ensure a diverse range of views and experiences, but it should allow for effective group interaction and discussion. The precise number of participants depends on the purpose of the research and the specific research question being explored. CSR scholars, who investigated consumer perceptions conducted focus groups of 3 to 7 people. For instance, Joo et al. (2019) conducted five focus groups of 3 to 5 people. Diers-Lawson et al. (2020) conducted six focus groups of 4 to 7 people. According to Boddy (2005), the number of participants inevitably depends also on the complexity and context of the study. Considering their recommendations, this research claimed that the ideal number was between 6 and 8 participants. This range (6-8) allowed

the researcher to (1) answer the research question, (2) understand consumers' perceptions about the phenomenon of interest, (3) ensure a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences, (4) allow effective group interaction, (5) provide the opportunity to all participants to share their thoughts and opinions, and (6) allow the moderator to facilitate the focus group successfully. The focus group members were fashion consumers who preferred purchasing items from local SMEs from four SEE countries – Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia (the reasons for this composition were provided in the sampling subchapter).

In terms of interaction, this study followed the recommendations of Oates and Alevizou (2018). Initially, it should be noted that this study adopted a focus group discussion (not a focus group interview). Thus, it was designed to facilitate interactions between participants (not between the moderator and participants). The moderator played a crucial role in achieving that. In this study, the focus groups were led by the researcher as several scholars recommended (Oates and Alevizou, 2018; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). According to Oates and Alevizou (2018), “moderating brings the researcher closer to the data and assists greatly with the transcription and analysis phases (Oates and Alevizou, 2018, p. 47)”. Besides, the researcher possessed all the required characteristics – knowledge, experience, educational background, ability to manage group interactions and interviewing techniques. Besides the moderator, the structure of the focus group plays a crucial role in the group interaction (Rosenthal et al., 2012)). This study conducted semi-structured focus groups as such a structure allowed flexibility to explore unanticipated themes (Boddy, 2005).

Regarding the venue, this study followed the recommendations of Stewart and Shamdasani (2015). It created a comfortable and safe environment for participants. Given the unusual situation of data collection (Covid-19), this study strictly followed the advice of WHO and local public authorities (WHO, 2020). Due to the restrictions on international movement, this study conducted both face-to-face and online focus groups (precisely synchronous online focus groups). In recent years, online focus groups have become common among social sciences (Remesher, 2018). Although face-to-face focus groups were the first choice, online focus groups were the closest online equivalent to in-person focus groups. Besides, they offered several advantages for this research. Initially, this method took significantly less time and was more efficient as the researcher and

participants could all participate from their homes or offices. So, it was also a lower-cost alternative that many scholars recommended (Clark, 2017; Remesher, 2018). There was no need to travel to the four countries (Clark, 2017). Lastly, there is an argument that participants are more comfortable when at home and will give more honest and open responses. Nonetheless, this study did not notice such a difference between the face-to-face and online focus groups. Remesher (2018) pointed out some disadvantages of this type of focus group. According to him, the researcher can face technical issues, which can interrupt the process of data collection; there might be a limited number of participants as they must acquire the correct technology; and the lack of face-to-face contact might not allow the researcher to capture the group member dynamic (Remesher, 2018). The research did not face such issues.

This study considered the cross-cultural factor before starting the data collection. It followed the suggestions of Morgan (2019) given in his book chapter 'Working Cross-Culturally'. Cultural studies may present some cultural and language barriers for the researcher. The researcher was familiar with the languages and cultures of the chosen countries. This study made sure to modify the method to meet the standards of each country. Rosenthal et al. (2012) suggested conducting two to three focus groups per country. Thus, this study ran two focus groups with six consumers in the four SEE countries (in addition to the pilot study). The guiding questions are depicted in Appendix 3.7. Whereas Appendix 3.8 presents a thorough explanation of the development of the focus group questions. The structure allowed the researcher to introduce additional related topics and encourage more open and free-flowing discussions. Participants were asked to sign a consent form. To obtain all the information face-to-face focus groups and online focus groups were audio-recorded. Participants on the online focus groups had to turn on their cameras in the discussion to grasp better the discussion, but they were only audio-recorded. Participants were informed in advance as they might felt unpleasant and unwilling to discuss freely the issues asked by the moderator. The focus groups varied from 1 hour and 20 minutes to 2 hours (similar to Stewart et al. (2007) recommendation). In total, the focus groups counted for 14 hours and 15 minutes. This study considers the focus group method suitable and successful for this study given the comments from participants. For instance, participant KP3 claimed the following: *"Thank you for making me feel comfortable... I enjoyed the discussion and learned a lot"*. This research conducted one pilot focus group (one face-to-face focus group with six consumers in Kosovo). Alike pilot interviews,

the pilot focus group proved that the research design and questions were suitable. Accordingly, the researcher proceeded to use them in the succeeding focus groups. Given the issue noticed in interviews with Zoom, the researcher sent a short user guide to all the participants providing instructions about the webcam, audio and environment.

3.5.3.2.4 Limitations and Drawbacks of the Focus Groups

Few scholars pointed out some disadvantages of this method. Some group members might hesitate to express their views due to social pressure (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Such pressure might also influence participants to conform to the opinions of others in the group or the researcher's expectations. Some participants might limit the input of other participants by dominating the discussion, and they might bias the results. The moderator may also bias results by intentionally or unintentionally providing clues to the participants (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Lastly, the analysis of focus group data can be complex and time-consuming. This research considered all these limitations before conducting the focus groups. It followed the recommendations of Krueger and Casey (2015), Morgan (2019), Oates and Alevizou (2018) and Saunders et al. (2016), among others, on how to successfully handle focus groups. The online focus groups provided the researcher with few disadvantages: (a) technical issues, which interrupted the process of data collection and (b) a limited number of participants as they had to acquire the correct technology (Remesher, 2018).

3.5.3.3 *Netnography*

3.5.3.3.1 Justification and Purpose for the Research

Netnography is an online qualitative research method pioneered by Kozinets (2002) and embraced by scholars across different fields and contexts (Costello et al., 2017; Kozinets and Gambetti, 2021). According to Kozinets and Gambetti (2021), netnography “has become an essential tool for qualitative research” and “has impacted the research practices of scholars around the world (p. 1)”. It gathers insights into consumers' perceptions and behaviours on “communities that emerge from online, computer-mediated, or internet-based communications (De Vlack et al., 2019, p. 197)”. Such communications occur on online forums, blogs, Facebook groups, Instagram pages, and

communities on other social media platforms (Kozinets, 2002; 2020). Thanh and Kirova (2018) state that “the distinctive value of netnography is that it excels at telling the story, understanding complex social phenomena, and assists the researcher in developing themes from the consumers' points of view (p. 33)”. Among others, its ‘unobtrusiveness’ (the naturally occurring trait) provides researchers with rich, relevant and naturalistic data (Prior and Miller, 2012; Reid and Duffy, 2018; Xharavina et al., 2020). Its adaptability and flexibility are other advantages of this method (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015). Netnography generates breadth and depth in research due to the variety and broad range of data (Costello et al., 2017) and provides a comprehensive analysis (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015). When compared to traditional methods that involve face-to-face communication, netnography is considered a cost-effective approach, as it is freely accessible to anyone and it does not require physical travel expenses (Costello et al., 2017; Thanh and Kirova, 2018; Xun and Reynolds, 2010).

Netnography, according to Magklaras et al. (2023), Xharavina et al. (2020) and Xharavina and Kapoulas (2019), has proved effective for exploring consumers’ perceptions and behaviours in the SEE region. Most importantly, Xharavina et al. (2020) state that netnography is a successful approach for exploring fashion-related online communities in this region. First and foremost, SEE offers this research an ideal space to implement netnography. SEE has a high Internet penetration rate of 60-70%, high public availability of the Internet, and massive participation of consumers in online communities (especially in fashion-related online communities) (Kelly et al. 2017; Xharavina et al., 2020). This research was mainly interested in Facebook groups as this social media is the most used one among South-East European citizens and the most common form of online gathering (Xharavina and Kapoulas, 2019). But it did not neglect other forms of online communication (blogs, Instagram pages and YouTube channels). Facebook membership numbers vary, but an active group in the region can have 100.000 to 300.000 members (Xharavina and Kapoulas, 2019). Such groups generate approximately 20–25 posts per day and 200 comments, and they are usually administered by administrators and moderators (Vasileios et al., 2023; Xharavina et al., 2020). While such online communities can provide a variety of data forms (e.g., images and videos), this research was interested only in written-form data, as this is also the most common form of communication between online communities (Kozinets, 2017). Specifically, this

research focused on the posts and comments of community members, as members intentionally share information and knowledge by interacting with each other (Liou et al. 2016).

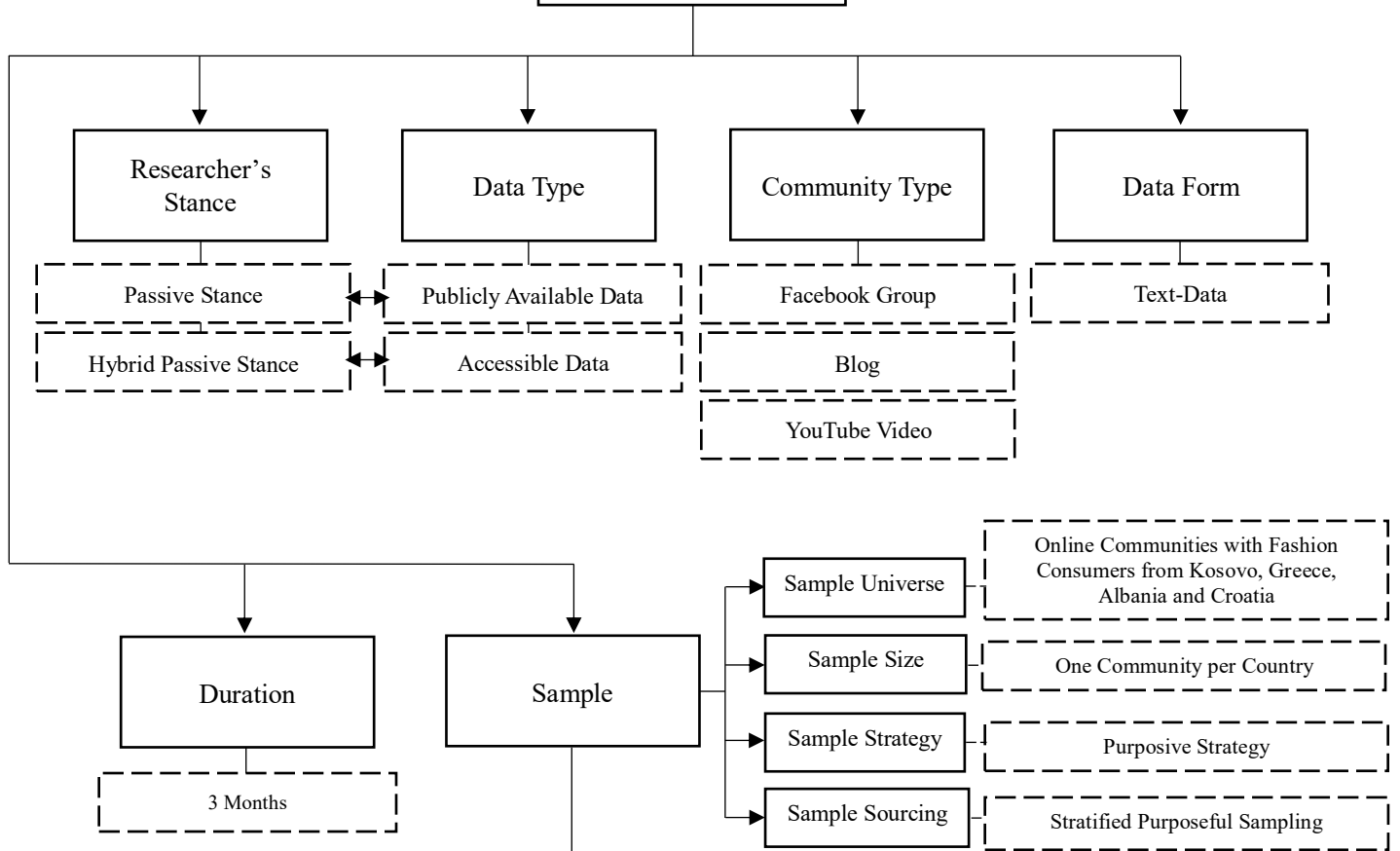
The characteristics of this method fit with the researcher's ontological and epistemological views (Kozinets (2020) shares the same opinion). According to Thanh and Kirova (2018), netnography is “appropriate when the research question is exploratory and when there is a need for a deeper description and explanation of a multifaceted phenomenon (p. 33)”. Subsequently, this research employed netnographic research. Netnography offered several gains to this study. It helped answer the second research question – **(RQ 2)** How do fashion consumers from SEE countries understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers’ behaviour affected by CSR activities? The variety of information presented by members in the online communities helped this research understand the multifaceted phenomenon of CSR. The freely accessible and unobtrusive data aided the researcher in gaining a deep understanding of SME consumers' perceptions and behaviours about CSR in the fashion industry in a natural context (compared to focus groups). It is crucial to state that netnography provided another face to the reality – the online reality – of the social phenomenon of CSR constructed by SME consumers. Figure 3.9 depicts the process of netnographic research in this investigation.

3.5.3.3.2 Sample: Online Community Selection

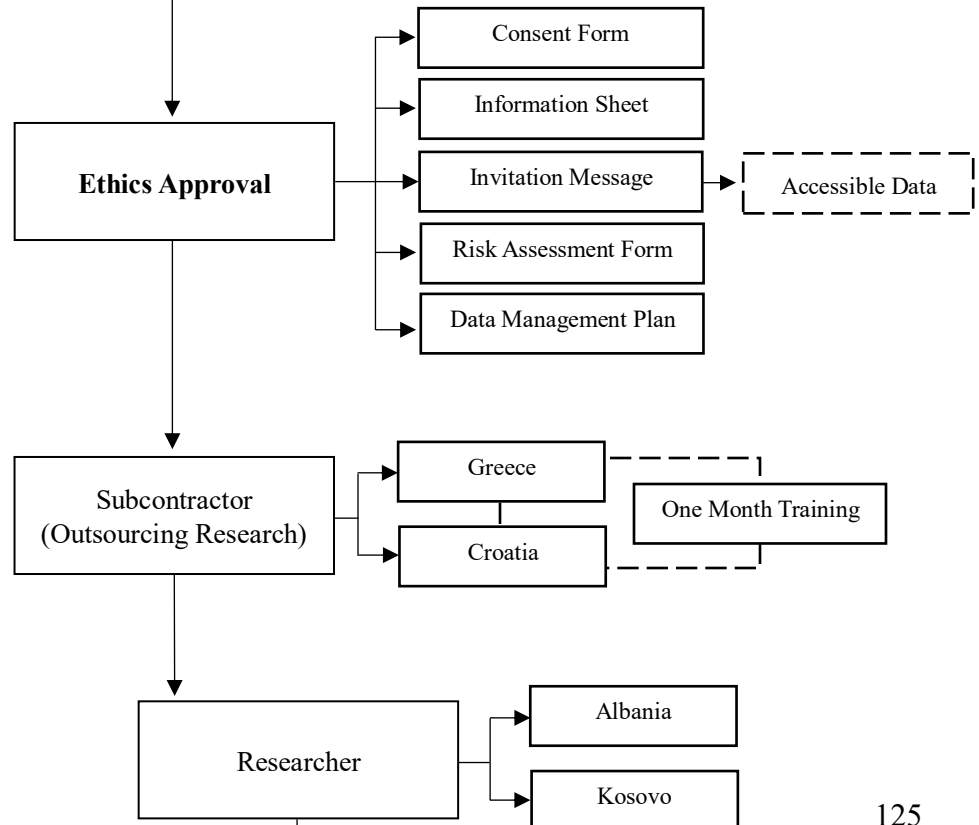
Netnography was conducted in each of the chosen states of SEE; the researcher conducted one netnographic research for each country. The intended sample was online communities with consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia who purchase fashion products/services from fashion companies, preferably local SMEs. Initially, the researcher planned to select and analyse a single online community per country. But after starting the data collection process, the number of online communities changed. In Greece, the researcher selected one Facebook community and two YouTube videos. In Kosovo, one Facebook group for each. In Albania and Croatia, the researcher decided on blogs. The selected online communities focused on fashion, and their discussions leaned towards small and medium firms. The decision on each of the previously mentioned online communities is presented below in the data collection process of this method. The researcher followed Kozinets’ recommendation for the selection.

NETNOGRAPHY

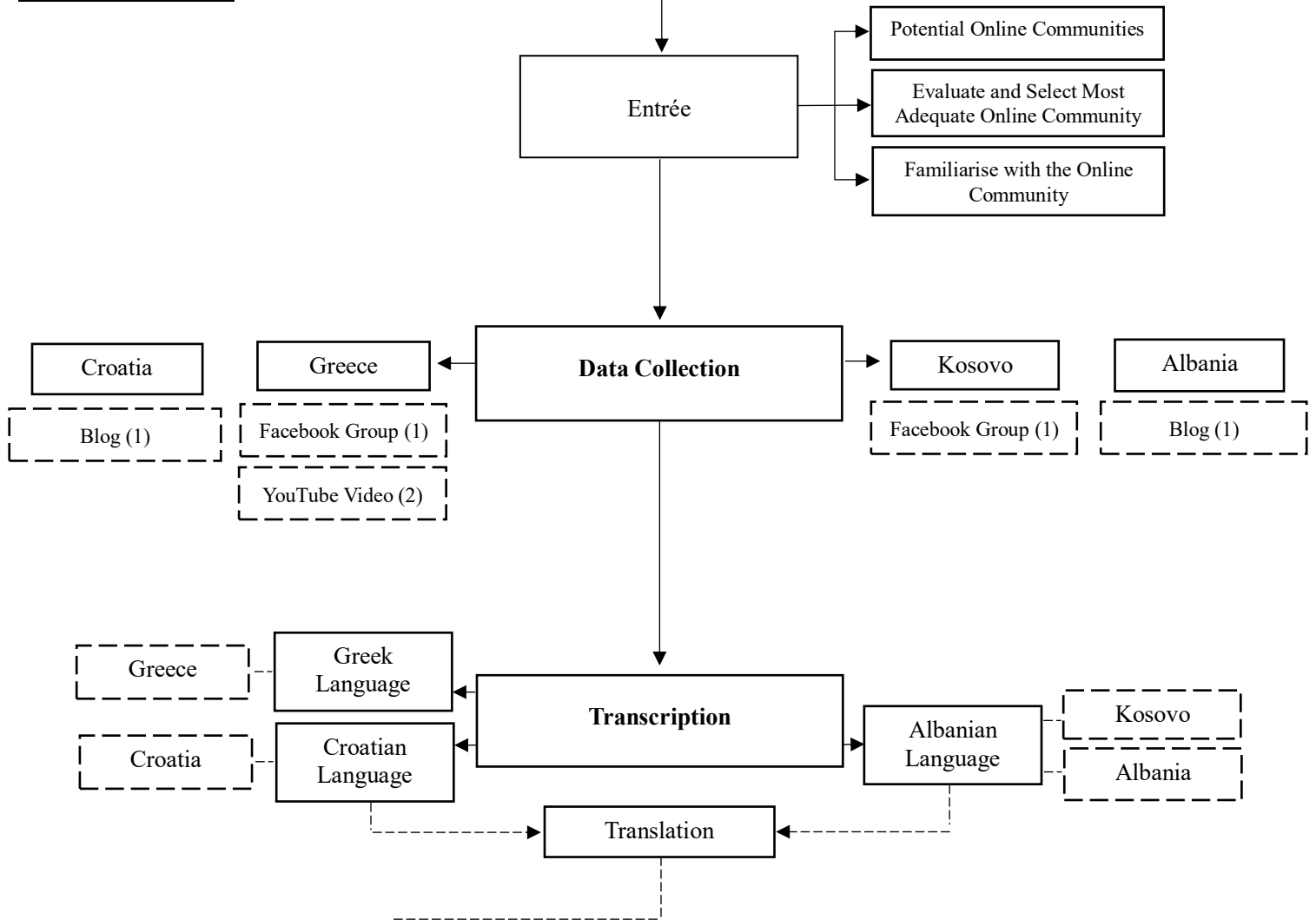
FOUNDATION PHASE



PREFIELD PHASE



FIELDWORK PHASE



REPORTING PHASE

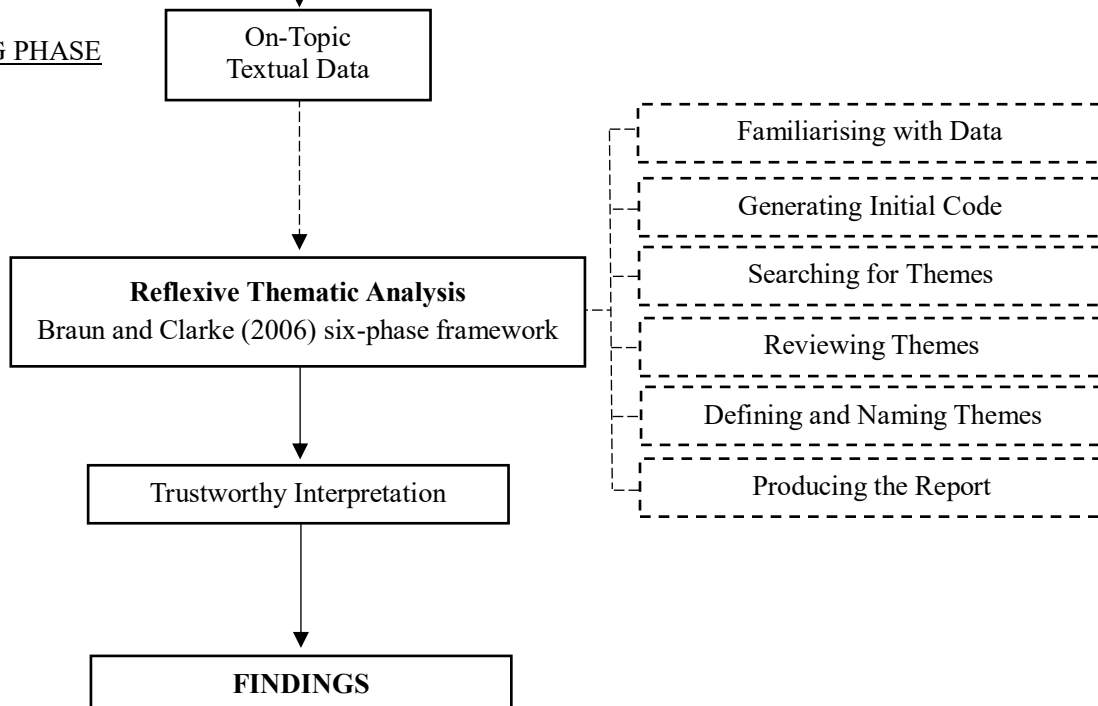


Figure 3.9 The Process of Conducting Netnographic Research

3.5.3.3.3 Data Collection Process

As a research method, netnography has distinguishable procedures (Chua and Banerjee, 2013; Quinton and Wilson, 2016), which convey practical guidelines to the researchers. Kozinets, as the pioneer of this method, proposed a five-step procedure which partly adopts the ethnography structure (Kozinets, 2002; 2020). Management scholars (among other discipline scholars) adopted this procedure into their studies (see Costello et al., 2017; Thanh and Kirova, 2018; Xharavina et al., 2020). Most of them followed strictly the steps that Kozinets (2002) recommended. A few other scholars transferred the procedure to their understanding (Bratucu et al., 2014). Regardless, management scholars, who have employed this procedure in their research, claim that it showed pleasing findings (Thanh and Kirova, 2018; Vasileios et al., 2023; Wiles et al., 2013; Xharavina et al., 2020). Kozinets (2002) recommended following these steps: “1) making cultural entrée, 2) gathering and analysing data, 3) ensuring trustworthy interpretation, 4) conducting ethical research, and 5) providing opportunities for feedback (p. 63)”. This research also considered the latest recommendations of Kozinets (2019) suited for social media. Kozinets (2019) is still loyal to these five steps (although he labelled them slightly differently). Accordingly, this research followed the procedure of Kozinets (2002). Similar to other methods, the implementation of this method was impacted by the ontological and epistemological views of the researcher.

Before starting the data collection process, the researcher decided on two crucial issues: the research stance and the type of data. Initially, the researcher selected the stance they had to follow. Netnography has two different standpoints, known as ‘active’ and ‘passive’ stances (Costello et al., 2017). Researchers who adopt the ‘active’ approach must get permission to enter the online community and use the data members provide (Kozinets, 2002). On the other hand, researchers who follow the ‘passive’ stance join the online community and use their data for research purposes without informing the community members; they follow this approach so that their presence does not influence the findings of the research and lose the main advantage of netnography – unobtrusiveness (DiGuardo and Castriotta, 2013; Quinton and Wilson, 2016). This research followed a passive stance, similar to Quinton and Wilson (2016) and Xharavina et al. (2020). This stance provides the researcher with a naturalist analysis of data, which makes the study

unobtrusive. Xharavina et al. (2020) findings show that participants might decide to cease commenting or be extra careful with their posts (which creates unnaturalistic/fake data) if the researcher follows the active stance. Likewise, Fisher and Smith (2011) argue that the active stance pushes participants away and limits the researcher from gaining in-depth information. To avoid the abovementioned disadvantages, this research monitored the interactions in the communities passively.

Formerly, it intended to focus only on publicly available data (data accessible to everyone). But during the selection of the communities, the researcher identified a few suitable communities for research with accessible data (data that required permission to access). The researcher adopted a 'hybrid' version of the passive stance when exploring accessible data. The researcher did not reveal their identity to the members, but they decided to inform the administrator/s of the groups and gain permission to access the group. For the research to occur, the researcher provided the administrator/s with an information sheet with all relevant information about this research and a consent form to sign. At the end of the netnographic investigation, the administrators received a short description of the findings, which needed to be approved by them. Regarding the second issue, the researcher considered the opportunity to focus on various types of data as netnography, as a method, offers such a benefit (Kozinets, 2020). The researcher decided to follow Costello et al. (2017) recommendation and use only text data as the main focus of the netnographic research for the following reasons. It provided this research with several benefits. The communities presented a plentiful amount of text data. Text data offered a more accessible process of data collection and analysis than audio and visual data. It provided the opportunity to identify themes and patterns straightforwardly and use thematic analysis (a data analysis approach that the researcher is familiar with). Lastly, visual or audio data could have created complexity in the research process and raised ethical concerns (as legal guidelines around such type of data are still under consideration; Kozines (2019)).

One community was investigated at a time. The looked-for information was collected for twelve months (three months per community), as the researcher reckoned this period satisfactory to accomplish the set objectives (Xharavina et al., 2020). The researcher conducted a netnographic investigation in Greece, Kosovo, Albania, and Croatia (consecutively). Each fashion-related online

community was pseudonymised, for instance, “GR-F”, “KS-F”, “AL-B”, and “CR-B”. These pseudonyms protected the confidentiality of the communities and their members and commenters. The researcher also used designations (presented in Table 3.5) to preserve members' identity and privacy. This act was crucial for the ethical integrity of this research (Costello et al., 2017). Additionally, comments from two fashion-related YouTube videos that generated intense discussions were analysed in Greece (GR-Y1 and GR-Y2; the justification for their use is provided in the next paragraph). Table 3.5 below presents the characteristics of each netnographic investigation.

Country	Kosovo	Albania	Greece		Croatia
Online Community	Facebook group	Blog	Facebook group	YouTube video(s)	Blog
Pseudonym(s)	KS-F	AL-B	GR-F	GR-Y1 GR-Y2	CR-B
Designations of Members and Commenters	KM1, KM2, KM3...	AB1, AB2, AB3... (for bloggers) AC1, AC2, AC3 (for commenters)	GM1, GM2, GM3...	GC1, GC2, GC3...	CB1, CB2, CB3... (for bloggers) CC1, CC2, CC3 (for commenters)
Type of Data	Text data (posts, comments)	Text data (posts, comments)	Text data (posts, comments)	Text data (comments)	Text data (posts, comments)
Time Period	3 months	3 months	3 months		3 months
Research Stance	‘Hybrid’ passive	‘Hybrid’ passive	‘Hybrid’ passive	Passive	Passive

Table 3.5 Characteristics of each Netnographic Investigation (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)

Before explaining the data collection process, the researcher considered it crucial to specify that two other researchers (a Greek and a Croatian subcontractor) implemented the data collection in Greece and Croatia, as the researcher does not speak fluent Greek and Croatian. South-East European Research Centre (SEERC) provided the required fund for this outsourcing research. The researcher trained the subcontractors (one of them was a SEERC staff) for around a month (four individual classes were held to explain the method to them). The researcher was in constant contact

with the subcontractors through every step. The researcher, however, implemented by herself the analysis of these investigations.

As previously mentioned, this research followed Kozinets' guidelines, which successfully assisted the researcher in collecting deep insights. Initially, the researcher exposed their intentions through the following research objectives. The researcher aimed to (1) investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion consumers from SEE countries about CSR, (2) explore the perceptions of fashion consumers from SEE countries about CSR activities implemented by fashion SMEs in these countries, (3) uncover the impact of CSR on the purchasing intention and behaviour of fashion consumers from SEE countries and (4) interpret the perceptions of fashion consumers from SEE countries about their (potential) impact on the CSR of fashion SMEs from these countries. These research objectives applied to all four countries. Based on these objectives, the researcher located the most suitable online communities. This process took around two to three weeks for each country, and it did not count in the three months of research. The researcher identified the appropriate community by considering the following criteria recommended by Kozinets (2002; 2020): relevant group, traffic of posting, discrete message posts, rich data and interactions relevant to research questions/objectives. Each criterion was qualitatively weighted as (1) satisfactory, (2) somehow satisfactory and (3) not satisfactory (Kozinets, 2019). After considering each criterion, the researcher identified the most appropriate community for each country. Firstly, the researcher identified the following communities: "GR-F", "KS-F", "CR-B", and "AL-B". But "GR-F" did not provide as rich and on-topic information as the researcher anticipated. Thus, in consultation with the subcontractor, the researcher decided to add to the research two YouTube videos (which they pseudonymised as "GR-Y1" and "GR-Y2") to attain the set objectives. The researcher and subcontractors spent two weeks familiarising herself with the communities and their members (two weeks per each). The researcher and subcontractors understood their conventions, norms and interactions and identified the community members, specifically the insiders (the opinion leaders) in each group (among tourists, minglers and devotees).

After making the entrée in each online community, the researcher started collecting insights. This process generated a large amount of data. The researcher adapted Kozinets' (2019) guidelines and categorised the data as on-topic and off-topic (refer to Table 3.6 for an example of this grouping).

This categorisation helped simplify the process for the researcher. The researcher and subcontractors recorded the data manually; they immediately transcribed the on-topic data in Word documents. By doing this, the researchers familiarised themselves with the online communities and kept the members' identities confidential. Data were stored on the researcher's personal computer and secured through a password, which protected the files. As previously indicated, the researcher collected data only in written form (text data). The communities, nevertheless, tended to use emojis, pictures and sometimes videos to express their views (the researchers did not consider such forms of expressions in this research). After data was collected, the researcher analysed the data through thematic analysis. This research engaged the Braun and Clark (2006) six-step procedure (the technique is explained in detail later in the 'Data Analysis subchapter). The researcher employed thematic analysis for each community (the YouTube videos and the fashion online community in Greece were included in one thematic analysis) and synthesised the findings afterwards. Findings provided attention-grabbing consumer perceptions about CSR understanding and its practices and thought-provoking interactions about consumers purchasing intentions and behaviours (CSR-related). Throughout this process, the researcher generated several themes, which are presented in the Chapter 6.

This research ensured an honest interpretation of data. This was achieved by being transparent about each decision in the process. As presented, this research explained every step and choice of netnographic research in all four countries. Kozinets (2019) recommends triangulating data to ensure an honest and trustworthy interpretation. The researcher claimed that netnography is a successful stand-alone method (Xharavina and Kapoulas, 2019). This research did not intend to generalise the data (as it is interpretivist in its nature), and neither did it intend to provide reliable data (as Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested) by triangulating netnographic findings with focus group findings. This researcher, nevertheless, used within-method triangulation (multiple sources to answer the same research question) because it offers richer and deeper insights into consumers' perceptions and behaviours (as Chua and Banerjee (2013) recommended). Concerning research ethics, this research followed a passive stance with publicly available data and a 'hybrid' passive stance with accessible data. As explained above, the researcher provided an information sheet and consent form to the administrators. The researcher ensured confidentiality by removing identifying information about members and by pseudonymising the communities they participated and their

names. Lastly, the researcher provided opportunities for feedback by sending a short conclusion of findings to the administrators. The administrators had the right to withdraw the community from the research if they were not satisfied with the presentation of the findings. Such information was provided in the information sheet for administrators. All the contacted administrators claimed a satisfactory conclusion of the daily group interactions, but none offered feedback.

ON-TOPIC DATA	OFF-TOPIC DATA
<i>“Recently, I am purchasing only <u>ethically-made</u> and <u>sustainable</u> clothing pieces because I know that little by little, the companies will be forced to respond to these demands...”</i>	<i>“GC7, have you studied fashion or is it your hobby?”</i>
<i>“... Indeed, a fast fashion T-shirt may cost less than an equivalent ethical fashion one, but if everybody thinks about whether they really need this T-shirt and purchase only these that are indeed necessary (even from fast fashion if nothing else can be done) for sure in the future, they will save... Why can’t every human be content with 5-10-20- even 50 - clothing pieces? ...”</i>	<i>“If you love it a lot and you want to do this more regularly, try to educate yourself by acquiring a lot of knowledge. This way you will increase the trust of your audience much more. I read it from a book and I thought I should tell you this to help you, because your content is notable!</i> <i>All the best GC1!</i> <i>I will follow your journey (heart emoji)”</i>

Table 3.6 Examples of On-topic and Off-topic Data from Online Communities

3.5.3.3.4 Limits/Drawbacks of the Method

Regardless of its many advantages, netnography inevitably has a few shortcomings (Clemente-Ricolfe, 2017). Scholars mention that this method might create difficulties due to the anonymity of online community members and their uncertain behaviour (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015; Wu and Pearce, 2015) (members can create false identities). Other scholars mention that the biggest concern for netnography is the validity and reliability of data (Prior and Miller, 2012; Xun and Reynolds, 2010; Wu and Pearce, 2015). Like the other methods in this research, this method anticipated attaining authenticity, plausibility and criticality. Indirectly, this research moderately tackled the validity and reliability concerns through within-method triangulation. It is crucial to state that the researcher intended to perceive the phenomenon of CSR in different realities (online

and offline self) and not achieve validity and reliability. Prior and Miller (2012) and Wu and Pearce (2014) discuss that implementation-wise netnography lacks transparency. Accordingly, this research explained every step undertaken in the subchapter above. Lastly, the researcher noted that this method did not necessarily provide the researcher with the most realistic data about consumers' behaviours (like ethnography research). But the researcher claimed it was the best available option for authenticity given the pandemic situation in which the research was conducted. The researcher considered that netnography's advantages surpass the said issues, and the researcher considered this method ideal for investigating consumers' perceptions in today's digitalised world.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the most crucial components in the quest for successful research (Eden and Nielsen, 2020; Edmondson and McManus, 2007). It is a process that explores, interprets and compares data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers in management employ a range of data analysis approaches (such as content analysis, discourse analysis, grounded analysis, and narrative analysis) (Cassell and Bishop, 2019; Miles and Huberman, 1994). They utilise such techniques to draw findings, answer research questions and build or elaborate theorising (Baratt et al., 2011; Cassell and Bishop, 2019). Qualitative data analysis offers the opportunity to “obtain a deeper understanding (Crane et al., 2017, p. 3)” of the CSR concept across cultures to CSR researchers. Qualitative scholars mention the importance of describing the process (Baratt et al., 2011; Cornelissen, 2017; Pratt, 2009). Edmondson and McManus (2007) state that a carefully implemented analysis and a detailed explained analysis “increases confidence that the researchers' explanations of the phenomena are more plausible than alternative interpretations (p. 1165)”. Among others, qualitative scholars state the importance of the interplay and internal consistency across research questions, data collection, data analysis and theory building (Bansal et al., 2018; Cornelissen, 2017). Accordingly, this research ensured alignment among these elements and explained the data analysis process for each method in detail below.

3.6.1 Critical Interpretive Synthesis: Data Synthesis

As mentioned in the data collection of the CIS, CIS's main aim is to formulate a synthesising argument to provide an insightful understanding of a phenomenon. Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) recommended generating such an argument through synthesising concepts. According to them, a synthesis argument "integrates evidence from across the studies in the review into a coherent theoretical framework comprising a network of constructs (p. 40)." It "links synthetic constructs (new constructs generated through synthesis) and existing constructs in the literature (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006, p. 45)". During this process, the researcher followed the guidelines that Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) recommended but considered the work of other scholars (like Depraetere et al. (2021) and Perski et al. (2017)) who employed CIS in their study. Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) work suited this research's philosophical assumptions and objectives. Like this research, Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) adopted an interpretivist/constructivist postulation into their study. The work of other scholars like Depraetere et al. (2021) and Perski et al. (2017) was not suitable for this research, as regardless of their interpretivist methodology, the researcher perceived that their work (indirectly) inclined towards objectivist/positivist ontological and epistemological assumptions. As an approach, CIS does not intend to be strictly reproducible (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). Thus, the founder (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006) did not suggest "pre-specified procedures" for the analysis. The researcher considered other options besides the synthesis argumentation, such as meta-ethnography and hybrid thematic analysis. This research did not consider meta-ethnography suitable for this part of the research, as researchers who employed meta-ethnography encountered issues interpreting/synthesising qualitative and quantitative data (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Denyer and Tranfield, 2006). On the other hand, the hybrid thematic analysis did not fit the researcher's ontological and epistemological views as this approach integrates bottom-up and top-down (inductive and deductive) coding (Xu and Zammit, 2020).

The procedure of synthesis argumentation was characterised by reflexivity and the "authorial voice". Data were saved as images, and then, important information was converted into a Word sheet. Data were stored as Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF/A, PDF) (.pdf) or JPEG (.jpeg, .jpg, .jp2), and the converted data were stored as MS Word (.doc/.docx). Initially, the researcher identified several codes from all the articles; codes were turned into synthetic concepts. To attain

synthesising arguments, key sub-themes and themes were identified. According to Depraetere et al. (2021), theme identification is the most vital element of CIS. Two central themes emerged from this study: *CSR Activities across South-East Europe* and *The Level of Operation of CSR among SEE Countries* (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4). The second theme, *The Level of Operation of CSR among SEE Countries*, helped achieve another essential goal of CIS – the development of a conceptual framework, which can also be used as a guideline for owners/managers willing to adopt CSR activities in their organisations (see Figure 4.7 in the Findings section). This conceptual framework categorised CSR practices into four groupings based on the actor level: company, national, regional and international. This framework resulted from the iterative data analysis process, which created the opportunity to link the newly identified constructs with existing constructs in the literature.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

The interpretation of the primary data was accomplished by utilising thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis offers the opportunity to grasp the views and opinions of participants about any particular issue (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Most importantly, it creates worthwhile findings rather than solely summarising the collected data (Clarke and Braun, 2016). Since thematic analysis received attention from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), it has been adopted and evolved among different disciplines (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2022). Management scholars, among other scholars, noticed the advantages of this approach and employed it in their research. According to Cassell and Bishops (2019), thematic analysis is now among the most popular analysis in the field.

Braun and Clarke (2022) mention three types of thematic analysis “families”: (1) coding reliability thematic analysis, (2) reflexive thematic analysis and (3) codebook thematic analysis. The researcher considered each of these options. The researcher decided to employ reflexive thematic analysis, as it reflected the underlying ontological, epistemological and methodological positions of this research. Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that reflexive TA is suited for research that embeds subjectivist ontology, constructionist epistemology and interpretivist (qualitative) methodology. In addition to suitability, this approach was feasible for the researcher. Previously,

the researcher applied the reflexive approach in two of her research (the work was published in peer-reviewed journals and conferences). The researcher also co-lectured thematic analysis with her supervisor for the Research Methods class for the Master's level. The researcher deemed this approach adequate for the research topic. Several CSR scholars adopted this technique in their studies and reckoned it competent (e.g., Kaur et al., 2022). Like the researcher, Crane and Glozer (2016) also considered thematic analysis adequate for analysing the CSR concept. Most importantly, this approach provided several advantages to this research. It was flexible, easy and quick to conduct, usefully summarised key features of the large body of data, offered a 'thick description' of the data set and generated unforeseen insights (Braun and Clarke, 2021a; 2022).

Consequently, this research conducted Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework of reflexive thematic analysis. The researcher regarded the seminal work of Braun and Clarke (2006) and the latest development of the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2021b; 2022). It applied Braun and Clarke's (2021b) six phases: "1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report (p. 331)". It is crucial to state that the researcher did not follow a linear way (a step-by-step procedure) of applying these phases. As Braun and Clarke (2022) recommended, the researcher employed an iterative application. It is crucial to state that as a result of the cross-national nature of the research, the researcher conducted separate thematic analyses for each respective SEE country for each method – interviews, focus groups and netnography.

Before the application of the reflexive TA, the researcher considered the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2021b; 2022) and Byrne (2022) and positioned the analyses in the inductive-theoretical and semantic-latent spectrums. Initially, the researcher decided on the data set approach. The researcher chose to code the entire data set to gain a rich description without losing the depth and complexity of the data set. In the inductive-theoretical spectrum, these cross-national analyses adopted a predominantly inductive approach. The analyses generated mainly data-driven themes and codes. However, they also considered the researcher's theoretical interest to ensure the generated themes and codes resonated with the theoretical concepts and the research questions identified in the literature review; the data were not coded in a theoretical vacuum. In the semantic-

latent spectrum, semantic themes, sub-themes and codes (explicit/descriptive meaning of data) predominated the analyses. This semantic prevalence was mainly due to the under-explored nature of the topic in the four chosen SEE countries. Although Braun and Clarke (2019) opted for the latent approach, the researcher decided that the semantic approach was more suitable for analysing and coherently depicting such a complex cross-national data set. Occasionally, the researcher adopted a latent approach to analysing the data.

To assure application quality, this research addressed the ten common issues Braun and Clarke (2021b) encountered in research adopting reflexive thematic analysis. It also considered the twenty questions recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021b) and found them efficacious. The researcher also ensured external peer validation of the analyses by presenting the findings at various conferences and publishing them in their proceedings (e.g., European Social Marketing Conference, 16th Annual Conference of the EuroMed Academy of Business, 10th International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues). In addition to her supervisors, the researcher received detailed feedback from Prof Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki (expert in qualitative research). The researcher described “what they did or how they engaged (Braun et al., 2022, p. 432).” The following sections describe what the researcher did and how she engaged in the analysis process of each method. A detailed explanation of these steps for each research method (interview, focus group and netnography) is presented below. The researcher deemed it crucial to note that the analyses for each method mainly followed the same procedure; thus, the descriptions below took that into account. To clarify it for the reader, the researcher displayed each procedure for each country separately in the appendices (Appendix 3.9, Appendix 3.10 and Appendix 3.11).

3.6.1.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis: Interviews

The researcher conducted six interviews in Kosovo, five interviews in Albania, five interviews in Croatia and six interviews in Greece (twenty-two in-depth online and face-to-face elite interviews in total). As previously emphasised, the researcher conducted a distinct reflexive thematic analysis for each respective country. Following these analyses, the researcher created a final country comparison report encompassing the key themes, sub-themes and codes. A detailed description of this process is portrayed in Appendix 3.9. The researcher conducted individual analyses in the

following country order – Kosovo, Greece, Albania and Croatia. A brief portrayal of the six-phase process applied to these four analyses is presented below.

(1) To familiarise herself with the data, the researcher attended to Byrne’s (2022) suggestion and listened attentively to each interview without taking notes. After actively listening to each interview, the researcher started transcribing the data. The researcher converted the audio recordings (file format: .avi) into textual data (MS Word: .doc/.docx). Each interview was saved as an MS Word document. Interviews from the same country were put under the same file. The files were categorised according to the chosen countries. In total, the records of four countries yielded 23 hours and 15 minutes. As previously mentioned, the interviews in Kosovo and Albania took place in the Albanian and English languages. Regarding the Albanian interviews, the researcher initially transcribed them into Albanian and afterwards translated them into English. The researcher translated them by herself, as this helped with the phase of familiarising with the data. The researcher started her immersion by reading and re-reading the data for each country individually (in the previously mentioned order). Reading and re-reading the data during the transcription bettered the researcher's immersion in the depth and breadth of the data (as Braun and Clarke (2021b) recommended). During this phase, the researcher wrote down familiarisation notes for each country.

(2) The researcher proceeded with data coding of interviews in the same country order – Kosovo, Greece, Albania and Croatia. The first step of the coding process was similar for all countries; it was inductive in nature (data-driven). Nonetheless, the researcher noticed that with each successive analysis, the inductive coding began converging with theory-driven coding. After generating the initial codes, the researcher ensured the codes worked in relation to the first research question for each analysis. The codes generated from the four analyses were predominantly semantic. For a few codes, nonetheless, the researcher followed the latent approach (refer to ‘Phase 2’ categorisations in Appendix 3.9). This phase helped the researcher identify the content and create meanings. The researcher created codes and occasionally a brief description of codes to simplify the data-gathering process. Examples of the codes generated for each country are illustrated in Appendix 3.9.

(3) The process of putting codes into candidate themes and sub-themes differed slightly across the four analyses. Variations in this process are illustrated in detail in Appendix 3.9. Nonetheless, for all of them, the researcher followed the recommendation of Braun et al. (2022) and did not ‘search’ for themes and sub-themes but generated them. The researcher created initial thematic maps for each SEE country. At this phase, each of the previously mentioned maps was inductive in nature. This phase generated preliminary conceptualisations of the main data patterns across each analysis.

(4) The next phase included reviewing themes, sub-themes and codes. As seen in Appendix 3.9, the first analysis (Kosovo-based) followed the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2019; 2022). Initially, the researcher reviewed the themes and sub-themes in relation to codes. Secondly, the researcher reworked some of the themes and sub-themes in accordance with the first research question (RQ1) and the theoretical concepts that interested the researcher. The successive analyses were influenced by the prior analyses. Accordingly, the researcher compared the themes, sub-themes and codes to the ones generated in the previous analyses (analysis of Kosovar, Greek and Albanian SME owners/managers, respectively). This iterative process re-generated themes, sub-themes and codes. During this phase, the researcher assured the thematic maps were satisfactory.

(5) For all four analyses, the researcher identified the essence of each theme by writing a detailed analysis. The researcher explained each theme in relation to the overall story, the RQ1 and its objectives. The generated themes and sub-themes were turned into subchapters and sub sub-chapters of Chapter 5. Themes and sub-themes created from each country analysis were predominantly semantic (explicit), as this approach offered the researcher and the reader a well-organised and easily readable report for the findings chapter (Chapter 5).

(6) This phase included the write-up reports presented throughout Chapter 5. The researcher considered the suggestions of Braun and Clarke (2022) and depicted themes and sub-themes through data extracts throughout the chapter. The researcher adopted an analytical-descriptive narrative and deemed that this narrative helped her successfully answer the first research question and its objectives.

Lastly, the researcher conducted another ending phase, inclusive of all four previously explained analyses – the country comparison report. This report was presented in sub sub-chapters 5.1.5 to 5.7.5 and provided an analytical discussion of the differences and similarities among these four analyses. The researcher observed that the themes, sub-themes and codes generated enriched the theoretical contributions of this research. Like Cassell and Bishops (2019), the researcher considered the reflexive thematic analysis approach a good fit for in-depth semi-structured interviews.

3.6.1.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis: Focus Groups

The researcher applied reflexive thematic analysis for focus groups as well. The researcher employed it in the past to analyse findings from focus groups (Xharavina et al., 2020) and considered it an effective approach. For this research, the researcher applied four different reflexive thematic analyses for each studied SEE country; one for each of the following: (1) three focus groups in Kosovo, (2) two focus groups in Albania, (3) two focus groups in Croatia and (4) two focus groups in Greece (nine focus groups in total). The researcher deemed the analyses successful, as they assisted this research to address the second research question and its objectives. A short description of the six phases of each of these four analyses is explained below. The researcher conducted these analyses in the following country order – Kosovo, Greece, Albania and Croatia. A detailed explanation of each of them is presented in Appendix 3.10.

(1) The researcher familiarised herself with the data by actively listening to each focus group discussion. The researcher started the familiarisation phase in the following country order – Kosovo, Greece, Albania and Croatia. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings (file format: .avi) into textual data (MS Word: .doc/.docx). Similarly to interviews, the researcher categorised the focus group discussions into ‘country’ files (one for each country). A translator interpreted the Albanian discussions conducted in Albania and Kosovo. The researcher became familiarised with the collected data by actively listening to the original discussions and reading and re-reading the original and translated data. The researcher documented familiarisation notes for each discussion and each country.

(2) The coding process was slightly different to all four analyses. The researcher inductively created initial codes from the features she noticed across the entire data set. Similarly to the reflexive thematic analyses for interviews, the researcher observed the impact of the preceding analyses on the nature of coding. Accordingly, inductive coding was blended with theory-driven coding. The researcher created the codes on paper. Codes were predominantly semantic, with some expectations of latent codes. A few examples of codes of each of the four analyses are depicted in Appendix 3.10.

(3) The theme-development phase was altered slightly for each successive analysis. While the theme development among data from Kosovar participants was solely inductive, the theme development for other analyses followed a combination of inductive and theoretical approaches. The visualisation of initial thematic maps (for each analysis) was intended to be purely inductive. Due to the implicit influence of the preceding analyses, the inductive approach blended with the theoretical one. During the first analysis (Kosovo-based), the researcher noted a set of codes that did not belong anywhere. Given the Braun and Clarke (2006) recommendation, the researcher put those codes under a ‘miscellaneous’ theme. The researcher noted that these codes shared similarities with other codes in the preceding analyses. At this phase, the researcher did not involve the ‘miscellaneous’ theme in the initial thematic maps.

(4) This phase was characteristic for each of the four analyses. While all four analyses attended to revise the themes, sub-themes and codes, they were influenced immensely by the preceding analysis. With the help of this phase, the researcher identified a new theme for the ‘miscellaneous’ grouping. While this theme did not directly relate to RQ2 and its objectives, the researcher deemed it relevant to the fashion industry context. The theme was applicable to all analyses.

(5) This phase was similar for all four analyses. The researcher refined, renamed and defined each theme identified in each analysis separately. The researcher considered all themes, sub-themes and codes in relation to the second research question. Excluding the first analysis, all the other analyses considered the thematic maps of the previous analyses in this phase. Throughout the four analyses, themes adopted a predominantly semantic approach as it helped the researcher attain coherent and readable findings.

(6) The write-up reports were similar among the four analyses. The reports were presented in Chapter 6 under different sub-chapters and sub sub-chapters aimed at the specific SEE country. The researcher adopted an analytical-descriptive narrative writing approach for all four reports. The findings presented in the previously mentioned reports effectively addressed the second research question and its objectives. Last of all, the researcher generated an inclusive country report, which analytically explained each of the themes and sub-themes in relation to all countries.

3.6.1.3 Reflexive Thematic Analysis: Netnography

The researcher applied the six-phase reflexive thematic analyses to netnographic findings as well. The researcher employed this approach in previous research (see Xharavina and Kapoulas, 2019; Xharavina et al., 2020; Maglakars et al., 2022) and claimed reflexive thematic analysis appropriate for analysing netnographic findings of online communities in SEE. This approach helped the researcher address the second research question and its objectives. The six phases are briefly described below. A detailed explanation of each country's analysis is shown in Appendix 3.11.

(1) The familiarisation phase differed between the netnographic research in the Kosovar and Albanian online communities and the netnographic research in the Croatian and Greek online communities. The researcher conducted the former studies. The subcontractors implemented the latter ones. In the first instance, the researcher immersed herself in the breadth and depth of data during the first step of data collection (step 1: making cultural entrée) and transcribed the data as data collection was occurring. In the second instance, the subcontractors immersed themselves in the respective online communities and transcribed the data as data collection was happening. The researcher was in continuous contact with each subcontractor during this phase. The second part of the familiarisation phase was done solely by the researcher. The researcher read and re-read the text data and noted a few comments generated during this phase for each analysis.

(2) Different from the interviews and focus group reflexive TAs, the coding in these four analyses was conducted digitally. Similarly to Byrne (2022), the researcher used the comment and highlighting functions of Microsoft Word for coding. The coding process was distinctive for each analysis; Appendix 3.11 depicts these coding developments for each country. The researcher

noticed that the within-method triangulation (focus group with netnographic research) impacted the coding nature of these analyses. A few codes were built upon the codes generated from the reflexive TAs of the focus groups.

(3) The theme development phase differed across each analysis. The theme development in Kosovo was predominantly data-driven; the theme development in the other countries tracked a combination of inductive and theoretical approaches. The researcher created initial thematic tables for each country.

(4) All four analyses reviewed the themes, sub-themes and codes. Nevertheless, themes, sub-themes and codes were influenced by the preceding analysis. They were also immensely impacted by themes, sub-themes and codes of the focus group analyses. The researcher reviewed the generated themes and sub-themes in relation to the final themes and sub-themes of the reflexive analyses of focus groups (of each country). During all four analyses, the researcher assured to revise them in relation to the RQ2, its objectives and the theoretical notions.

(5) The researcher produced a detailed explanation for each theme and explained the relation of each theme with the overall story. These detailed explanations were deemed helpful for the presentation of findings.

(6) The researcher wrote four reports presented in this research in the third sub-chapter of Chapter 6, precisely in sub sub-chapters 6.3.1 to 6.3.4. These analyses, similar to the analyses of interviews and focus groups, were iterative, and the researcher alternated among the six phases.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Every researcher must ensure ethical and responsible research. Social researchers adhere to ethical research practices to ensure that. Bell and Bryman (2009) identify eleven categories of ethical principles relevant to management researchers: (1) harm to participants, (2) informed consent, (3) anonymity, (4) dignity, (5) privacy, (6) confidentiality, (7) affiliation, (8) honesty and transparency, (9) deception, (10) misrepresentation and (11) reciprocity. This research carefully considered each of these principles; it implemented them according to the researcher's understanding. The

principles facilitated the integrity and quality of this research. They also helped successfully identify and tackle ethical issues. In addition to these principles, this research considered the recommendations of Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) and Bryman (2015). The researcher also attended the Ethics course (a mandatory course from the University of Sheffield) and discussed every decision with the supervisors. Most importantly, the University Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved this research (refer to Appendix 3.12). Accordingly, the researcher deemed that this research successfully considered ethical challenges.

Initially, the researcher ensured protection from potential harm (or wrongdoing, as Cassell (1982) refers) for research participants through informed consent. This research claimed that no harm occurred to participants. From the beginning, participants were notified that partaking in this study was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any moment without giving any reason. The researcher was extremely cautious, especially in the face-to-face investigations (considering the situation created by Covid-19). Thus, before each face-to-face focus group or interview, the researcher checked the advice from the community authorities, where the researcher held the interviews and focus groups and followed their advice. The researcher developed a preparedness plan to prevent infection during the data collection. The researcher developed and agreed to a response plan in case someone at the interviews became ill with symptoms of Covid-19. During the interviews and focus groups, the researcher provided information, both orally and in writing, on Covid-19 and the measures the researcher took to make this occasion safe for participants. For the face-to-face focus groups, the researcher arranged seats for participants at least 1-1,5 meters apart. The researcher put on view dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub. The researcher prepared the environment by opening windows for an hour before the discussions and opening the windows whenever possible during the discussions to make sure the venue was well-ventilated. If anyone started to feel unwell, the researcher would follow the preparedness plan. Thus, after the interviews and focus groups, the researcher retained the contact details of all participants for at least one month (this would help public health authorities trace people who might have been exposed to Covid-19 if one or more participants became ill shortly after the gathering). Fortunately, the data collection faced no issues with Covid-19 and the protection of participants from harm (Covid-19) was ensured. The researcher noticeably stated all this information in consent forms and participant

information sheets for face-to-face interviews and focus groups, which were attached to this ethics application to the UREC (University Research Ethics Committee).

The researcher informed the participants (face-to-face and online) that they could contact the research team if they experienced stress or had any other concerns about the research. The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants. The researcher provided an information sheet for them to review. Once they reviewed it, they individually agreed to consent. For online interviews and focus groups, the researcher sent the consent form via e-mail before the online gathering. The information sheet and the consent form explained in detail the research procedure and the risks and benefits of the research; this allowed participants to make an informed decision. Participants were informed about the data collection and utilisation (how, why and by whom their data were collected and used). They were also notified about where their data was stored and when it would be destroyed. The researcher encouraged the participants to ask questions about the research. In addition to the researcher, the participants could have contacted other research team members if they required further clarification (the researcher provided contact information on the information sheet and consent form). The researcher ensured the participants that this research guaranteed anonymity, privacy and confidentiality. This was crucial to the researcher and this research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Accordingly, the researcher protected participants' privacy by giving pseudonyms for their names and companies. The researcher, in particular, minimised identifiable information for the owners and managers (such as the city they operate) as they could be more easily identified (Ma et al., 2021). Like Ma et al. (2021), this research claimed that confidentiality was a “critical condition of conducting an in-depth interview (p. 90)”. For the netnographic research, the researcher deemed no potential harm to members of the selected online communities because both the communities' and members' names were pseudonymised. Their information was kept confidential, and their quotes were paraphrased, so no potentially problematic information about participants was used or published. The data was safely stored in an encrypted file on a password-protected laptop. As formerly stated, the researcher did not disclose identifiable data in the research's analysis or to any third party. The lead researcher and the research team were the only ones who had access to these datasets.

The researcher considered a few other possible challenges, such as carelessness or dishonesty, as scholars argue that a study might fall short due to such issues (Bryman and Bell, 2007). To avoid such problems, the researcher put “ethical issues as central to the conduct of all research rather than as a separate component in the research process (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 75)”. The researcher was transparent about every step of this research, precisely about the data collection and analysis; the transparency presented the honesty and reasonability of this research (as previously mentioned, it did not attempt to provide replication). In addition, the researcher abstained from prejudiced, offensive language during in-depth interviews and focus groups (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2016) and recognised the work of scholars by referencing it. This research presented the findings accurately. In this attempt, it acknowledged its drawbacks and limitations. As Bryman and Bell (2007) recommended, it avoided “misleading, misunderstanding, misrepresenting or false reporting of research findings (p. 71)”. Lastly, the researcher attempted to achieve reciprocity. Reciprocity is “the idea that the research should be of mutual benefit to researcher and participants or that some form of collaboration or active participation should be involved (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 71)”. The researcher achieved that by providing feedback to participants (including the online community administrators/moderators) and addressing the concerns that these participants tackled during the interviews and discussions.

3.8 Reflection: Methodological Limitations and Challenges

Regardless of its many benefits, this research was not without its methodological challenges and limitations. The researcher was aware of potential challenges and limits before starting the investigation. Thus, the researcher identified potential barriers and created alternative plans to overcome them. During this process, the researcher had to redesign the research and learn how to adapt and overcome any potential challenge (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). This research presented a few challenges to the researcher because of its multi-country nature. According to Sinkovics and Penz (2011), “research that transcends one single national culture context is invariably more complex (p. 708)”. The researcher identified information on each country, Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, and Greece and their differences. As Pischke et al. (2017) suggested, the researcher focused on language, cultural, economic and political differences between these countries as such

differences impact the research track. Although SEE countries share similarities, each has particularities (Khan et al., 2018).

The researcher initially identified the cultural and language peculiarities of these four countries. Afterwards, the researcher identified the possible cultural and language barriers while conducting this research. Each country speaks a different language or dialect: Kosovo (Albanian; gegë dialect), Albania (Albanian; gegë and toskë dialect), Croatia (Croatian) and Greece (Greek). The researcher anticipated conducting the interviews and discussions in English, as around 70% of SEE citizens communicate fluently in English (SIKKT, 2013). Accordingly, to minimise misinterpretation, researchers suggested using ‘tactical sampling’ – investigating participants whose English is fluent. If this was not achieved, the research would occur in local languages: Albanian, Croatian, and Greek, as the researcher is familiar with the spoken languages in the region (a translator would be looked for to attain more accuracy). The researcher was aware that collecting, analysing and interpreting data in SEE’s local languages possessed few challenges – it would be time-consuming and expensive (the researcher would employ another researcher who is competent in the native language and their dialects; Drew, 2014; Squires, 2019), meanings could be distorted in the process of translation, and the translator could restrict the flow of interviews (Lopez et al., 2008). Thus, the original proposal was to conduct them in the English language, but if the researcher faced the afore-said barriers, another researcher had to be employed (preferably another PhD/Master student); in such case, strict ethics guidelines would be followed (in terms of confidentiality, data storage, and safety procedures).

The researcher conducted all focus groups in Albanian in Albania and Kosovo and all the other focus groups and interviews in English in Croatia and Greece. The researcher noticed that Albanian and Kosovar participants felt more comfortable discussing in their language. This comfort was not noted among Croatian and Greek participants; they were eager to discuss their views in English. Besides distinguishing languages and cultures, each country has diverse systems, policies and processes, different political situations and distinctive bureaucracy issues. Presuming the differences, the researcher was mindful of them before collecting the information (Medeiros, 2017; Khan et al., 2018). Another vital concern was funding (Polonetsky, 2014; Helms, 2017). The researcher needed funds to travel to all the countries, book particular settings for the interviews,

and, if required, hire a researcher or a translator. Initially, the researcher planned to request financial resources either from RTSG or funding programs that support Kosovar students or CSR-related studies (e.g., UNICEF, KosovoLab). This approach, as previously explained, was deemed cost-effective to the researcher. In addition, the researcher used their networking to find the venues for the focus groups without any cost. For the netnographic research in Greece, the researcher applied for funds from SEERC; SEERC accepted and funded the netnographic research in Greece.

If the researcher faced barriers while gathering data because the spread of COVID-19 intensified, and such obstacles impacted the researcher's access to participants, this research considered the possibility of following two alternative plans. Given the COVID-19 epidemiological situation, this research reckoned the possibility of employing online interviews and focus groups for all countries. While this approach would offer a faster, lower cost, less intrusive, and unconstrained participation of geographically diverse participants, it also provided the researcher with several disadvantages: technical issues, which could interrupt the process of data collection; a limited number of participants as they must acquire the correct technology, the absence of (1) capturing the richness of body language, (2) face-to-face conversation and (3) the group member dynamic (Clark, 2017; Borochoff, 2018). While this proposal would provide a possible alternative, it would alter the research design and process. The second plan was to follow a 'hybrid' approach; the researcher would conduct a few interviews and focus groups online and a few others offline. As presented before, this research followed a 'hybrid' approach; it conducted online focus groups and interviews in Greece and Croatia and face-to-face focus groups and interviews in Albania and Kosovo. This plan offered the best opportunity, as it helped the researcher gain in-depth insights and the possibility to compare the offline and online approaches.

Another challenge this research faced was the challenge of publishing qualitative findings in good or top-tier management journals. As Fatima and Elbana (2023) presented, management journals have a historical preference for publishing quantitative research (especially top-tier management journals). Their focus typically does not align with qualitative studies, and the reviewers tend to be more critical of the subjective interpretations. This research considered the recommendations of management scholars, such as Bansan and Corley (2011; 2012), Gephart (2004), Johnson et al. (2006), Lee (2001), Pratt (2009), and Symon et al. (2018). They belong to the editorial teams of

top-tier management journals and recommended criteria for interpretivist research. This research considered that it tackled this issue successfully because initially, such criteria helped the researcher provide clear findings and qualitative and well-designed investigation and increased the chances of publishing in good qualitative journals. Another challenge was presenting the methodology chapter in a linear path. Given the iterative nature of this research, the researcher considered this a challenge. Accordingly, the researcher employed Hogg and Maclaran's (2008) and Pratt's (2009) suggestions and displayed the process through figures. The figures helped the researcher present the iterative nature of this research, and they also helped show the research design clearly and concisely.

Lastly, this research attempted to turn every limitation into a challenge and every challenge into an opportunity. The changes implemented in the research design and process provided the researcher with development and progress. Every challenge stimulated critical thinking and fostered growth. They led the researcher to learn new skill sets (such as the online interviews and focus groups), expand their knowledge, create creative solutions and explore unconventional methods (such as CIS application) (all these critical characteristics required for the researcher's future career). Lastly, the researcher deemed that these challenges impacted the researcher's contribution to the field of management and, precisely, to CSR.

3.9 Conclusion of the Chapter

The ontological, epistemological and methodological positions largely impacted the path of this research. Ontologically, the researcher followed an adoption of subjectivism. Epistemologically, the researcher came across as a soft constructivist. Methodologically, the researcher identified as an interpretivist. As Carson et al. (2001) and Kapoulas and Mitic (2012) recommended, these philosophical positions helped answer what, why and how the research was conducted. Precisely, they helped formulate and address research questions. The multimethod qualitative approach depicted the research's exploratory purpose. The secondary and primary research helped the researcher attain the main objectives. The critical interpretive synthesis of secondary data gained insights into CSR in SEE. The primary data helped rich an insightful understanding of CSR in three contexts (SMEs, four SEE countries and the fashion industry) and among two social entities

(owners/managers and consumers). The twenty-two face-to-face and online semi-structured one-to-one elite interviews conducted in Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia helped understand the CSR perceptions and practices of SME owners and managers. The nine face-to-face and online semi-structured focus groups conducted among the consumers of these countries and the four netnographic investigations provided detailed information into consumers perceptions and behaviours in terms of CSR. This chapter presented in detailed the data analysis. It critically discussed the ethical considerations. Lastly, it reflected on the methodological limitations and challenges. To sum it up, the decisions taken in this chapter shaped the path of this research. They helped this research attain the research questions and objectives.

Overview of the Findings

The majority of qualitative scholars agree that qualitative research produces a large amount of textual data. Accordingly, the presentation of qualitative research findings should be well-organised (Gopaldas, 2015; Kim, 2017). To offer the reader a straightforward and comprehensive chapter, this research organised the findings into three parts. Each part (presented as a chapter) answers each research question. Figure 4.1 below illustrates the relation of each question with each chapter (part).

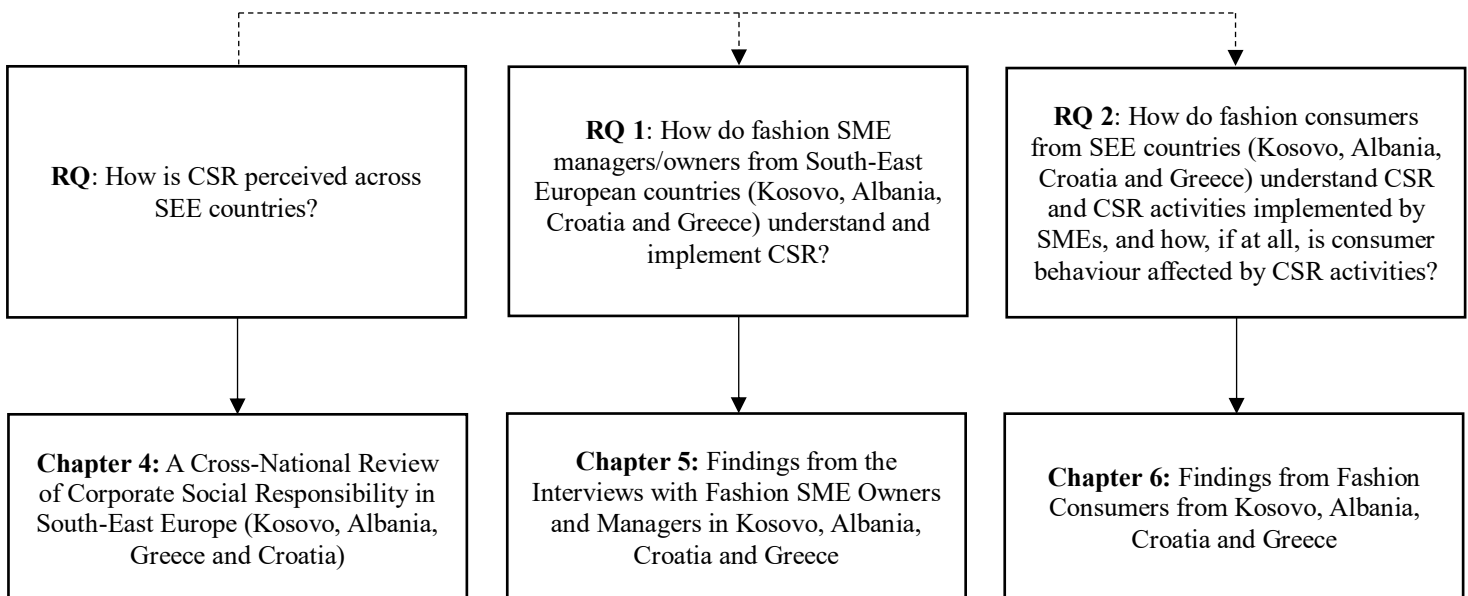


Figure 4.1 A Graphical Presentation of the Relation between Research Questions and Findings Chapters

4. A Cross-National Review of Corporate Social Responsibility in South-East Europe (Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia)

4.1 Introduction of the Chapter

This subchapter presents a review of corporate social responsibility across four South-East European (SEE) countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The review analysed 39 studies (36 journal papers and three conference papers) through **critical interpretive synthesis** (CIS). It served as a **groundwork** for this research, and it proposed research areas for future researchers. It depicted the cross-national differences among these four SEE countries through an **institutional lens** (precisely, through the Matten and Moon's (2008; 2020) explicit-implicit framework). The subchapter, initially, presents the descriptive findings of the review. It shows information about the journal titles and conference names, and it indicates the quality of them through the Impact Factor (2022), Scopus CiteScore (2023), ABS list (AJG 2021) and Scimago (2023). It presents the identified methodological and theoretical approach. It shows the level of analysis of the selected studies (the review classified them into individual, company, industry and cross-cultural studies). It briefly considers the industry focus among the studies. Afterwards, the subchapter presents the thematic chart and discusses the two main identified themes: CSR activities across South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) and the level of operation of CSR among these countries. It shows the identified reasons for the absence of the CSR mentality in the region and in each of these four countries and each country's understanding of CSR as a process. It shows the developed typology and a four-level conceptual framework for CSR operation. Specifically, it introduces the reader to the classified levels of CSR operation among these countries – the company, national, regional and international level. It presents the theoretical and practical contributions of this framework to the CSR field and its implications for business practitioners and policymakers. It also discusses the identified impact of the European Union (EU), as a regional actor, among these four countries. While critically discussing all of the abovementioned issues, this subchapter unveils a future research agenda for scholars willing to investigate the gaps in the region. Most importantly, this subchapter provides the baseline for this research. It shows an introductory understanding of CSR among these four countries, and it justifies one of the fundamental focuses of this research – the CSR differences between EU

(Croatia and Greece) and non-EU (Kosovo and Albania) member states in the South-East Europe region.

4.2 Descriptive Findings of the Review

This review included 39 studies (36 journal papers and three conference papers) that have investigated CSR or its implementation across one or several South-East European countries. The emphasis was placed on Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Nevertheless, this review also selected a few papers that, in addition to SEE countries, investigated countries outside SEE (e.g., Minoja et al., 2022). It included such papers only when the findings were important to the research questions, and it focused only on the findings relevant to the selected SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). The 39 reviewed studies used the term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) throughout their manuscripts; very few studies used interchangeable notions to describe CSR. For instance, Licastro and Sergi (2019) used CSR and sustainability interchangeably because of their interconnection; most studies that used such terms interchangeably (without reasoning) have been removed from the selection process due to criteria exclusion. Initially, this review looked into the publications (time, outlets and contextual characteristics). Given Mukherjee et al. (2023) recommendations, it identified the studies into empirical, conceptual and literature review. This review identified 31 empirical studies, one conceptual study, one systematic literature review and six empirical and conceptual (combined) studies. It classified the selected studies in accordance with the research design – qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods designs (a detailed explanation of the research methods is provided in the next sub-subchapter). It also identified the theoretical application for each study and it concluded that several of the chosen studies lacked theoretical application (only 19/39 engaged theoretical views).

This review looked into the level of analysis (mentioned in the previous paragraph) and identified such level(s) for each selected paper. So, the review classified the papers into (a) individual, (b) company, (c) industry and (d) cross cultural level of analysis. 22 out of 39 papers followed a multi-level analysis (two or more of the afore-mentioned level of analysis) and 17 out of 39 papers followed a single-level analysis. Most of the reviewed studies focused on the individual, company and industry level. In total, 22 out of 39 studies undertook company level of analysis. 18 out of 39

studies were industry-focused. The main industry covered by researchers is banking (6 out of 18 studies focused on banking). Besides banking, researcher focused on food, education, telecommunication, construction, hospitality and tourism industry. 16 out of 39 studies focused on individual level (such as, employees, consumers, residents, and business students and entrepreneurs). The researcher noted a lack of cross-cultural studies. Out of 39 studies, only nine studies undertook cross-cultural research. The presented information about these categories includes both, single and multi-level analysis. The above-mentioned and other characteristics of this review (including author/s' surname/s, journal or conference title, journal paper's publication year, country focus, level of analysis, methodological approach and theoretical approach) were previously presented under the 'data-extraction template' in Appendix 3.3.

4.2.1 Academic Journals and Conference Studies

The analysed papers were published in various journals and conferences in the field of management, business management, economics, and ethics, among others. Table 3.6 in Methodology chapter presented the title of the journals and names of the conferences of the analysed papers. To indicate the quality of the selected papers, this review identified the Impact Factor (2022) and the Scopus CiteScore (2023) for each of the journal. It also identified the ranking of the journals in the ABS list (AJG 2021) and Scimago (2023). Appendix 4.1 presents all the journals titles and the afore-said quality indicators (for each journal). It also shows the conference name, year and location for each selected conference paper. As seen in Appendix 4.1, SEE region has not attracted the attention of top-tier journals, except the Journal of Organizational Behavior (ABS 4; Q1) and the European Management Review (ABS 3; Q1). Both journals focused on Greece (European Management Review focused on Greece and Bulgaria). Most of the ABS list journals focused on Greece (with the exception of Business Ethics, the Environment and Responsibility (ABS 2), Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society (ABS 2) and International Journal of Cross Cultural Management (ABS 1), which focused on Kosovo and Albania).

This review showed that some of the main countries in the SEE region, besides Greece, have been neglected. Scholars have attempted to direct the attention of other scholars to such countries through editorial essays (such as Soulsby et al. (2021) in the Journal of Business Ethics) but mainly

emphasised the post-communist societies and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries. As presented above, Greece received the most attention among SEE countries. This focus can be ascribed to a few characteristics of Greece. First, Greece is referred as a developed country, and, up until now, the majority of CSR studies focused on developed countries. Second, the financial crisis of Greece (2007-2008) provided a unique ground for CSR scholars. Accordingly, CSR scholars investigated CSR in Greece during and after crisis (e.g., Magrizos et al., 2021). The neglect towards the rest of the region (particularly towards Kosovo, Albania and Croatia) can be a result of the lack of interest of the top-tier journals and the lack of interest of the academics to investigate these countries. Regardless of the reason of the neglect, this review presented that the region rarely makes it to the influential published peer-reviewed papers. When the latter countries are investigated, most of these studies are published in conference proceedings, local journals, book chapters and theses (e.g., Costopoulou et al., 2018; as presented in methodology chapter, chapters and theses have been removed from the selection process). Evidently, Greece received the most attention among these four countries. The researcher also noticed a proliferation of investigations on this topic in the last two years in Croatia. In contrast to Greece and Croatia, Albania and Kosovo have just begun to be studied by CSR scholars. This attention was mirrored in the CIS process of papers selection. The majority of the analysed papers were focused on Greece. A few papers were centered on Croatia, and a couple of them investigated CSR in Kosovo and Albania. Figure 4.2 below illustrates numerically the country-focus of each analysed paper (other countries refer to other SEE and outside SEE countries).

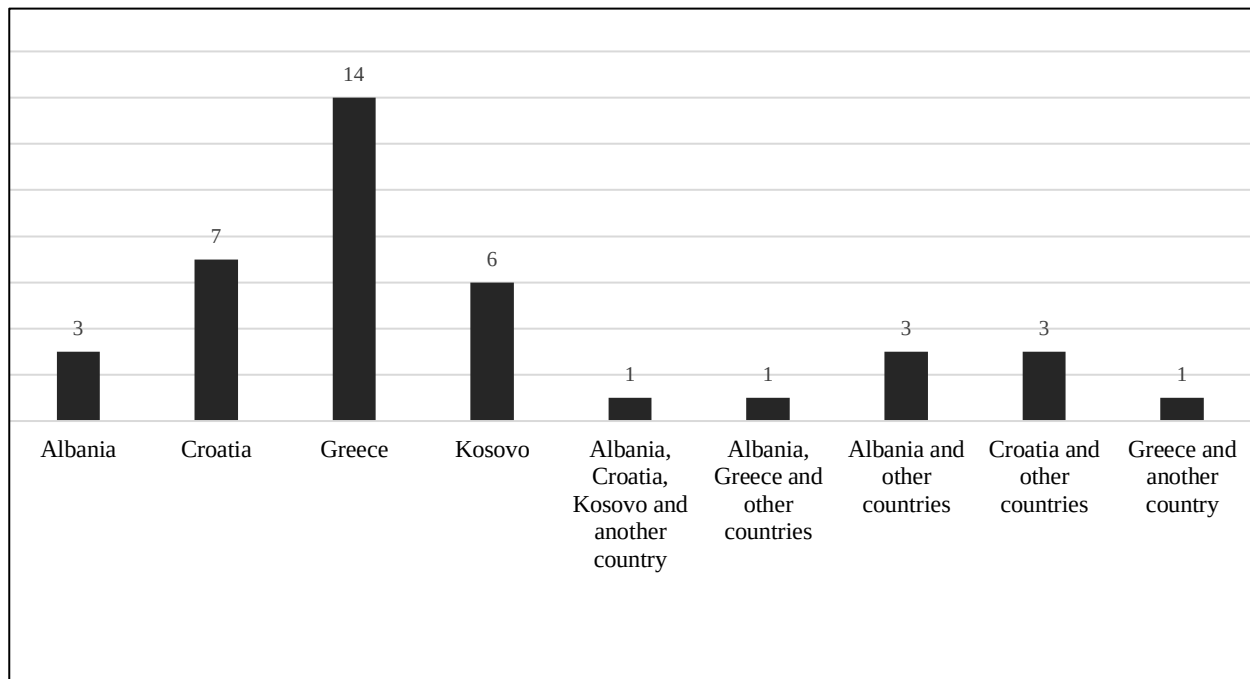


Figure 4.2 The Graphical Illustration of Country-Focus for each Analysed Paper in the Review

The researcher deemed it important to reiterate that the selection process was based on the recommendations provided by Depraetere et al. (2021) and Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) (as previously presented in the Methodology chapter) and did not intentionally mirror the number of articles (the researcher did not apply quota sampling).

In terms of time period, the researcher purposefully focused on the 2017-2022 period in order to depict the latest trends in the CSR studies in these four countries. Figure 4.2 presents below the number of selected papers for each year of the chosen period. The majority of the selected papers were published in 2021 – 11 out of the 39 chosen papers, and the fewest papers were published in 2022 – 3 out of 39 papers. Similar to the previous illustration, this numerical illustration does not mirror the number of articles published during that year (the researcher purposefully selected the papers).

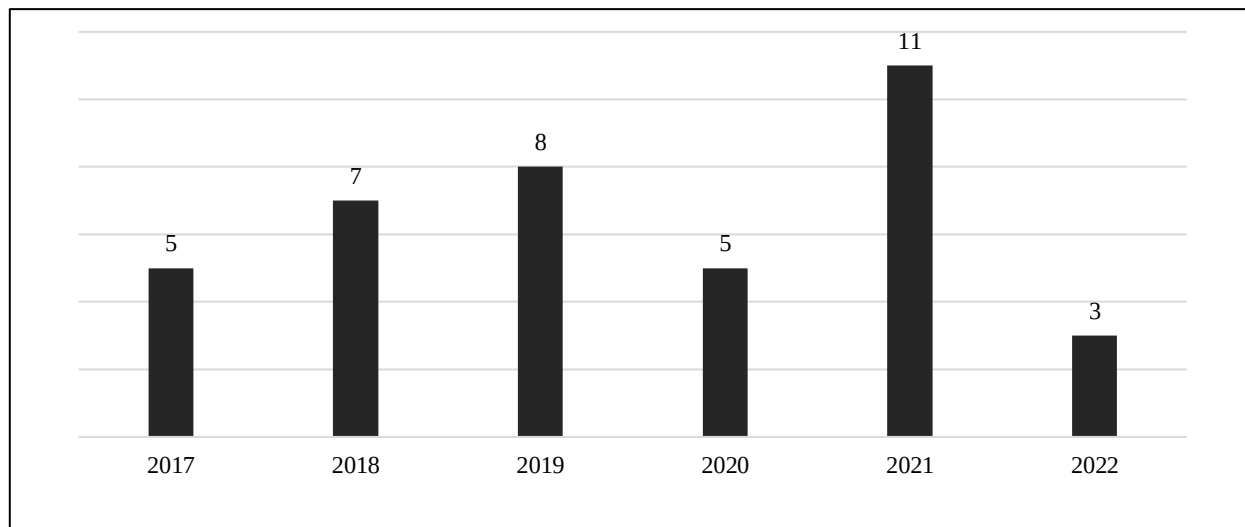


Figure 4.3 Distribution of the Analysed Papers in the Review per Year (time frame: 2017-2022)

4.2.2 Research Methodologies and Theoretical Approaches of the Analysed Papers

As previously mentioned, this review classified the selected studies in terms of research design – qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods designs. This classification is depicted in Figure 4.4 below. The review found that the majority of the selected studies, precisely 29 out of 39 papers employed quantitative methods (74,36%). The few other papers employed qualitative and mixed-methods designs. Particularly, seven out of 39 papers used qualitative approaches (17,94%), and two out of 39 papers conducted mixed methods (5,12%). One of them is a conceptual paper and it did not follow any approach (2,58%); consequently, it was not included in this classification. The researcher noted that even during the skimming of the potential papers for the review, the majority of scholars, who investigated CSR in these four countries conducted quantitative research. This preference can be attributed to the historical dominance of quantitative research in CSR field (Crane et al., 2018; Fatima and Elbana, 2023; Zaman et al., 2022). Given the lack of qualitative research, future scholars investigating CSR in the region could contribute methodologically by employing qualitative methods in a field dominated by quantitative methods. In terms of methods, the most common quantitative method was the questionnaire – 24 out of 29 quantitative papers employed questionnaires. The researcher noted that a considerable number of papers used second-

hand data. All seven of the qualitative papers and five quantitative papers based their research on second-hand data (such as, reports, legal acts, documents and company websites).

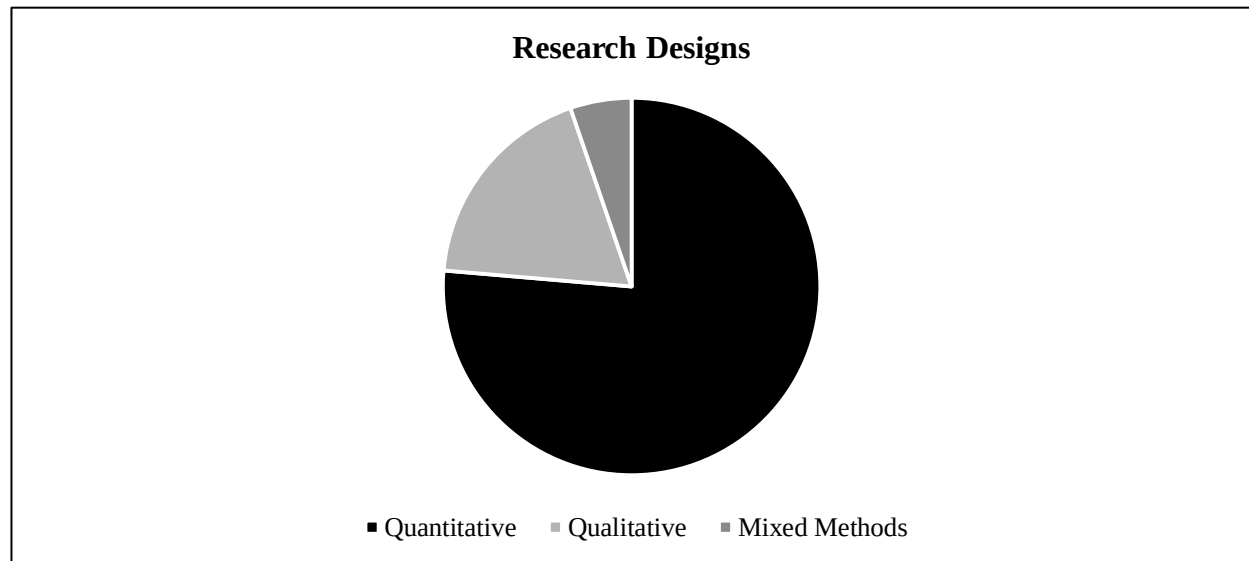


Figure 4.4 The Graphical Illustration of the Research Designs Employed in the Analysed Papers of this Review

This review showed a lack of qualitative first-hand data collection methods (such as interviews and focus groups) among the papers. The absence of these methods was also noted during the skimming process. Accordingly, future qualitative scholars researching CSR in SEE could employ qualitative first-hand data collection methods in their studies. Such methods are deemed suitable for investigating such topics by CSR scholars (Crane et al. 2018), especially for research that want to place focus on individual understanding of CSR. Consequently, this research employed three first-hand qualitative data collection methods.

In terms of quality appraisal (the aims of the research, the design, the process, data and the data analysis), this review noted that CSR studies focused on Kosovo, Albania and Croatia lack such appraisal (with few exceptions, e.g., Grabner-Kräuter et al., 2021; Melović et al., 2019 and Minoja et al., 2022). CSR studies on Greece, on the other hand, are deemed of high methodological quality. The absence of quality appraisal among Kosovar, Albanian and Croatian CSR studies can be ascribed to the quality of the published journals and conferences (discussed previously). Such an

absence among Kosovar and Albanian studies can be attributed to the level of their education system. None of the countries (Kosovo and Albania) has a well-established system. As a new country, Kosovo has a short education system history (Zabeli et al., 2021). Similar to Kosovo, Albania has a short higher education history. In addition to that, as post-communist country, Albania had to undergo several reforms during the last three decades, which influenced their higher education system (EC, 2023). In terms of theory, half of the analysed papers (20 out of 39) did not include theoretical approach. Papers that investigated CSR through theoretical lens used various theoretical underpinning. The main theoretical underpinnings were stakeholder and legitimacy theory. In addition to them, these papers used instrumental theory, natural resource-based view, attribution and social learning theory and leadership and trait theory, among others. 12 out of 20 papers adopted a single-theory approach, and eight out of 20 papers adopted a multi-theory approach. The lack of the theoretical approach among these papers can be attributed to the quality and rank of published journals and the personal preferences of scholars.

4.3 The Key Themes (Subjects) Identified from the Reviewed Articles

To attain synthesising arguments, the researcher identified key themes and sub-themes. The two key themes, several sub-themes and synthetic concepts are presented in Figure 4.5. The next two sub-subchapters discuss each of the key theme in detail. The researcher created this thematic chart after assessing the findings of the 39 selected studies.

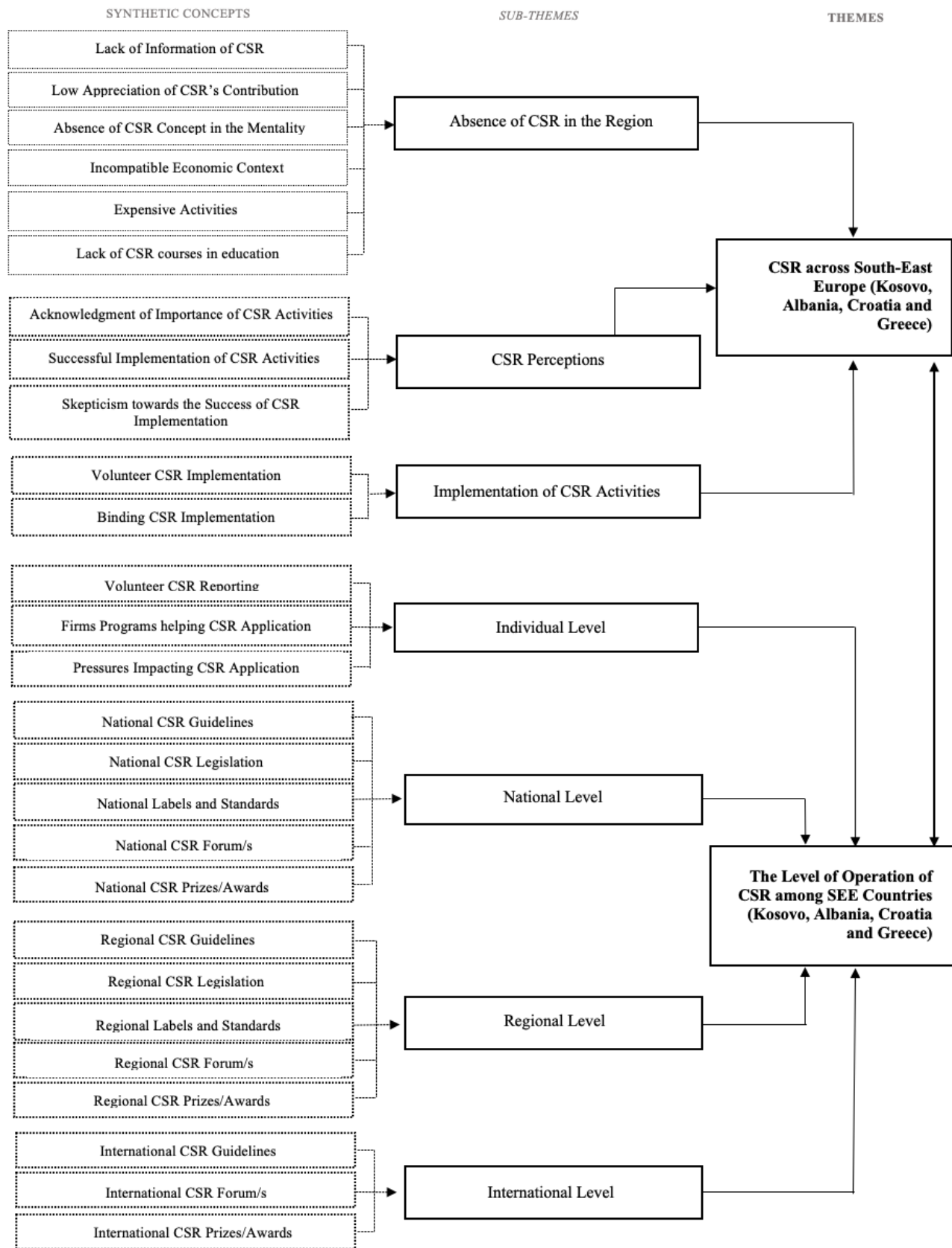


Figure 4. 5 Thematic Chart for Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS)

4.3.1 CSR across South-East Europe (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)

This review showed a generally low level of CSR awareness and implementation in the SEE region. It showed that Greece and Croatia (EU member states) make an exception as CSR awareness and implementation in these two countries have increased in recent years (Papacharalampous et al., 2019). The CSR discourse in Greece and Croatia has received reciprocal attention in academia. In the initial search (without time filter), academic databases identified 19047 results in Greece and 7227 results in Croatia (return to Appendix 3.2 to see initial search results). The researcher observed that CSR literature in Greece is at a different maturity level compared to literature in Croatia, Albania and Kosovo. The initial search showed that Greek scholars have researched CSR-related topics for the last two decades (e.g., Giannarakis, 2009). Scholars from Croatia have focused on CSR in the last decade. On the other hand, scholars from Kosovo and Albania have just begun acknowledging the importance of investigating CSR; they have focused on CSR field, mainly, in the last five years (Berisha et al., 2022; Minoja et al., 2022). The academic databases counted 4309 results for Kosovo and Albania, precisely 1825 in Kosovo and 2484 in Albania. CSR studies in these countries (Kosovo and Albania) mainly focus on CSR awareness. The absence of CSR literature can be attributed to the absence of CSR concept among practitioners. Similar to scholars, practitioners in Kosovo and Albania have just begun acknowledging the importance of CSR activities (Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter, 2020).

This review showed that, overall, the SEE region lacks a CSR mentality. The absence of this concept in the region comes from (a) the lack of information on CSR (Pitoska et al., 2018; Proikaki et al., 2018), (b) the complex mentality of the region (Perić and Turalija, 2018), (c) the non-recognition of the CSR benefits to society and the businesses (Butković et al., 2021), (d) the lack of company's international operations/collaborations (Papacharalampous et al., 2019;) (e) the EU accession level (the absence or presence of EU membership; Perić and Turalija, 2017; Melović et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2020), (f) national politics (Apospori, 2018), (g) slow economic development (Perić and Turalija, 2017) and (h) the lack of inclusion of CSR courses in education programs (Perić and Turalija, 2018; Berisha et al., 2022). This review considered that the absence of the CSR concept in the region is inconsistent with the involvement of stakeholders in raising CSR awareness. Businesses in SEE are pressured to be aware of and implement CSR activities by their

respective governments, the public, media, academic community, CSR forums, employees, and particularly by regional and international actors like the EU and UN (Grabner-Kräuter et al., 2021; Melović et al., 2019; Barić et al., 2021; Butković et al., 2021). Yet, businesses in these countries rarely apply CSR activities. The ones that employ CSR activities are mainly large businesses (from the banking and telecom sectors; Melović et al., 2019; Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter, 2020) or international companies that act in these countries (Barić et al., 2021). On the other hand, small and medium-sized enterprises lack information (Pitoska et al., 2018) and interest in CSR activities (Apospori, 2018). Managers of small and medium-sized enterprises are mainly unfamiliar with the CSR notion and its activities (Apospori, 2018). The ones aware of the concept rarely implement CSR initiatives or report their CSR practices, as they perceive them as expensive (Chatzoglou et al., 2017).

The majority of scholars (from the reviewed papers) implied that CSR is strategic in its nature (e.g. Perić et al., 2017; Dropulić and Čular, 2019; Jupe and Bejko, 2020; Partalidou et al., 2020; Barić et al., 2021; Bekteshi et al., 2021; Glaveli, 2021; Papacharalampous and Papadimitriou, 2021; Trivellas et al., 2021). These scholars, with some exceptions (presented in the next sentence), did not directly emphasise the strategic nature of CSR. Partalidou et al. (2020), Barić et al. (2021), Bekteshi et al. (2021), Glaveli (2021) and Papacharalampous and Papadimitriou (2021) straightforwardly highlighted the strategic CSR. Bekteshi et al. (2021) noted a strategic CSR approach among small and medium-sized enterprises, too. On the other hand, Perić and Turalija (2018) stated that Croatian companies view CSR as a philanthropic and individual approach (rather than strategic). Panagiotopoulos (2021) was the only scholars to mention a hybrid of tactical and strategical CSR among Greek companies. The researcher identified that companies in the region (regardless of size) apply CSR practices to:

- (a) achieve and retain a good image (Chatzoglou et al., 2017; Perić and Turalija, 2018; Vila et al., 2021),
- (b) respond to the increasing pressure of stakeholders to disclose their social and environmental activities (Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter, 2020),
- (c) attain employee satisfaction and loyalty (Vlachos et al., 2017; Vučemilović, 2019; Jupe and Bejko, 2020; Grabner-Kräuter et al., 2021),

(d) obtain better economic performance (Partalidou et al., 2020; Bekteshi et al., 2021; Nimani et al. 2022) and

(e) achieve competitive advantage (Proda, 2017; Perić and Turalija, 2018; Vila et al., 2021; Barić et al., 2021).

The researcher observed that none of the reviewed papers purposefully or straightforwardly conceptualised CSR. These papers, nevertheless, presented several CSR activities taken by companies in these four countries. The researcher identified these activities and presented them in Table 4.1 below. The researcher noticed that none of the papers mentioned activities in terms of slow movement and green living. Likewise, Serafimova et al (2017) noticed that companies in the region have not yet embraced such trending movements.

	CSR Activity	Author(s)
COMPANY LEVEL	CSR Reporting (corporate reports, press releases, corporate websites)	Costopoulou et al. (2018); Dropulić and Čular (2019); Levkov and Palamidovska-Sterjadovska (2019); Vila et al. (2019); Jupe and Bejko (2020); Partalidou et al. (2020); Barić et al. (2021); Glaveli (2021)
	Codes of Conduct (Codes of Ethics) and Standards	Perić and Turalija (2018); Pitoska et al. (2018); Dropulić and Čular (2019); Papacharalampous et al. (2019)
	Employee Rights	Dropulić and Čular (2019); Jupe and Bejko (2020); Barić et al. (2021)
	Employee Satisfaction	Golja (2019); Jupe and Bejko (2020); Barić et al. (2021); Bekteshi et al. (2021); Grabner-Kräuter et al. (2021); Panagiotopoulos (2021); Papacharalampous and Papadimitriou (2021); Trivellas et al. (2021)
	Unemployment Reduction	Serafimova (2017); Dropulić and Čular (2019); Golja (2019); Vila et al. (2019);

	Anti-Corruption Program	Dropulić and Čular (2019); Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter (2020)
	Charitable or Humanitarian Work (donations, sponsorships, humanitarian programs)	Perić and Turalija (2018); Dropulić and Čular (2019); Jupe and Bejko (2020); Barić et al. (2021); Panagiotopoulos (2021); Papacharalampous and Papadimitriou (2021); Trivellas et al. (2021)
	Environmental Protection (donations, internal politics, production)	Dropulić and Čular (2019); Golja (2019); Levkov and Palamidovska-Sterjadovska (2019); Jupe and Bejko (2020); Barić et al. (2021); Licastro and Sergi (2021); Trivellas et al. (2021)
	Customer Satisfaction and Rewarding	Chatzoglou et al. (2017); Dropulić and Čular (2019); Glaveli (2021)
	Fair Trade	Serafimova (2017); Barić et al. (2021)
	Cause-related Marketing Programs	Perić and Turalija (2018); Golja (2019)

Table 4.1 CSR Activities at Company Level among SEE Countries (Greece, Croatia, Kosovo and Albania)

Similar to the findings of Crane et al. (2018), Thorne et al. (2017) and Jackson et al. (2020) (presented in the literature review chapter), this review indicated that the national context significantly impacts CSR implementation. Such an impact was noticed by a few of the analysed papers, which conducted cross-cultural investigations. For instance, Melović et al. (2019) and Minoja et al. (2022) implied that CSR and its implementation differ across countries. This review noticed a few differences among Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece at national level. Each of the four countries apply different approaches towards CSR. The level of operation of CSR in each country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) is discussed in detail in the next sub-subchapter. In addition to differences at national level, this review noticed differences at regional institutionalisation. As presented from the beginning, these four countries are either EU (Greece

and Croatia) or non-EU (Kosovo and Albania) members. This categorisation was reflected in the findings of this review. The findings evidenced that CSR implantation differs among EU and non-EU member countries.

This review indicated implicit and explicit CSR occur in the SEE region (among these countries). It showed that CSR practices move towards implicit among non-EU member states and explicit among EU member states. An imperative implicit CSR factor in the CSR application across these countries is the regional organisation of the EU (Melović et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2020). Regardless of the dominance of explicit CSR practices among EU member states, the EU's legislation and guidelines largely determine the path of CSR for EU member states in SEE (precisely, Greece and Croatia). Compared to Kosovo and Albania (non-EU member states), Greece and Croatia (EU member states) are (a) more aware of the CSR concept, (b) appreciate CSR's contribution to the company, (c) implement diverse CSR activities (Perić and Turalija, 2017; Arraiano and Hategan, 2019; Barić et al., 2021; Butković et al., 2021). For instance, Perić and Turalija (2017) (one of the papers included in the review) stated, “[i]t may be said that Croatian membership in the European Union was the main trigger for the introduction of the concept of social corporate responsibility in everyday work and activities (p. 37).” The better position of Greece and Croatia (EU member states) in the CSR spectrum can be attributed also to (a) their development (they are considered developed countries), (b) strong economies and (c) high rate of economic growth.

EU's guidelines also inform non-EU member states in SEE (Kosovo and Albania) regarding CSR importance and application (as these countries are candidates or possible candidates of the EU; Melović et al., 2019). This review showed that the EU indirectly impacts the implementation of CSR in Kosovo and Albania (Jupe and Bejko, 2020). So, this review suggested that the presence or lack of institutional pressure, like the EU, influences the application of CSR at the national level (which directly and indirectly impacts the company level among EU member states and non-EU member states, respectively). This review also demonstrated Matten and Moon's (2008) prediction for the region that explicit CSR will expand towards all of Europe and beyond. It showed that companies in EU member states adopt an explicit commitment towards CSR, whereas companies in non-EU member states have yet to demonstrate Matten and Moon's (2008) prediction. Accordingly, non-EU member states adopt an implicit CSR. These claims are illustrated in Figure

4.6 below. Yet, the researcher deemed it important to highlight that EU and non-EU member states in SEE do not commit only one form of CSR – implicit or explicit. They adopt a **hybrid adoption of CSR**, but one form of CSR always dominates. In SEE, explicit CSR is dominant among EU member states (Greece and Croatia) and implicit CSR is dominant non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania).



Figure 4.6 An Illustration of Explicit and Implicit CSR in SEE Region

In addition to the national context, this review states that the lack of CSR implementation among SEE countries emerges from (a) the absence of this concept in SEE mentality, (b) the low appreciation of CSR’s contribution to business performance (Partalidou et al., 2020), (c) incompatible economic and social contexts (Melović et al., 2019), (d) the lack of regulatory imperatives (Licastro and Sergi, 2021), (e) the absence of leaders, who lead socially responsible entities (Trivellas et al., 2021) and (f) the lack of knowledge and skills to implement CSR (Melović et al., 2021). It concludes that current knowledge on this matter is insufficient, and future studies should enrich the CSR literature in this region (Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter, 2020; Bekteshi et al., 2021).

4.3.2 The Level of Operation of CSR among SEE Countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)

This review noticed that each of the studied SEE countries differs at the company, national and regional level; nonetheless, all countries directly or indirectly adhere to the pressures from international non-governmental organisations (Butković et al., 2021). Each SEE country has

different legislation, guidelines, forums, prizes or awards. Despite the pressure from stakeholders, Kosovo is the only country in the region that does not have specific national legislation about CSR (Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter, 2020). All countries have bodies or platforms that offer guidelines to companies willing to embrace CSR (Proda, 2017; Melović et al., 2021). All countries have had CSR forums for several years (Papacharalampous et al., 2019; Grabner-Kräuter et al., 2021). Greece and Croatia, as developed countries when compared to the rest of the region, created such forums earlier than the rest (Papacharalampous et al., 2019). Kosovo does not offer prizes or awards to socially responsible companies. At the regional level, all SEE countries are accountable to the same guidelines and standards, and all are members of CSR Europe. Lastly, all SEE countries adhere to guidelines and standards introduced by international non-governmental organisations (Barić et al., 2021; Butković et al., 2021; Melović et al., 2021). Table 4.2 presents an overview of the national, regional and international levels for each of these four SEE country based on the 39 reviewed paper.

		EU member States		Non-EU Member States	
		Greece	Croatia	Kosovo	Albania
NATIONAL LEVEL	Legislation	A National CSR Agenda	A National CSR Agenda	No	National Criteria for CSR/ National Action Plan on CSR 2011-2014
	Guidelines	The Greek Sustainability Code (2019)	Environmental Permit – A Brief Guide to the Public (2019)	Code of Ethics and Corporate Government (2014)	National Platform (2011)
	Forums	CSR Hellas (2000)	Croatian Business Council for Sustainable	CSR Kosova (2011)	Albanian CSR Network (2015)

			Development (1997)		
	Prizes/Awards	Hellenic Responsible Business Awards (annually)	CSR Index Awards (annually)	No	CSR Prize (2015)
REGIONAL LEVEL	Legislation	Directive 2014/95/EU On non-financial reporting		No	No
	Guidelines	EU Corporate Social Responsibility and Responsible Business Conduct; European Commission Strategy on CSR			
	Standards	The Business Social Compliance Initiative; Environmental Management and Audit Scheme			
	Forums	CSR Europe (all states)			
	Prizes/Awards	They are all accountable for any regional CSR prizes/awards			
	Prizes/Awards (won)	No	European CSR Award (2013)	No	No
INTERNATIONAL LEVEL	Guidelines	The UN Global Compact The 2030 Agenda OECD Guidelines Principles for Responsible Investment			
	Standards	ISO 9001/ ISO 14001/ OHSAS 18001/ SA 8000			
	Prizes/Awards	They are all accountable to any international CSR prizes/awards			

Table 4.2 Different Levels of CSR Practices in SEE Countries (Greece, Croatia, Kosovo and Albania)

Based on the analysis, this review claimed that CSR in SEE should be categorised into four groupings based on the actor level:

- 1) **company level** (companies),
- 2) **national level** (countries, national regulatory groups, local NGOs),
- 3) **regional level** (regional non-governmental and governmental organisations), and

4) **international level** (international non-governmental organisations).

The **first level** is individualistic in nature. It focuses on the companies. Primarily, it focuses on company's CSR awareness. As presented above, CSR awareness is a crucial factor in CSR operation. Secondly, this level highlights the company's CSR perception. Companies in SEE viewed CSR either as strategic or tactic. Both CSR awareness and CSR perception in SEE are impacted by coercive (externally codified rules and laws) and normative pressures. Thirdly, this level includes CSR actions that directly and indirectly impact companies core principles and their positioning on the CSR spectrum. Companies in SEE countries are pressured to implement CSR activities by various stakeholders. Stakeholder pressure comes from national (Perić and Turalija, 2017), regional and international levels (Grabner-Kräuter et al., 2021; Barić et al., 2021; Butković et al., 2021). CSR actions can also impact several stakeholders (Grabner-Kräuter et al., 2021). Companies in SEE implement several CSR activities, such as CSR reports, codes of conduct (codes of ethics) and standards, employee-related activities (employee rights, employee satisfaction and unemployment reduction), anti-corruption programs, charitable and humanitarian work, environmental protection activities, customer satisfaction and rewarding, fair trade and marketing-related activities (Proda, 2017; Pitoska et al., 2018; Trivellas et al., 2021). Ideally, companies' CSR actions should be voluntary (explicit) in nature. Such activities should show what the company stands for; they should encourage employees and their stakeholders to contribute to social and environmental objectives (Vlachos et al., 2017) and add value to the development and loyalty of CSR (Vučemilović, 2019). This review showed that companies in the EU-member states (Croatia and Greece), different from non-EU member states, incline towards explicit commitment (Partalidou et al., 2020). Companies in non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania) rarely take voluntary steps to implement CSR in their organisations (with few expectations; see Melović et al., 2021). Accordingly, this review challenged the findings of Jamali et al. (2017) and Khan et al. (2021). Companies in developing countries (in this case, non-EU member states) are not necessarily philanthropic and do not incline towards explicit CSR activities due to religious and cultural values. In most companies in Kosovo and Albania, CSR implementation does not occur willingly. Particularly, large companies in Kosovo and Albania generally adopt an implicit commitment towards CSR (Papacharalampous et al., 2019; Butković et al., 2021). Small and

medium companies, on the other hand, tend to neglect (intentionally or unintentionally) such practices (Proda, 2017; Apospori, 2018).

The **national level** refers to actions taken by the company to comply with the expectations of countries, national regulatory groups and local NGOs. At this level, companies should follow national CSR guidelines, labels and standards and CSR legislation (Proda, 2017). They should participate in national CSR forums and be able to receive prizes and awards for their CSR actions (Melović et al., 2021). Ideally, companies should implement this stage voluntarily (Trivellas et al., 2021). However, many national actors oblige companies to follow some of these activities (Butković et al., 2021). Such activities help improve the position of the company on the CSR spectrum. Scholars claim that in developing countries, CSR lacks institutionalisation and experiences institutional complexity (Soundararajan et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2021). This claim is accurate about non-EU member states in SEE, namely, Kosovo and Albania. The situation is not the same when it comes to developed countries in the EU, like Croatia and Greece. Table 1 shows that CSR among EU member states in SEE is formalised and institutionalised. Table 1 also presents the other SEE countries' stance towards national-level CSR activities. It shows that non-EU member states in the SEE region have national legislations that require companies to adopt CSR and its activities, but they are not obligatory.

The **third level** is regional. At this level, companies are recommended or obliged to follow CSR activities from regional non-governmental and governmental organisations (Apospori, 2018; Butković et al., 2021). This level depends on the location of the companies, as South-East European countries belong to EU or non-EU member states. Companies located in EU member states (Croatia and Greece) have to follow EU CSR guidelines, labels, standards, and legislation (e.g., Directive 2014/95/EU on non-financial reporting; Apospori, 2018; Arraino and Hategan, 2019; Aureli et al., 2020), and they are expected to participate in the EU CSR forum (Melović et al., 2021). Companies not located in EU member states (Kosovo and Albania) are not obliged to follow the EU CSR actions (Proda, 2017). Yet, given their geographical position (within the European continent) and their willingness to join the EU (Melović et al., 2021), they are recommended to follow EU CSR-related guidelines, participate in the EU CSR forum, and they can receive EU CSR prizes and awards. At this level, both groupings follow implicit practices of

CSR. This review shows that companies in this region have performed satisfactory CSR when they have followed the EU recommendations (Papacharalampous et al., 2019; Butković et al., 2021). So, implicit CSR successfully impacted the implementation of such practices. This review shows that EU member states in the region implement better CSR than non-EU member states. Implicit CSR is more effective when required (rather than recommended) by a regional actor.

The last actor level is the **international level**. At this stage, companies are recommended to follow the suggestions of international non-governmental organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Serafimova, 2017; Melović et al., 2021). They should follow international labels, standards and international guidelines, and they can receive CSR prizes and awards. All companies in SEE should follow these suggestions, but they are not obliged. So, this review agrees with Lu et al. (2020) reasoning that international actors play a crucial role in the region in raising CSR awareness. It also shows that international actors impact the companies in SEE countries, which claim to follow their recommendations. This influence is a result of the geopolitical landscape of the countries, as Jamali et al. (2020) stated.

This categorisation is portrayed in a framework (see Figure 4.6). The framework serves as a guideline for managers/owners willing to adopt CSR activities in their organisations, and it could also be applied or tested by companies in other developing countries. The framework shows the impact of institutional pressure in embracing CSR activities. While it is aware of the differences among companies, it is isomorphic in its foundation. Companies should carefully go through each level and follow them as they embrace CSR procedures – ideally, levels are sequential. Nonetheless, considering the impact of different factors/drivers in CSR implementation, the researcher recognised that companies might follow a non-sequential application. Lastly, this framework does not differentiate among company sizes (micro, small, medium or large).

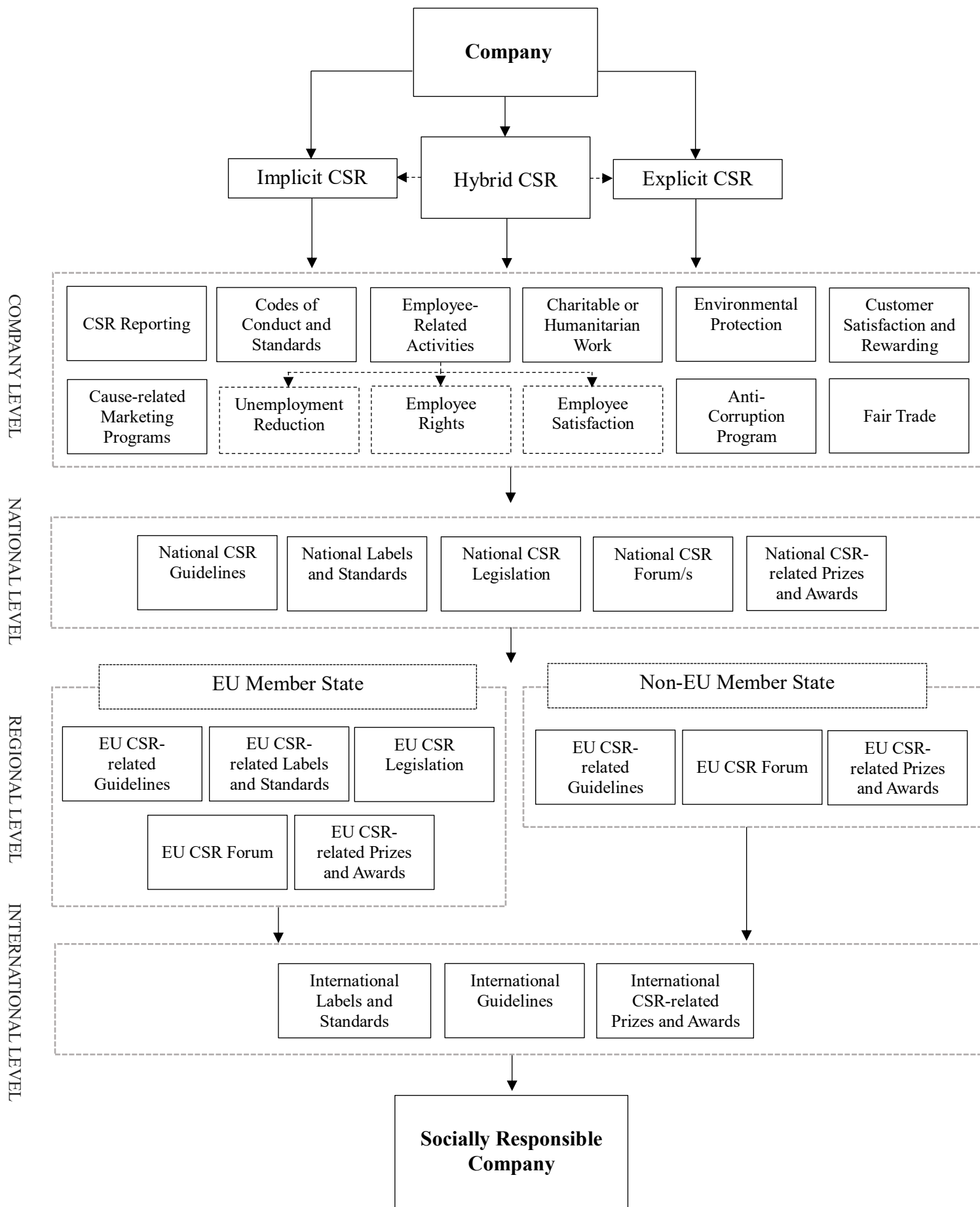


Figure 4.7 The Four-Level Conceptual Framework

4.4 Conclusion of the Chapter

This review collected and analysed 39 papers (36 journal and three conference papers) through critical interpretive synthesis (CIS). It investigated the diversity and dynamics of CSR in less-studied countries in the South-East Europe region – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. It employed institutional theory, namely Matten and Moon's (2008) framework, to discuss the findings of the analysis. The analysis resulted in two key themes: (1) CSR activities across Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece and (2) the level of operation of CSR in SEE region (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). The review presented the perceptions of these four SEE countries about CSR and its activities. It showed that, in general, companies in these four SEE countries do not truly grasp CSR as a concept. It argued that these countries generally lack a CSR mentality, and companies in the region lack a full implementation of CSR. Nevertheless, each of the four countries from SEE has differences in CSR implementation and level of operation. Their unique situations shape the application of CSR. Peculiarly, each SEE country's national context has a notable impact on the implementation of CSR among companies (Melović et al., 2019; Georgieva et al., 2021; Stojanović et al., 2021; Minoja et al., 2022). The regional actor in the region – the EU, is the principal institutional distinction. Besides the regional level, this actor impacts the company and national levels of CSR operation (Butković et al., 2021). This regional actor positively impacts the performance of CSR among these EU-member states in the region (Croatia and Greece) compared to non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania). So, this review claimed that a higher political and economic union, such as the EU, has an immense impact on the implementation of CSR in the region. Precisely, the EU impacts the success of implicit CSR practices. The review provided information on legislation, guidelines, standards, forums, and prizes/awards for each four SEE countries, as Arora et al. (2020) recommended. It developed a typology for CSR activities taken at the actor level: 1) company, 2) national, 3) regional, and 4) international level. This typology led to Figure 4.6 (the four-level conceptual framework), which presented CSR initiatives taken by the actor level and guided companies willing to embrace CSR in their organisation. The main contribution of this review is the analysis of cross-national differences among these SEE countries regarding CSR implementation, particularly the differences between EU and non-EU

member states in SEE. This review can also be considered as a first attempt of CSR conceptualisation in SEE context.

4.4.1 Identified Gaps from CIS Findings

As mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, this review served as a base for this research. It presented the current CSR situation in SEE region, precisely in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. It provided the researcher with specific information on the interested topic. This review identified new research gaps (some of which are presented in Recommendations for Future Research sub-chapter) and supported previously-identified research gaps (presented in the Literature Review chapter). The identified gaps supported the researcher's choices for the rest of the research. These gaps that supported the rest of this research are presented below.

(1) The review showed that, in most cases, scholars (who investigated these four countries) focused on large companies and neglected micro, small and medium-sized companies. As stated in the Literature Review chapter, more than 90% of the economy of these four countries is composed of SMEs. Accordingly, the lack of investigations of SMEs should be tackled. The importance of investigating SMEs was highlighted in the Literature Review chapter. The findings of this review further support the focus of this research on SMEs – SMEs offer fertile grounds for research. While SMEs have started to grab the attention of CSR scholars in SEE, their importance in the region has not been sufficiently depicted (Magrizos et al., 2021) and needs further investigation. The review also showed that, in rare cases, scholars did not differentiate among company size. As presented in the Literature review chapter, the company size is a fundamental factor in CSR studies. This research tackled the lack of difference among company sizes and focused solely on one grouping – SMEs.

(2) The review showed that CSR studies in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece lack theoretical approach. Only 19 out of 39 studies engaged theoretical views. The importance of including theories in CSR investigations was emphasized several times in this thesis. The review findings further support the importance of theories in CSR investigations. By providing a theoretical lens in this research, the researcher advanced the integration of theory in CSR studies (Wang et al., 2020). In addition, only eight out of 39 studies adopted a multi-theory approach. To researcher responded to this lack by employing a multi-theory approach in this research.

- (3) The review showed that some of the analysed studies have investigated cross-national differences (e.g., Melović et al., 2021). Yet, none of the studies have investigated these four countries, and none of them have looked at the differences between EU and non-EU member countries in this region. To researcher's knowledge, this research is the first to investigate these countries and review the literature in the region.
- (4) The review revealed that EU plays a crucial role in CSR among these four countries. This finding reinforced the decision of the researcher to compare EU and non-EU member states in SEE Europe (precisely, Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece).
- (5) The review showed that 21 out of 39 studies lacked industry-focused. Thus, this research decided to investigate CSR in an industry-context.
- (6) Lastly, the review displayed an absence of quality appraisal, especially among studies in Kosovo and Albania. The review showed that only seven out of 39 papers employed qualitative methods. The lack of qualitative methods reiterated the decision of the researcher to employ qualitative methods.

5. Findings from the Interviews with Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

5.1 Introduction of the Chapter

This section presents a detailed discussion of the perceptions of fashion small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) owners and managers (from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) on corporate social responsibility and its implementation. The researcher structured the section in accordance with the CSR implementation steps. As mentioned in the literature review, this research adopted the four steps recommended by Fatima and Elbanna (2023): (1) CSR awareness (organisation's commitment to CSR), (2) CSR communication, (3) CSR embedding and (4) CSR evaluation. During the thematic analysis, the researcher identified another step – CSR understanding. The researcher considered fundamental the influence of CSR understanding on this process. Accordingly, this step is included in the discussion of the findings, and it is discussed in detail in the discussion chapter. Based on the findings, the researcher placed this as step as the second one in the CSR implementation process.

This section, initially, depicts the CSR awareness among owners and managers of Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Secondly, it illustrates and conceptualises the understanding of CSR of each interviewee. It identifies the main CSR drivers for each respective country. Afterwards, it explains in detail the process of CSR embedding. It focuses on the internal and external CSR activities, and it emphasises the implicit, explicit or hybrid nature of them. It also explains the CSR evaluation and the main CSR barriers faced by fashion SMEs. Lastly, it discusses the influence of COVID-19 pandemic in the CSR implementation process. Throughout the section, the researcher compared and contrasted the findings of each country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). Based on the findings, the researcher created two empirical frameworks, which focused on (1) CSR awareness and (2) CSR communication, respectively.

5.2 CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

5.2.1 CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Kosovo

During the discussions with each owner and manager of fashion SMEs in Kosovo, the researcher noticed that all of them are aware of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) term. Most of the owners and managers (with the exception of K1) disclosed that they were introduced to the term in the last five to six years. K1, owner-manager of a small-sized social enterprise, stated, “*I was introduced to the term and the process **many years ago**, around twelve years ago...*” K3, owner-manager of a medium-sized enterprise, was unclear of the CSR term in the beginning. He said, “*No [paused] I am not sure I have heard of it [confused]...*” After the researcher explained the term to him, he recalled that one of their international business partners (an Italian company) obliged his company to fulfill a few requirements, which he referred as CSR requirements.

All Kosovar owners and managers were introduced to the term in the last years from different actors. Most of them were presented to the term through trainings offered by local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in Kosovo. K4, owner-manager of a small-sized social enterprise, was first informed about CSR through Kosovo CSR Network. She stated that she and her sisters (co-founders of their enterprise) developed their knowledge on social responsibilities by participating in a few training sessions held by international NGOs. Alike the majority of Kosovar owners and managers, K6 (owner of a small-sized enterprise) claimed that he became aware of CSR through a session held by an EU-funded program. K1 was also introduced to the term through an international organisation’s training session several years ago. He explained,

*“...Initially, I didn't know it as a term. During the **training**, I asked if they could explain to me what CSR means [laughs] and who would have thought that today I constantly try to incorporate this term in our business in every aspect, especially in the environmental one.”*

Out of six owner and managers, K5 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) was the only one introduced to the term during his bachelor studies. He stated that regardless of the term awareness, one develops knowledge on it while working.

Although the interviewees were aware of the concept, K1 and K4 (owners-managers of small-sized social enterprises) claimed an absence of the CSR concept in their country. They expressed their resentment with the current CSR situation in Kosovo. They ascribed the lack of information of businesses social responsibilities to several actors. K4 hold the country accountable. According to her, “... *when you start a business in Kosovo, you’re not really informed of your social responsibilities as a business ... there’s **no manual** to correctly explain such responsibilities...*” Similar to K4, K1 stated that the country does not provide adequate guidelines and legislations for enterprises, especially for social enterprises. Kosovo did not ratify the law for social enterprises until December 2018 (Berisha, 2019). K1 attributed this negligence to the country’s government and their lack of interest about social responsibilities. Other owners and managers ascribed the lack of CSR concept in the fashion industry to the fashion companies, precisely the central figures of the companies. K5 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) believes that the issue with CSR in Kosovo is not the CSR unawareness, but the unwillingness of owners or managers to adopt CSR practices into their businesses. He stated,

*“... I believe that managers and owners are aware of CSR, but they are **not willing to implement CSR strategies** into their businesses. I think it’s the **mentality**. We lack such a mentality. The main focus of managers and owners is **financial gain**. To put it frankly, their focus is making quick money.”*

K4 and K1 believe that the current situation in Kosovo would be different if companies were required to obey environmental protection laws and report their activities. K1 criticised the activities of other fashion companies in Kosovo. He stated that “...*there are many fashion companies, especially in Gjakovë [city in Kosovo], that throw textile waste in nature or burn it...*” K1, who is also an environmentalist, claimed that such environmental unfriendly activities influenced the creation of his enterprise and determined his enterprise’s main principles.

5.2.2 CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Albania

Similar to owners and managers of fashion SMEs in Kosovo, fashion SME owners and manager in Albania are aware of the CSR term. All of them claimed that they are well informed of CSR.

For instance, A1 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) noted, “... *at our fashion studio, corporate social responsibility is an integral part of our business philosophy...*” Albanian fashion SME owners and managers were informed about CSR term from different actors. A3 stated, “*I was first introduced to it years ago – around 5 years ago, when one of my clients wanted a campaign on CSR.*” A1, A2 (owners and managers of small-sized enterprises) and A4 (manager of a medium-sized enterprise) were introduced to the term during their studies in business. A2 stated, “...*I was introduced to the term in school, in a **business class**.*” A1, A2 and A4 studied abroad in European universities. They all admitted that their education impacted their knowledge on CSR and CSR practices within their enterprises. The researcher noticed that all of the SME owners and managers from Albania belong to generation Y and generation Z. The impact of age in their CSR awareness was mentioned by the interviewees themselves. A1 pointed out “*as a **Gen-Z** business founder, I have grown with lots of information about climate change...*”. A2 claimed that although the majority of Albanian owners and managers do not grasp the CSR concept, younger people have started to be mindful of it mainly because it “...*is becoming a **trend among young people** worldwide.*”

Similar to Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers, Albanians noticed an unawareness of CSR and its practices. A2 and A1, in particular, highlighted the lack of understanding, embracement and appreciation of such practices in the fashion industry in Albania. The lack of appreciation impacted A1’s company geographic distribution. A1 introduced collections to international markets, mainly to central areas of Europe, USA and East Asia because she deemed that “...*there is a grander appreciation of such practices...*” A3 (owner of a small-sized enterprise) referred to similar struggles. Her company’s geographic distribution remains in the region, mainly in Albania (80%), and partly in Kosovo (15%) and North Macedonia (5%). Regardless of the difficulties that the company faces to convey its socially responsible practices, A3 mentioned that their company has managed to gain customers that “...*make social impact[s]...*” by purchasing their products.

5.2.3 CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Croatia

During the discussions, the researcher noticed that Croatian owners and managers are well informed of the CSR term and its practices. They considered CSR an integral part of them (as

individuals) and their companies. Most of them have been familiar with the term for a long period of time (15 to 20 years). C1 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) enthusiastically claimed, “... *I am quite passionate about it as an individual. We, as a team, are quite passionate about it...*” Croatian owners and managers mentioned a few factors that influenced their awareness of CSR. The main factors highlighted during the interviews were media, practice and education. C2 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) stated, “[*Pondering*] *I got introduced to it years ago through **media** but learned more about it mainly from **practice**...*” A few other owners and managers, such as C3 and C4 (owners-managers of small-sized enterprises) ascribed their knowledge on CSR to their education. Similar to C2, C3 noted that she developed her understanding of CSR practices through work. C4 was first informed about CSR term in her university classes, but credited her and her co-founders’ journey to responsible fashion to their participation in a global-known fashion summit.

Different from Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers, Croatian fashion SME owners and managers stated that the fashion industry in their country acknowledges CSR and its benefits to their enterprises, the industry, environment and society. However, they accentuated consumers’ and society’s lack of interest on CSR activities. C1 stated that Croatians have a tendency to follow the latest fashion trends and wear mass-produced clothes from global fashion brands. C3 who shared similar views with C1, added

*“...I am aware that the fashion industry in Croatia is not what it used to be, but there are local [Croatian] brands offering unique and trendy pieces while using eco-friendly materials, supporting fair trade... but Croatian **people buy ready-to-wear products from fast fashion brands**...”*

The lack of CSR appreciation from consumers and society can be ascribed to a few factors, mainly to the (a) high price of clothes produced from slow fashion SMEs and the (b) skepticism of consumers towards truthfulness of such activities. The other factors are discussed in detail in the next sub-chapter (Croatian Consumers’ Views on CSR and CSR Practices). Similar to A1 (an Albanian small owner/manager), Croatian owners and managers stated that due to the lack of local consumers’ interest, they changed their geographical sales distribution (expanded it to the Croatian coastal tourist centers) and introduced collections to global market, mainly to central Europe. It should be noted that three out of four Croatian interviewees owned slow fashion brands (hence the

dissatisfaction with consumers practices). The researcher also observed the brand websites of the Croatian interviewees and noticed that all of them have (a) English as the first language, (b) euro as the main currency (they had euro before Croatia replaced the Croatian kuna to euro; the replacement started on 1 January 2023) and (c) e-commerce platforms, among others. These website elements further illustrate interviewees' concerns with the irresponsible purchasing practices of local consumers.

5.2.4 CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Greece

All owners and managers of fashion SMEs in Greece are familiar with the concept of CSR. They were introduced to the concept several years ago. For instance, G4 (manager of a small-sized enterprise) said, *“Sure, I am aware of it for many years...”* G6 (owner of a small-sized enterprise) stated,

*“I first heard of CSR around 30 or 35 years ago... the concept has been part of our business since the early days. We have been **aware** of CSR and **embraced** it long before large companies... Our brand has been eco-friendly for almost 30 years...”*

Similar to them, G2 (manager of a small-sized enterprise) and G3 (manager of a medium-sized enterprise) claimed that their companies acknowledge and embrace the concept. Greek owners and managers were introduced to the concept through different actors. G5 (manager of a small-sized enterprise), G2 and G3 stated that they were first informed about CSR in their business studies. G1 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) said he was introduced to it through social media and learned more about its practices and activities on its own, due to his interest in learning new information. G6 tried to recall how she got acquainted with CSR. She first heard of CSR from media (mainly from the backlashes faced by major companies in the late 1990s) and international tourists visiting her store. She claimed that because of the central location of her store in Thessaloniki, international tourists, who were conscious consumers, informed her about responsible activities. It should be noted that G6's company produces and sells fur clothing. Regardless of the received criticism, G6 (as previously mentioned) has incorporated CSR in her company.

The researcher deemed crucial to highlight that two of the interviewees, G2 and G3 manage companies that were created on responsible grounds. From the start, their CSR awareness has impacted the CSR strategy in their respective companies. Different from G2 and G3, G1 manages a company, which was first created on commercial purposes. Because of his curiosity on CSR, his company started their journey to responsible fashion, five years ago. These responses show that CSR awareness has a direct impact on the embedding of CSR among fashion SME owners and managers in Greece. Different from Croatian owners and managers, Greek owners and managers stated that their consumers and society express interest in responsible companies and activities. All Greek owners and managers mentioned consumers' awareness of CSR and sustainability. G2 said, "...**Greek consumers** have become very conscious – **socially and environmentally conscious** – of their purchasing practices..." G3 emphasised the consumers' influence on companies' willingness to follow responsible or sustainable approaches. G6, however, criticised several Greek fashion companies, which endorsed CSR because of consumers pressure and not their sincere intentions. She expressed her resentment with their false claims about social and environmental responsibility and regarded their efforts as greenwashing.

5.2.5 CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The four subsections above presented the CSR awareness of fashion SME owners and managers in four countries of South-East Europe: Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher identified (a) if, (b) when and (c) how these SME owners and managers were introduced to CSR. While all of them claimed that they are aware of the concept, the researcher noted differences among them. These variances can be ascribed to a few factors: (a) differences at individual level, (b) differences at company level, (c) differences at national level and (d) differences at regional institutionalisation level.

At individual level, the researcher noted that (a) age, (b) education, (c) curiosity and (d) current and past work experiences impact the CSR awareness of fashion SME owners and managers. Younger SME owners and managers have more opportunities to be aware of CSR compared to older generations. Informally and formally educated SME owners and managers have more

chances to recognise the CSR term than non-educated ones. A few SME owners and managers were introduced to CSR out of curiosity and other owners and managers, such as C2 and A3, learned about CSR through work experiences. While a few researchers, such as Paoloni et al. (2023), claimed that gender impacts the CSR awareness of owners and managers, this research did not notice any influence of gender on SME owners' and managers' CSR awareness. At the company level, the researcher, similar to Colucci et al. (2020), noticed that the core business of the fashion company induces CSR awareness. Slow fashion companies have a tendency to be more aware of CSR than commercial companies. For instance, at first, K3 (a commercial company) did not recall the CSR concept. On the other hand, A1, G2, C3 and C4 (owners and managers of slow fashion companies) discussed the concept enthusiastically.

At the national level, the researcher noted several differences in terms of awareness.

(a) Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers claimed that Kosovo and Albania lack CSR awareness. Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers, on the other hand, stated that Croatia and Greece are well-informed of the concept and CSR practices.

(b) Most Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers were mainly informed of the concept in the last five to six years (2018-2023). Albanian fashion SME owners and managers were introduced to the term during the last decade (2013-2023). Contrary to Kosovars and Albanians, Greek and Croatian fashion SME owners and managers showed they were informed of CSR in the last 25 years (1998-2023). Such differences could be attributed to the next points (c and d).

(c) Media in Croatia and Greece regularly discusses CSR issues. Media in Kosovo and Albania help promote responsible companies but rarely covers such topics.

(d) Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers, who were presented to the term in their studies, studied at local (public) universities. Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers, who were educated about CSR, studied abroad in international (public and private) universities. Similar to the findings from CIS (presented in the previous sub-chapter), these findings stress that Kosovo and Albania lack inclusion of CSR courses in their education programs. These countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) have educational differences amongst each other.

(e) Different from Albanians, Croatians and Greeks, Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers were informally educated about CSR through local and international NGOs operating in Kosovo.

This informal education depicts the influence of regional and international actors in a recently-established (post-conflict) state, such as Kosovo.

(f) Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers stated that the fashion industry in their countries lack CSR awareness. On the other hand, Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers stated the opposite.

While discussing the national differences, the researcher observed that some of the above-mentioned distinctions can be categorised in two country groups: (a) Kosovo and Albania and (b) Greece and Croatia. This categorisation can be ascribed to the differences in terms of countries' developments. Greece and Croatia are considered developed countries, whereas Kosovo and Albania are regarded as developing countries. This categorisation can also be attributed to the differences in terms of regional institutionalisation. Greece and Croatia are EU-member states; Kosovo and Albania are non-EU member states. As presented in the literature review, EU is a vocal regional actor in CSR awareness. These findings show that EU member states in the region are more aware of CSR than non-EU member states, and they depict EU's influence on raising CSR awareness. It is important to recall that the four countries are part of South-East Europe (same region), and Albania and Kosovo are candidate and potential candidate of EU (respectively). Thus, EU's is indirectly involved in Albania and Kosovo. This regional involvement was, especially, portrayed in Kosovo. Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers were introduced to CSR through EU-based or EU-funded NGOs or programs. These findings reveal an indirect EU impact on CSR awareness among non-EU member state. The researcher noted another indirect effect of the EU. For instance, K3, a Kosovar owner-manager of a medium-sized enterprise, was first introduced to CSR by an Italian partner, which required from K3's company to adopt CSR practices. These findings show that partnerships with companies located within EU can influence CSR awareness of companies outside EU.

An overview of the influences on CSR awareness of fashion SME owners and managers from these four countries is presented below in Table 5.1

Influences on CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers			
Kosovo	Albania	Croatia	Greece
International NGOs	Abroad (International) Education	Education	Education (Business Studies)
Local NGOs	Previous Job Experience (in Marketing, Advertising and PR)	Media	Social Media
EU-funded Programs	Social Media	Practice	Media
Abroad (International) Education	Internet Browsing	Summits (Global Fashion Summit)	Conscious Consumers (International Tourists)
Practice	Age (e.g., Generation Y and Generaion Z		Curiosity (Willingness to Learn New Information)
Associations (Kosovo CSR Network and Kosovo Fashion Association)	have more opportunities to be informed of CSR compared to older generations)		

Table 5.1 Influences on CSR Awareness of Fashion SME Owners and Managers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

The researcher noted the importance of these influences in raising CSR awareness. Consequently, the researcher depicted them in a framework (Figure 5.1), which explains the factors involved in the process of becoming aware of CSR. This empirical framework is specific to the (a) company size, (b) industry and (c) country. The main purposes of this framework are to (a) illustrate the influences on CSR awareness of fashion SME owners and managers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece, (b) depict the process of becoming aware of CSR (from SME owners and managers point of view), (c) convey insights to researchers focusing on fashion SME owners and managers and (d) provide suggestions to actors willing to raise CSR awareness in the region, mainly in Kosovo and Albania (given the claimed lack of CSR awareness among them). The researcher does not intend to generalise the findings, but they followed the suggestions received from a qualitative research workshop, held by Prof. David Silverman, who stated that a successful

qualitative framework should give (quantitative or mixed method(s)) researchers the opportunity to test it.

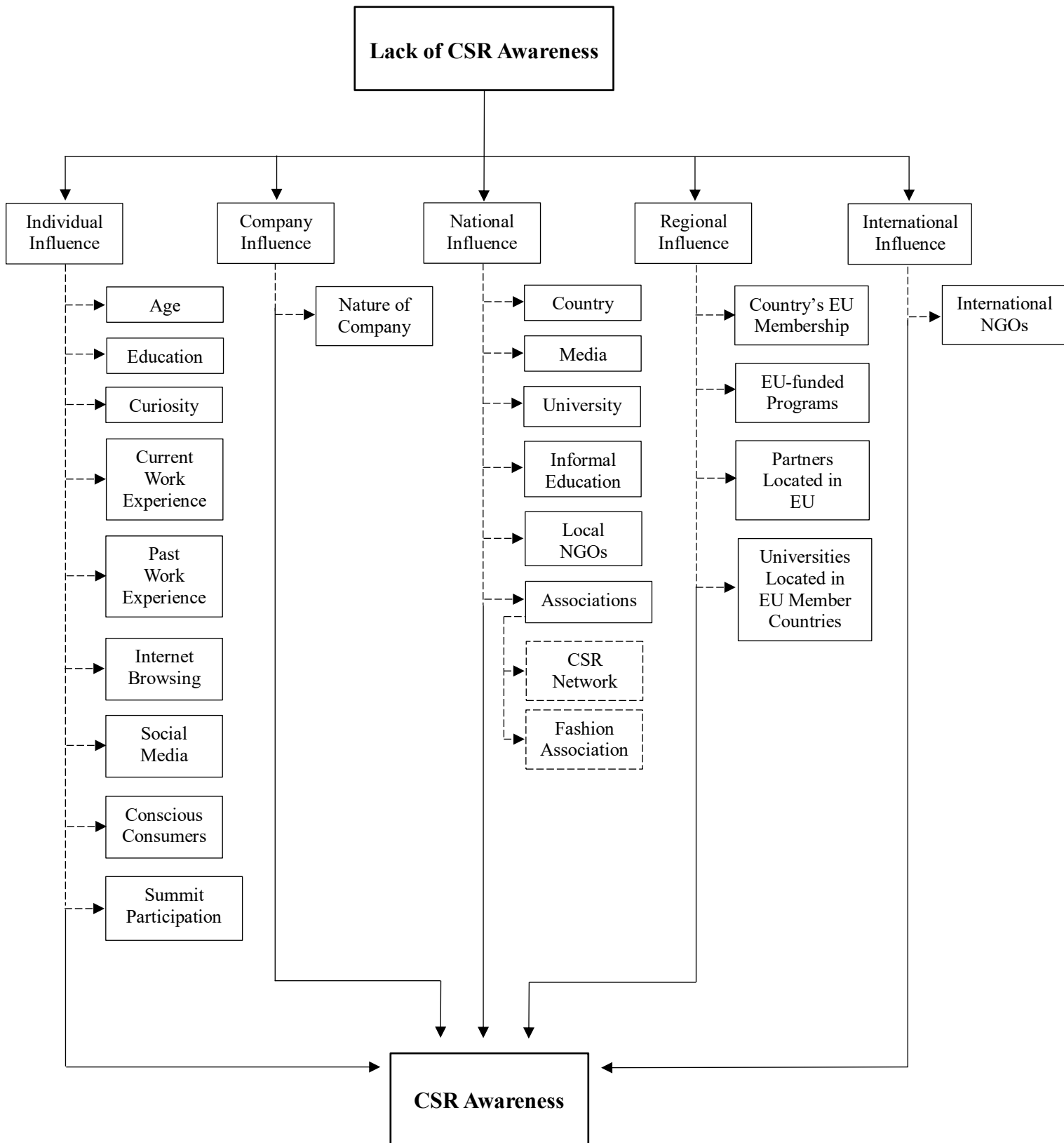


Figure 5.1 Empirical Framework for Raising CSR Awareness among Fashion SME Owners and Managers

5.3 CSR Understanding among Fashion SME Owners and Managers across Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

5.3.1 CSR Understanding among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Kosovo

The researcher investigated the fashion SME owners and managers' understanding of CSR. They were asked to define CSR in their own words. The researcher deemed it crucial to explore the conceptualisation of CSR from fashion SME owners' and managers' point of view, as SME owners and managers are the backbone of the companies. Their interpretations illustrated the influence of their understanding of CSR on the process of CSR implementation within their companies. This subsection describes the understanding of the CSR concept from Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers. K1 and K4 (owners and managers of small-sized social enterprises) provided their interpretation of CSR. Both explained the term enthusiastically. This eagerness about CSR can be attributed to the enterprise type that they own and manage – social enterprise. K1 explained,

*“In my view, a socially responsible company is a **successful company**. A successful company **gives back to the community**, meaning that the company compensates for all the damage...”* He illuminated his conception. *“...For example, companies that cause a lot of pollution, give donations to different environment protection organisations. This has happened with our business as well; companies with which we have collaborated that have had a negative impact on the environment, we have compensated for them as well – this is basically the logic of corporal social responsibility.”*

K1's illumination shows the influence of CSR's understanding on CSR implementation. In addition to him, K4 outlined CSR as,

“...one of the crucial elements that a business should have...” She added, *“...obviously the socially responsible business must maintain a **work order**, there has to be a **work ethic** and **law** that protects the **employee**. It should seek to bring out products that*

*aren't problematic for the **environment**, as well as price the products to match the law..."*

On the other hand, K2 (manager of a medium-sized company) and K5 (owner-manager of a small-sized company) defined CSR from a managerial point of view. K2 described CSR as

*"...a concept that shows that companies have responsibilities towards society that **go beyond simple financial gain**. This means that companies, regardless of their size, must consider their impact on the **environment**, the **local community**, **employees** and **all stakeholders** in general."*

Oftentimes during the interview, K2 used the term strategy to describe CSR. A similar terminology was used by K5, who defined CSR as "...the idea that, besides making profit, a business has a **responsibility to society** – the responsibility to try and make a **positive impact on society**." The above-mentioned Kosovar owners and managers portrayed CSR as a voluntary strategy. They did not regard it as obligatory. K4 was the only one, who stressed the hybrid nature of CSR (a combination of implicit and explicit elements). She mentioned the law on labor in addition to voluntary practices. K3, on the other hand, viewed CSR solely as an obligation. The researcher deemed that his understanding was influenced by his Italian business partner. Because of his business partner's request, he referred to CSR activities as partnership requirements. Different from the others, K3's understanding of CSR focused mostly on employees. He said, "...[humming] as far as I understand, it's about more favorable conditions for work for the **employees**, new equipment, sufficient and safe space and all the necessary conditions for a comfortable job, meaning everything that the **law** requires."

5.3.2 CSR Understanding among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Albania

Owners and managers of fashion SMEs in Albania also provided their interpretation of CSR. A1 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise) defined CSR as "...a concept that emphasises the **ethical and responsible behavior** of corporations and businesses towards **society** and the **environment** in addition to their primary goal of making profits." A3 (owner of a small-sized enterprise) explained their understanding of the social responsibility as, "...running the business and always taking actions and decisions by having in mind **social problems** or **SDG goals** based

*on the field your company is running.” To A2 (owner of a small-sized enterprise), “corporate responsibility means that a company thinks of its activity not only in terms of **profit**, but also of its **social and environmental impact**...” A4 stated, “CSR is the **right moral and financial** approach...” All of the afore-said owners and managers depicted the voluntary nature of CSR. A5 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise), on the other hand, viewed CSR as a social obligation. While he admitted to attempt embedding CSR in their company, he stated that the concept is more suitable for medium and large-sized companies. He claimed that larger companies can effectively carry out CSR practices because of their financial resources and capabilities. He also highlighted the misperception created to small-sized enterprises from the ‘corporate’ word in the ‘corporate social responsibility’ term. He said,*

*“... the ‘**corporate**’ word in the term implies policies and principles implemented by **corporations**. Such policies and principles are impossible to be achieved by small-sized enterprises, especially by a newly-established enterprise, like ours... While our company embraces this **social obligation**, it is not easy to implement such practices and have similar effects like larger companies...”*

All Albanian owners and managers identified the financial gain as a responsibility of fashion SMEs. Yet, they ascribed other responsibilities, which went beyond the financial gain. Their understanding of CSR focused on several dimensions. They highlighted the environmental, social and ethical dimension of CSR. The researcher noticed that the main dimension that concerned them in their businesses is environment. In terms of stakeholders, they underlined only society in their definitions. During the discussions, they highlighted several other stakeholders, like employees, marginalised groups, media, the local community and consumers. A3 included SDG goals in their conceptualisation of CSR. Regardless of the importance of SDG goals in raising awareness of CSR, A3 was the only owner among the four countries that pointed them out. All Albanian owners and managers considered the CSR as the right approach, and they all admitted to embrace it in their businesses. The researcher observed the websites of each company and noted that they apply CSR-related terms in their content. Nevertheless, sustainability stands as their main website theme. The researcher attributes the sustainability dominance to the nature of the fashion companies (three out of five companies consider to be sustainable fashion companies), the embedding of the sustainability trend and the expansion of their geographical sales distribution.

5.3.3 CSR Understanding among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Croatia

Croatian fashion SME owners and managers provided their understanding of CSR. They discussed the CSR concept enthusiastically. Compared to the other countries, the researcher noted a willingness of Croatian interviewees to discuss the concept in length. All of them highlighted the importance of the concept for them and their companies. C4 stressed the importance of defining the concept. According to her, CSR conceptualisation helps the company understand their position, intentions and future goals (in terms of their social, environmental and economic impacts). She described CSR,

*“...besides **making profit**... contributing to **environment** and **society** by creating **positive impacts**... offering **fair wages** and **safe labor practices** to the employees in accordance with the **law**... collaborating with **local suppliers**, who genuinely care about the environmental and social responsibilities...”*

C4 was the only Croatian SME owner-manager that considered the profit as a responsibility of a company. She was also the only one to highlight the importance/influence of law (precisely, the labor act). Among Croatians, she was the only one to depict the hybrid nature of CSR (implicit and explicit) in their CSR conceptualisation. She accredited her and her co-founders understanding of responsible fashion to Scandinavian countries, precisely to Denmark.

All Croatian owners and managers pointed out the responsibility towards the environment and society. During the discussions, they stated the influence of employees on a socially and environmentally responsible company. Croatian fashion SME owners and managers were also the only ones to consider local suppliers as important CSR stakeholders. All of them mentioned reliable, local suppliers, who share same social and environmental responsibilities with the company. For instance, C2 and C1 stated,

*“...operating the company in a way that the company ... achieves **qualitative products**, **satisfied employees** and finds **environmental solutions**... achieves successful cooperation with **reliable suppliers**, who alike the company, are committed to the same goals – quality, qualitative materials, superior craftsmanship, environmental solutions...”* (C2, owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise)

*“... a **responsible business model** that is aware of the **society, environment** and **ethical practices**... a company that is driven by the **positive impact**... one that offers **eco-friendly** and **high-quality products**... works with suppliers, who share same views...”* (C1, owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise)

Besides their understanding of the term, C1 offered a fashion industry specific conceptualisation.

*“...In **fashion**, a socially responsible company is a company, that produces **local, handmade**, timeless pieces in **small series** and works with **local suppliers** ... to **reduce the carbon footprint**, ... one that fights the fast fashion and encourages the **responsible** and slow consumption...”*

As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, the researcher observed the websites of the Croatian fashion SMEs. The researcher noticed that their perception of CSR was conveyed in their websites. Different from Albanian fashion SMEs, the websites of the Croatian companies underlined many aspects of CSR. While C4's website emphasised several CSR dimensions and covered a few of company's CSR activities, their main focus remained sustainability. The other companies' website did not emphasise sustainability; nonetheless, they described several of their practices through the 'sustainable practice(s)' term.

5.3.4 CSR Understanding among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Greece

The researcher also investigated the CSR's understanding of Greek fashion SME owners and managers. Similar to Croatians, most of Greek fashion SME owners and managers discussed CSR enthusiastically. All of them viewed CSR as a voluntary strategy, and they emphasised the explicit nature of CSR in their conceptualisations. For instance, G3 stated,

*“... for our company, CSR means creating a **responsible reality** for the **society**. We achieve this through ethical fashion, minimum textile waste [protection of environment], natural materials, timeless and high-quality clothes, fair working conditions, safe workplace, certified suppliers, transparency and by giving back to society... for us, it is a **moral obligation**...”*

G1, who embraced the idea of responsible fashion in the recent years, understands CSR as a,

*“... an **integral part** of the company, which deals with company’s impacts on **society** and **environment**... an **ethical behaviour** adopted by companies in every aspect of their existence... a company that produces ethically, gives charities, donates, rescues... cares about the **employees**, follows philosophies that positively impact the society, such as zero waste philosophy... chooses wisely the **suppliers**...”*

During the discussions, none of the Greek fashion SME owners and managers mentioned the financial gain as a responsibility. Their perception of CSR went beyond the financial gain. They underlined the ethical, social and environmental dimensions. Unlike fashion SME owners and managers from other countries, the main emphasis of Greeks was the ethics. All of them stated the importance of ethics in their understanding of CSR. While many of the interviewees mentioned that their companies were founded on ethical, social and environmental bases, a few others (like G1 and G5) stated that they added the ‘environment’ element along the road. Nevertheless, they mentioned that they have always operated in ethical and social grounds. In their CSR conceptualisations, Greek fashion SME owners and managers identified several stakeholders. They conceptualised CSR from the fashion context and provided several fashion-specific illustrations of their understanding. The researcher also observed the websites of the Greek fashion SMEs. Similar to Croatian fashion SMEs, Greeks depicted their understanding of CSR in their websites. They highlighted different aspects of CSR. Different from Albanians, Greek fashion SMEs did not stress the sustainability term. While they mentioned sustainability in their content, CSR-related topics received similar or greater attention. A few of them have CSR-specific components in their websites’ headers, such as ‘Social Responsibility’, ‘Charity’, and ‘Ethos’.

5.3.5 CSR Understanding among Fashion SME Owners and Managers across Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The previously presented findings showed the CSR understating among fashion SME owners and managers of Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher noted individual differences in the interpretation of the concept among them. Similarly to Szegedi et al. (2023), the findings of this research revealed that the majority of fashion SME owners and managers perceived CSR as a voluntary approach. K3 was the only owner-manager, who claimed CSR as an obligation. A few

others, such as K4 and G1, shared a hybrid understanding of CSR; they described CSR as an explicit-implicit strategy. These differences among fashion SME owners and managers can be attributed to their individual characteristics. The researcher noticed a few differences at the company level. These differences can be ascribed to the nature of the company. Similar to CSR awareness, nature of the company influences the CSR understanding of fashion SME owners and managers. The owners and managers of companies that were created on responsible grounds provided a more inclusive conceptualisation of CSR. While a few scholars (Elhajjar and Ouaida, 2020; Thanh and Podruzsik, 2018) claimed that the size of company impacts the CSR understanding, this research's findings show that the size of company does not have an influence on it.

The researcher noted a few differences among fashion SME owners and managers at the national level. Initially, Kosovar SME owners and managers were less enthusiastic when explaining the term. Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers were eager to explain their understanding of the term. Croatians and Greeks provided longer and more encompassing conceptualisations compared to Kosovars and Albanians. Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers identified several stakeholders in their conceptualisations, while Kosovars and Albanians focused mostly on employees and the environment. Nonetheless, Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers identified several other stakeholders during the later discussions. Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers emphasised the suppliers and their influence on responsible practices. The researcher did not notice such emphasis among Kosovars and Albanians (neither during the discussion of this question nor during later discussions). Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers provided general definitions of CSR. On the other hand, Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers offered context-specific descriptions of CSR; they explained CSR from the fashion industry point of view. Such differences can be attributed to the differences in the national development among these countries. Kosovo and Albania are developing economies. Croatia and Greece are developed ones. The previously listed differences support the claims of Jamali and Karam (2018) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), who state that country context influences CSR understanding.

They can also be ascribed to the regional (EU-membership) differences. Fashion SME owners and managers of EU-member states (Croatia and Greece) provided more detailed, encompassing and context-specific descriptions compared to fashion SME owners and managers of non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania). The previously-mentioned differences can also be attributed to mimetic isomorphism. Similar to these findings, the findings of White et al. (2017) showed that fashion companies tend to mimic activities from other companies (mimetic isomorphism). Findings showed that companies in Croatia mimicked their CSR understanding from other EU-member states. For instance, C4 (Croatian fashion SME owner-manager) mentioned Denmark fashion industry as an example of ‘best CSR practices’ in the fashion industry. Regardless of their differences, fashion SME owners’ and managers’ CSR interpretations (presented in the above sub-sections) illustrated the influence of their CSR understanding on the CSR embedding of their companies.

5.4 CSR Drivers across SEE Countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)

5.4.1 CSR Drivers among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Kosovo

Kosovar owners and managers of fashion SMEs highlighted several drivers. Most of them implement CSR into their organisations because of their personal convictions and altruistic motives. All Kosovar owners and managers highlighted their intentions to help the community. Given the high unemployment rates in Kosovo, owners and managers of commercial enterprises considered that they helped the community by providing job opportunities. They asserted this to their altruistic motives. In addition to social enterprises, which must hire marginalised groups by law (law for social enterprises: 06/L-022), commercial enterprises also admitted to employ minority. For instance, K3 said, “...*we hire different communities and create an environment where everyone feels equal and safe, without exceptions and discrimination...*” K3 acknowledged the influence of the legal obligations and partnership requirement in their company’s actions.

The owners and managers of social enterprises stated that their CSR activities are greatly impacted by the social and environment factors. While the ‘social’ factor impacted the owners and managers of the commercial enterprises, the environment factor impacted only the owners and managers of social enterprises (K1 and K4). K1 said, “...*we don’t throw the waste in nature, so this way we*

*contribute for a **clean environment**...*” They both attributed the inclusion of this factor to their personal beliefs. K2 was the only manager that pointed out the consumers as their drivers. She stated, “...*we believe in the win-win-win mindset. We win, the consumers win and the community wins...*” She added, “...*such a strategy is the reason why we are deemed reliable, maintain a loyal consumer base, have more and more demand every day, and are an example of a success story in Kosovo.*” She admitted that financial gain is another driver of the company. Similar to her, K4 referred to the financial gain as one of the drivers.

5.4.2 CSR Drivers among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Albania

In Albania, owners and managers of fashion SMEs emphasised several CSR drivers. Given the impact of fashion industry in the environmental and ethical issues, all owners and managers disclosed such issues impacted the way they operate their businesses. The environment factor, in particular, plays a crucial role to almost all the fashion SMEs. A3 stated that the environmental awareness influences their company’s manufacturing process. To eliminate fabric waste, their company involves recycling into their steps. A3 explained, “...*we handpick used fabrics and **recycle** them by ironing, washing and repairing. We brand the recycled products under our label.*” Similar to A3, A1, A2 and A4 stated that they implement environmental-friendly practices. A1 claimed that their company is the first sustainable fashion company in Albania and the company advocates the slow fashion movement. In addition to A1, A2 and A4 stated that they consider environment in the process of design, fabric selection and production. A4 admitted using recycled fabrics and avoiding mass production by offering limited products. A2 stated, “...*we use hand-made fabric... it is a **conscious choice**...*” A1, A2 and A4 stated that environment impacts the core of their organisations. A1 noted, “...*we embrace **eco-consciousness** in our mission...*” While A2 said, “...***environmental responsibility** is ingrained in the identity of our brand...*”

Albanian owners and managers of fashion SMEs claimed that the existing ethical issues in the fashion industry impacted their CSR activities. These ethical issues included unfair treatment of employees, unsafe workspace, gender inequality and lack of diversity. They claimed that they addressed these issues because of their personal convictions. Gender equality and women’s empowerments are the main CSR drivers for A1 and A2. A1 stated, “... *we have grown up with*

*the horror stories of the **bad treatment of women** in their work environment in Albania, so this is the reason, we are committed to ethical labor practices...*” A1 claimed that they are an all-women company, and the company supports economic, social and educational empowerment of women. A2 stated that because of their personal beliefs, she and her co-founder afford equal economic opportunity to “...*women who are economically marginalised...*” For the same beliefs, A3 claimed that they support diversity by working closely with Roma community.

A4, A1 and A5 stated that they provide safe workspace and new technologies to their employees. When asked why they follow such practices, they claimed such practices are ‘the right thing to do’ to avoid the unsustainable methods that are common in the fashion industry in Albania and be responsible towards employees. A5 stated that employees impact his company’s responsible activities. “*We are mindful of our **employees’ opinions** about every step of the manufacturing process. We consider their views on our practices. We involve them in the decision-making process...*” A5 also underlined other CSR drivers, such as brand awareness in the international market, brand recognition and reputation. He said, “...*among others, we create a **positive brand perception** or improve the current brand perception...*” Most of the Albanian owners and managers of fashion SMEs (A1, A2, A3 and A4) considered sustainable future as a driver for their socially responsible activities. A1 highlighted the impact of the slow fashion movement in their practices. Lastly, all Albanian owners and managers stressed that their responsibility towards society impacts their CSR practices. A3 noted, “*To be socially responsible is **a must** now days...*”

5.4.3 CSR Drivers among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Croatia

Croatian fashion SMEs owners and managers underlined several CSR drivers. Environment is the main CSR driver for all Croatian fashion SMEs. All of them referred to the negative impact of the fashion industry in the environment and its influence on their CSR activities. A few of Croatian owners and managers attributed their intentions to protecting the environment to their awareness of environmental issues. C4 said,

*“We are **aware** of the negative effect of fashion in the environment... fashion industry is the second largest polluter... **being aware and not taking actions** feels wrong, so I*

believe we are doing the right thing by taking actions that help the environment protection...”

Most of them ascribed the care for environment to their personal beliefs and the nature of the company. For instance, C3 (who manages a slow fashion company) said,

*“... As an **individual** and as a **company**, we contribute to protecting the environment and we encourage responsible purchasing practices among consumers... I know it sounds naïve, but we want to make the world a better place for us and the future generations...”*

All of them affirmed that environment influences the manufacturing process of their companies. They stated they follow environmental-friendly practices and implement environment-conscious activities. They claimed that such practices and activities provide solutions for the fast fashion, and they ascribed CSR implementation to their awareness of the negative impact of fast fashion, their personal convictions and the nature of their companies (slow fashion companies). In addition to the environment, C2 stated that awareness has impacted every dimension of their CSR implementation. C2’s company is now mindful of their partnerships, ethical responsibilities towards their employees and social responsibilities towards their community because as he stated, *“... the level of **awareness** has raised and we want to contribute to positive changes by our example...”*

All of them highlighted their altruistic motives. Such motives impact several of their CSR practices and activities, such as their willingness to help the community by supporting women and local family businesses. C1 explained, *“... Our company collaborates with women-owned small businesses. These businesses mainly operate in underdeveloped regions in Croatia...”* Similar to her, C2 and C3 stated that they work with local suppliers to support the local community. In addition to altruistic motives, Croatian fashion SME owners and managers highlighted other CSR drivers. C4 mentioned the successful story of other fashion companies as a driver force for their company. C1, C2 and C3 also emphasised their employees as a driving force. They claimed that their companies are driven by the responsibility they feel towards their employees. C2 mentioned another CSR driver – the CSR trend. He said, *“... we also implement CSR because we want to follow certain **trends** in the world...”*

5.4.4 CSR Drivers among Fashion SME Owners and Managers in Greece

Greek fashion SMEs owners and managers disclosed several of their CSR driving forces. They claimed that the existing ethical, social and environmental issues in the fashion industry impacted their CSR implementation. Their awareness of such issues is their main CSR driver. Every Greek fashion SMEs owners and managers stated that their awareness of ethical issues impact the practices and activities in their companies. Consequently, all of them disclosed to include ethical production in their values. G3 said, *“From the beginning, **ethics** has driven all our processes... from the design of the product ... to the delivery services...”* In addition, environmental awareness influences the practices and activities of most Greek fashion SMEs. G6, G3 and G2 mentioned that the environmental issues have impacted their manufacturing processes since they have established their companies. G1 and G5, on the other hand, stated that their practices have been affected by environmental awareness in the last five years. They affirmed that the ephemeral and fast fashion trends influenced their practices and activities; they apply environmental-friendly practices and activities to fight such trends and reduce their environmental impact.

Greek fashion SMEs owners and managers highlighted a few other CSR drivers. G1 and G3 mentioned their altruistic intentions as another CSR driver. Both G1 and G3 follow a zero-waste philosophy and they donate (or recycle) their textile waste. G3 disclosed other contributions to the local community (e.g., supporting young designers and donating to local NGOs), which she attributed to their altruistic motives. For the same motives, G1 and his co-founder support animal rescuing. A few of these Greek owners and managers, like G4, G3 and G1, underline employees as their driving force. Three of them (G4, G3 and G1) used the term ‘family’ to describe their employees. G4 said, *“...feels like helping my **family**... they are like my own daughters... it’s **moral obligation**...”* G3 also ascribed their employee-focused responsibilities to the moral obligation. She stated that their employees are the main asset of their company; she said, *“...it goes without saying that we support them and their craft... this way we also support our local community...”* Lastly, Greek fashion SMEs owners and managers claimed the conscious consumer as another CSR driver. G5, in particular, emphasised the power of the conscious consumers in their practices. They stated that they have changed their packages to environmentally-friendly ones because of the pressure from their conscious consumers.

5.4.5 CSR Drivers across SEE Countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece): An Overview

The previous subsections presented the CSR drivers of the Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs. The fashion SME owners and managers highlighted various driving forces. An overview of the CSR drivers among these four countries is presented below in Table 5.2 While the fashion SMEs owners and managers showed individual differences, most of them shared similar views on the main CSR drivers. CSR drivers of Kosovar fashion SMEs are more simplistic in nature. On the other hand, CSR drivers of Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs are more dynamic and context-specific. These differences can be ascribed to the nature of the companies and different countries' development phases. In terms of the nature of the company, the majority of the interviewees in Albania, Croatia and Greece owns and manages sustainable or slow fashion (commercial) companies. Kosovar interviewees own and manage mainly commercial companies (with the exceptions of K1 and K4, who own and manage social enterprises). In terms of countries' development phases, Kosovo is a recently-established (developing) country. Albania, Croatia and Greece are established countries. Kosovar SME owners and managers have recently embraced the CSR concept into their companies (in the last 5 years) and they focus on company's basic needs. Albanian SMEs embraced the CSR term in the last decade. Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs and their owners and managers have embraced the CSR term more than two decades ago, and their countries have well-established fashion industries (compared to Kosovo).

CSR Drivers			
Kosovo	Albania	Croatia	Greece
Personal Convictions	Environmental Care	Environmental Care	Ethical Issues in the Fashion Industry
Legal Obligation	Environmental Issues in the Fashion Industry	Environmental Issues in the Fashion Industry	Environmental Issues in the Fashion Industry
Altruistic Motives (a) Intention to Help the Community	Ethical Issues in the Country: (a) Employee Unfair Treatment (b) Unsafe Workspace	Personal Beliefs	Social Issues in the Fashion Industry

	(c) Lack of Diversity		
Environmental Care	Personal Convictions	Nature of Company (Slow Fashion Company)	Negative Impacts of Ephemeral and Fast Fashion Trends
Social Issues: (a) Marginalisation (b) Unemployment	Social Causes: (a) Gender Equality (b) Women Empowerment	Negative Impacts of Fast Fashion	Altruistic Motives (a) Intention to Help the Local Community (b) Intention to Support Designers (c) Intention to Rescue Animals (d) Donations
Loyal and Satisfied Consumers	“The Right Thing to Do” (Moral Obligation)	Social Responsibility Awareness	Employee Care
Economic Benefits	Employee Views	Altruistic Motives (a) Intention to Help the Community	Moral Obligation
	Brand Awareness in International Market	Successful Stories of Fashion Companies	Conscious Consumers Pressure
	Recognition and Good Reputation	Responsibility towards Employees	Sustainable Future
	Sustainable Future	CSR Trend	
	Social Responsibility		

Table 5.2 CSR Drivers of the Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Fashion SMEs

5.5 CSR Embedding and CSR Activities across fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

5.5.1 CSR Embedding among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo

All Kosovar owners and managers of fashion SMEs affirmed they have included a CSR strategy and CSR practices in their companies. None of them have a CSR department or a CSR employee that deals solely with it in their structures. Yet, all of them stated that they embrace CSR in different levels, and they regard their companies as socially responsible companies. K2 said,

"... we do consider our company a responsible one for numerous reasons. Firstly, as a company we respect the rights of employees and their working conditions. Secondly, we protect the environment. Thirdly, we help and support the local community, with a focus on marginalised groups such as women and people with disabilities. Lastly, we are transparent and honest with the interested parties."

All Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers claimed they embrace CSR in their companies' values. The owners and managers of social enterprises, K1 and K4, stated that social responsibilities are included in the principles of their enterprises. K1 indicated that their enterprise has three principles that convey responsible practices (directed towards the environment and community). He also mentioned that their enterprise language expresses these responsibilities. Besides K1, K4 stated that CSR was incorporated in the values of their enterprise. She ascribed the CSR embedding to the social component on which their enterprise was grounded – the empowerment of economically marginalised women. Regardless of the social component, K4 said that the process of CSR embedding required time. She said,

"...at first, we couldn't think of anything else beyond the workers getting paid their base salaries. Eventually, when it was all set, we started to think of ways to motivate our workers to stay and like their job..."

In addition to K1 and K4, other owners and managers like K5 and K6 claimed that they incorporate social responsibilities in their daily tasks, mainly in the form of activities directed towards society/community and environment. While others' CSR application included community and environment, K3's understanding of CSR application referred only to the obligatory responsibilities, such as providing decent jobs and safe workspace for their employees (in accordance with labor law in Kosovo: 03 L-212 and stakeholders' requirements). K2, the manager of a medium-sized company, described the CSR embedding in their company in detail. She said,

*"...the company doesn't have such a department, but it works through the HR team, Finance and Marketing... Around **3-4 people** are involved in decision making as well as proposals, and **anyone can bring forward credible ideas**... The company does have **a plan** exactly about this topic, because it aims to focus the business policies directly*

into it, as well as grants and institutional support locally and globally. Investing in this aspect is a huge advantage.”

5.5.1.1 CSR Activities among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo

Owners and managers of fashion SMEs in Kosovo implement various CSR activities. Similar to Mory et al. (2017), the researcher classified the CSR activities as internal and external activities. Internal activities include the actions that tackle CSR issues in the company’s inner environment. These actions are mainly directed towards employees. All Kosovar owners and managers highlighted the employee-focused CSR activities. A few of them ascribed these activities to the codified and mandatory state requirements. For instance, K3 stated,

“As a company, we operate based on Kosovo’s law on labor. This law has changed throughout the years and we have changed based on that. We work based on the articles about the rights of the employer and employees, work hours, the equipment and machineries, holidays, etc. all of which is compiled by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare...”

While the employment law (precisely, the law on labor in Kosovo: 03 L-212) dictates the relationship between the employer and the employee and obliges companies to provide fair employment practices to their employees, several Kosovar owners and managers (besides K3) indicated the voluntary nature of these activities. For instance, K1 stated,

*“I’m thankful that laws exist because they enforce businesses to respect the employee rights and impose different quotas [gender, racial, and minority]. Fortunately, in our business, it isn’t necessary to apply any legal measures because we **voluntarily** provide more than what the law requires. If we look at the number of employees, out of 13, there are 4 men and 9 women. If we went by the law, it would’ve been the total opposite.”*

Besides K1, K2 and K4 stated that the employee-focused activities in their enterprise were conducted in accordance with Kosovo’s law on labor (implicit CSR) and adopted as voluntary CSR activities (explicit CSR). Matten and Moon (2020) referred to this process as explicitisation. Such activities included the implementation of gender policies, equal opportunities in the

workplace, well-being activities and safety trainings. Regardless of the explicitisation process, such activities identify as explicit CSR activities. Other explicit CSR activities (voluntarily initiated) by Kosovar owners and managers are the fulfillment of standards, such as ISO standards, (which create good working conditions, practice gender policies and include different communities), social gatherings (such as virtual group chats, casual dinners, short trips), and creative workspace, among others. The researcher noticed that a few owners and managers, such as K2 and K4, implement women-specific activities, such as trainings and information sessions about breast cancer. These gender-specific activities can be ascribed to the fact that the vast majority of employees in the fashion workforce in Kosovo are women (KIESA, 2019). K4, owner and manager of a small-sized enterprise, applied a distinctive explicit CSR activity aimed at their women employees. She described,

*“We noticed that our female workers like to connect to other generations, so we held **master classes**. We invited younger generations for the women to teach them, and this made them feel like grandmothers. The classes were only one hour long but that was enough to motivate them for the rest of the day because they created a personal bond with the people they taught, considering them as their grandkids or students, and all this had a very positive impact...”*

A few CSR activities, such as hiring marginalised group of people can be put under both categories, implicit and explicit CSR. Such practice is categorised according to enterprise’s nature. For instance, K1 and K4 (who own and manage social enterprises) are obliged by Kosovar law on social enterprise to hire marginalised people (implicit CSR). However, when K2’s enterprise (which is a commercial enterprise) hires marginalised people, the practice is regarded voluntary (explicit CSR). These and other explicit and implicit CSR activities directed towards the inner environment are presented below in Table 5.3

Internal CSR Activities	
<u>Implicit CSR Activities</u>	<u>Explicit CSR Activities</u>
Employment Contract (Law on Labour)	Employees’ Well-being (Online and In-Person Trainings, Informative Sessions, Posters)

General Occupational Protection (Law on Occupational Safety, Protection of Health of Employees and Protection of Labour Environment)	Women's Well-being (e.g., Raising Awareness about Breast Cancer through Online and In-Person Informative Sessions, Posters, Fact Sheets)
Equal Gender Opportunities (Law on Labour)	ISO Standards (e.g., ISO 10015:2019, ISO 9001: 2015)
Equal Gender Criteria (Law on Labour)	Education on Interpersonal Capacities (Online and In-Person Trainings)
Prohibition of All Forms of Discrimination (Law on Labour)	Virtual and Physical Team Building and Bonding
Protection of Youth, Women and Persons with Disabilities/ Protection of Motherhood (Law on Labour)	Inspirational Workspace
Fair Wages (Law on Labour)	Assistance in Documentation such as Credit Guarantors, Visas, Health Insurance, etc.
Paid Absence from Work (Law on Labour)	Social Gatherings (Online and In-Person)
Prohibition of Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities (Law on Labour)	Workplace Trainings (e.g., about Newer and Safer Practices)
Hiring Marginalized People (Law on Social Enterprises)	Safety Trainings (e.g., in Cases of Fire or Incidents at Workplace)
Annual Leave (4 weeks) / Annual Leave for Mothers, Single Parents and Persons with Disabilities (additional two days)/ Maternity Leave/ Break during Working Hours/ Daily Rest/ Weekly Rest (Law on Labour)	Workplace Harassment Trainings (e.g., Sexual Harassment Training)
	Hiring People with Disabilities
	Access to Infrastructure to People with Disabilities (e.g., toilets, elevators, and parking lots)
	Hiring Marginalised People

Table 5. 3 Implicit and Explicit CSR Practices Implemented by Kosovar Fashion SME Owner and Manager

In addition to internal activities, Kosovar owners and managers emphasised other CSR activities directed towards consumers, community, media, partners or the general public – namely, the external CSR activities. Almost all external activities underlined by Kosovar owners and managers were explicit in nature. A few activities, such as certifications, could be identified as explicit or implicit. This categorisation is based on owners' and managers' driving forces. For instance, K2

stated, “... *We take care of our **consumers** by meeting ISO standards and using certified organic materials that can be recycled...*” She credited these standards to her and her company’s willingness to care for the consumers (explicit nature). On the other hand, K3 emphasised similar certification awards (ISO and SMETA). He endorsed such certifications to meet his international business partner’s (Italian company) requirements (implicit nature).

K1 highlighted several community-focused activities that their company has undertaken. A few of them are presented below.

*“We have organized different **trainings** especially for young people that are interested in fashion and that show an interest in starting similar businesses along with protecting the environment. Through these trainings, we have helped them improve their skills in business making. We have organized trainings to educate the citizens in reducing the textile waste... As a business we have **collaborated** with fashion students and we have created a lot of innovative, recyclable products. The first collaboration was displayed in Prishtina, and it was a very successful activity because a lot of people showed interest. Through this, we have **supported young fashion designers** and **their potential**. Another collaboration occurred in an online participation in the international exhibition in Milan, where various organisations showed interest on our work...”*

Table 5.4 illustrates the afore-mentioned and other external CSR activities.

External CSR Activities			
<u>Consumer-Focused</u>	<u>Community-Focused</u>	<u>Partner-Focused</u>	<u>General Public- Focused</u>
ISO Standards (e.g., ISO 9001: 2015)	Local Employment (Decreasing the Unemployment Rate in Kosovo)	Certifications (e.g., ISO 9001: 2015; SMETA (Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit))	Break Social Stereotypes (e.g., Inclusion of Disabled Community in Promotion Campaigns)
Certified Organic and Recycled Materials	Trainings (e.g., Improving Skills of Young People in Fashion Business)	International Exhibition Online Participation	Training (e.g., Educating the Citizens in Reducing the Textile Waste)

Thank You Notes to Consumers from Economically Marginalized Female Employees	Supporting Young Fashion Designers and their Potential (e.g., Collaborating)	Fairtrade Participation	Sharing Eco-friendly Tips (e.g., Instagram Posts and Stories)
	Volunteering (e.g., Litter Picking)		
	Clean Environment (e.g., No Textile Waste)		

Table 5.4 External CSR Activities Focused on Consumers, Community, Business Partners and General Public

The researcher noticed that a few Kosovar fashion SMEs do not necessarily use the CSR term to refer to such activities; yet, their owners and managers are mindful of the impact that these activities have towards the main CSR dimensions – society, environment and economics.

5.5.2 CSR Embedding among Fashion SMEs in Albania

Albanian owners and managers of fashion SMEs declared they have included CSR and CSR practices in their enterprises. Similar to Kosovar owners and managers, they do not have a particular CSR department. Yet, all of them considered that they regard their fashion enterprises responsible. All owners and managers affirmed that these responsibilities are embedded in their companies' identities. For example, A2 said, “... *social and environmental responsibility are ingrained in the identity of our brand...*” A3, who shared similar views with A2, illustrated the embedding of CSR in their company as,

“...We follow a simple strategy of recycling, supporting diversity and helping Roma community... we care for life on land and water, gender equality and diversity... we are leaving a mark and we are trying our best. [the researcher asked how CSR is integrated] We are a startup and we do everything on our own...”

The researcher noted that CSR embedding differs between small and medium-sized enterprises. Small companies, such as the company of A5, A2, A1 and A3, base CSR strategy on themselves

and every person involved in their companies. A1 explained the integration of CSR in their company. While she stated that the size of her company affects the CSR embedding. She emphasized, “*We feel comfortable defining ourselves as a responsible fashion company...*” She added,

*“The entire team is informed about our CSR practices...At our fashion studio, CSR is an essential part of our business philosophy. We are committed to making a positive impact on society and the environment while producing high-quality fashion products. We attain this commitment through being **environmentally conscious**, using **ethical sourcing** and **sustainable methods**, applying **fair employment** practices, collaborating with **local** artisans and craftsmen and **educating customers** on sustainable practices... As a fashion studio specializing in made-to-order designs, using natural fabrics, and actively researching better practices in fashion, we have implemented several actions and practices to demonstrate our commitment to responsibility.”*

The researcher noticed that the process of CSR application changes in a medium-sized enterprise, such as the one managed by A4. A4 (similar to K2, manager of a medium-sized enterprise in Kosovo) highlighted that CSR is based on a few departments. IB said that CSR is integrated within the human resources, marketing and public relations departments. Their company has a CSR plan, which they initiated two years ago. They incorporated the CSR plan as part of their sustainability business strategy. A4 said,

*“Our aim is to do better. We are committed to create a culture of responsibility... Our strategy is linked to our company’s values. The **CSR plan** is well-thought and takes into account the views of our stakeholders. It has clear goals, which are focused towards our customers, employees and the community... CSR activities are reported monthly... We want to learn and improve along the road, but our decisions will always be morally right.”*

Their CSR activities resembled the activities of A1. A4 stated that in the last two years, their company has introduced safe, environmental-friendly and community-friendly practices. A4’s explanation illustrated the impact that company size has in CSR organisation and execution.

During the interviews with Albanian owners and managers of fashion SMEs, the researcher observed that all Albanian owners and managers were prone to using the sustainability term. This preference can be ascribed to a few influences (1) the nature of their enterprise – sustainable fashion enterprises, (2) the inseparable linkage between the terms and (3) the tendency to equate the two terms. A few owners and managers, like A1 and A4, differentiated between CSR and sustainability. Yet, the indivisible linkage between the two was unavoidable. A1, similar to Carroll (2021), considered sustainability as part of CSR. A4, on the other hand, stated that they included CSR in their sustainable business strategy.

5.5.2.1 CSR Activities among Fashion SMEs in Albania

Albanian owners and managers of fashion SMEs apply several CSR activities. Similar to Kosovo, the researcher differentiated between internal and external CSR activities. All owners and managers emphasised the employee-focused activities (internal). The researcher noticed that the owners and managers did not highlight the obligatory nature of such activities. According to Albanian law, companies are obliged to follow the Labour Code (no. 7961; Lalaj and Poro, 2020). Accordingly, the researcher explored the implicit employee-focused activities and depicted them in Table 4.5. Albanian owners and managers claimed that they voluntarily implement employee-focused activities (these explicit activities are also presented in Table 4.5). A few Albanian owners and managers, such as A1 and A4, had detailed plans to boost employee engagement. Other owners and managers, such as A2, A3 and A5, applied less activities. Like in Kosovo, the fashion industry in Albania is women-dominated (95%; AIDA, 2021). This fact impacted the employee-activities. For instance, A1, who owns and manages an all-women company, highlighted that her company provides women-specific activities to empower them.

Internal CSR Activities	
<u>Implicit CSR Activities</u>	<u>Explicit CSR Activities</u>
Employment Contract (Labour Code)	Employees' Well-being (Trainings, Informative Sessions)
Health and Safety Protection (Labour Code)	Women's Well-being (e.g., Remote Work and Flexible Hours, Promotion of Gender Equal Workplace Culture)

Prohibition of All Forms of Discrimination in the Field of Employment (Labour Code)	Open and Inclusive Communication Culture (Encouragement of Employees to Share Ideas, Concerns and Feedback)
Special Protection for Children and Women / Protection of Motherhood / Protection for Employees Denouncing Corruption (Labour Code)	Team Meetings (Online and In-Person; Formal and Informal)
Fair Salary (Labour Code)	Flexible Work Arrangements (Work-Life Balance)
Equality between Sexes in Terms of Reward (Labour Code)	Suggestion Boxes for Employees
The Principle of Trust, Justice and Cooperation (Labour Code)	ISO Standards (e.g., ISO 10015:2019)
Prohibition of Compulsory Labor (Labour Code)	Professional Development Opportunities (e.g., Workshops, Courses, and Mentorship Opportunities)
Protection of the Working Environment / Protection from Atmospheric Conditions and Fires and Explosions (Labour Code)	Team Building and Bonding
Training of Employees (Health, Safety and Hygiene Protective Measures) (Labour Code)	Creative Workspace
Work-from-Home and Teleworking (Regulating Weekly Working and Rest Time, Overtime, Work on Official Holidays and Night Work) (Labour Code)	Social Gatherings (Online and In-Person)
Annual Leave (4 weeks) / Maternity Leave/ Break during Working Hours / Daily Rest/ Weekly Rest (Labour Code)	Workplace Trainings (e.g., about Newer and Safer Practices)
	Safety Trainings (e.g., in Cases of Incidents at Workplace)
	Hiring Marginalized People
	Inclusion of Employees in the Decision-Making Process

Table 5.5 Implicit and Explicit CSR Practices Implemented by Albanian Fashion SME Owner and Manager

Regardless of the nature of the activities (implicit or explicit), all Albanian owners and managers regarded their employees as the foundation of the company. A5 stated, “... *For us, employees are part of the family. They make us, the brand...*” Albanian owners and managers disclosed several external CSR activities directed to consumers, community, general public and partners. All owners and managers stated that the external CSR activities were explicit in nature. Table 4.6 depicts these external activities.

External CSR Activities			
<u>Consumer-Focused</u>	<u>Community-Focused</u>	<u>Partner-Focused</u>	<u>General Public- Focused</u>
ISO Standards (e.g., ISO 9001: 2019)	Local Employment	International Exhibition Participation (Online and In-Person)	Information Campaign(s) (e.g., Social Media Posts about Fast Fashion Consequences, Sustainable Fashion, Ethical Fashion Consumption)
Certified Organic and Recycled Materials	Zero-Waste Production	Fairtrade Participation	Training (e.g., Educating the Citizens in Reducing the Textile Waste)
Lower Environmental Impact Material (e.g., Organic Cotton, Hemp, Tencel, Linen)	Training(s) (e.g., Educating the Community on Ethical Fashion Consumption)	Festival Participation	Sharing Eco-friendly Tips (e.g., Instagram Posts and Stories)
Made-to-Order Model	Volunteering (e.g., Litter Picking)	Event(s)	Cultural Event(s)
Eco-Friendly Packaging (Recycled Cardboard Boxes and Biodegradable or Reusable Garment Bags)	Pop Up Event(s) (Supporting New Artists; Using Homemade Food)		Break Social Stereotypes (e.g., Inclusion of Roma Community in Promotion Campaigns)
	Helping and Supporting Roma Community		
	‘Thank You’ Instagram Post(s)		

Table 5.6 External CSR Activities Focused on Consumers, Community, Business Partners and General Public

A2, A3 and A5 followed a similar approach for their external activities (as they did for their internal activities). Such activities were implemented occasionally. These owners and managers attributed this aperiodic characteristic to their companies' lack of resources. Regardless of resource constraints, the researcher noticed that these owners and managers implemented various unique external activities. For instance, A3 organised a few pop-up events for the community during the year. In addition, A3 applied a peculiar external activity, which she explained "...*We give back to Roma community, by gifting them our oldest collections for them to resell...*" Other Albanian owners and managers, such as A1 and A4, implement a concrete plan for external activities. A1 explained their company's plan below,

"[Sustainable Material Selection] We have made significant strides in sourcing and utilizing sustainable and natural fabrics in our designs. This includes using organic cotton, hemp, tencel, and linen, which have lower environmental impacts compared to conventional fabrics... [Zero-Waste Production] We have adopted zero-waste pattern-making techniques to minimize fabric waste during the production process. This ensures that we utilize our materials efficiently, reducing environmental impact... [Made-to-Order Model] Our core business model revolves around made-to-order designs. By producing garments only when they are ordered, we minimize overproduction and excess inventory, reducing fashion's contribution to waste and environmental degradation... [Eco-Friendly Packaging] We have transitioned to eco-friendly packaging materials, such as recycled cardboard boxes and biodegradable or reusable garment bags. This reduces our reliance on single-use plastics and minimizes packaging waste... [Research and Development] We have dedicated resources to ongoing research on better practices in fashion. This includes exploring innovative sustainable materials, production methods, and dyeing techniques with lower environmental impacts..."

5.5.3 CSR Embedding among Fashion SMEs in Croatia

Croatian fashion SME owners and managers stated that they have embedded CSR into their enterprises. Similar to Kosovar and Albanian fashion SMEs, none of the Croatian fashion SMEs have a CSR department or a specific CSR-related employee. IE said, “...*our brand is too small for it to be someone's specific task...*” Similar to C2, C1, C3 and C4 ascribed the absence of CSR in their structures to the size of their company and the lack of resources. Regardless of the CSR structural absence, all Croatian fashion SME owners and managers claimed that they have embedded CSR in their companies’ purposes, visions, values and processes. C3 stated, “...*CSR is integrated in the **core** of our company... it is part of our **company philosophy**...*” C1 added, “... *it is everything we do... we are guided by responsible practices... for us, it is **the standard**...*”

As illustrated above, all Croatian owners and managers regard their companies as responsible. All of them stated that they take into account CSR in every process of their companies, from the creative process to the packaging. C4 stated,

“...*social and environmental responsibility impact **every choice of ours**... We ensure that everyone involved in our processes shares the **same values** as us – our tailors, our partners, our suppliers. Our **employees** are well aware of these responsibilities and like us, they appreciate and embrace them... We ensure **safe and fair labour practices** and a **minimal environmental impact** in every step of the production process. Our **partners** and our **suppliers**, whom we source locally, also share our values on the social and environmental responsibilities...*”

All of the Croatian fashion SME owners and managers described a similar embracement of CSR into their companies. Three out of four of these SMEs embodied the slow fashion movement. Accordingly, these SMEs owners and managers (C1, C3 and C4) stated that their company philosophies are directly impacted by social and environmental responsibilities. This embedding has influenced also the retail process. C4 explained that their company prefers e-commerce platforms to traditional shops, as such choice is more environmental-friendly. Their company saves up to 30% of their energy by using e-commerce. C3 stated a similar embedding process of CSR. C3 explained that these responsibilities influenced even the furnishing of their retail stores; their

stores have eco-friendly furniture. All Croatian interviewees highlighted their willingness to contribute to a social and environmental development. Nevertheless, they mentioned the disadvantage of the size of their companies. C2 said,

“...smaller brands like ours, certainly cannot contribute more significantly to the overall solution, but the message we send through our brand is important... we try as much as our position and possibilities allow to enhance the environment and society, to take conscious activities...”

5.5.3.1 CSR Activities among Fashion SMEs in Croatia

Croatian owners and managers of fashion SMEs disclosed several of their CSR activities. The researcher classified their CSR activities as internal and external. At the beginning, this third-level section focuses on the internal activities (directed mainly on the employees). The researcher noted that Croatian owners and managers mentioned a hybridisation of the nature of the internal CSR activities (explicit and implicit). The Croatian law obliges companies to follow the labour act (71-05-03/1-14-2). Since Croatia joined the European Union as the 28th member country, Croatian labour act has transposed several directives of the European Union. The researcher explored the labour act and included its legal characteristics in Table 4.7 (below). A few of the interviewees mentioned these lawful obligations. Nevertheless, Croatian fashion SMEs owners’ and managers’ focus lied on the voluntary internal-focused activities. A few of them, such as C3 and C1, emphasised only the voluntary activities. These employee-focused activities undertaken by Croatian SME owners and managers are presented below in Table 5.7

Internal CSR Activities	
<u>Implicit CSR Activities</u>	<u>Explicit CSR Activities</u>
Obligations and Rights of Employer and Employee (Labour Act)	Employees’ Well-being (Trainings, Informative Sessions, Posters)
Employer-Employee Relationship (Labour Act)	Women’s Well-being (e.g., Flexible Hours, Promotion of Gender Equal Workplace Culture, Raising Awareness about Breast Cancer through Informative Sessions and Fact Sheets)

Employment Contract (Labour Act)	CEN and CENELEC Standards (e.g., CEN/TC 248)
Protection of Life, Health, Privacy and Dignity of Employees (Labour Act)	Education on Interpersonal Capacities
Education and Training to Employees (Labour Act)	Team Bonding
Prohibition of All Forms of Discrimination (Labour Act) / Equal Gender Opportunities and Criteria (Labour Act)	Inspirational Workspace
Fair and Equal Salaries (Labour Act)	Social Gatherings (Online and In-Person)
Harassment and Sexual Harassment (Labour Act)	Workplace Trainings (e.g., Safer Practices)
Participation of Workers in Decision-Making (Labour Act)	Safety Trainings (e.g., in Cases of Incidents at Workplace)
Protection of Motherhood (Labour Act)	Open and Inclusive Communication Culture
Working Hours	Team Meetings (Online and In-Person; Formal and Informal)
Employment Rules (Obligation to Adopt Employment Rules) (Labour Act)	One-to-one Communication (Virtual and Physical)
Trade Unions And Employers' Associations (Labour Act)	Professional Development Opportunities (e.g., Workshops, Courses, and Trainings)
Economic And Social Council (Labour Act)	Celebrations (e.g., Dinners, Parties)
Annual Leave (18 working days) / Annual Leave for Mothers, Fathers, Single Parents	
Maternity Leave/ Break during Working Hours/ Daily Rest/ Weekly Rest (Labour Act)	
Night Work (Prohibition of Night Work for Women in Industry) (Labour Act)	
Employment Book (Labour Act)	

Table 5. 7 Implicit and Explicit CSR Practices Implemented by Croatian Fashion SME Owner and Manager

In addition to internal CSR activities, Croatian fashion SME owners and managers highlighted various external activities. They claimed that external activities are explicit (voluntary) in nature. Such activities concentrate on consumers, community, local suppliers (partners), and general public. C1 claimed that the main responsibility towards their consumers is providing them socially and environmentally responsible products. She stated, “...we do not use products made out of

animal skin or any harmful material...we offer high-quality, hand-crafted pieces... our pieces are produced in small series...” C3, C4 and C2 shared similar views. C2 claimed, “*For us, it is important to offer our consumers superior craftsmanship, satisfactory, high-quality and durable products... we do not tend to create too large stock nor to manufacture too large batches... we produce in small series...*” All Croatian fashion SME owners and managers provided eco-friendly packaging. Besides that, C1, C3 and C4 mentioned that they inform and educate their consumers on ethical fashion consumption by sharing eco-friendly facts and tips to their consumers through website pages, emails and newsletters. For instance, C4’s company has a page in their website named “The effect of fast fashion, what can you do?” Croatian fashion SME owners and managers mentioned several other external CSR activities centered on the community, partners and general public. These activities are presented below in Table 5.8

External CSR Activities			
<u>Consumer-Focused</u>	<u>Community-Focused</u>	<u>Partner-Focused</u>	<u>General Public-Focused</u>
Lower Environmental Impact Material (e.g., Organic Cotton, 100% Cotton, Bamboo, Linen)	Local Employment	International and Local Exhibition Participation (Online and In-Person)	Information Campaign(s) (e.g., Social Media Posts about Fast Fashion Consequences, Sustainable Fashion, Ethical Fashion Consumption)
Certified Organic and Recycled Materials	Zero-Waste Production	Fairtrade Participation	Training (e.g., Educating the Citizens in Reducing the Textile Waste)
CEN and CENELEC Standards (e.g., CEN/TC 248)	Training(s) (e.g., Educating the Community on Ethical Fashion Consumption)	Festival Participation	Sharing Eco-friendly Tips (e.g., Social Media Posts and Stories)
E-Commerce	Volunteering (e.g., Litter Picking)	Celebrations (e.g., Work Anniversaries)	Cultural Event(s)
Eco-Friendly Packaging (Recycled Cardboard Boxes and Biodegradable	Local Suppliers from Rural Areas who Respect Social and Environmental Standards	‘Thank You’ Social Media Post(s)	

or Reusable Garment Bags)			
Sharing Eco-Friendly Facts and Tips (e.g., Website Page, Emails, Newsletters)	Event(s) (Supporting New Artists)		
‘Thank You’ Social Media Post(s)	‘Thank You’ Social Media Post(s)		

Table 5.8 External CSR Activities Focused on Consumers, Community, Business Partners and General Public

5.5.4 CSR Embedding among Fashion SMEs in Greece

Greek fashion SME owners and managers affirmed they have embedded CSR into their companies. All of them considered their companies as socially and environmentally responsible. The process of embedding CSR slightly differs across the selected Greek fashion SMEs. The embedding differs according to the size (small or medium-sized company) and nature of the company (slow fashion or commercial company). The small-sized companies (G6, G5, G3, G2 and G1) have incorporated CSR into all of their structures. They stated that these responsibilities lie with every single person involved in their companies. G2 attributed this to the close working relationship that the size of the company provides to them. She stated,

*“...we’re a **small group** of people, we all know each other so well, we take every decision together... our employees and our supplier carry out the mission of the brand, thus, I make sure that our responsible practices are hugged by all of us...”*

CSR is integrated differently in the medium-sized company managed by G3. G3 explained that their company includes CSR within their management and their departments of public relations and marketing. The researcher noted a similar integration in medium-sized companies in Kosovo and Albania; Kosovar and Albanian medium-sized companies also grounded the CSR activity on a few departments. Regardless of the size of the company, none of Greek fashion SMEs have a specific CSR department or employee.

The slow fashion companies (G3, G2 and G1) have integrated CSR in their purposes, missions, visions and values. G3 stated that CSR is embedded in their core purpose, mission and vision, as their company was founded on responsible and deliberate grounds. Similar to G3, G2 claimed that they have embraced CSR in every aspect of their company. He used the expression “...*from head to toe...*” to explain such CSR embracement. The other companies (G6, G5 and G4) have also integrated CSR into their visions and values. Their understanding of the process of embedding differs from the understanding of the slow fashion SMEs. For slow fashion companies, CSR is a core element of their company identity. For the companies of G6, G5 and G4, CSR is an added value and not their company's identity. For example, G6, whose company produces and sells fur clothing, stated that they have adopted CSR in their company for 30 years. She stated that social and environmental responsibilities are part of her company's values and vision. Accordingly, they source locally and follow a zero-pollution philosophy. As part of their environmental responsibilities, they have presented vegan collections, made out of wood and not plastic (during the last 25 years). It is important to note that their company still offers animal fur collections (in addition to the vegan collections). Yet, G6 claimed that their sales declined because of animal activism groups. She replied to such critics, “... *we are ethical, we care about our employees and our society, we care about the environment...we make zero pollution...*” Her understanding of CSR implementation does not include animal protection. Consequently, the CSR activities of her company do not tackle such issues. G6's CSR implementation shows an example of CSR embedding as an added value (not as a company's identity). Her understanding of CSR is also an ideal example to depict the influence of owner's or manager's CSR understanding on the process of CSR embedding.

5.5.4.1 CSR Activities among Fashion SMEs in Greece

Owners and managers of fashion SMEs in Greece apply several CSR activities as part of their CSR strategy. The researcher classified their CSR activities as internal and external. All Greek owners and managers highlighted the importance of internal CSR activities. All of them ascribed such activities to the willingness of their companies. The researcher, nevertheless, identified and observed the codified and mandatory state requirements for employees. Greece protects employees' rights through the Labour Law (4808/2021), which was last amended in 2023. Similar

to Croatia, Greece (as a European Union member country) adopted the European Union directives in the law. The Labour Law's characteristics are presented below in Table 5.9. Table 5.9 illustrates also the explicit CSR activities (actions taken voluntarily by the Greek fashion SMEs to tackle CSR issues in their inner environment).

G3 explained a few of their company's explicit CSR activities. She said, "...*We have created **equal opportunities** regardless of positions, everyone should be heard and, we have educated the staff on the things that increase their **interpersonal capacities**...*" G3, G2 and G1, whose companies are in the end process of adopting the zero-waste policy, mentioned employee training on new technologies as an explicit CSR activity. G2 also mentioned that they encourage suggestions and feedback from their employees. She said "...*we provide a **creative work environment** which makes the employees feel heard, one that offers **equal opportunities** for everyone and encourages **growth**... an environment that invites people to connect with others...*" G4, who also highlighted a comfortable work environment as an employee-focused CSR activity, said, "...*I provide a shoulder for them... I said before, they're like my daughters...*" Her understanding of CSR activities mainly included support and understanding of the employees.

Internal CSR Activities	
<u>Implicit CSR Activities</u>	<u>Explicit CSR Activities</u>
Employment Contract (Labour Law)	Employees' Well-being (Online and In-Person Trainings, Informative Sessions, Posters)
Work and Rest Time (Labour Law)	Women's Well-being (e.g., Flexible Hours, Promotion of Gender Equal Workplace Culture)
Salary and Other Benefits (Labour Law)	Education on Interpersonal Capacities (Online and In-Person Trainings, Workshops, Videos)
Balancing Family and Work Obligations (Labour Law)	Virtual and Physical Team Building and Bonding
Occupational Safety, Protection of Health of Employees and Protection of Labour Environment (Labour Law)	CEN and CENELEC Standards (e.g., CEN/TC 248)

Prevention of Violence and Harassment in the Working Environment (Labour Law)	Workplace Trainings, Workshops and Videos (e.g., about New Technology and Safe Practices)
Personal Data Protection (Labour Law)	Inspirational, Creative and Comfortable Workspace
Equal Gender Opportunities (Labour Law)	Social Gatherings (Online and In-Person)
Participation of Workers in Decision-Making (Labour Law)	Safety Trainings (e.g., in Cases of Incidents at Workplace)
Protection of Minors during Employment (Labour Law)	Open and Inclusive Communication Culture
Annual Leave (4 weeks) / Maternity Leave / Paternity Leave / Parental Leave / Child Care Leave / Career Leave / Force Majeure Leave / Marriage Leave / Election Leave / Study Leave / School Activities Leave / Death of Close Relative Leave / Unpaid Leave / Sick Leave / Break during Working Hours/ Daily Rest/ Weekly Rest (Labour Law)	Professional Development Opportunities (e.g., Workshops, Courses and Fairs)
Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (Labour Law)	Team Meetings (Online and In-Person; Formal and Informal)
Digital Employment Card (Labour Law)	One-to-one Communication (Virtual and Physical)

Table 5.9 Implicit and Explicit CSR Practices Implemented by Greek Fashion SME Owner and Manager

In addition to internal CSR activities, Greek fashion SME owners and managers disclosed several external CSR activities. Such activities focused on consumers, community, partners and general public. G2 stated, “...we offer our consumers timeless, hand-made pieces made out of vegan and environmental-friendly fabrics in limited series... we use only recyclable packaging... we offer them repair services...” G3 mentioned similar characteristics of their products. She also used the terms “timeless”, “hand-made” and “environmental-friendly” when explaining her company’s products. AS highlighted their biodegradable packaging and tags. G1 also talked about the “made-to-order” process, which ensures their consumers of company’s social and environmental practices. In addition to the afore-mentioned activities, G1 and G3 discussed about their charities.

For instance, G1's company donates clothes to people in need and avoids the throwaway consumerism.

The researcher noted that the majority of Greek fashion SME owners and managers emphasised environment as a stakeholder. They mentioned several CSR activities primarily directed to environment protection. All of them stated that they source their materials from small, local Greek businesses that respect social and environmental standards; G3 emphasised local suppliers that are certified of ethical practices. They all attributed these activities to the reduction of the environmental impact, precisely the carbon footprint. In addition to environmental protection, these activities helped the community by supporting local economy. A few Greek fashion SME owners and managers, such as G3, G2 and G1, highlighted the zero-waste production philosophy. This philosophy is predominantly focused on the environment. As part of the philosophy, G3, G2 and G1 said that they offer limited production series and repurpose or recycle textile waste. The above-mentioned external CSR activities and other ones not mentioned in the paragraph are presented below in Table 5.10.

External CSR Activities				
<u>Consumer-Focused</u>	<u>Community-Focused</u>	<u>Partner-Focused</u>	<u>General Public-Focused</u>	<u>Environment-Focused</u>
Certified Materials: OEKO-TEX Standard 100 / Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)	Local Employment	International and Local Exhibition Participation (Online and In-Person)	Information Campaign(s) (e.g., Social Media Posts about Fast Fashion Consequences, Sustainable Fashion, Ethical Fashion Consumption)	Zero-Waste Policy
Lower Environmental Impact Material (e.g., Organic Cotton, Tencel, Linen, Pinatex,	Zero-Waste Production	Fairtrade Participation	Sharing Eco-friendly Tips (e.g., Facebook, Instagram Posts and Stories, LinkedIn Posts)	Small, Local Greek Businesses that Respect Social and

Rayon and Modal)				Environmental Standards
Made-to-Order Process	Video(s) (e.g., Educating the Community on Ethical Fashion Consumption)	Festival Participation		Limited Production Series
Eco-Friendly Packaging (Recycled Cardboard Boxes and Biodegradable or Reusable Garment Bags)	Animal Rescuing	Celebrations (e.g., Dinners)		Repurposing or Recycling Textile Waste
Sharing Eco-Friendly Facts and Tips (e.g., Emails, Newsletters)	Supporting Local Economy (Employing Suppliers that Own Family Businesses and Respect Social and Environmental Standards)	‘Thank You’ Social Media Post(s)		Donating Unsold Pieces
‘Thank You’ Social Media Post(s)	Event(s) (e.g., ‘Thank You’ Parties)			Certified Suppliers
Repair Services	Supporting Local NGOs Charity (Donation of Unsold Clothes)			Sustainable Future

Table 5.10 External CSR Activities Focused on Consumers, Community, Business Partners and General Public

5.5.5 CSR Embedding and CSR Activities across fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The previous subsections discussed in detail the process of CSR embedding from Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek owners and managers in their respective fashion SMEs. These sections also presented and categorised the CSR activities implemented by the afore-said fashion SMEs. The researcher noted a few differences and categorised them at the (a) individual, (b) organisational, (c) national and (d) regional level. The researcher upheld the individual differences to the CSR understanding of the owners and managers. The variety of CSR understanding among owners and managers were discussed previously. Yet, the researcher deemed it important to re-emphasise the differences among the interviewed owners and managers in terms of age and education. These two factors impacted the nature of the company and the process of CSR embedding. All of the owners and managers, who belong to generation Y and Z, own and manage slow fashion (or sustainable) companies. Consequently, all of them embraced CSR in their companies' purposes, missions, visions and values. At the same time, all of the afore-mentioned owners and managers were formally and informally educated about CSR. In addition to age and education, the researcher noticed another characteristic which impacted the CSR activities – philosophies and movements. Slow fashion movement and zero-policy philosophy impacted the owners and managers views, and consequently, they impacted the CSR embracement in the companies they own and manage. Feminism also impacted several of CSR activities. For instance, a few owners and managers implemented women-empowering CSR activities.

At the company level, the researcher noted differences in terms of nature and size of the company. For slow fashion companies, CSR is a core element of their company identity. Accordingly, slow fashion companies embraced CSR in every aspect of their organisations. For commercial companies, CSR is not their company's identity; it is an added value. Consequently, commercial companies embrace some of the CSR dimensions. In terms of company size, medium-sized companies integrate a more formalised process of CSR embedding compared to small-sized companies. Medium-sized companies ground CSR on a few departments. Small-sized companies integrate CSR into every structure and share it with every single person involved in their companies. At the national level, the researcher noted differences among (a) Kosovars and

Albanians and (b) Croatians and Greeks. These differences can be ascribed to the countries' developments. As mentioned in the previous subsections, Kosovo and Albania are developing countries, whereas Croatia and Greece are developed countries. Yet, when comparing Kosovo and Albania, the researcher noted a dissimilarity between them. Albania fashion SMEs embraced CSR more intensely than Kosovar fashion SMEs. The Albanian's CSR embedding can be ascribed to its development. Albania is well-established, and it has a well-regarded fashion industry. Kosovo is a recently-established country, and it has a developing fashion industry.

The researcher also noted that fashion industry's development stages differ across these countries. For instance, Greece's fashion industry is a mature, world-wide recognised industry. Croatia's and Albania's fashion industries are well-established. Kosovo's fashion industry, on the other hand, is in its introduction phase (although it has started to gain international attention in the last couple years). Lastly, the researcher identified differences in terms of regional institutionalisations. The EU member states (Croatia and Greece) revealed a more inclusive CSR embedding than non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania). Precisely, the employment laws showed noteworthy differences between these EU and non-EU member states. A few internal CSR activities in non-EU member states, such as the involvement of employees in decision making, prevention of harassment, and balancing of the family and work obligations, are explicit in their nature. These exact activities are of implicit nature among EU member states; they are included in the employment laws. These articles in Greece and Croatia have been transposed from directives of the European Union. This overview revealed that Matten and Moon's (2008) explicit-implicit framework is informative for identifying CSR activities at different levels (company, national and regional).

5.6 CSR Communication among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

5.6.1 CSR Communication in Fashion SMEs in Kosovo

The thematic analysis depicted two modes of CSR communication among Kosovar fashion SMEs – self-initiated and stakeholder-initiated. Both ways convey the message (content) to various stakeholders. Based on the findings of CSR activities (presented above), the message can be about

the organisation, management, product, manufacturing process and sales. It focuses on one or more of the following topics: environment, society/community, ethics and philanthropy. To communicate the message, owners and managers of Kosovar fashions SMEs disclosed a variety of channels. These are either company channels (social media, emails, meetings, posters) or independent ones (TV, radio, magazines, fairs, workshops, discussion panels). The main channels used are media and meetings. They use traditional and online media. Regardless of the increase of online media, precisely social media, usage in Kosovo in recent years (Kemp, 2023), owners and managers stated that they frequently use TV, radio, and magazines as means of communication. For instance, K1 stated,

*“We usually use the media to convey our CSR activities to different groups. Lately we’ve been very present in the traditional media. We’ve been covered by **local and national media**, mainly by **radio stations and TV channels**. Our enterprise has gained an outstanding attention... The relationship with the [traditional] media is reciprocated. There are cases where they are the ones that initiate the coverage, and we also invite them sometimes to report our activities in the community.”*

Similar to K1, K4 claimed that local, national and international media provided them extensive coverage. K4 said, “... *several international magazines from Belgium, Germany and Italy covered our social activities...*” K4 attributed the international coverage to the social component of their enterprise, specifically the empowerment of marginalised women through direct employment. All Kosovar fashion SME owners and managers, besides K5, highlighted the media-initiated coverage. They also disclosed they often invite local tv and radio stations to cover their activities. In addition to traditional media, they disclosed the usage of online media, precisely of social media. All of them claimed that they use Facebook and Instagram to convey their activities to their stakeholders. For instance, K5 uses Instagram posts to show their customers ways to take care of their purchased clothes. K1 uses their social media presence to educate young people on reducing the textile waste. Among them, K1, K2 and K4 use their website as another communication channel for their activities. The other companies (K3, K5 and K6) do not have a website at all.

Besides media, owners and managers claimed meetings as a tool to communicate their CSR activities. Informal and formal meetings are the most used tools of communication within Kosovar

SMEs. Smaller companies (such as K1, K4 and K5) typically use informal meetings to communicate their activities to their employees. Such meetings occur in the coffee shop, at the park or in the group chat. They also acknowledge the importance of formal meetings.

For instance, K4 stated,

*“Very often we’ve held [formal] **meetings** to relay the messages, to describe the activities, and explain the outcomes of every task. We’ve always had open discussions and everyone has expressed their opinions... When we communicate with the employees, we use **non-formal notions** to communicate the message because we have to bear in mind that they are in their 40s and have only elementary schooling, and they don’t understand the terms... we simply tell it as a story”*

The other owners and managers also stated that they do not apply the CSR term in their discussions. K1 said,

“...we do not use the term CSR in our business, at least not particularly... but we do have our causes as a company, for example: protecting the business, saving the nature, caring about the community... and these are the terms that we frequently use.”

Larger companies (such as K2 and K3) embrace both forms of meetings, but put more attention to formal meetings. This preference can be ascribed to their organisational structure. K2, who manages a medium-sized enterprise that comprises 250 employees (permanent and contractor employees), stated that the CSR term is a well-known term to their Management, HR, Finance and Marketing team. Yet, it is a new term to their employees. Kosovar owners and managers use other tools, such as emails, posters and trainings, to convey CSR activities to internal stakeholders. K6 stated, “... *It depends on the activities. Sometimes, we use **emails** or **online group chats**. Other times, we use **posters**. Recently, we placed some safety and health practices in our workplace...*”

5.6.2 CSR Communication in Fashion SMEs in Albania

Albanian owners and managers of fashion SMEs stated that they mostly initiate communication with stakeholders. In rare cases, the communication can be initiated from media or other stakeholders (such as local and international NGOs, fashion institute or fashion society). Similar to Kosovar owners and managers, they stated that the messages can be about the organisation, management, product(s), manufacturing process and sales, and they focus on the environment,

society/community, work ethics and goodwill. Two Albanian owners and managers, A1 and A4, disclosed they have a specific communication strategy for the CSR activities. Their companies have identified different tools for different stakeholders. A1 explained their CSR communication strategy. She stated,

*“We are dedicated to transparently communicate our CSR practices to all our stakeholders... Here's how we engage with each group. We communicate our CSR practices to **consumers** through product labeling, website, social media, newsletters and emails. [Product Labeling] We label our products with sustainability certifications and information about the materials used. [Website and Social Media] Our website and social media platforms regularly feature content explaining our CSR initiatives, sustainable practices, and the impact of responsible fashion choices. [Newsletter and Emails] We include CSR updates in newsletters and emails to keep our customers informed about our commitment to sustainability...”*

Similar to A1, A4 stated that they use website, social media, newsletters and emails to communicate with their consumers. All of the other owners and managers, besides A5, use website to communicate their main CSR activities (A5's company does not have a website). The researcher observed and noticed the presence of CSR activities in their websites' content. In addition to websites, all Albanian owners and managers claimed they use social media, particularly Instagram, to convey such practices. For instance, A2 said, “...*We also often post pictures and videos of our fabric making process and the people who do it... During sustainable fashion week, we have an **information campaign** about what sustainable fashion means...*” A4 added that their company often use Albanian fashion influencers to communicate their CSR activities to their consumers.

The main communication channels they use to convey their CSR activities to employees are informal and formal meetings, trainings and group chats. For instance, A1 stated,

*“...We convey our CSR practices to **employees** through meetings and trainings. [Meetings] We hold regular meetings to share updates on our CSR initiatives and involve employees in discussions about sustainability. [Trainings] We provide training to our employees on sustainable practices and ethical behavior, fostering a culture of responsibility within the organization...”*

A5, A3 and A2 claimed they mostly use informal meetings to inform their employees about the CSR activities. They often discuss the activities with the employees. Such discussions take place in the workplace, coffee shops or online group chats. In addition to employees, A1 mentioned the communication tools to convey CSR to media. A1 revealed,

*“...we engage with **media** through press releases, interviews and features. [Press Releases] We issue press releases to media outlets to announce significant CSR milestones, collaborations, and sustainability achievements. [Interviews and Features] We actively engage with media through interviews and features to discuss our CSR efforts and the importance of responsible fashion.”*

5.6.3 CSR Communication in Fashion SMEs in Croatia

Croatian fashion SME owners and managers disclosed several communication channels employed by them to convey CSR and CSR activities to their stakeholders. They mainly use internal channels, such as meetings, websites, social media, emails and newsletters, among others. Occasionally, they use external channels, such as magazines, fairs, trainings and workshops. The main channels used are formal and informal meetings and online media (website and social media). In most cases, communication is initiated by the company. In rare cases, communication is initiated by local and internal online and traditional media and fashion society.

C1 stated that their company uses different channels for different stakeholders. For employees, C1 mentioned informal and formal meetings as the most common tools. Similar to C1, C2, C3 and C4 highlighted the informal and formal meetings. C2 mentioned that they have a monthly formal meeting to discuss ethical, environmental and social issues as a staff. He stated that they might have several informal meetings during the month, depending on the occurrences. He credited this to the working space proximity; he said, *“...our atelier where we create is in the same space with our offices, and we are in contact all the time...”* He also emphasised a frequent face-to-face and virtual communication with retail employees. Their company has six stores (three of which are located in Croatian coastal tourist centers). Accordingly, he said, *“...ensuring impartial communication and engagement with our sellers is very important to us...”*

C1, C3 and C4 (owners-managers of slow fashion companies) have weekly CSR-focused formal meetings and several informal meetings during the month. When referring to informal meetings, most of them indicated one-to-one casual conversations. For instance, C3 said “...*sometimes, we can discuss about such issues while walking to the park, grabbing the lunch, going for a coffee...*” She ascribed the opportunity to have such meetings to the close employee-employer relationship provided by the small size of her company. Similar to C3, C4 attributed the prevalence of informal meetings to the composition of her company. She said, “...*we are all family, some of us have been close friends since we were kids...*” C1 added that, occasionally, they use video calls, emails and newsletters to communicate their CSR activities to their employees. C2 mentioned trainings as effective tool to educate their employees about safe and ethical practices. C3 and C4 also highlighted the importance of celebrating successes with their employees (e.g., dinners and small parties).

Every Croatian fashion SME owner and manager highlighted online media as a successful communication channel. They mainly use this channel to convey their CSR-related activities to their consumers and community. All Croatian fashion SME owner and manager use social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They mentioned that they frequently post about their company’s social and environmental impacts. C3, C4 and C1 stated that they use these platforms to educate their consumers and the community on responsible purchasing practices. In addition, Croatian fashion SME owner and manager use their websites to communicate CSR-related content. The researcher observed their websites and social media platforms and noted qualitative and fresh content. Croatian fashion SME owner and manager, with the exception of C2, use websites to present the impact of social, ethical and environmental responsibilities in their organisation, vision and values, product(s) and manufacturing process, among others. In addition, C3 utilises their website to offer guidelines to consumers on conscious practices (e.g., careful wash). C1 stated that they use their website to reach other stakeholders, such as partner, community and media.

5.6.4 CSR Communication in Fashion SMEs in Greece

Greek fashion SME owners and managers claimed that they adopt various tools to communicate their CSR activities to their stakeholders. The communication is self-initiated for the most part.

Most of the Greek fashion SME owners and managers (G3, G2, G1, and G5) have specific communication plans for the CSR activities. Even the owners and managers, who do not have such communication plans (like G6) stated that they intend to craft such plans in the near future. G3, who manages a medium-sized company, explained their CSR communication plan.

*“For us, it is really important to communicate our CSR with each and every stakeholder of ours. We have a **clear communication strategy** to achieve that. We are straightforward and transparent... We use **multiple channels** to convey our strategy to all of our stakeholders. Our main channel is our **website**. We have devoted a section in our website for our ethical, social and environmental activities. We use **social media**, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Instagram. We send **emails** and **newsletters**... We make sure to be consistent in our communication and to update our content... Our main goal is to inform our stakeholders...our end-goal is to achieve engagement...”*

Other Greek fashion SME owners and managers, such as G4, mentioned a different approach. G4 stated that their company outsources such services. While their manager decides on the information to communicate to the stakeholders, the outsourced company selects the channels to communicate the activities. Nevertheless, G4 noted that they do not employ formal communication tools to convey messages to their employees. Because of the close relationship with their employees, they mainly use informal meetings. All of the other Greek fashion SME owners and managers admitted to engage differently when conveying CSR activities to their employees. G2 and G1 stated that they use several online and face-to-face communication channels, such as WhatsApp group chats, SMS communications, outings, virtual events, and formal weekly meetings, among others. G3 and G2 emphasised virtual and face-to-face trainings and workshops as communication channels with their employees. G2 explained,

*“From the start, our brand has embraced the zero-waste policy. Our employees were the first to be informed about it. We informed and educated them through **one-to-one talks, workshops and training videos**. We have encouraged them to embrace this policy by **setting a good example**. From the start, we took their ideas into consideration, and we still do take them into account...”*

All Greek fashion SME owners and managers mentioned their websites and social media platforms as communication channels for conveying their companies' CSR activities to the consumers. All of them admitted to use these channels to inform consumers about companies' CSR-related results and to encourage them to embrace conscious purchasing behaviors. The researcher observed each of the interviewee's online presence (their websites and social media platforms) and noticed that the majority of them presents fresh and qualitative CSR-related content. For instance, G1's company has a page in their website's navigation bar dedicated to charity. Their website has another page, which shows all of their partners and suppliers. G3's company, on the other hand, has a page dedicated to social responsibility; the page discusses company's views on CSR, their activities and daily social- and environmental-friendly practices.

5.6.5 CSR Communication among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

In terms of communication tools, these findings depicted that fashion SMEs in SEE adopt similar communication tools to other fashion companies around the world. Similar to Pelikanova et al. (2021), Arrigo et al. (2022), Low and Bu (2022) and Rienda et al. (2023), the findings revealed that company website and social media are among the most prominent communication tools. Contrary to the findings of Colucci et al. (2020) among Italian fashion companies, these findings showed that fashion SMEs in SEE abstain from CSR reporting. In addition to communication tools, these findings presented an in-depth understanding of the CSR communication process. The process of CSR communication presented several resemblances among Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs. Given that, the researcher decided to depict this process into a framework (see Figure 5.2) This empirical framework explains the process of communicating a CSR message (content) from the emitter to the receiver. The emitter can be the owner, manager or the employee. Regardless of the person, the emitter is under the cloak of the company; hereafter, emitter is referred as the company (emitter=company). It is important to note that this framework is size-specific. It describes the CSR communication of small and medium-sized companies. In addition to size, this framework is industry (fashion) and country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) specific. It presents the CSR communication of the fashion SME owners and managers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece and it shares insights to researchers investigating

similar contexts. Practically, it illustrates the process for companies willing to communicate their CSR-related contents.

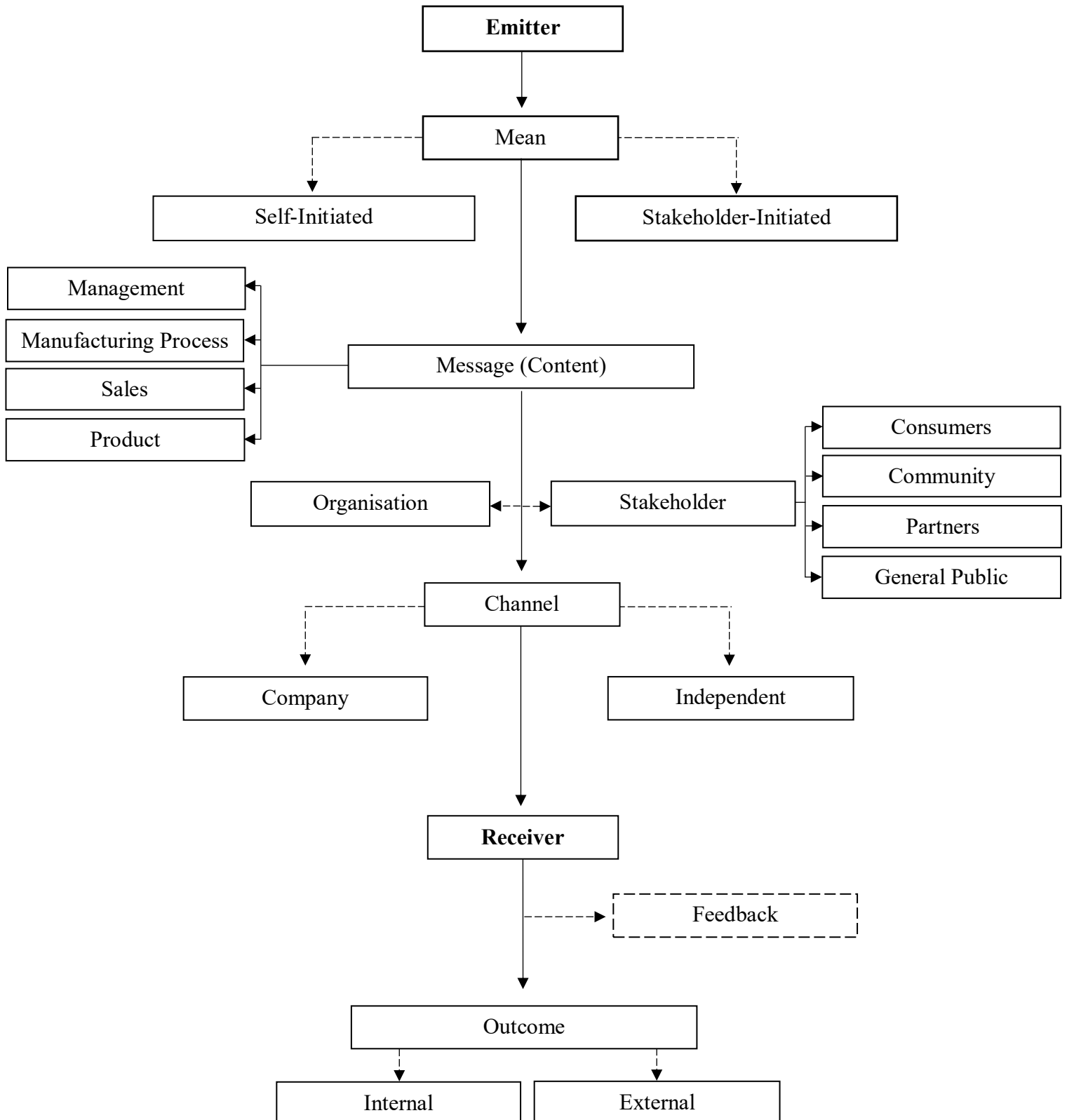


Figure 5.2 Empirical Framework for Communicating CSR in SMEs

The company is presented to two modes of CSR communication– self-initiated and stakeholder-initiated. After identifying the mode, the company selects the message that they want to convey. The message is directed towards stakeholders (such as, consumers, community, partners or general public) and organisation (mainly employees). The message can be about the management, manufacturing process, product(s) and sales. After deciding on the message, the company has to select the channel of communication. The previous subsections provided a variety of channels. These channels are mainly categorised as company and independent channels. Company channels can be company's social media, their website, emails, meetings, newsletters, and posters. Independent channels can be TV, radio, magazines, fairs, workshops, and discussion panels, among others. Once the channel is selected, the message reaches the receiver. This whole process must have an outcome that serves the company. The outcome(s) can be internal (assisting the organisation's goals, such as brand awareness, brand reputation, image correction) or external (assisting the organisation with its goals towards consumers, community, partners or general public, such as conscious purchasing, consumer loyalty, loyal and productive employees, and loyal suppliers, among others). The outcome(s) should have two main goals: (a) inform and (b) engage. Lastly, the company must seek for feedback. Although none of the interviewees mentioned the importance of the feedback, the researcher deemed it crucial to add it to this process.

The formation of this framework (similar to the CSR awareness framework) was grounded on the recommendations of Prof. David Silverman. The researcher considered it essential to note that this framework does not apply for CSR communication during crisis. Future researchers can test or elaborate it, or develop a new framework specific to that context.

5.7 CSR Barriers among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

5.7.1 CSR Barriers among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo

The thematic analysis depicted three main CSR barriers among Kosovar owners and managers, (1) the size of the company, (2) the lack of resources and (3) the lack of CSR mentality. All, besides

K2 and K3, mentioned the size of the company as the main barrier to implementing CSR activities. The same owners and managers highlighted the lack of resources. For instance, K1 claimed, “...*We are too **small** a company to have a department dedicated to CSR. It **costs a lot** to have a qualified person to do that job. We **can’t afford** it...*” K1, K2, K4 and K5 noted another CSR barrier – the lack of CSR mentality. K2 underlined, “*The awareness of the team for the implementation of these practices remains the main barrier... Perhaps because of the mindset. It takes a lot of time and dedication during implementation.*” In addition, K5 mentioned the unwillingness of owners or managers to adopt CSR practices, which he ascribed it to the lack of CSR mentality. K1, owner and manager of a small-sized fashion enterprise, mentioned another challenge, consumers’ trust issues towards such activities. He said,

“Another challenge that we face as a business is to convince citizens that what we do is good for them. It is not easy to convince them to donate clothes because it’s hard for them to understand how they benefit from this. They often ask what happens to these clothes, they assume that we sell them and keep the money and the consumers don’t earn anything. We always kindly describe the entire process to them, that we sell the clothes and all the funds go to people from marginalised groups as well as those with health issues”

5.7.2 CSR Barriers among Fashion SMEs in Albania

Albanian owners and managers highlighted the same barriers like Kosovar owners and managers. The main barrier they face when implementing CSR activities is the size of the company. All, besides A4 (which is a medium-sized company), stated that the size of their company dictates the undertaken CSR practices. The second barrier is the lack of finances, which is directly affected from the first barrier (the size of the company). Similar to the first barrier, all owners and managers (besides A4) mentioned the financial hardships. For instance, A1 disclosed, “*CSR can pose significant financial challenges for small businesses. Often, the most profitable practices involve unsustainable methods, such as using synthetic fabrics and outsourcing production to countries with lower labor costs...*” In addition, A2 highlighted the lack of mentality. As they regard their company sustainable, their activities are mainly focused on this field. She stated, “*In Albania, sustainable fashion is still not fully understood and embraced. People liked the hand-made aspect*

of our brand and the motives we used, but did not necessarily appreciate the sustainability part of it.” In spite of these barriers, A5 (an owner-manager of a newly established, small-sized company) declared, *“Till now we have not seen these practices as challenges but as obligations towards our stakeholders, and we only want to improve them in due time...”*

5.7.3 CSR Barriers among Fashion SMEs in Croatia

The thematic analysis identified two CSR barriers among Croatian fashion SME owners and managers: (1) consumers’ lack of interest and (2) the size of the company. Most of the Croatian fashion owners and managers referred to consumers’ lack of interest on social and environmental-friendly activities as their main barrier. Croatian owners and managers of slow fashion companies (C3, C4 and C1) mentioned their several attempts to tackle this issue. All of them stated that they have expanded their geographical distribution of sales to Croatian coastal tourist centers and presented collections to central Europe. C3 justified the expansion, *“... In all sincerity, international tourists visiting Croatia appreciate more our environment-conscious products compared to our own [Croatian] consumers, locals...”*. All Croatian fashion SME owners and managers mentioned the size of the company as another barrier, precisely the financial challenges due to the size of the company. C1 said that, at times, finances alter their activities and impact the success of CSR strategy.

5.7.4 CSR Barriers among Fashion SMEs in Greece

Greek fashion SME owners and managers highlighted a few barriers: (1) the size of the company, (2) the lack of resources and (3) greenwashing (especially from large companies). All Greek fashion SME owners and managers (with the exception of G3) mentioned the size of the company as an obstacle to successful CSR implementation. The lack of resources (which most of them considered as a consequence of the size of the company) affect their CSR strategy. G1 claimed that the lack of resources influences the occurrence of CSR-related activities in their company. G2 stated that, sometimes, the insufficient resources destroy the creativity. Regardless of the size of their companies, G1 and G2 stated that the actions taken by them will help make the world a better place. G6 highlighted another barrier, the negative impact of greenwashing. She stated that the

false claims of fashion companies, especially large companies, about social and environmental responsibilities negatively impact their CSR activities. She mentioned that, because of these false claims, consumers have become skeptic toward the CSR efforts taken by her company. Lastly, G3 mentioned a few external barriers, such as the certification of their partners, to the full adoption of zero-waste policy.

5.7.5 CSR Barriers among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The researcher noted that Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs face mainly similar CSR barriers. The most highlighted barrier is the size of the company. All of them referred to their size as a barrier to achieving an impactful CSR implementation. Similar to Demujinck and Ngnodjom (2013), Courrent et al. (2018) and Lähdesmäki et al. (2019), findings showed that the majority of owners/managers also mentioned the lack of resources, which often times results from the size of the company. The other different barriers, such as the lack of CSR mentality mentioned by Kosovar fashion SME owners-managers or the greenwashing mentioned by Greek fashion SME owners-managers, can be ascribed to the different CSR development phases in each country. Kosovo is at an introductory stage of CSR development, hence the issues with the lack of CSR mentality among owners-managers and consumers. Greece is at a mature stage of CSR development, hence the issues with greenwashing. The researcher noticed that different from the findings of Shen et al. (2015) and Agudo-Valiente et al. (2017), the findings of this research disclosed that none of the SME owners/managers consider the lack of stakeholder awareness a main CSR barrier.

5.8 CSR Evaluation among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

This sub-chapter does not differentiate among the four countries, as very few SMEs apply CSR evaluation in their CSR implementation process. The researcher noticed that only medium-sized companies claimed to conduct CSR evaluation. None of the owners and managers of the small-sized companies mentioned it. The researcher asked the owners and manager of small-sized companies about the reasoning of such neglect. Most of them (from four countries) stated the lack

of economic resources. G6 was the only owner of a small-sized company, who said, “...*I am planning to start assessing the result of our activities. I have seen some competitors already doing it...*” Managers of medium-sized companies admitted to measure the impact of CSR activities. For example, K2 stated,

“...We have monthly reports which are the main means of communication for the activities within the company, meanwhile the evaluation of operations is conducted every 6 months where there’s a report of all operations on every company level...”

Similar to K2, G3 and A4 claimed that they conduct reports every six-months. They also noted that the evaluation process is not focused solely on the CSR activities, but on the overall activities taken by their companies. K2 and G3 highlighted the importance of CSR evaluation. G3 stated that it is fundamental to understand the relation of the activities and company performance.

5.9 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter presented the perceptions of fashion SME owners and managers about corporate social responsibility. By presenting their perceptions, this research depicted another facet of CSR reality. This chapter briefly discussed the cross-national differences in terms of CSR understating among the four SEE countries in the overview sub-chapters. It pointed out the differences between developed and developing countries. It also emphasised the role of EU in CSR understanding of the SME owners and managers. Among others, this chapter interpreted the CSR implementation process through the four steps recommended by Fatima and Elbanna (2023): (1) CSR awareness, (2) CSR communication, (3) CSR embedding and (4) CSR evaluation. It identified another fundamental step in this process, which is rarely mentioned by CSR scholars – CSR understanding. It also highlighted the neglect of CSR evaluation among small-sized companies.

6. Findings from Fashion Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.1 The Introduction of the Chapter

This subchapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the perceptions of fashion consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece on corporate social responsibility and its implementation. The researcher structured the subchapter around two topics: (a) the consumption process of fashion consumers and (b) CSR awareness, understanding and its impact on consumers purchasing decisions. Before discussing CSR awareness, understanding and its impact on consumers purchasing decisions, the researcher deemed it fundamental to observe the consumption process among Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers. This observation provided genuine responses from participants, and it offered the researcher an initial understanding of consumers' perceptions of CSR.

In the first part, the subchapter identifies the fashion consumption practices and focuses on the consumption drivers of fashion consumers. Most importantly, it presents an empirical framework, which illustrates the consumption process of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. In the second part, this subchapter presents the perceptions of consumers about CSR. Precisely, it depicts the awareness and understanding of CSR. It shows another empirical framework, which depicts the influences on CSR awareness among fashion consumers of Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher intentionally turned these findings into a framework in order to offer the readers the opportunity to compare it with the framework on CSR awareness among fashion SME owners and managers. This framework provides the reader the opportunity to reflect and recognise the multifaceted reality of CSR. Afterwards, the subchapter shows the consumers' perceptions of the CSR adoption of fashion SMEs in their respective countries. It also discusses the impact of CSR on the purchasing behaviour and purchasing intention of consumers. Lastly, it portrays consumers' views about the CSR communication and communication tools used by socially responsible fashion SMEs.

6.2 Findings from the Focus Groups with Fashion Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.2.1 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.2.1.1 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Kosovo

The thematic analysis depicted two modes of consumption among Kosovar fashion consumers: (a) monetary and (b) non-monetary. The monetary mode includes practices, such as (a) purchasing and (b) renting clothing. All participants, regardless of gender, highlighted that they purchase various clothing items. Only the female participants mentioned renting as a monetary practice. On the other hand, the non-monetary mode embraces practices, such as (a) gifted, (b) borrowed, and (c) lending clothing. The researcher noted that borrowed and lending clothes are common only among Kosovar female participants. A few of them claimed they borrow and lend clothes to their close friends for events, such as weddings or kina nights. Male participants only highlighted the gifted clothing as a non-monetary practice. The gifted clothing, nonetheless, is the most common non-monetary practice across both genders. Almost all Kosovar consumers claimed that they receive clothing items as gifts for most of their celebrations (mainly birthdays). Table 6.1 illustrates some of the participants' quotes about the afore-mentioned modes and practices.

Mode	Practice	Participant	Gender	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	KP4	Male	<i>"I prefer to <u>shop</u>..."</i>
		KP9	Female	<i>"I prefer to <u>shop online</u>..."</i>
	Renting	KP12	Female	<i>"... for instance, I had a recent event, celebrating my son and I <u>rented</u> two dresses..."</i>
		KP13	Female	<i>"I also have <u>rented</u> evening dresses a few times..."</i>
Non-monetary	Gifted	KP6	Male	<i>"I have received <u>clothes as birthday gifts</u> countless times, mainly from my girlfriend..."</i>
		KP13	Female	<i>"I receive <u>clothes as gifts</u> quite often and, to be honest, I love that [laughing]..."</i>

	Borrowed and Lending	KP1	Female	<i>"... My best friends and I <u>borrow</u> and <u>lend</u> clothes. Mostly for events; sometimes, for night outs, too ..."</i>

Table 6.1 Consumption Modes and Practices of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

6.2.1.1.1 Fashion Purchasing Practices of Consumers from Kosovo

The researcher noted that all Kosovar consumers participating in the focus groups were enthusiastic to discuss about their (fashion) purchasing practices. Most of Kosovar fashion consumers frequently purchase clothes. All of them (with few exceptions) admitted to purchase, on average, three times during a month. A few other participants claimed they purchase clothes once a month. This period of time was perceived differently among participants. For instance, KP14 considered the once-a-month period as *"pretty often"*; on the other hand, KP4 referred to it as *"very rarely"*. The researcher noted that such emphasis was impacted by the purchasing frequency of the other participants in the discussions. These responses and other responses from the Kosovar focus groups are presented below in Table 6.2 In addition to them, KP9 used a different 'frequency meter' to describe her purchasing frequency. She claimed her purchases depend on her mood; she said, *"...every time I'm in a bad mood."*

Frequency	Participant	Quotes
5-6 times per month	KP2	<i>"... 5-6 times a month, sometimes more than that. Depends on the month"</i>
3-4 times per month	KP5	<i>"Me too, 3 or 4 times a month, depending on the budget"</i>
3 times per month	KP13	<i>"... It's been years that I buy at least something, a minimum of 3 times for sure"</i>
3 times per month	KP1	<i>"I usually buy clothes at the beginning of the month and then I just add more during the month, so up to 3 times"</i>
3 times per month	KP15	<i>"At least 3 times a month..."</i>
3 times per month	KP3	<i>"I would say a minimum of 3 times, depends on the month or season..."</i>
1 time per month	KP10	<i>"Every time I get paid"</i>
1 time per month	KP14	<i>"Personally, once a month, so you could say <u>pretty often</u>"</i>
1 time per month	KP4	<i>"I buy clothes <u>very rarely</u>, maybe once a month"</i>

Table 6.2 The Purchasing Frequency of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

It is important to note that the researcher purposefully selected participants, who purchase from local small and medium-sized fashion companies. Understandably, the chosen participants purchase clothes from other fashion companies (micro, large, or multinational companies, among others). Their shopping preferences varied across their personal likings. The majority of Kosovar participants highlighted their preference towards two type of fashion companies: (a) local small and medium-sized companies and (b) international large companies (mainly fast fashion ones, such as Zara and Bershka). A few participants combine these types. For instance, KP12 claimed,

*“... If I’m looking for more fancy clothes, I shop **locally** because there are more options. If I’m looking for sport clothes I usually shop in **foreign brands** like Adidas and Nike. So, it all depends on what I need to buy...”*

Other participants, such as KP15, who needs larger sizes because of his higher-weight stated,

“Considering the sizes I need, I’m between second hand and big stores... usually middle-sized ones don’t work out because I need larger sizes. I mainly find my sizes in New Yorker and Levi’s, they have plenty of options for me, as well as second hand. There are 2-3 smaller shops that I shop at, but to be honest it’s very difficult to find sizes for me. So bigger shops along with second hand, have more options for me.”

Regardless of the fact that SMEs in Kosovo comprise 99% of the businesses, KP15’s comment implied a lack of size-inclusive companies in Kosovo market.

6.2.1.1.2 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

The researcher identified several purchasing and consumption drivers among Kosovar participants. The majority of them highlighted the quality of clothes as an essential factor. Several of them admitted to look for quality only when they purchase high-price or long-lasting products. For instance, KP1 stated, *“I tend to care more about the quality when I’m buying a coat because it lasts longer, compared to shirts or pants which we buy more often.”* Another driver mentioned by many of the participants was necessity. Nevertheless, necessity was comprehended differently among participants. The researcher noticed a gender difference in the comprehension of it. Female participants considered purchasing as a necessity for several instances. For instance, KP1, KP8 and KP12 considered seasonal purchases as necessities; they claimed that purchasing for each

season is a ‘must activity’. Male participants, on the other hand, use the term ‘necessary clothes’ to describe the purchased clothes that they previously lacked in their closet. The researcher observed that the majority of male participants emphasised necessity as their main driver for purchasing clothes. The third driver was pricing. Several of the participants from Kosovo highlighted low prices and sales as their drivers. A few of the participants claimed that the pricing driver is a result of the weak economy. As mentioned previously in this thesis, Kosovo is considered one of the poorest countries in Europe. Accordingly, participants’ argumentation on pricing can be confirmed. The other drivers identified during these focus groups – season, trend, fun and design – are illustrated below in Table 6.3.

Driver	Participant	Gender	Quote
Quality	KP5	Female	<i>“I personally check the material first, because in Kosovo it doesn’t always mean that the material is as good as it says on the tag, so the main thing for me is checking the material.”</i>
	KP7	Male	<i>“...the quality is what makes me pick a product... I’d say good quality above all.”</i>
	KP10	Female	<i>“I personally check the quality of the material first if it’s good enough, but it’s also important that I like the product.”</i>
Necessity	KP13	Female	<i>“If I have to go to an event, I consider it a necessity to purchase a new outfit...”</i>
	KP17	Male	<i>“...if I need something I just go get that one thing and that’s it...”</i>
	KP16	Male	<i>“Usually when I go shopping, I know what I need to buy and I only get the stuff I plan to... for example, if I need a winter jacket because I don’t have one, I go and get it...”</i>
Price	KP9	Female	<i>“...like everyone else said, depends on the price...”</i>
	KP15	Male	<i>“I always look at the price first... I also follow sales; I’m subscribed to half of the stores in Albi and Skopje Mall and I get notified when they have stuff on sale...”</i>
Season	KP1	Female	<i>“I shop based on the season; I check what I need to buy that I didn’t get the previous year, for example if we’re close to winter I shop for a good coat...”</i>

	KP8	Female	<i>"I shop depending on the season, for example in the summer I shop for swimsuits, in the winter for coats, scarves and hats..."</i>
Trends	KP12	Female	<i>"...it's also what's trending at the moment. I buy new stuff depending on the trends that change every day, week or month because I tend to wear whatever's in at the moment."</i>
	KP13	Female	<i>"I also choose depending on what's trending..."</i>
Fun	KP14	Female	<i>"...I mostly shop just for fun, as a recreational activity."</i>
	KP3	Female	<i>"Back when I was a student, I used to consider it more a necessity but ever since I started to work, I don't only see it as a necessity but I can buy stuff just because I like it and I have fun shopping..."</i>
Design	KP19	Male	<i>"The design, the shape, the color..."</i>
	KP11	Female	<i>"Style and color"</i>
	KP18	Female	<i>"Of course, the style..."</i>

Table 6.3 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

6.2.1.1.3 Post-Consumption among Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

Several of consumers mentioned post-consumption practices. They claimed they mainly donate their used clothes. Majority of them stated that they tend to donate or give away their (used) clothes to people in need or younger close or distant family members. For instance, KP3 mentioned, *"... [l]ast year I **donated** half of my wardrobe to the Red Cross..."* Participants stated that they tend to avoid throwing clothes away; they practice throwaway only when their clothes are damaged. KP1 said, *"... I almost never throw clothes away. I do it only when clothes are frayed or faded..."* While discussing these practices, a few participants (in the third focus group) highlighted the need to recycle worn clothes. They said that they are not aware of recycling points in their hometown(s). The researcher noticed that none of the participants in the two other focus groups mentioned recycling as a post-consumption practice.

6.2.1.2 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Albania

Similar to Kosovar participants, Albanian participants mentioned two types of consumption modes (a) monetary and (b) non-monetary. For Albanian participants, the monetary mode included the act of buying clothing items for themselves and for others, but it did not include renting. All participants stated that the main consumption practice for them is the act of buying. All of them, with the exception of AP10, stated that they enjoy shopping. AP10 said, “[a]ctually, I find shopping stressful and I don't really enjoy it. If I had enough LEK (Albanian currency) and if I could, I would buy them all at once, only once a year...” Participants also mentioned the non-monetary practices, such as (a) gifted, (b) borrowed, (c) lending and (d) swapped clothing. They considered these practices as secondary to the act of buying clothes. Different from Kosovar participants, Albanian participants practice borrowing and lending clothes regardless of gender. Similar to Kosovar participants, most Albanian participants said that they receive clothes as gifts and gift clothes to their close friends and family. Albanian participants highlighted another non-monetary practice. Precisely, AP1 and AP2 (who are sisters) shared that they tend to swap clothing items or outfits with each other. Some of the participants’ quotes about these modes and practices are presented in Table 6.4

Mode	Practice	Participant	Gender	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	AP11	Female	“... I prefer to <u>buy clothes</u> ...”
		AP7	Male	“... I see clothes that I like and I <u>buy</u> them right away...”
		AP3	Female	“I <u>shop</u> a lot”
	Gifting	AP12	Male	“...and I tend to buy clothes for my loved ones...”
Non-monetary	Gifted	AP12	Male	“I get <u>clothes as birthday gifts</u> almost every year...”
	Borrowed and Lent	AP12	Male	“... I, sometimes, <u>borrow</u> my roommate’s outfits... I also <u>lent</u> him my clothes...”
	Swapped	AP2	Female	“... My sister and I have <u>swapped clothes</u> with each other our entire life [laughing] ...”

Table 6.4 The Consumption Modes and Practices of Fashion Consumers from Albania

6.2.1.2.1 Fashion Purchasing Practices of Consumers from Albania

Similar to the focus groups in Kosovo, the researcher noted that participants in the Albanian focus groups were eager to share their (fashion) purchasing practices. Their frequency is mostly measured with purchases per month – from one to five purchases. The responses of participants based on this frequency are illustrated below in Table 5.5. Some other participants, nevertheless, used a different ‘frequency meter’ to describe their purchasing practices. Similar to KP9 (participant in one of the focus groups in Kosovo), AP8 and AP11 said that their mood impacts their purchasing practices. AP8 claimed, “... *I buy everytime I don’t feel well **emotionally**. Shopping calms me down very much, so if I see something I like, even if I don’t need it, and I might never wear it, I just buy it to make me feel good.*” AP11 added, “[t]here are days when I feel bored, I buy something for myself and I see that it changes my mood completely.” For AP3, her purchasing practices are measured in terms of discounts. She said, “...*I buy every time there’s a **discount**...*” A few others, like AP10, stated that they ‘frequency meter’ is necessity.

Frequency	Participant	Quotes
5 times per month	AP1	<i>“I can buy five times during a month”</i>
3-4 times per month	AP11	<i>“I usually buy <u>3-4 times</u> during the month...” “Sometimes I might buy <u>even five times</u> a month...”</i>
3 times per month	AP3	<i>“I tend to buy <u>three times</u> per month...”</i>
2-3 times per month	AP4	<i>“I usually shop <u>2-3 times</u> during the month... but it depends, to be honest...”</i>
2-3 times per month	AP5	<i>“Same as AP4, I also purchase new clothing <u>items two or three times</u> during the month”</i>
1 time per month	AP9	<i>“I visit the mall 3-4 times during the month, but I buy only <u>once a month</u>...”</i>
1 time per month	AP7	<i>“I usually buy new clothes <u>once a month</u>, but there may be cases where I see clothes that I like and I buy them right away. But once a week I visit TEG or shops at the city center.”</i>

Table 6.5 The Purchasing Frequency of Fashion Consumers from Albania

Similar to Kosovar participants, Albanian participants mentioned their inclination towards two types of fashion companies: (a) local SMEs and (b) international large companies (such as Zara,

Bershka, Pull&Bear and Sergio, among others). Albanian participants claimed their preference to combine these type of fashion companies. Several participants highlighted the obsession of Albanian consumers (generation Y and Z) with fast-fashion brands like Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius and Pull&Bear. Most of the participants, however, claimed that they do not share the same obsession with their peers. For example, AP11 said, *“It's not like I'm obsessed with brands either. I have certain preferences, but I generally try to buy brands for certain occasions, whereas for everyday life clothings I usually shop in **second-hand stores**.”* Similar to AP11, a few other participants mentioned their tendency to purchase every-day clothing from second-hand stores.

6.2.1.2.2 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Albania

As a result of the two focus groups with the Albanian participants, the researcher identified various purchasing and consumption drivers of Albanian fashion consumers. These drivers are presented below in Table 6.6 The researcher noticed that Albanian participants emphasised the quality-to-cost ratio. Many Albanian participants highlighted the importance of this ratio to their purchasing and consumption practices. Some of their responses are illustrated in the table below. In addition to them, AP9 said,

“I believe in the price-quality ratio, and I don't believe that I can find something that's cheap with the same quality as something that's very expensive. Therefore, I don't believe that much in the offers (discounts) that other participants mentioned, especially here in Albania... If it's expensive, I take it because it should be worth it...”

Different from Kosovar participant, none of the Albanian participants specified solely the quality or the pricing as drivers in their purchasing practices. Participants emphasised the importance of discounts in their practices. Most of them, with few exceptions, revealed the impact of discounts in their purchases. AP4, was the only participant among the two focus groups, who mentioned the fabric composition. Participants responses about the other drivers – necessity, trend, style, and fit – are presented in the table below.

Driver	Participant	Gender	Quote
Quality-Price Ratio	AP2	Female	<i>“I take into consideration the <u>quality and its ratio with the price</u>...”</i>
	AP11	Female	<i>“I look at the <u>ratio of quality with the price</u>...”</i>

	AP1	Female	<i>"... I also consider the <u>ratio of quality with the price</u>... [t]he <u>quality depends on the price</u>. The price I paid should justify the quality of the material of the clothing I bought, then the cost depends on my budget, on my salary..."</i>
Discount	AP3	Female	<i>"...I prefer to buy things in <u>discount</u>, it has become an addiction"</i>
	AP7	Male	<i>"I am definitely influenced by the <u>discounts</u>... January and July discounts make me go on shopping sprees..."</i>
Necessity	AP8	Female	<i>"When I <u>need</u> something very specific for a certain occasion, I buy it ..."</i>
Trend	AP12	Male	<i>"...I am influenced by <u>trends</u>; trends have an impact on me. I go around and see the last designs offered by different brands, then I buy them, if my budget allows me to do it."</i>
Style	AP6	Female	<i>"...I buy clothes depending on the style..."</i>
	AP5	Male	<i>"The first is the style and the second is the quality ..."</i>
Fit	AP6	Female	<i>"...I also choose something that <u>suits me</u>"</i>
Fabric Composition	AP4	Male	<i>"I only purchase <u>vegan clothing</u>, so I look at the material because if I'm wearing a non-vegan clothing, I have a feeling that that I am harming nature... I can't bear wearing clothing made of animal skin."</i>
	AP2	Female	<i>"...I know the materials pretty well, and the choices I make are very good for myself. I don't buy synthetic clothes just to leave them in the closet."</i>

Table 6.6 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Albania

6.2.1.2.3 Post-Consumption among Fashion Consumers from Albania

Albanian participants discussed their post-consumption practices. Similar to Kosovar participants, they give away their used clothing items. They stated that they mainly give their used clothes to their younger siblings, friends, or family members. A few of them claimed that they offer their used clothes to people in need. Similar to Kosovar participants, they claimed that they tend to

prevent throwing clothing items away. Some participants, such as AP6, AP10 and AP11, stated that they give their clothes to second-hand shops (free of charge). AP1 and AP2 (who are sisters) said that they have their own online social media account, where they sell their used clothing items or give them for free for people in need. None of the Albanian participants mentioned recycling as a post-consumption practice. Yet, they discussed their willingness to adopt such a practice if offered to them. AP12 said, “...*I’d drop off many clothing items if there were recycling points in Tirana...*”

6.2.1.3 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Croatia

Similar to the findings in the other countries in SEE, the thematic analysis depicted two modes of consumption among Croatian fashion consumers: (a) monetary and (b) non-monetary. Croatian participants considered (a) purchasing, (b) gifting and (c) renting as monetary practices. All participants claimed that they acquire clothes. CP8 was the only participant among both focus groups, who claimed, “*I don’t really buy new clothes – extremely rarely. I mostly buy second hand stuff...*” In terms of renting, only a few participants stated that they have rented clothes. They claimed that they mainly have rented clothes for special events. CP3 and CP4 also acknowledged the “eco-friendly” nature of renting. Different from Kosovar participants, Croatian participants practice renting among both genders. All of them claimed that, at one point, they have received a clothing item as a gift for their celebrations (mainly for Christmas). They also embraced non-monetary practices, such as (a) gifted and (b) swapped clothing. Similar to Kosovar and Albanian participants, gifted clothing is the most frequent non-monetary practice. Only two out of 12 participants stated that they use swapping as a practice. The afore-mentioned modes and practices of Croatian participants are illustrated below in Table 6.7

Mode	Practice	Participant	Gender	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	CP12	Female	<i>“I <u>shop</u> quite often...”</i>
		CP13	Female	<i>“I tend to <u>shop</u> and I enjoy it...”</i>
	Renting	CP3	Female	<i>“...I have <u>rented</u> gowns for special events... I am being <u>environmentally conscious</u>...”</i>
		CP8	Male	<i>“I have <u>rented</u> a couple times, a suit ... [the researcher asked for the reason] Because I</i>

				<i>don't feel like paying money for clothes because I cannot really afford it."</i>
	Gifting	CP6	Male	<i>"Last time I went shopping <u>I got a dress for my fiancé</u>"</i>
Non-monetary	Gifted	CP2	Female	<i>"I have received <u>sweaters, pajamas, slippers</u> several times for Christmas ..."</i>
		CP9	Female	<i>"I got <u>clothes</u> many times..."</i>
	Swapped	CP4	Female	<i>"... lately, I've embraced a sustainable path and I've started <u>swapping</u> clothes that I no longer like wearing..."</i>

Table 6.7 Consumption Modes and Practices of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

6.2.1.3.1 Fashion Purchasing Practices of Consumers from Croatia

The researcher observed that Croatian participants purchased less often than Kosovar and Albanian participants. The purchases per month varied from one to three times. CP10 said that he usually purchases once in two months. These responses are displayed below in Table 6.8. Four out of 12 participants claimed that in the last couple of years they have changed their shopping habits. They have embraced a conscious approach towards shopping; they referred to themselves as conscious consumers. In addition to them, CP11 stated his disinterest in purchasing clothes. He said, *"I simply don't like buying a lot of clothes each year..."*

Frequency	Participant	Quotes
3 times per month	CP12	<i>"I might buy up to <u>three times</u> a month"</i>
2-3 times per month	CP13	<i>"I'd say around <u>2-3 times</u> during the month..."</i>
1 time per month	CP6	<i>"Maybe once <u>per month</u>"</i>
1 time per month	CP1	<i>"I usually buy <u>once a month</u>, but it might happen to buy less or more..."</i>
1 time in two months	CP10	<i>"I'd say <u>once in two months</u>."</i>

Table 6.8 The Purchasing Frequency of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

Croatian participants prefer three type of fashion companies: (a) international large companies (such as Zara, H&M, Mango, Massimo Dutti, Reserved, Guess and Calvin Klein, among others), (b) local SMEs and (c) second-hand shops. The majority of participants combine these types of fashion companies. Different from Kosovar and Albanian participants, Croatian participants purchase from fast-fashion and luxury international large companies. They also claimed to buy from local slow fashion SMEs. A few other participants, such as CP4 and CP8, highlighted their tendency to purchase from second-hand shops.

6.2.1.3.2 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

The researcher identified several purchasing drivers of Croatian participants. These drivers are presented below in Table 6.9 The most influential drivers are quality, pricing and quality-pricing ratio. Different from Kosovar and Albanian participants, Croatia participants did not mention discounts as an influence in their purchases. Instead, they claimed that fit and style are important when purchasing clothes from fashion SMEs. Croatian participants emphasised the importance of the nature of the company. Particularly, CP4 and CP9 mentioned the environmental-friendly companies. In addition to them, CP3 stated a few factors of secondary importance. She said, “...*I also consider good customer service, good reviews, if the company support[s] the community. These are not my primary factors, but they influence my choices...*”

Driver	Participant	Gender	Quote
Quality	CP1	Female	<i>“Most important for me is <u>quality</u>... I want something that has quality since I want it to last a long time”</i>
	CP5	Male	<i>“I only care about the <u>craftsmanship</u> because I want <u>quality</u> and longevity of the product I am buying... <u>quality</u> ensures that the clothing lasts”</i>
Price	CP8	Male	<i>“The first thing I consider is <u>price</u>”</i>
	CP2	Female	<i>“<u>Price</u> is important because I don’t have a lot of money to spend...”</i>
Quality-Price Ratio	CP7	Male	<i>“<u>Price and perceived quality ratio</u>... I am personally not a frequent shopper of clothes and other fashion products, and I always aim to buy things that will pay themselves off, so to speak...”</i>

	CP6	Male	<i>“When purchasing clothes from a small or medium shop, I primarily consider two key factors, quality and price... for me, <u>price needs to align with the perceived value</u>...”</i>
Necessity	CP11	Male	<i>“I buy new clothing only if I truly <u>need</u> it and I cannot find it in a second-hand store...”</i>
Style	CP13	Female	<i>“I search for unique designs that express <u>my style</u>...”</i>
	CP4	Female	<i>“...I also look for <u>vintage outfits</u>... that’s my <u>style</u>”</i>
Fit	CP10	Male	<i>“... <u>proper fit</u> because it ensures wearability...”</i>
	CP12	Female	<i>“... The things I buy need to <u>fit the aesthetic</u> that I seek...”</i>
Fabric Composition	CP9	Female	<i>“For me, it’s important that clothes have nice <u>fabric</u>...”</i>
Environmental-friendly company	CP9	Female	<i>“... and for the company to take good care about the <u>environment</u> when producing.”</i>
	CP4	Female	<i>“...an important factor for me is if the company is <u>environmentally friendly</u>...”</i>

Table 6.9 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

6.2.1.3.3 Post-Consumption among Fashion Consumers from Croatia

Croatian participants shared their post-consumption practices. They claimed that, in the majority of cases, they either donate their clothes or throw them away. CP3, CP4 and CP9 said that they always donate their used clothes and avoid the act of throwing away. They mentioned that they donate clothes to a few local NGOs that embrace the zero-waste philosophy and help the community by giving away the donated clothes. CP1 stated that she has once donated clothes to H&M. She explained that H&M provides a garment collecting program and reimburses consumers with vouchers. Some other participants admitted to throw them into bins. For instance, CP13 said that regardless of her unwillingness to throw clothes away, she is left with no other choice. She said that disposing clothes at recycling points is not convenient for her and she might not always be able to donate the clothes.

6.2.1.4 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Greece

Similar to the other SEE countries, findings in Greece portrayed two modes of consumption: (a) monetary and (b) non-monetary. Greek participants stated that purchasing clothes is their main monetary practice. The researcher noticed that they enjoy shopping as an activity. Participants in the second focus group discussed about the possibility of renting outfits, yet, none of the participants claimed to embrace such practice. In terms of non-monetary mode, Greek participants highlighted the (a) gifted, (b) borrowed and (c) lending clothing practices. Similar to the previous findings from the other SEE countries, findings in Greece showed that Greek participants emphasised gifted as the main non-monetary practices. A few participants claimed to borrow and lend clothes to their friends. The consumers quotes illustrating these modes and practices are portrayed in Table 6.10.

Mode	Practice	Participant	Gender	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	GP12	Female	<i>"I love <u>shopping</u>..."</i>
		GP6	Male	<i>"I <u>buy clothes</u> quite often..."</i>
Non-monetary	Gifted	GP8	Female	<i>"My friends give me <u>gifts</u> for birthdays or special occasions..."</i>
		GP9	Male	<i>"My wife <u>buys me clothes</u> often..."</i>
	Borrowed and Lending	GP11	Female	<i>"... not as much as we use[d] to, but my friend group <u>borrow[s]</u> and <u>lend[s]</u> <u>outfits</u>..."</i>

Table 6.10 Consumption Modes and Practices of Fashion Consumers from Greece

6.2.1.4.1 Fashion Purchasing Practices of Consumers from Greece

As stated in the previous paragraph, the researcher observed the enthusiasm of Greek participants when discussing their purchasing practices. At some point during the focus groups, almost all of them claimed to enjoy shopping. The frequency of their purchases mirrored the stated enjoyment from this activity. Greek participants ‘measure’ their purchases per month; the variety of their frequency varied from one to six times per month. Their responses are portrayed in Table 6.11 A

few other participants, such as GP2 and GP9, used necessity as a measurement tool for their purchases. GP7 stated that she makes extra purchases when fashion companies offer discounts.

Frequency	Participant	Quotes
5-6 times per month	GP8	<i>“Every time I pass through Tsimiski [other participants laughing], so around <u>5-6 times</u> in a month”</i>
3-4 times per month	GP12	<i>“I ‘d say <u>three or four times</u> during a month...”</i>
3 times per month	GP7	<i>“It really depends, but usually <u>three times</u> per month...”</i>
3 times per month	GP13	<i>“I buy up to <u>three times</u> per month, not more...”</i>
2 times per month	GP4	<i>“I buy at least <u>two times</u> during the month”</i>
1 time per month	GP1	<i>“I used to buy a lot, like five times per month, now I usually buy only <u>once</u>”</i>

Table 6.11 The Purchasing Frequency of Fashion Consumers from Greece

Greek participants prefer two type of fashion companies: (a) international large companies (such as Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, Massimo Dutti, Calvin Klein, Levi’s and Diesel, among others) and (b) local SMEs. Many participants stated that they tend to combine these two types of fashion companies. For instance, GP13 said, *“I might get a shirt from Bershka, but I also might get a unique piece from Nassos (Greek fashion company) ...”* Several participants claimed that they get the casual clothing items from international fast-fashion companies and the formal clothes from Greek fashion SMEs.

6.2.1.4.2 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Greece

The researcher identified numerous purchasing drivers of Greek participants. Similar to Croatian participants, Greek participants highlighted quality, pricing and quality-pricing ratio as the most influential drivers. Similar to Kosovar and Albanian participants, Greek participants mentioned discount as a driver. On the other hand, Greek participants were the only ones that emphasised the influence of the social purpose. The afore-mentioned drivers and the other ones – necessity, style and the environmental-friendly company – are illustrated below in Table 6.12

Driver	Participant	Gender	Quote
Quality	GP1	Female	<i>“<u>Quality</u> is important because it ensures that the clothes will be useful for a long time”</i>
	GP3	Female	<i>“<u>Quality</u> is important to me because I have a sensitive skin to different types of cloth[es]. I also don't have a lot of time nor am I willing to go shopping very often or select clothing items very often. So, something <u>durable</u> is very convenient for me.”</i>
Price	GP4	Female	<i>“<u>Price</u> is important because if they are very expensive, I will not probably be willing to give the money...”</i>
	GP2	Male	<i>“I look at the <u>price</u>...”</i>
Quality-Price Ratio	GP8	Female	<i>“Normally I would consider <u>the quality and how much that is consistent with its price</u>. Of course, I wouldn't buy something that is not quality just for its price”</i>
	GP6	Male	<i>“Price and quality primarily because I like <u>value for money</u>”</i>
Necessity	GP2	Male	<i>“... and I purchase clothes only when I <u>need</u> them”</i>
	GP9	Male	<i>“I buy clothes only if it is something that I really <u>need</u>. I don't like wasting money...”</i>
Discount	GP7	Female	<i>“I am definitely influenced by <u>discounts</u>. I buy every time the companies I like offer discounts...”</i>
Style	GP13	Female	<i>“... I like it when the shop aligns with my <u>style</u>”</i>
	GP12	Female	<i>“I buy clothes that fit my <u>style</u>”</i>
Social Purpose	GP10	Female	<i>“... If the shop has a <u>social purpose</u>, it's a plus.”</i>
Environmental-Friendly Company	GP5	Female	<i>“...I tend to buy only from <u>environmentally friendly brands</u>...”</i>

Table 6.12 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Greece

6.2.1.4.3 Post-Consumption among Fashion Consumers from Greece

Greek participants discussed their main post-consumption practices. Similar to the participants from the other SEE countries, Greek participants mentioned the donation of clothes as the main post-consumption practice. Most of them claimed that they donate clothes whenever they get

notified for such initiatives. A few of them (GP7, G12 and GP13) stated that they give clothes to people in need. Some participants claimed to throw away some clothing items. Nevertheless, they stated that they put them somewhere where homeless people can access them. G7 claimed to give used clothes for recycling. She said that a Greek company provides clothing recycling services through several recycling points.

6.2.1.5 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The previous subchapters and sub-subchapters discussed in detail the fashion consumptions of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher deemed it important to reiterate that the 57 participants are consumers, who purchase from small and medium-sized fashion companies. Understandably, these participants shop from other fashion companies, such as micro, large, or multinational companies. The researcher decided to observe the behaviours of these participants prior to introducing the CSR topic. This observation provided genuine responses from participants, and it offered the researcher an initial understanding of consumers perceptions.

The thematic analysis generated a few important findings about the (a) modes of consumption, (b) purchasing frequency, (c) purchasing drivers and (d) post-consumption practices. The researcher noticed similarities and differences among the four SEE countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. In terms of modes of consumption, participants from these four countries follow similar practices: (a) monetary and (b) non-monetary. Participants' responses among these countries differ within each practice. For instance, participants from Albania and Greece mentioned only the act of buying clothes as a monetary practice. Participants from Kosovo and Croatia added renting as a second monetary practice. In terms of non-monetary practices, participants of each country apply different practices. Albanian participants embrace the most diverse non-monetary practices among all. They admitted to follow four non-monetary practices – gifted, borrowed, lending and swapped clothing practices. They are the only ones, who referred to themselves as conscious consumers. Croatian and Greek consumers did not label themselves as conscious consumers; yet, their behaviours displayed their conscious practices. The researcher noticed that, in this initial

understanding of fashion consumer behaviours, Kosovar participants are the only ones, who did not mention or show any conscious practice.

The researcher also investigated the purchasing frequency. Initially, the researcher did not intend to observe the participants' frequency of purchases. These responses were an outcome of the genuine discussions with each focus group. The researcher deemed it relevant to include this topic in the findings because of the influence of purchasing frequency to the conscious consumption. Based on that, the researcher identified the main frequency meter. Kosovar, Albanian, Greek and Croatian participants used purchases per month to describe their purchasing practices. The researcher noticed that Kosovar, Albanian and Greek participants buy clothes more frequently than Croatian participants. This finding was unanticipated given that Greek consumers claimed to embrace conscious practices. Nonetheless, the researcher reflected and claimed that Greeks enthusiasm towards fashion justify this finding (Pisokas, 2023).

The researcher also identified the purchasing drivers of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. While the researcher discussed and illustrated each driver in the previous sub sub-chapters, the researcher decided to also jointly portray the consumer drivers of the four SEE countries in the Table 6.13 As seen in the table below, Croatian and Greek participants were impacted by CSR-related factors, such as the environmental-friendly nature of the company. Greek participants were the only ones to highlight the social purpose, which is a crucial element of CSR. Albanian participants also mentioned the fabric composition. They attributed this factor to their conscious practices. Nonetheless, fabric composition can be considered a CSR practice. Kosovar participants were the only ones to show a lack of CSR impact in their purchasing behaviours. The only same factor mentioned by participants of the four countries that can be considered a CSR attribute is quality. As presented in the findings from the interviews with fashion SME owners and managers, the quality of clothes is an essential attribute of their CSR understanding and implementation. The differences at national level can be attributed to the different perceptions and understanding of such concepts. They can also be ascribed to the different development levels among these countries. The researcher considered critical to restate that this research does not intend to generalise the findings. The national level differences depicted the variations of reality and intended to induce the reader to reflect and recognise the variations of reality.

Kosovo	Albania	Croatia	Greece
Quality	Quality-Pricing Ratio	Quality	Quality
Necessity	Discount	Pricing	Pricing
Pricing	Necessity	Quality-Pricing Ratio	Quality-Pricing Ratio
Season	Trend	Necessity	Necessity
Trends	Style	Style	Discount
Fun	Fit	Fit	Style
Design	Fabric Composition	Fabric Composition	Social Purpose
		Environmental-friendly company	Environmental-Friendly Company

Table 6.13 The Purchasing Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

The researcher also investigated the post-consumption practices of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The main post-consumption practices mentioned by participants are: (a) donating clothes, (b) giving clothes away and (c) throwing clothes away. The participants identified several donation places, such as local NGOs, humanitarian NGOs, second-hand stores and fashion companies that provide donating clothes programs. Donating clothes is a common practice among participants of the four countries. Such practice can be allured to the collectivist nature of these societies. Such societies tend to prioritise the well-being of others (Jamali et al., 2020). Unfortunately, participants from all four countries admitted to throw clothing items away. They claimed that they tend to avoid such practice, but, at times, it is the easiest practice. The researcher noted that only Kosovar and Albanian participants claimed to give clothes away to friends, close and distant family members, and people in need. This practice among Kosovar and Albanian participants can be ascribed to the values of their societies – Kosovo is a post-conflict society and Albania is a post-communist society. Such societies tend to care about others and engage in altruistic acts (Hall et al., 2021).

Lastly, as a result of these findings the researcher created an empirical framework, which is illustrated in Figure 6.1 This framework presents the consumption process of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. It claims that consumption drivers initiate the process of

consumption. It shows the main consumption drivers identified from consumers of these four countries. It presents the next step in this process, the consumption mode. It identifies two modes of consumption – monetary and non-monetary, and it portrays the main practices for each mode. It depicts the main types of fashion companies frequented by consumers of these four countries. It illustrates the impact of the purchase frequency in the consumption. It identifies two types of consumption – conscious and unconscious. The researcher referred to the CSR consciousness of consumers in these two consumption types. Lastly, the framework portrays the post-consumption practices among Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers. It is important to state that this framework illustrates an initial understanding of the consumers consumption. It served as a base for the rest of the investigation.

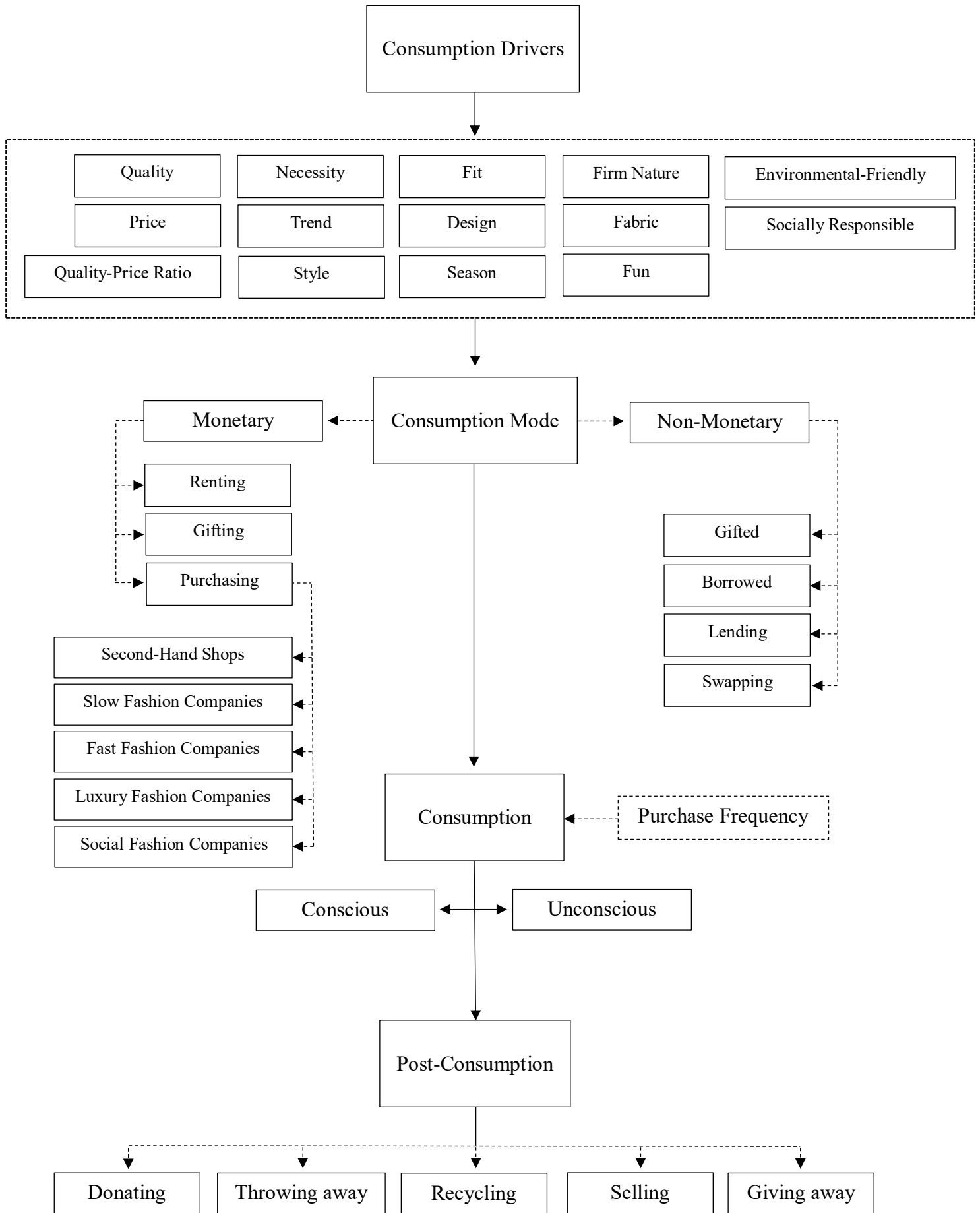


Figure 6.1 Empirical Framework of Consumer Consumption Process

6.2.2 CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.2.2.1 CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo

Most of the participants claimed that they are not aware of the CSR concept. They said that they heard about CSR for the first time in the focus group(s). For instance, K15 stated, *“I haven’t heard about it before. First time, today.”* A few other participants claimed they are aware of CSR. Precisely, five out of 19 participants stated that they had been introduced to the notion prior to the focus group(s). Four of them stated that they have been informed about CSR in the last three years. K16 was the only one among the five participants, who stated that he has been familiar with CSR for more than 10 years. K16 said, *“I heard about it for the first time in high school. It was part of a study in a business course...”* It is important to note that K16 attended a business-oriented private high-school. KP10 and KP14 said they have been introduced to CSR during their master studies. KP14, who got her master’s degree from a UK university, has been informed about CSR in a business course. KP10 has studied CSR as part of her master’s thesis. During the discussion, she emphasised, *“...I am pretty informed on it.”* KP7, who has worked in different foreign companies and international organisations, mentioned that he has learned about CSR through work. On the other hand, KP15 said that he has heard about CSR from the first time from well-known multinational corporations. He said,

“As a frequent consumer and huge fan of Coca Cola, I heard it from them for the first time. Even though they are one of the biggest environment pollutants in the world, they tried to work on doing better in that aspect...I’ve also heard it from a group of environmentalists, who attacked Nestle because of its irresponsibility they have as a corporate. These are the two instances where I’ve heard about it, so one of them in a negative way (Nestle), and one of them being aware that they’re not doing good but trying to fix it (Coca Cola).”

The researcher asked them to identify the reasons of the lack of CSR concept. A few of them ascribed the lack of CSR to the omission of the concept in the higher educational system. This discussion occurred among participants of the second focus group. While KP10 mentioned the

absence of mandatory inclusion of CSR in business courses at university level, KP16 (participant in the third focus group) mentioned he has learned about CSR in a business high-school class. The researcher ascribed this difference in opinion to the 'state' of the education – private vs public. A few other participants pointed out the exclusion of CSR from local companies (in fashion and other industries). Regardless of the reasons of the absence of the concept among Kosovar consumers, several of the participants stated that they felt grateful to participate in the focus groups and attain knowledge about CSR.

6.2.2.2 CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers in Albania

More than half of Albanian participants (from both focus groups) claimed that they are aware of the CSR concept. Precisely, eight out of 12 participants mentioned they are aware of CSR prior to the focus groups. The researcher noticed that, compared to Kosovar participants, Albanian participants are well-aware of CSR. Most of them claimed they have been introduced to the concept in the last five years. AP7 was the only one, who stated, “... *I was first introduced to CSR around 15 years ago, when I was a bachelor student...*” It is important to highlight that AP7 is a marketing lecturer. The other participants have been informed about CSR through their current work, master studies, or documentaries. AP11, who works as a risk modeler in a bank branch, said that she has been introduced to the term as part of her work. AP6 and AP8 have been informed about CSR during their master studies. AP8 said, “*When I did my master's degree in business administration, we had a topic on social responsibility and we even had a coursework...*” Other participants, such as AP2, AP4 and AP5 and AP10, said that they first heard about CSR in documentaries. AP4 (a filmmaker and cinematographer) explained, “*I have watched several documentaries about it, and that's how I became aware...*”

The rest of the participants said that it was their first-time hearing about CSR. Accordingly, the researcher asked Albanian participants to identify the reasons of the CSR unawareness. Most of them ascribed the absence of the concept to two issues: (a) the exclusion of CSR from daily discussions and (b) the absence of CSR in local companies (regardless of size). Several participants expressed their resentment with the lack of interest of Albanian society to discuss such important topics. A few other participants highlighted the unfamiliarity of Albanian companies (in the fashion

and other industries), and they referred the lack of CSR among consumers to companies. AP7 (a marketing lecturer) also mentioned the lack of compulsory classes on CSR in business programs at bachelor level. Similar to Kosovar participants, Albanian participants thanked the researcher for introducing them to this concept and inviting them to participate in such discussions. The researcher noted that both Albanian focus groups were extremely enthusiastic to discuss about CSR. In point of fact, the focus groups in Albania lasted the longest among four countries, and participants were willing to continue with the discussion even after the focus groups ended.

6.2.2.3 CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers in Croatia

The majority of Croatian participants, with a few exceptions, claimed that they are familiar with CSR. Exactly, 11 out of 13 participants claimed that they have been introduced to the concept. Compared to Kosovar and Albanian participants, Croatian participants were more informed of the concept. They have become mindful of the concept through different factors. A few of them, such as CP1 and CP13 claimed that they have been introduced through social media. CP1 said, “*Honestly, I don’t remember, but probably around five years ago while searching on my Instagram.*” CP10 stated that he has first read about CSR years ago in an online newspaper article. CP8 said that he has learned about CSR through a training session around five-six years ago. CP3 (researcher), CP4 (business student) and CP9 (business analyst) stated that they have been introduced to CSR in their studies. CP3 (who finished her bachelor studies in a well-known US university) mentioned that she heard about CSR in her bachelor studies in a communication strategy class. CP2 and CP12 were the only participants, who claimed to not be aware of the term. When discussing the understanding of CSR, CP12 stated that she is aware of the social factor, but it was the first time she heard the term. The researcher noted that the majority of Croatian participants were mindful of the concept and its impact in today’s world.

6.2.2.4 CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers in Greece

More than half of Greek participants mentioned their familiarity with CSR. On the other hand, a few others claimed to have never heard the term prior to the focus group(s). Precisely, eight out of 13 participants stated that they have been informed about CSR. GP2 (a business graduate) mentioned that he has been informed about CSR through a coursework in his bachelor studies.

Similar to him, GP5 and GP9 claimed that they have been introduced to CSR in a business class in their MBA studies. The researcher considered important to mention that all three participants were educated either abroad or in private universities. GP10 stated that he was introduced to CSR through a friend, who works on the business field. GP1 and GP13 said that they have heard about CSR through fashion companies. GP13 mentioned a local small fashion company that embraces CSR. GP1 mentioned a campaign by H&M. She said, *“I first got introduced to it through the conscious campaign of H&M. Maybe two years ago. It was everywhere. I read about the campaign and then search[ed] more online... this is how I learned about sustainability, about CSR...”*. GP11 claimed she is aware of sustainability but not of CSR. GP3, stated that she can grasp what the term means, but she has never heard this specific term.

6.2.2.5 CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The previous sub-chapters illustrated the current CSR awareness of fashion consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher noticed that Croatian participants are the most familiar with the concept, and Kosovar participants are the least aware of it. Overall, Croatian and Greek participants showed they are well-informed of CSR compared to Kosovar and Albanian participants, who did not show as much awareness of CSR as the former participants. The lack of CSR awareness among Kosovar and Albanian participants can be ascribed to (a) the exclusion of CSR from daily discussions and (b) the absence of CSR in local companies. Similar to Vatamanescu et al. (2021), these findings showed that young consumers are aware of social responsibilities. Given the national and regional differences in CSR awareness, this research claimed that institutional conditions (such as government and regional institutions) are more salient to CSR awareness than the age of consumers. The researcher noticed the importance of a few influences in raising CSR awareness among consumers of these four SEE countries and portrayed them in a framework (Figure 6.2). Besides depicting the influences of consumers in raising CSR awareness, this framework intends to present the process of becoming aware of CSR from SEE consumers point of view, provide information to researchers investigating (or willing to investigate) such topics and offer suggestions to actors willing to increase CSR awareness among

consumers of these four countries, particularly among Kosovo and Albania consumers (as they mentioned the lack of CSR awareness).

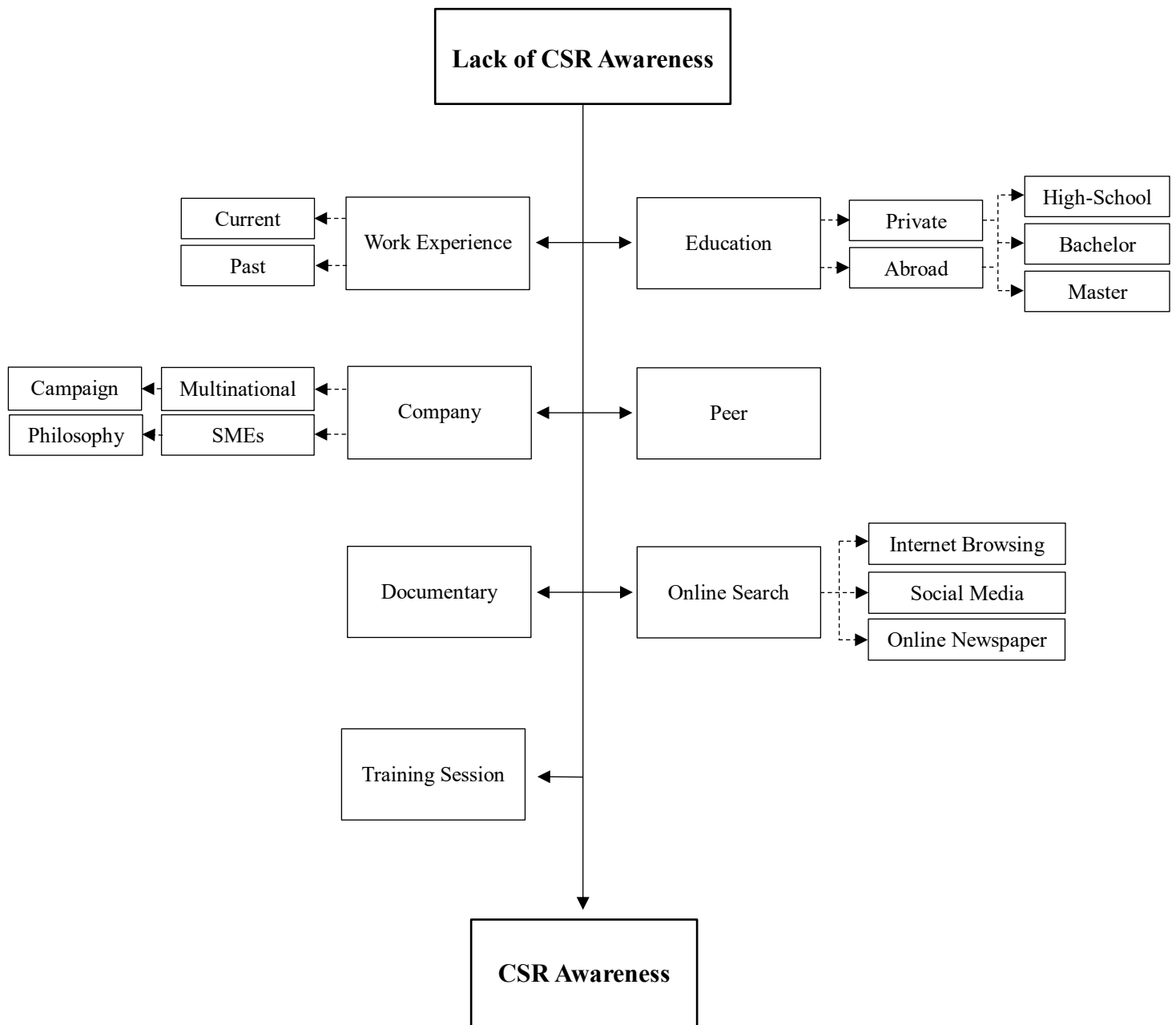


Figure 6.2 Empirical Framework for Influences on CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers of Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.2.3 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.2.3.1 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo

Although most Kosovar participants did not recognise the concept of CSR, all of them (willingly) discussed their understanding of the term. The researcher deemed it important to provide them with a definition of CSR; the definition, however, was not stated until they discussed their understanding of the term. The researcher purposefully decided to leave it after this discussion, not to influence their views. The purpose was to gain authentic responses (the same approach was taken with the focus groups of all four countries). At first, they offered a general understanding of the term. During the discussion, they added a context-specific (industry- and country-specific) understanding of CSR. The researcher observed that participants aware of CSR provided all-encompassing and detailed explanations. They mentioned all CSR dimensions. For instance, KP16 (who is aware of CSR for more than a decade) claimed,

*“In the beginning, I also used to think that it means the things that the corporate does for the **society** and **environment**, but then I learned that there’s another pillar. It’s the way the corporate works, the way it treats its employees, renewable resources, and how much damage it causes the environment. So, the topic of social responsibilities of a company is a huge one.”*

KP14 and KP15 understanding of CSR focused on the environment protection and the “giving back” to community. KP14 said,

“...a corporate should contribute a part of their revenue to ecology, so it gives back to the community... I would say that the first step is like KP15 mentioned before, to be aware of the damage you can cause in a lot of aspects, be it the environment, the community. As soon as you are aware of this, whatever steps you take to work on it, no matter how small, it is considered as a step in that direction.”

On the other hand, participants unaware of CSR offered brief and partial descriptions. Their understanding concentrated on one of the stakeholders – consumers. Understandably, all of them mentioned the responsibilities of companies towards them (consumers). For instance, KP13 said *“The behavior towards the clients... the main thing that makes a company responsible is how they treat their clients... clients are the most important.”* They also highlighted the responsibilities of

the owners and managers. All of these responsibilities focused on the products and services offered to them. Appendix 6.1 illustrates some of these responsibilities. A few other participants noted other aspects of CSR. KP7, KP9 and KP17 mentioned the relationship of the owners with the employees. KP9 also stated the responsibility towards society. KP11 highlighted transparency as the main pillar of a socially responsible company. She comprehended transparency as, *“... when there’s no deceit about prices. There are cases where you pick an item with a certain price and when you go to check out, they tell you it’s another price...”* Lastly, KP17 mentioned the environment dimension. According to him, a socially responsible company takes care of environment. He said, *“...I like what Zara has been doing since we’re talking about fashion companies. You can donate the clothes that you don’t wear anymore for them to recycle and sell again...”*

6.2.3.1.1 Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo in Terms of Company Size

The researcher observed that this topic offered a lively discussion in each of the three focus groups in Kosovo. The thematic analysis depicted two groups of thoughts among Kosovar consumers about CSR in relation to the size of the company. One group claimed that the social responsibilities are the same for all company sizes. Responses that belong to this grouping are presented in Appendix 6.2. On the other hand, the other group stated that the social responsibilities change in accordance with the company size. Most of Kosovar participants belonged to this grouping. They provided various reasoning to justify their views. For instance, KP16 said, *“...the bigger the company, the bigger the impact on the society, as well as the responsibility to make a change – bigger companies tend to pollute the environment more...”* KP14 added, *“... large companies have more pressure from the outside. At the same time, they’re more exposed to such terms and have the resources to contribute in this aspect...”* Several participants, such as KP17, KP3 KP2, claimed that it is easier for large companies to adopt a CSR mentality because large companies have more financial resources and capabilities than SMEs. KP3 illustrated her response. She said, *“A big company like Zara doesn’t have a problem with the revenue, they don’t have limited funds. They see what’s good for the environment, for the ecosystem, for example they use paper bags because they can. But a small company is impacted more easily from such changes.”*

KP15 provided another view about the differences of CSR adoption according to the size of the company. He said,

*“...bigger companies have to **maintain an image**, and they have to follow a path no matter if they want to or not. It’s becoming very common that corporates are letting people go because of carbon footprint or because of the social responsibility, but at the same time they’re losing the balance between keeping employees and protecting the environment, so it’s a very delicate territory.”*

A few participants (KP6, KP14 and KP15) referred to the adoption of CSR among SMEs as solely altruistic. KP6 said, *“...it’s only if they do it from a place where they really want to contribute.”* A few others claimed that this adoption is easier for SMEs to implement CSR. KP16 (a fashion consumer and founder of a marketing agency) stated that because of the size, SMEs have the advantage to be creative when compiling their CSR strategies. He said, SMEs can implement more CSR activities than large companies because the latter can’t risk to do things differently from their regular activities.

6.2.3.2 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Albania

All Albanian participants were eager to discuss their CSR understanding. Each of them provided their explanation of CSR. Initially, they discussed their general understanding of the term. Later, they argued about the impact of contexts on CSR. Their general understanding of CSR focused on different CSR dimensions, such as, philanthropy, economy and ethics. Their conceptions included several stakeholders, but mainly focused on community, society and employees. Several of these general conceptions are presented Appendix 6.3. The understanding of CSR through the fashion industry lens generated a lively discussion among both focus groups. Participants (themselves) started discussing the industry-context in the CSR understanding. The researcher noted that Albanian participants were well-informed about this context. The majority of Albanian participants (including those unaware of CSR) were familiar with the negative impacts of fashion industry. For instance, AP6 said,

“All fashion companies have a responsibility because they bring a product to society. In order to produce a product, those companies impact the society – the work done to produce that particular product, the material that was used to make it, the environment

pollution that these materials can cause. Recently, I found out that the fashion industry is the second main water polluter, and it is actually a very powerful indicator for these companies that they should have social responsibility. Because what they do has a big negative impact in this case....”

AP11 expressed her resentment with the unfair practices of fashion companies,

“I have also been informed about the use of children to produce certain clothes [AP10 interrupted and said “child labour”]. I have heard that Zara hires children in third-world countries. To harm children shouldn’t be acceptable! Isn’t this part of the social responsibility in relation to this aspect? [resented] ... So, fashion companies should implement fair practices and feel responsible for what products they’re offering their consumers ...”

AP5 provided his understanding of an ideal implementation of CSR by fashion companies. *“**Transparency** towards the buyer. Everything companies do, everything they produce, the way they produce it, the fabrication, how the employees work, economic issues...”* Several participants also highlighted fashion-specific CSR practices. AP8 shared an example of a fashion SME in Albania that donates off-season clothing to the abandoned children’s homes or to others in need.

As previously stated, a few Albanian participants claimed that they were unfamiliar with CSR. Regardless, they expressed their understanding of CSR. They used terms, such as, clothes of quality, donations, credibility, consistency and welcoming environment, to describe a socially responsible company. For instance, AP1 said, *“... it is not socially responsible for fashion companies to produce clothes of lower quality...”*

6.2.3.2.1 Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Albania in Terms of Company Size

To better understand the participants’ perception of CSR across different contexts, the researcher asked Albanian participants about their interpretation of CSR in size-context. The researcher categorised the participants’ responses into two groups: (a) social responsibilities are the same for all company sizes and (b) social responsibilities change in accordance with the company size. AP4, AP5 and AP7 considered the social responsibilities to be the same for all company sizes. AP4 said, *“[a]ll businesses should have social responsibility regardless of the size of the business. I don’t*

think it has much to do with their size, as with the vision of people who started these businesses...”

Other participants, such as AP1, AP2, AP10 and AP11, claimed that social responsibilities differ according to the size of the company. For instance, AP11 said,

“... If a multinational fashion company, such as Inditex, owns several other brands, evidently such as company should provide more CSR activities to the community and its stakeholders than a fashion SME. The responsibility of a multinational company is also related to the fact that it receives tremendously much more profit than an SME. To iterate my point, large companies can give back to the community more than SMEs, for example, by putting more recycling bins in the area - CSR should go in direct proportion to company's growth rate...”

AP6 and AP8 shared different views from all participants. AP6 said, “[i]deally, responsibility should be the same for every company, be it big or small, but seeing the wild capitalism, it's obvious that the bigger companies have more wrong doings in the behind production...” AP8 claimed that the social responsibility of a fashion company depends on the type of the company. She noted, “it depends on the **type of business**. So I believe if there is a company that deals with production, of course the responsibilities of a company that produces are higher than these of the one that only sells...”

6.2.3.3 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Croatia

All Croatian participants shared their understanding of CSR. In their conceptualisations, they highlighted the ethics as the main CSR dimension, and they mentioned stakeholders, such as employees, partners, community and environment. A few participants provided a general understanding of the concept. A few others shared their understanding of CSR in the fashion context. CP8 provided a general and specific conceptualisation. He said,

“In my view, CSR is how they (companies) treat supply production chains and their employees, if employees are treated fairly... In terms of fashion, I'd say transparency of production practices and the possibility of material recycling, promotion of sustainable approaches to fashion and related issues...”

The researcher noticed that, similar to CP8, a few other participants included the term sustainable as part of their conceptualisations. The researcher deemed that these participants considered sustainability as part of CSR. For instance, CP9 claimed, “... *being responsible for what they (companies) offer for their market, trying as much as possible to be sustainable and responsible of the natural source[s]... when doing CSR, they are taking the sustainable path...*” All participants (aware of CSR) pointed out the importance of fair treatment of employees and environment protection in their conceptualisations. To highlight the importance of environment factor in CSR, Croatian participants used terms, such as environmentally conscious, environmentally friendly, eco-friendly, environmental preservation, environmental protection and ecological guidelines. Several participants highlighted transparency as a crucial element of CSR. These are some of the participants quotes underlining transparency: “...transparency of production practices... (CP8)”, “...if it is honest and transparent to the costumer (CP11)” and “... being transparent of their work... (CP4).”

As previously mentioned, two participants claimed they were unaware of CSR. Regardless of that, they joined the discussion (in each focus group). CP12, who claimed to be unaware of CSR but aware of the social component, said, “... *paying their employees a fair wage, mak[ing] employees feel seen and heard, respect[ing] time off and working hours, providing good working atmosphere... no skimping out to make more money, being transparent to their employees...*”

6.2.3.3.1 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Croatia in Terms of Company Size

The researcher noticed that the most intense discussion among both Croatian focus groups was the discussion of the impact of company size on the CSR implementation. Similar to Kosovar and Albanian participants’ responses, Croatian participants’ responses belonged to two groups: (a) social responsibilities are the same for all company sizes and (b) social responsibilities change in accordance with the company size. CP6, CP10 and CP11 considered that social responsibilities are the same for all company sizes. CP10 said, “*I think that every company, whatever size, has to have the highest standard of social responsibility, even though large companies influence a larger group of people...*” Most Croatian participants believed that social responsibilities change in accordance with the company size. All participants belonging to this group of thought shared a similar view

with CP1, who said, *“bigger companies have more responsibilities than smaller ones.”* Nevertheless, they considered large companies as irresponsible. They criticised this lack of responsibility and deemed it unfair. Several of them expressed their resentment with large companies, especially in the fashion industry. CP8 said, *“[t]he bigger the company, more mess they make it seems. Just because you have money doesn't mean you can do whatever.”* Croatian participants claimed that large companies prioritise the profit and the positive image in public to CSR. CP9 said, *“[w]ell of course, when the company gets bigger, they care more about making profits than keeping their main goal which they started with or embraced during the journey...”* CP3 added *“[u]nfortunately, the larger the company, the more they practice cost optimization... because the supply chain increases, the company compensates on the fabric quality and labor conditions...”* Most of them agreed that such practices are unfair to the ‘important’ stakeholders of large companies. They used the term important stakeholders to refer to consumers, employees and the environment. CP3 claimed that large fashion companies apply CSR *“...primarily for PR...”* to avoid negative public opinions. CP4 said, *“...that in many cases [this] means they lack CSR and transparency...”* Participants reiterated the unfairness of such practices. They believed that large companies have more resources and reach than SMEs, and thus, large companies should use them for social purposes. The researcher noticed that many Croatian participants think preferably of SMEs approach towards CSR. CP9 stated, *“... [s]maller companies seem to have many owners that are still relatively passionate about their work in fashion and want to retain their integrity for as long as possible.”*

6.2.3.4 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Greece

Greek participants were willing to discuss their CSR understanding. They provided their CSR conceptualisations. In these conceptualisations, they included different CSR dimensions, such as, ethics and philanthropy. They also included stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, community and environment. They provided general and fashion-specific CSR conceptualisations. GP5, who provided an overall understanding of the term, said, *“[i]n my view, what makes a company responsible is when a company provides its consumers a quality product or service, while providing fair wages and treatment to its employees, committing to the local community and protecting the environment.”* Similar to GP5, most participants, who claimed to be aware of CSR,

mentioned the fair practices and fair treatment of employees. A few of them, such as GP1, claimed that employees should be the primary stakeholders for every company. GP2, who showed eagerness to discuss CSR, also shared his understanding of the term. He said,

“... To be considered responsible a company must prove that it has its non-profit purpose as a priority. It should be able to prove it is not making decisions to maximize its profit but to meet its responsibility goals and be responsible in all manners and stages. There is a lot of greenwashing taking place so just preparing a CSR or sustainability report does not make you [the company] responsible. The company should show via its marketing that they are doing something positive for the world and that this is a priority.”

Similar to Croatian participants, Greek participants stressed the importance of environment protection from fashion companies. Different from Kosovar, Albanian and Croatian participants, Greek participants highlighted the protection of animals when discussing CSR from the fashion context. According to them a socially responsible fashion company is one that does not perform animal cruelty. In this discussion, a few participants also shared their perception of ideal CSR practices and activities. For instance, GP2 mentioned, “... [r]ecycling, pro-bono activities, charity activities...”

6.2.3.4.1 Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Greece in Terms of Company Size

Responses of Greek participants about the impact of the company size in the CSR application belong to one of the two groups: (a) CSR is the same for all company sizes and (b) CSR differs according to the company size. A few participants, such as GP1 and GP13, belonged to the first group of thought. GP1 said, “*I don't think the size of a company influences social responsibility. I believe that social responsibility should be a must in each and every company no matter the size of it.*” The majority of participants considered that CSR differs according to the company size. GP10 claimed, “... *the bigger the company, the bigger the footprint...*” Similar to Croatian participants, Greek participants criticised the large-size fashion companies. G2 said,

“Large companies have more resources to act responsibly but relatively they do that to a lesser extent compared to smaller companies. This is because large companies also have big marketing budgets so they only want to appear as responsible...”

GP5 agreed with GP2. She added, *“...their efforts are pure PR.”* A few other participants claimed that large companies in the fashion industry care only about return on investment. GP8 and GP9 claimed that it is easier for SMEs to follow CSR. GP9 highlighted an advantage of SMEs compared to large companies – the direct local impact. GP8 provided another reasoning. She said,

“I believe that maybe small companies could be more responsible socially since less people decide about the company. The more the people the more the arguments and dilemmas may be, which can lead to less social responsibility...”

During this discussion GP2, made an important remark. He said, *“I don't think that they should call it CSR as this is associated more with larger companies. They should have ESG impact as their priority to the extent that they can do it...”* A similar remark was made by A5 (owner-manager of a small-sized enterprise in Albania) while explaining their understanding of CSR.

6.2.3.5 CSR Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The previous subchapters and sub subchapters provided the CSR understanding of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher noted similarities and differences among participants conceptualisations. The majority of participants provided a comprehensive understanding of CSR. The researcher noted that participants, through their conceptualisations, identified the main CSR dimensions and stakeholders. The researcher noted varieties among (a) Kosovar and Albanian participants and (b) Croatian and Greek participants in terms of CSR stakeholders. Kosovar and Albanian participants (aware and unaware of the concept) considered consumers and employees as primary stakeholders of CSR. On the other hand, Croatian and Greek participants (aware and unaware of the concept) highlighted the employees and the environment as primary stakeholders of CSR. These differences can be attributed to the different institutional regionalisations. EU, an influential regional actor, provides the EU citizens with programs and campaigns on the importance of environment and employee rights (e.g., the Climate Pact; #EU4FairWork campaign; European Commission, 2023). Accordingly, Croatian and Greek

participants, who are EU citizens, tend to focus on these two stakeholders. Through this discussion, participants, unintentionally, joined the theoretical discussion of primary and secondary stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). Participants, who themselves are CSR stakeholders, identified the primary stakeholders in their CSR conceptualisations (as previously presented). While the researcher admitted that CSR varies by each company's purposes, the researcher deemed it important to consider the views of consumers as well. Ultimately, the interviewed managers and owners of fashion SMEs in SEE considered consumers as primary stakeholders. Additionally, a few participants joined another important discussion in the CSR field – the CSR-sustainability discussion, and they contributed to it. Similar to Carroll (2021), participants considered sustainable practices as part of CSR. Lastly, the researcher observed that all participants of the four investigated SEE countries criticised the CSR application of large fashion companies. Concerning SMEs, Croatian and Greek participants approved of their local SMEs' CSR application. Kosovar and Albanian participants, on the other hand, condemned the CSR application of their local fashion SMEs. Lastly, the researcher observed that consumers who admitted to conscious consumption had a better CSR understanding. Consequently, the findings of this research agree with Ferioli et al. (2022) and Lee and Lin (2022), who claimed that consumption influences CSR understanding.

6.2.4 Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Consumers Perceptions of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in their Respective Countries

6.2.4.1 Kosovar Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in Kosovo

All participants expressed their perceptions of the current CSR situation among fashion SMEs in Kosovo. The majority of them voiced their dissatisfaction with the situation. They stated that they are not aware of CSR activities taken by fashion SMEs in Kosovo. KP16 was among the few participants, who mentioned an example of a small fashion company applying CSR activities. He stated,

*“I had a personal experience with a company that produces shoes here in Kosovo. They told me that they take a **good care of employees** and their requirements. They provide employees with the healthiest food; the owners themselves find all the local and healthy ingredients needed to prepare the food because they want to ensure that their employees are healthy. I found it quite interesting...”*

KP7 highlighted another fashion company operating in Kosovo, that actively deals with social responsibilities; the company (a small-sized social company) mentioned by KP7 was owned by K4, whom the researcher priorly interviewed. KP7 referred to K4's work as a rare example of ideal implementation of CSR among fashion SMEs in Kosovo. KP14 stated that she has noticed that one of the brands she frequents treat their employees fairly. She added, "...*I have seen the employees are motivated to do their job and I think they get fair compensation...*" KP3, KP8 and KP17 said they have only seen CSR activities taken by international fast fashion companies (like Zara and Bershka). Three of them mentioned the fair wages and environmentally friendly packages. KP17 also indicated the aforementioned Zara's recycling practice. KP8 said that she considers international fast fashion companies, such as Zara and Bershka, more environmentally friendly than local fashion SMEs. The majority of participants indicated the absence of such activities in the fashion industry. KP18 emphasised, "...*I haven't seen yet any fashion brand that has taken actions, they don't even think about it because it's not a very popular topic here.*" Several participants expressed their resentment with Kosovar fashion SMEs approach towards CSR. While discussing this topic, participants directed attention to the absence of basic responsibilities from local fashion companies. They highlighted (a) the lack of fair wages and treatment of employees, (b) unfair selling practices, (c) poor quality products, and (d) the absence of environmentally friendly practices. Participants' views illustrating their resentment with the current situation are displayed in Appendix 6.4.

6.2.4.2 Albanian Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in Albania

Similar to Kosovar participants, Albanian participants were vocal about their views towards CSR in local fashion SMEs. They expressed their discontent with the current CSR situation. AP4 and AP8 stated that fashion SMEs in Albania might not even be aware of the term. Most participants claimed that, to their knowledge, most fashion SMEs operating in Albania do not implement CSR activities. For example, AP5 said,

"I think that in Albania the fashion industry is not in time. The industry has to take CSR seriously. All new established fashion companies should be inspected, both SMEs and large ones, and the state should create criteria for each company to be eco-friendly. Awareness and seriousness should be raised!... I think that the economic state

of our country [Albania] plays a key role also, because if our country doesn't provide a 'fertile ground', socially responsible companies cannot function..."

AP2, who works as an image creator, claimed that she has never noticed a fashion SME in Albania applying CSR activities. According to her, the only fashion SMEs she has spotted implementing CSR are foreign fashion companies operating in countries, such as France or Italy. She emphasised the transparency of CSR activities by such foreign companies and the lack of it among Albanian fashion SMEs. Among others, she stated,

"First of all, fashion SMEs in Albania do not even know what products they are selling on the market, and they must know it. They do not provide information on the fabric compositions, and they are obliged to explain what material clothes are made of. They should show if this material pollutes the environment, if it can cause you allergies, if it's made of cotton, if it's made of leather..."

Other participants, such as AP6 and AP11, also highlighted the absence of environmentally friendly and fair selling practices among fashion SMEs in Albania.

On the other hand, a few participants claimed that a few local fashion SMEs embrace one or more dimensions of CSR. AP8, AP10 and AP6 shared their experiences. As previously mentioned, AP8 shared her experience with a fashion SME in Albania that donates off-season clothing; she highlighted the philanthropy dimension of this company. AP10, on the other hand, shared her experiences with two companies. Initially, she discussed about an SME that emphasises the legal dimension of CSR. She said, *"I buy clothes from a small shop in the city center pretty often. Because I'm continuously in touch with the employees, I know their working conditions. They have good working conditions and fair salaries... in accordance with the labour act..."* AP10 also mentioned another fashion SME from which she purchased clothing items only a couple times. She stated that, to her knowledge, that is the only socially responsible fashion SME in Albania that embraces all dimensions of CSR. She explained,

"They make clothing by themselves, they have local designers, they have local tailors and what impressed me is that it is actually an Albanian production... The way the production phase is done, be it quality wise or in other aspects, is completely ethical... it's done the same as they do it in the foreign countries... the prices, on the other hand, are very high for the Albanian market..."

AP6 also mentioned a fashion SME operating in Albania that has done campaigns against racism and awareness campaigns for people with autism.

6.2.4.3 Croatian Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in Croatia

Croatian participants shared their perceptions of the CSR adoption from fashion SMEs in Croatia. Unlike Kosovar and Albanian participants, most Croatian participants approved of the local SMEs' CSR implementation. They expressed their content with the current situation. CP3 was enthusiastic about the development of CSR among fashion local SMEs. She said, *"as an environmentally conscious consumer, I'm pleased with the path of CSR among small fashion companies in Croatia because some of these companies that I know, have directly influenced the local community."* Similar to her, CP4 said, *"I love when I see any company that adopts such an approach."* Both CP3 and CP4 shared their experiences and content with socially responsible fashion SMEs in Croatia. A few Croatian participants, such as CP8, disagreed with the previous claims of CP3 and CP4. CP8 said,

"CSR has become a fad and companies are using it to increase their profit, they're using CSR for greenwashing. Maybe I am not very aware of CSR activities by small fashion companies in Zagreb or Croatia, but I cannot trust these companies until there is transparency to us consumers. There should be defined rules as to what CSR means in the fashion industry..."

Different from other participants, CP5 claimed, *"I'm indifferent I only care if the companies provide good quality products and not harm me directly."*

6.2.4.4 Greek Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in Greece

The discussion with Greek consumers generated various responses about the CSR adoption from Greek fashion SMEs. GP12 claimed to be content with the current CSR state. GP12 response was straightforward. She said, *"I feel satisfied."* On the other hand, a few other participants claimed that the CSR application among SMEs Greek fashion varies. GP5 said,

"I think it goes from one extreme to the other. There are small companies, who adopt zero-waste philosophy and they truly work on that, and there are other small companies, who only care about the profit. [The researcher asked him to justify his

view] I think it's the mindset of the owners. Maybe it can be the age. Younger owners tend to be ready to embrace such philosophies..."

Alike GP5, GP10 claimed that the CSR application varies across SMEs. GP10 stated that she appreciates the fashion SMEs that have incorporated CSR, yet, she stated that she is advocating for all companies to adopt a social purpose. She said, "... *this is a way to improve the workplace and the world...*"

6.2.4.5 Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Consumers Perceptions of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in their Respective Countries: An Overview

The previously-presented findings showed the consumers perceptions on the state of CSR in their respective countries. The discussion was focused only on SMEs. As presented, participants shared different views on the state of CSR. These differences can be ascribed to the difference in their CSR understanding and their CSR expectations. The researcher noted that Kosovar and Albanian participants were more eager to discuss this topic than Croatian and Greek consumers. The researcher deemed that this eagerness is a result of the insufficient application of CSR among fashion SMEs in Kosovo and Albania. Most importantly, these findings showed that, according to participants' perception, CSR is present in Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs and it absent in Kosovar and Albanian fashion SMEs.

6.2.5 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

6.2.5.1 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Intention and Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

The researcher asked Kosovar fashion consumers about the impact of CSR in their purchasing intention and actual purchasing behavior. To understand the impact of CSR in their purchasing behaviour, the researcher looked into their last consumption and investigated their drivers. Given the lack of ethical, conscious and sustainable purchase drivers among Kosovar fashion consumers, the researcher attempted to understand the impact of CSR in their purchasing intention. The researcher asked consumers about their willingness to purchase from fashion companies adopting

CSR and their willingness to pay a premium price for a product/service offered by socially responsible small and medium-sized companies (in the fashion industry). The researcher classified participants answers into two themes and several sub-themes. The identified themes are discussed below.

6.2.5.1.1 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

The researcher observed that the majority of participants do not take into consideration the CSR approach of the fashion company/ies in their purchases. They alluded this behaviour of theirs to the lack of the CSR implementation by fashion companies (in general), especially by small and medium-sized fashion companies in Kosovo. KP8 also mentioned the poor communication of CSR activities from fashion SMEs; she stated, “...as a consumer, I don’t have much access to such information, I search on web, but they almost never share such information...” KP7, KP16 and KP18 identified another potential reason. They claimed that Kosovar fashion consumers are not impacted by CSR activities because of their unawareness of CSR and its impact. A few participants held themselves accountable for such purchasing behaviour. For instance, KP14 said, “*Maybe it’s bad to say it but personally I’m **not exposed to information** regarding the social responsibility of the fashion companies. I haven’t even ever asked for it...*” KP14 also pointed out the insensitiveness to CSR activities; she said, “...also, maybe it’s just because I’m a little **insensitive** to these sorts of things.” Many participants ascribed the absence of CSR impact in the purchasing decisions also to the current economic and political situation in Kosovo and the mindset of their society. Their perceptions are presented below in Table 6.14. The researcher observed that Kosovar participants had the tendency to shift the discussions from their personal views to an overall perception of the society. This tendency can be allured to the collectivistic culture of Kosovo. It is best illustrated in the table below (the researcher underlined the words emphasising it).

Participant	Quote
KP16	“I think that <u>we</u> are a post-war society that went through a transitional phase that lasted very long, and the first thing <u>we</u> look at is the price , so I think that this social responsibility thing is somewhere <u>at the bottom</u> of the things we look at... it doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t start thinking like that. However, it’s hard for the entire people to change the opinion within a period of ten years.”

KP14	<i>“...as a society <u>we</u> aren’t educated that much about it...”</i>
KP8	<i>“I think that <u>as a society</u> we aren’t aware of the responsibilities of the companies.”</i>
KP18	<i>“I think it has a lot to do with the lifestyle that <u>we</u> (Kosovars) have. <u>We haven’t been informed</u> very much about CSR or the unethical production process of clothing items...”</i>
KP2	<i>“It also depends from the country <u>we</u> live. In other countries these topics are widely discussed but we aren’t the right people to discuss about these topics. <u>As a country, we</u> never discuss about these topics therefore <u>we</u> aren’t informed about them. <u>We</u> simply buy the product <u>we</u> like.”</i>

Table 6.14 Kosovar Consumers Perceptions about the Absence of CSR Impact in their/consumers Purchasing Decisions

KP15 was the only participant among three groups, who stated, “... *I left a store after seeing a T-shirt made of recycled plastic, because I think that it’s not comfortable...*” KP15 admitted he has been aware of CSR and CSR practices for several years. Yet, his response showed that a fashion consumer might prefer comfort to CSR practices (such as recycling).

On the other hand, the researcher observed a few participants, whose purchases have been impacted by CSR or CSR activities. In particular, KP7 and KP9 shared their experiences. They stated that their awareness of CSR practices and activities (taken by fashion SMEs) impacted one or several of their purchases from those particular fashion companies. KP7 shared an example when a socially responsible SME (owned by K4) has impacted the purchase of gifts for his loved ones, too. He said,

“... I also bought a gift for my aunt... I liked the quality and the care they offered through the product. The history behind the business was an added value, because all the jumpers were hand made from the widow women or from the women who live in the remote villages that were hired in this company, and they offered quality products. This made this business stand out and made me buy there gifts as well.”

KP9, who is a junior journalist, stated that, while reporting, she was introduced to the work of a local fashion designer; she said that the unique, high-quality and recyclable clothing items impacted her purchasing decision. Nevertheless, these cases were rare among participants of the

three focus groups in Kosovo. The researcher observed that the lack of CSR impacted the purchases of few participants. Particularly, KP2 and KP3 highlighted that the absence of fair employee treatment impacted their purchasing decisions. KP2 and KP3 mentioned that they stopped visiting a few local fashion (small and medium-sized) companies because of the unfair treatment of employees. KP7 shared that the lack of ethical production practices influenced his purchasing behaviour. He said, “...*I saw a documentary that a lot of clothes that are made in China are made from 5-year-old children, knowing well that they shouldn't be working in factories. Ever since, I haven't bought T-shirts made in China.*” His view showed the importance of CSR awareness in conscious or ethical purchasing practices. KP8 and KP16 also stated that their personal beliefs about the environment protection impacted some of their purchases. KP8 said that after being informed through social media about the negative impact of fashion industry in the environment, she has started to purchase clothes of higher-quality and recyclable. For the same reasons, KP16 claimed that he has started purchasing clothes from local second-hand shops.

6.2.5.1.2 Impact of CSR in the Last Consumption of Kosovar Consumers

The researcher asked the participants about their last consumption and the impact of the CSR dimensions in their purchasing decisions. The majority of participants claimed that they did not consider nor they were influenced by the CSR practices and activities of the fashion SMEs. Some of their responses were “No (KP4)”, “Not at all (KP12)”, “*I haven't thought of it (KP6)*”, “No, no (KP19)”. Some participants stated that they had not been aware of CSR prior to these focus groups. Some others, like KP3, said that they had conscious and ethical practices in mind while purchasing, but the necessity and price overshadowed the influence of the former-mentioned practices. During this discussion, most participants iterated the lack of CSR application among fashion SMEs in Kosovo. KP8, KP9 and KP16 are the only consumers, who considered one or more dimensions of CSR in their last consumptions. KP8 said, “*First, the material was of high quality, sustainable and recycled. Second, the item was in 'the list' from last year [everyone laughing] ...*” KP9 purchased a blouse from a local designer who is known for fair practices, and KP16 got a shirt and a pair of trousers from a second-hand store. Responses of other participants, who did not weigh up CSR in their last consumption are presented in Appendix 6.5. KP12's

comment outlined the discussion in the three groups. She said, “[w]hat we should do and what we do are completely different from each-other.”

6.2.5.1.3 Impact of CSR in Kosovar Consumers Purchasing Intention

The researcher also looked into the impact of CSR in consumers purchasing intentions. Given the lack of the awareness of CSR among Kosovar consumers, the researcher decided to ask consumers about the potential impact of CSR in their purchases. To make the question straightforward for the participants, the researcher provided specific qualities of responsible fashion SMEs (such as, offering decent jobs, respecting human rights, protecting the environment and/or giving charity). Most participants claimed they would purchase a clothing item to support the social causes of fashion SMEs. For instance, KP13 said,

“I would say that if I heard the information that someone is doing some kind of activity with social responsibility, I would have felt good and if I could, I’d help and contribute in that aspect. If helping means for me to be a costumer or something, I think that it would motivate me to do so...”

KP11 said, *“The information I gained about CSR in this focus group will definitely impact in my future purchases.”* KP10, on the other hand, stated that she would not be willing to purchase solely for that reason. She claimed, *“... I’d go for a visit. I’d buy it if I liked it but if I didn’t I wouldn’t. Maybe I’d buy it for charity, otherwise no.”* Her views supported the pervious claim that consumers might prefer comfort to CSR practices. Nevertheless, KP10 distinguished charity from other CSR practices.

6.2.5.1.4 Kosovar Consumers Perception on Premium Price

To understand the impact of CSR in consumers purchasing intention, the researcher asked the participants about their willingness to pay a premium price about a fashion item produced or sold by socially responsible SMEs. The previous findings showed that pricing is an important factor in purchasing decision of Kosovar fashion consumers. Different from previous responses, the majority of participants claimed their willingness to pay a premium price. They justified their premium price to their willingness to benefit others. For instance, KP2 said *“Yes, it’s worth it. Of course, I’d do it for something that’s worthy. It’s worth paying for charity, for employees, for*

environment, because there's no harm in donating for a good deed.” On the other hand, KP12 was the only participant, who stated their unwillingness to pay a premium price to support socially responsible SMEs in the fashion industry. She said,

*“I can pay a premium price only if I like it. If I don't like it, I will not pay a premium price because I have **no interest** whatsoever about this part. Regarding the employees, you get to see them only 5 minutes, and although they treat you good, I can't buy it if I don't like it.”*

While the researcher anticipated a lively discussion after KP12's response, participants of this (the second) focus group accepted her view, and they solely justified their willingness to pay a premium price (as presented above).

The researcher observed that a few participants have paid a premium price. Precisely, three participants (KP1, KP7 and KP16) admitted to have paid a premium price to support the social causes of fashion SMEs. KP1's and KP7's reasonings are presented below.

“I bought a handmade blouse for a higher price because I wanted to motivate them. Besides, their symbolic had a meaning.” (KP1, female)

“I did pay premium pricing when I purchased from KK4 [the social enterprise owned by K4] ... There were two things that impressed me and made me buy several items from KK4. Number one is the fact that by buying it I'm empowering a group of women from the rural areas and, because it was a unique jumper, which means that it was made only for me and no one else had it besides me. It's very hard to buy something that's so rare and unique that nobody else has. That's why I didn't think twice and I bought their clothing items.” (KP7, male)

KP16 had a different experience from KP1 and KP7. He said, *“Yes, but then I was a bit disappointed with the quality because it wasn't worth it the money I paid.”* On the other hand, KP14 and KP17 said that they might have unconsciously support a socially responsible SME in the fashion industry. KP14's argumentation was, *“Maybe I did it unconsciously, because the companies are conscientious.”*

6.2.5.2 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Intention and Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Albania

Similar to Kosovar participants, the researcher sought to get answers from Albanian participants about the impact of CSR in their purchasing intention and actual purchasing behavior about clothing items. The researcher identified the answers into two themes: (a) purchasing behaviour and (b) purchasing intention. These themes are discussed in detail in the next sub sub-chapters. The interest in purchasing intention was a result of the absence of conscious practices among the majority of Albanian participants. To better understand participants' purchasing intention, the researcher also looked into their will to purchase from fashion SMEs implementing CSR and pay premium pricing.

6.2.5.2.1 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Albania

Most Albanian participants did not take CSR into account in their purchases. They ascribed this behaviour to several factors: (a) the lack of familiarity with the CSR and conscious activities, (b) the prioritisation of other factors (such as quality-to-cost ratio, necessity and discounts) to CSR, (c) the absence of CSR implementation from fashion companies in Albania, and (d) the poor communication of CSR activities from fashion companies. AP3, who mentioned the unawareness of conscious practices, said, “... *as a kid, I have never been educated to look out for clothing information – how the item is processed, what it contains, what material it is made of.... I didn't even know about the information provided in the tag in clothing items...*” Similar to her, a few other participants allured the absence of such behaviour to their lack of knowledge on conscious activities. AP10 mentioned the absence of CSR activities from fashion SMEs in Albania. She said,

“... [f]ashion SMEs producing and selling clothing in our country lack basic responsibilities. They do not even put wash tags in the clothes. Obviously, such tags serve a purpose... if a T-shirt doesn't have a wash tag that specifies the material and the degree it should be washed at, and for example, the T-shirt can be washed only at 40°C and if you put it at 60°C, you have automatically damaged that T-shirt twice faster and in a very short period of time, your T-shirt will be faded, and you will buy another T-shirt with which you will pollute the environment.”

AP10's response highlighted the importance of SME's social responsibilities, besides the consumers. A few participants mentioned the lack of good communication from socially responsible SMEs. AP8 and AP10 mentioned that they were familiar with few socially responsible SMEs, which do not promote their CSR application. Lastly, the researcher identified the prioritisation of other factors (such as quality-to-cost ratio, necessity and discounts) to CSR as a factor to the lack of a purchasing behaviour that reflects on CSR. This prioritisation was clearly illustrated when discussing the purchasing and consumption drivers of Albanian participants.

On the other hand, a few Albanian participants stated that some of their purchases have been impacted by the CSR activities of fashion SMEs in Albania. AP8 and AP10 claimed that some of their purchases have been influenced from CSR activities of fashion SMEs. Their examples were illustrated in one of the previous subchapters, precisely in the "Albanian Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in Kosovo" subchapter. The researcher noted that such activities impacted only a few purchases of these two participants. A8 admitted to have purchased only one clothing item from that company; AP10 claimed to have bought only a couple clothes. The researcher asked them for the reasons of the low number of purchases. AP8 explained that such initiatives have not reached her other than that time. AP10 attributed the low purchase frequency to the high prices of products.

The researcher also noticed that several Albanian participants have been impacted by their conscious purchasing practices. Different from Kosovar participants, some of the Albanian participants identified themselves as conscious consumers. Their identifying characteristics include: (a) awareness of the importance of fabric composition, (b) awareness of the negative impact of fashion industry in the environment and (c) familiarity with and applying of responsible practices (such as less washing to save the energy and water and to protect environment).

6.2.5.2.2 Impact of CSR in the Last Consumption of Albanian Consumers

The researcher posed a few questions to the participants about their last consumption and the CSR's influence in their purchases. Most participants, with few exceptions, claimed that they did not take into account CSR or CSR activities of fashion SMEs in their last bargains. AP10 was the

only participant to have considered the social responsibility prior to her last purchase. Nevertheless, AP4, AP5 and AP11 stated that they have partially considered it, as their last purchases have been influenced from unfair and non-eco-friendly practices of SMEs. AP5 shared his last experience,

“I went to a shop in Tirana where there are very high-quality products and moderately high prices. In this case, I found a product from 300€ to 50€, it was 70-80% off. I tried it on, I liked it, and when I went to the cash register, I realised that there were feathers inside. I asked the employee if the feathers were real and she said yes. I told her that I was sorry and that I wouldn't buy it...”

6.2.5.2.3 Impact of CSR in Albanian Consumers Purchasing Intention

This topic was mainly discussed with participants, who mentioned their unfamiliarity with CSR. The researcher asked them about the potential impact of CSR in their future purchases. AP1 claimed that, if CSR activities on philanthropy or environmental protection were presented to her, she would purchase clothing items from that fashion SME. Similar to her, AP1 stated that he would buy clothes from such SMEs. AP3 said that she would buy clothes from socially responsible companies, but she would prioritise pricing. She said, “... [a]ssuming that the clothes are of high quality because of the socially responsible nature of the SME, I would purchase from such a company, but only if the clothes have average pricing...” AP12 shared a similar view with AP3. He stated that he would purchase from a socially responsible SME, but their CSR activities would not be of chief importance.

6.2.5.2.4 Albanian Consumers Perception on Premium Price

The researcher asked the Albanian participants about their willingness to pay premium pricing about a clothing item from a socially responsible SME. Participant responses were categorised into two groupings: (a) willing to pay a premium price and (b) not willing to pay a premium price. AP5, AP7, AP8 and AP10 stated that they are willing to pay extra for an item that benefits the community and environment. AP10 reiterated her past experience with a fashion SME that sell high-price products. AP7 and AP8 claimed that they have never paid a premium price, but they would do for such purposes. AP5 said,

“I would definitely pay a premium price if I know that my contribution is used for good things for humanity and for the SME to thrive and raise CSR awareness. So, even if I contribute to increase the net worth of a company that is very aware of everything it does for humanity, then I am willing to do it because I help this company become an example for other companies.”

A few participants, such as AP3 and AP6 claimed that they would not pay a premium price. AP6 explained her view,

“I have never paid a premium price because I don't know any SME here which is so transparent as to promote these policies. I know a brand that has done campaigns against racism, and raised awareness for people with autism. I can buy from them, but I would not pay a premium price because at the end of the day I'm buying only an article of clothing.”

6.2.5.3 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Intention and Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

To understand the purchasing intention and purchasing behaviour of Croatian consumers, the researcher asked them a few questions. Their responses generated two themes (purchasing behaviour and purchasing intention) and a few sub-themes, which the researcher discussed in the following sub sub-chapters.

6.2.5.3.1 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

Croatian participants' responses were categorised into two groups: (a) Croatian consumers consider CSR in their purchasing decision and (b) Croatian consumers do not consider CSR in their purchasing decision. More than half of Croatian participants highlighted the impact of CSR in their purchases. During the discussions, they shared their experiences and reasoning of such impact in their purchasing decision. Four Croatian participants considered themselves as conscious consumers. CP3, a conscious consumer, claimed that she purchases clothes from socially responsible companies for two reasons: (a) to support important social causes and (b) to help local SMEs, which she called “... *the backbone of Croatian economy...*” CP4 (also a conscious

consumer), said that, in the recent years, she has been purchasing clothing items from a small shop in Zagreb that “...does not throwaway clothes and it reuses them or sells them with a low price in the off season...” In addition to them, CP9 stated that she mainly purchases clothing items from socially responsible SMEs. CP9 said that she might not refer to herself as a conscious consumer, but she is aware of the impact of her purchases. She mentioned some priorities that she has when purchasing clothes. She said,

“...First, the item has to be good, for long term usage, because when I give it away for second hand shops, they can resell it for people in need and people can reuse these items. Cheap clothes can't be any good example for this kind of trade. Second, I tend to look for fabrics that are environmental-friendly, but not always... Third, I like to buy for a company that donates or reuses used clothes...”

A few other participants, such as CP13, mentioned that the CSR implementation impact only some of their choices. CP13 said, “Basic pieces of clothes such as shirts and tops, for me, are a thing of necessity and will usually choose the cheapest option,” She stated that for such items she usually purchases from fast-fashion. She takes into consideration the nature of the company when she looks for unique or high-quality clothing items.

A few other Croatian participants claimed that they do not take CSR into account in their purchases. CP2 said, “I try not to think of it because I will limit my small amount of choices even more”. CP5 ascribed this behaviour to the prioritisation of other factors. CP5 said, “I first check if the product is of a great quality”.

6.2.5.3.2 Impact of CSR in the Last Consumption of Croatian Consumers

More than half of Croatian participants claimed that they were impacted by a CSR practice in their last consumption. For example, CP9 said, “Last time I went shopping I bought a dress... What stood out was the way it fit me and the material of which it was made, it was of high quality... that company is also environmental-friendly...” CP10 shared his last consumption purchase. He said, “I bought a few shirts. I bought other pieces there in previous years and the quality turned out to be excellent, and the company is quite conscious of the environment.” A few other participants stated that they usually consider such factors, but their last purchases were fast purchases. CP7

said, “No, because I just needed a pair of trousers for work on short notice”. Similar to CP7, CP13 said,

“Honestly, this time not that much. I was in a hurry because of traveling, so I basically grabbed the first thing available (it was an online purchase) ... In all honesty, it was the price. There was a huge sale. And as I said, I was in a hurry.”

6.2.5.3.3 Impact of CSR in Croatian Consumers Purchasing Intention

The researcher asked the participants, who claimed to be unaware of and not impacted by CSR, about the potential effect of CSR practices and activities in their purchasing intention. CP5 stated it would not affect him in his purchases. Different from CP5, CP12 said that such practices and activities would impact her purchases. She claimed

“It will absolutely impact my purchasing intention. I would like to support businesses who are responsible to their communities and who give back. For me, the employees or the owners already are a huge part of my buying intentions. If they are satisfied and have great customer support, I will more likely be buying products there.”

6.2.5.3.4 Croatian Consumers Perception on Premium Price

The researcher asked the Croatian participants about their willingness to pay a premium price for clothing items produced and sold by socially responsible SMEs. Participants provided various views. A few participants expressed their willingness to pay a premium price. CP3 claimed that she has paid premium pricing before. She said, “Yes, I have. I believe in supporting brands that care about their community, so I've paid a premium for responsible clothing.” A few other participants claimed that they support such responsible SMEs, nonetheless, they would not pay a premium price. CP12 said,

“I would probably want to contribute to such conditions by purchasing from them. But, again, if I deem the price to be too great for the product that I want to get, that would be the ultimate factor to impact my buying decision”

CP8, a conscious consumer, said, “I would not because I don't really buy new clothes, as I said, I mostly buy second hand stuff. This is my approach to conscious consumption”. CP2, on the other hand, claimed to not be willing to pay a premium price. She said, “I don't have a large budget to

be able to afford expensive piecese just for the sake of CSR. Mostly I have to think how to get more pieces for a certain price.”

6.2.5.4 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Intention and Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Greece

The researcher also investigated the impact of CSR in the purchasing behaviour of fashion consumers from Greece. The researcher asked Greek fashion consumers about the influence of CSR practices and activities in their purchasing intention and actual purchasing behavior. The findings from Greek participants identified two themes (purchasing intention and purchasing behavior) and a couple of sub-themes, which are presented in the next sub sub-chapters.

6.2.5.4.1 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Greece

Greek participants' responses belonged to one of the two groupings: (a) CSR impacts the purchases of Greek consumers and (b) CSR does not impact the purchases of Greek consumers. More than half of Greek participants claimed that, at one point, CSR activities have impacted their purchasing decisions. For instance, GP10 said,

“Yes, the company's responsible actions influenced me on buying my clothes there. This is because I was more certain of the products that I was purchasing. They had provided all the information that I needed to know even before purchasing the product and not seeing it in real life”

A few participants, such as GP4, claimed that the lack of CSR has also influenced some of their purchases. GP4 said, *“I heard a rumor about a Greek company being disrespectful, and I decided not to buy from this company again because I feel angry when companies do not behave kindly”* GP7 stated that CSR has impacted a few of her purchases, but she expressed her concern about the honesty of these companies. Other participants, such as GP3 and GP11, claimed that their purchases are rarely or never impacted by CSR. GP11 said, *“...I buy from the same places every time. I consider myself to be a loyal customer to specific brands, mostly because I enjoy the clothes, but I am not necessarily aware of their CSR practices”*

6.2.5.4.2 Impact of CSR in the Last Consumption of Greek Consumers

The researcher asked Greek participants about their last purchase from an SME and the main influence in their purchasing decision. The researcher noted that a very few participants claimed that the socially responsible nature of the fashion SMEs or CSR activities implemented by fashion SMEs impacted their last purchase. For instance, GP5 said,

“I always go for items that are eco-friendly and not very mainstream. And the last place that I decided to buy the last item provided me with a lot of eco-friendly options which I could choose from depending on my style”

Most participants claimed that other factors, such as price, quality, design and color, impacted their last purchase. GP3 said, *“... I needed some basic T-shirts of good quality and so, I bought them because I needed them and they had soft fabric.”*

6.2.5.4.3 Impact of CSR in Greek Consumers Purchasing Intention

The researcher asked the participants, who claimed to be unfamiliar with CSR, about the influence of CSR in their future purchases. All three participants claimed that CSR would impact their purchasing decision. Their views are presented below.

“Honestly, I haven’t thought about them before. I believe these factors mentioned would definitely affect me. But still the items need to fit my needs and be of high quality.” (GP3)

GP11, on the other hand, claimed that she would purchase from a socially responsible fashion SME if the company is transparent about their activities.

6.2.5.4.4 Greek Consumers Perception on Premium Price

Lastly, the researcher asked all Greek participants about their will to pay premium for an item offered by socially responsible companies. The majority of participants claimed their unwillingness to pay premium for such an item. For instance, GP9 said, *“No I would not pay premium because I do not consider clothes so important as to give a lot of money.”* GP3 stated that she would pay a premium price only for a clothing item of high quality. A few other

participants, such as GP2 and GP10, claimed that they have paid in the past. GP10 said she would also pay premium pricing in the future. GP10 shared one of her past experiences. She said,

“Yes, I paid premium price a couple of times. It was really appealing that they could be convincing about what they do and how they do it. Last time I paid a premium price was for a bag made out of recycled plastic bottles.”

6.2.5.5 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece: An Overview

The previous subchapters and sub subchapters presented the purchasing behavior and purchasing intention of fashion consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The researcher observed that CSR activities implemented by local fashion SMEs impact the purchases of consumers from Croatia and Greece. Such activities rarely impact the purchases of consumers from Kosovo and Albania. The researcher noticed that the two main reasons for the lack of CSR impact on the purchases of the latter consumers are: (a) consumers' unawareness of CSR and its impact and (b) fashion SMEs unawareness of CSR and their lack of CSR implementation. The researcher noticed that the majority of participants aware of CSR, with few exceptions, claimed that CSR and CSR activities taken by fashion SMEs impact or have impacted once their purchasing decisions. These findings show that, the majority of participants aware of CSR engage in responsible behaviours. The attitude-behaviour gap befalls only on a few participants, such as KP15 and CP5. The researcher also investigated the purchasing intentions of the participants who got familiar with the CSR concept in the focus groups. The findings showed that most of these participants expressed their willingness to engage in responsible purchases. The researcher also investigated the will of all participants to pay premium pricing. The findings presented that participants of the four SEE countries shared similar views. All of them belonged to one of the two groups of thoughts: (a) CSR is more important than price and (b) price is more important than CSR. Their responses depended on their perception of CSR, financial status, and the consumers perception on the added-value of the purchased items.

6.2.6 Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Consumers Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs

6.2.6.1 Kosovar Consumers Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs

The researcher investigated Kosovar consumers perceptions of consumers' impact on the CSR application of fashion SMEs. The researcher noticed that this question generated a lively discussion in all three focus groups. Participants views were categorised into three groups: (a) consumers are the influencers (drivers) of the fashion SMEs' CSR implementation, (b) fashion SMEs are themselves the motivators of CSR application and (c) consumers and fashion SMEs (jointly) influence the SMEs' CSR implementation. Most participants acknowledged their potential influence on the CSR approach of such companies. Several of them used the word 'power' to describe their impact. For instance, KP1 said, "...*the society is the one that has the power to influence and encourage them [fashion SMEs] to change that part...*" Similar to her, KP3 stated, "...*as consumers we have the power to appeal.*" A few other participants disagreed. They considered that the decision to apply CSR depends only on the company. KP6 claimed that consumers have no power when it comes to such choices. He said, "...*only one person complaining won't change anything. Maybe a very small percentage of people will stop going to buy there, but sooner or later they will give up and they will return again.*" KP3 opposed KP6's claim. She took an example of a medium-sized fashion company operating in Kosovo and the impact that consumers had on the company practices through social media (precisely, TikTok).

KP17 expressed his doubtful views about the consumers' impact. He said,

"...as long as we aren't accountable ourselves, we can't make a company be so, because there are a lot of more essential things that we haven't started dealing with yet, and we haven't started practicing them yet. Therefore, I think that with this tempo it's going to last for a long time until we see some changes."

A few other participants recognised their power, but claimed that the decision relies also on the fashion SMEs. They stated that the ideal situation would be the integration of consumers' requirements and company's approach.

6.2.6.2 Albanian Consumers Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs

The responses of Albanian consumers belonged to one of two groups: (a) consumers impact the CSR activities of fashion SMEs and (b) fashion SMEs are responsible for CSR implementation and their activities. Several participants highlighted the importance of consumers in impacting fashion SMEs to be aware of and implement CSR activities. AP5 claimed,

“I am very aware of the influence chain. I know that I can directly influence a fashion SME. Many people don’t understand the power of an individual, what a big role they can play, and how much their politics can influence an SME. Consumers perceptions can even influence the policies and production of big fashion companies. I know Burberry started selling a hooded sweatshirt with a noose, and it received so much backlash in social media that they had to remove it and even apologise... I know the importance that consumers have in companies. I know my importance as an individual in the longevity of a company”

On the other hand, a few participants claimed that the duty of being responsible lies entirely on the fashion SMEs. AP6 said that impacting the SMEs to take CSR actions should not be consumers’ duty. AP9 shared a similar view. He said, *“[t]his should not be the responsibility of the consumer, but of the fashion SME.”* The researcher noted that different from Kosovar participants, this question did not encourage many responses among Albanian participants.

6.2.6.3 Croatian Consumers Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs

Croatian participants provided various responses; they included both large and fashion SMEs. The researcher, nevertheless, focused only on the fashion SMEs. Their responses belonged to two groups: (a) consumers can impact the CSR application of fashion SMEs and (b) consumers cannot impact the CSR application of fashion SMEs. CPX was vocal about the power of individual. CP3 said, *“Absolutely! I believe that as a consumer I have the power to impact the practices of a small or medium company because my purchasing choice directly sends a message to companies of such size ...”* CP4 and CP9 believed in the individual power when supported by larger amounts of people. CP4 claimed, *“... if enough people pressure companies they can make them change their actions.”* Similar to her, CP9 said *“I believe in change but with a voice. I cannot make a change*

when I just do it myself without influencing people around. Everyone should be familiar with these matters” A few other participants, such as CP8 considered that their choice hold power only with smaller companies. He said, *“[i]n small companies possibly, because they have a small community which they keep working with, and as consumer I can influence to change their actions or encourage them to keep the same ones...”* Similar to CP4 and CP9, CP7 mentioned the power of large amount of people, but was skeptical of their influence. He said, *“...if enough people boycott, I guess, but I haven't got much faith in that.”* A few participants believed that consumers cannot impact the CSR application of fashion SMEs. For instance, CP1 said, *“No because we people are selfish and no matter how many people boycott certain product there is still plenty more who will buy it...”*

6.2.6.4 Greek Consumers Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs

Similar to Croatian participants' responses, Greek participants' responses fit to one of the following groups: (a) consumers have the power to influence the CSR practices of fashion SMEs and (b) consumers do not have the power to influence the CSR practices of fashion SMEs. A few participants considered that consumers hold the power to make such changes. For example, GP4 claimed that her power relies on the feedback. GP4 said, *“... one of the best things that I, as consumer, can do is give very realistic reviews of the products I am purchasing or of the company from which I am purchasing.”* Different from GP4, who emphasised the individual power of consumers, GP9 and GP10 highlighted the influence of consumers' joint impact. GP9 claimed, *“Customers voice is feedback. If every customer ever provides feedback to the business, they can impact the CSR implementation of that business.”* GP10 added, *“If all consumers do not buy things from companies that are disrespectful then these companies will be forced to behave better in order to survive”* On the other hand, a few participants, such as GP7, considered that consumers are powerless and the willingness to implement CSR relies solely on the company.

6.2.6.5 Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Consumers Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs: An Overview

The researcher observed the Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers' perceptions of their impact on the CSR of fashion SMEs. The above subchapters presented relatively similar views of participants at national level. Responses of the Albanian, Croatian and Greek participants belonged to one of the group of thoughts: (a) consumers have the power to influence the CSR implementation of fashion SMEs and (b) consumers do not have the power to influence the CSR implementation of fashion SMEs. At national level, Kosovar participants were the only ones, whose views belonged to three group of thoughts. In addition to the two afore-mentioned groups, Kosovar participants responses belonged to this group – (c) consumers and fashion SMEs (jointly) impact the CSR implementation of fashion SMEs. The researcher considered that the views of the participants from these four countries are truly individualistic in nature.

6.2.7 Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs in their Respective Countries

6.2.7.1 Kosovar Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs

In addition to the managers' perceptions, the researcher investigated the CSR communication of fashion SMEs in Kosovo through consumers' perceptions. The researcher identified the most successful communication tools for Kosovar consumers used by fashion SMEs to reach and impact consumers' choices in terms of CSR. The researcher also explored the ideal communication tools for Kosovar consumers. Participants reiterated the lack of CSR activities from Kosovar fashion SMEs. KP14 said, "... *I have neither seen nor heard...*" KP17 shared a similar view like KP14; he said, "*Me too. I have never seen or heard about any CSR activity from fashion companies in Kosovo.*" As discussed in a previous sub sub-chapter, the lack of awareness can be a result of the lack of good communication strategies from Kosovar fashion SMEs. KP16 stated, "... *I think that there are some companies that do have social responsibilities but they don't show it enough.*" The researcher asked the participants if fashion SMEs have reached them (the participants) about CSR activities. Most of them said that fashion SMEs have never reached them. Both, KP15 and KP16 said "*[v]ery seldom.*"

The researcher asked the participants about the main communication channels used by Kosovar fashion SMEs to transpire CSR-related information. Participants mentioned a few channels. KP15 and KP16 emphasised news stories. KP15 said, *“I have been informed about some CSR activities of some particular fashion companies when they were on the news, where they talk about things that they have done...”* KP15 and KP16 shared the news story of KK4 (the fashion SME owned by K4). KP8 mentioned the word-of-mouth, and she deemed it a successful communication tool for Kosovar society. The researcher also asked the participants if they self-initiated a search about CSR activities of a fashion SME they purchased from. The majority of them claimed to have never purposefully searched a fashion SME while hinting at CSR information. KP17 said, *“...very rarely, if at all I take my time to look at what specifically has a company done regarding this matter.”* The researcher also looked into the perceptions of participants about the ideal communication tools. The ideal communication tools from which Kosovar consumers would receive CSR-related information are presented below in Table 6.15.

“I would write in the price tag the material the item was made off, because there are a lot of people who are allergic in cotton. It would be a good idea to write the material in the Albanian language also because not everybody understand English.”

KP12 said, *“... I think that such tools may have an impact in educating Kosovar consumers, not only to protect the environment, but about all the CSR dimensions that you mentioned...”*

Current (Effective) CSR Communication Tools	Ideal CSR Communication Tools
News Stories	Website
Word-of-Mouth	Word-of-Mouth
	Packages and Tags
	Social Media
	TV Stories (including news stories)

Table 6.15 Kosovar Consumers Perceptions about the Current and Ideal CSR Communication Tools used by Fashion SMEs

6.2.7.2 Albanian Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs

The researcher asked Albanian participants about the most effective communication tools used by Albanian fashion SMEs that have influenced their choices concerning CSR. The researcher also asked about their perception about the ideal communication tools. Albanian participants identified the most successful tools used to reach them (concerning CSR). AP9, AP10 and AP11 mentioned social media, mainly the company's Instagram page, and the website. AP10 stated that a successful communication depends also on the consumer's willingness to accept and search for new information. He said, "... *for example, if I want to know about a certain product then I go to their website to do research.*" AP6 claimed that she has been informed about the previously-mentioned campaigns on racism and autism, mainly, through social media. She opposed her peers about the effectiveness of websites. She claimed, "*I don't know SMEs that show their work on protecting the environment or donating to people in need, maybe some large companies, but SMEs do not do it. SMEs lack transparency...*"

Albanian participants willingly discussed the ideal CSR communication tools. They mentioned several potential tools, which are presented below in Table 6.16. AP10 and AP12 highlighted the effectiveness of word-of-mouth in the Albanian society. AP9, AP10 and AP11 re-emphasised the importance of social media and websites in transpiring CSR activities. AP4 and AP5 mentioned creative advertisements and mini documentaries. AP4 and AP5, who work as filmmakers and cinematographers, expressed their creativity. They explained the influence of these two tools in the purchasing decision of consumers. In addition, they claimed that these tools will raise the awareness of CSR across the society.

Current (Effective) CSR Communication Tools	Ideal CSR Communication Tools
Website	Website
Social Media	Packages and Tags
	Word-of-Mouth
	Social Media
	Creative Advertisements
	Mini Documentaries

Table 6.16 Albanian Consumers Perceptions about the Current and Ideal CSR Communication Tools used by Fashion SMEs

6.2.7.3 Croatian Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs

The researcher investigated the consumers' perceptions about CSR communication of fashion SMEs in Croatia. To achieve that, the researcher asked Croatian participants about the most effective communication tools used by Croatian fashion SMEs. In addition to that, the researcher asked Croatian participants about their perceptions of the ideal CSR communication and communication tools to reach and impact their choices. Croatian participants mentioned several effective tools. The majority of them (among both focus groups) highlighted social media, website, events and philanthropic activities. CP4 added, *"... eco-friendly packaging is a strong communication tool used by socially responsible SMEs."* CP3 said, *"[i]n my view, the adoption of zero-waste philosophy is the most successful communication tool... it demonstrates the urgency and importance of CSR... anytime I see a fashion brand embracing such a philosophy, I'm convinced..."* The researcher noticed that Croatian participants were willing to provide communication advises to Croatian fashion SMEs implementing CSR activities. For example, CP8 said, *"I'd suggest fashion SMEs in Croatia not to use communication tools to bump up margins, but to use them to advertise an added value that these companies provide to their consumers..."* CP4 added, *"...they should use such tools to advertise their CSR approach, I'd stress - advertise it, advertise it..."* CP12, who shared a similar view like CP4, suggested, *"... small companies could advertise their good practices through their employees because employees are the mirror of a company."* CP9 mentioned the impact of influencers. She said, *"[m]ake people aware unconditionally, influencing and influencers nowadays is the trend, and it is [a] really good way to get into the people's subconscious without they even feel it."* CP3 reemphasised the importance of communication. She said, *"... they must always have clear communication objectives and communicate transparency..."* The identified communication tools are presented in Table 6.17

Current (Effective) CSR Communication Tools	Ideal CSR Communication Tools
Social Media	Zero-Waste Philosophy
Website	Eco-Friendly Packaging

Events	Social Media
Philanthropic Activities	Website
Eco-Friendly Packaging	Employee-Focused Advertisements
Zero-Waste Philosophy	Influencers
	Events
	Philanthropic Activities

Table 6.17 Croatian Consumers Perceptions about the Current and Ideal CSR Communication Tools used by Fashion SMEs

6.2.7.4 Greek Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs

Similar to Kosovar, Albanian and Croatian participants, the researcher asked the Greek participants about their views of the CSR communication and communication tools of Greek fashion SMEs. Most participants claimed that socially responsible Greek fashion SMEs prioritise communicating such practices. A few participants stated that commercial Greek fashion SMEs do not put an emphasis in communicating CSR. For instance, GP4 said, *“they decide what to advertise and what not, and some of them are not transparent... maybe they should just prove it more...”* Greek participants mentioned the most common and effective communication tools. They highlighted social media, website, eco-friendly products and eco-friendly packaging. GP10 said,

“In my opinion, a fashion company should not just advertise their approach to CSR, it should give a demonstration of it... for example, when I buy a shirt which states in its tag that it is eco-friendly and comes with an eco-friendly package, I believe their approach to CSR is for real...”

GP5 claimed that embracing zero-waste philosophy is the most effective communication tool for any fashion SME. In addition, GP1 mentioned healthy working environments as a successful communication tool. She said, *“I think it’s important to have and show a healthy working environment to begin with... also, it’s important to have a good understanding and communication between the owners and managers because it is all communicated to consumers...”* GP13 recommended that the best communication tool is *“... to keep up the implementation...”* According to her, implementation is the only opportunity to show the positive impact on the community. She added, *“... then it needs to be communicated vividly in their marketing.”* On the other hand, GP8 said that the most successful communication strategy for a fashion SMEs is when

the information reaches her without her trying to search for such information. The aforementioned and other effective CSR communication tools are portrayed below in Table 6.18

Current (Effective) CSR Communication Tools	Ideal CSR Communication Tools
Social Media	Zero-Waste Philosophy
Website	Eco-Friendly Packaging
Eco-Friendly Product	Eco-Friendly Product
Eco-Friendly Packaging	Social Media
Zero-Waste Philosophy	Website
	Healthy Working Environment
	CSR implementation

Table 6.18 Greek Consumers Perceptions about the Current and Ideal CSR Communication Tools used by Fashion SMEs

6.2.7.5 Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs in their Respective Countries: An Overview

The previous subchapters provided Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers' perceptions about the CSR communication of fashion SMEs in their respective countries. The researcher noticed that all participants showed interest in these discussions. They provided their views about the CSR communication tools used by fashion SMEs in their respective countries. They also identified the effective CSR communication tools. The communication tools mentioned by consumers – company website, social media and product labelling – resemble the ones cited by the CSR scholars in the fashion industry (e.g., Pelikanova et al., 2021; Rienda et al., 2023). The researcher observed a difference among CSR communication tools used by Kosovar and Albanian fashion SMEs compared to Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs. Based on the participants' perceptions, the former fashion SMEs rarely communicate their CSR activities, and they use less tools to communicate their activities. The researcher did not intend to imply that more tools mean more effective tools; Kosovar and Albanian participants themselves claimed the lack of CSR communication and communication tools from their local fashion SMEs. Croatian and Greek participants highlighted several successful tools used by their local fashion SMEs to communicate

CSR activities. The researcher noticed that the tools used by Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs are more diverse than tools used by Kosovar and Albanian fashion SMEs. All participants of the four SEE countries mentioned their views of the ideal CSR communication tools. The researcher observed another difference among the perceptions of Kosovar and Albanian participants and Croatian and Greek participants. The latter participants focused on zero-waste philosophy and eco-friendly product and packaging. The differences among them can be ascribed to a few factors: (a) the influence of EU programs in EU citizens (Croatians and Greeks) and (b) the development of the society (Croatians and Greeks are considered developed societies).

6.3 Findings from Netnographic Research in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

This subchapter presents the consumption practices of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece and their perceptions on CSR and CSR activities taken by fashion companies, precisely small and medium-sized companies, in the fashion industry of their respective countries. This subchapter shows another face to the reality of the phenomenon of CSR constructed by Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion consumers. It depicts the unobtrusive interactions of Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion consumers in online communities. These interactions provided the researcher with a rich understanding of the afore-mentioned consumers' perceptions and behaviours (from CSR perspective).

Similar to the focus group findings subchapter, this subchapter is structured around two parts: (a) fashion consumers' consumption process and (b) their CSR awareness, understanding and impact on their purchasing intention and purchasing behaviour. Prior to presenting the perceptions of Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion consumers, each sub subchapter provides the reader with descriptive findings of the netnographic research. Afterwards, each sub subchapter depicts the two afore-mentioned parts. This subchapter provides the reader with the opportunity to view the fashion consumers' perceptions, intentions and behaviours in an unobtrusive setting. It shows the multifaceted reality of CSR, and it provides the reader with the opportunity of comparing

and contrasting the fashion consumers' perceptions, intentions and behaviours in two different settings.

6.3.1 Netnographic Findings of Kosovar Fashion Consumers

The researcher conducted a netnographic research among Kosovar fashion consumers. This research focused on the interactions of an online community in the form of Facebook group. Hereafter, the community is denoted by KS-F. KS-F focused on the fashion consumption of Kosovar consumers. The interactions in the group were in Albanian language. The researcher conducted the research by herself for three months. During this period, the researcher got familiarised with the group, observed their conversations and collected the on-topic data. The thematic analysis was conducted after the three-month period.

At the time of the investigation, KS-F was the largest online community among Kosovar consumers. It had been present on Facebook since July 2016. It was managed by two admins and seven moderators and it had 147.746 members. KS-F was a private group. Consequently, the researcher, who followed a hybrid stance of netnographic research, informed the admins and moderators from the first day of the investigation. KS-F had specific rules for all the members, who were obliged to follow them in order to join and interact within the community. The researcher referred to the members as KM1, KM2, KM3 etc. All members were of Kosovar nationality, and they interacted only in the Albanian language. They shared their views about fashion products produced and sold by local and international fashion companies. They discussed their purchasing practices and experiences. KS-F also offered its members purchasing services. Members were offered the 'sales day' (once per week). In this section, they could sell their used clothes to each other. The researcher deemed KS-F a dynamic community, which generated around 50 posts per day and 1500 posts per month. The analysis generated two themes, which are discussed in the following subchapters. The findings are presented into two parts: (a) consumers' consumption process and (b) CSR and its impact on consumers.

6.3.1.1 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Kosovo

The researcher observed that the consumption practices followed by KS-F members belonged to monetary and non-monetary consumption modes. Members claimed a preference towards the monetary practices, mainly towards purchasing. The majority of them claimed that they enjoy the act of buying clothing items. For example, KM37 said, “... *I enjoy buying new clothes... shopping makes my day better...*” The ‘sales day’ further indicated their preference towards this monetary practice. The researcher observed their conversations and noticed that most members tend to make unmindful purchases (they do not follow conscious practices). Very few members shared their responsible purchases. In addition to buying, several members (all women) claimed that they rent clothing items. The researcher noticed that these members only rent outfits for formal occasions (evening dresses, gowns etc.). KM31 shared her experience; she said, “... *this summer, I have rented all the evening dresses for our family events... it saved me a lot of money and time...*” Some members mentioned non-monetary practices. For example, KM29 mentioned the act of receiving gifts. A few other members, such as KM54 and KM57, stated the borrowed and lending practices. Similar to renting, these practices were used by members to borrow and lend formal outfits. Members’ comments (quotes) about the afore-mentioned modes and practices are presented in Appendix 6.6.

The researcher identified the types of fashion companies frequented by KS-F members. KS-F members purchase from (a) small and medium-size fashion companies and (b) large fast-fashion companies. The tendency to purchase from the afore-mentioned types of fashion companies was also highlighted in the findings of the focus groups. The researcher, through the netnographic research, had the opportunity to observe in more detail the companies frequented by Kosovar consumers. The researcher noticed that Kosovar SMEs mostly sell imported goods from Turkey. KS-F members rarely mentioned Kosovar companies that produce their clothing lines. The researcher considered such behaviour to be a result of the small number of Kosovar manufacturer SMEs. Although the researcher’s focus was on SMEs, the researcher observed the members’ perceptions towards purchases from fast-fashion companies. KS-F members preferred to purchase from local fashion SMEs rather than from large fast-fashion companies. In this netnographic research, the researcher had the opportunity to also observe the views of Kosovar consumers about

second-hand stores. KS-F members posted only twice about second-hand stores during the three-month period of investigation. Only a few members claimed to frequent such stores and their driver to purchase from them was the trend and low price, not their views on conscious consumption.

6.3.1.1.1 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo

The researcher observed the conversations between members of KS-F and identified their purchasing and consumption drivers. The identified drivers are mostly similar to drivers identified in the findings of the three focus groups with Kosovar consumers. In the netnographic research, the researcher identified two additional drivers – comfort and fit. The netnographic findings further support the claim of the researcher that Kosovar consumers do not consider the nature of the company or any CSR activities as consumption drivers. Table 6.19 outlines the drivers of Kosovar consumers based on the netnographic research.

Driver	Participant	Quote
Style	KM41	<i>“...Hi fashionistas! I wanted to share with you my new purchase [a dress]. I got it because I thought it looks <u>stylish</u>. What are your views on it? [attached a photo]”</i>
Trend	KM3	<i>“... I got this crochet top for night-outs [attached a photo] ... It’s so <u>trendy</u> and looks so <u>stylish</u>. I’m happy with my purchase.”</i>
Quality	KM9	<i>“...No, for me <u>quality comes first</u> and then the rest...”</i>
Necessity	KM23	<i>“... Hello fashion-enthusiasts! I wanted to ask where I can find 100% cotton T-shirts? I <u>need</u> a few of them in black for my work...”</i>
Comfort	KM10	<i>“I have recently bought the same pair of boots. I got them because they seemed so <u>comfortable</u>, and, indeed, they are comfortable...”</i>
Price	KM18	<i>“...I bought it because... and it was <u>very cheap</u>, too [talking about a jacket]”</i>
	KM76	<i>“...I got it yesterday, it had a <u>reasonable price</u>... let’s see how long it will last...”</i>
Fit	KM18	<i>“...I bought it because it <u>fit me really well</u> and...”</i>

	KM42	<i>“... I got the same dress as you because it <u>fit me perfectly</u>... To be honest, all of their dresses [talking about a local SME] fit well in every one...”</i>

Table 6.19 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Kosovo based on the Netnographic Research

6.3.1.1.2 Post-Consumption Practices

The researcher identified several post-consumption practices of KS-F members. They claimed that they mostly practice (a) donating, (b) giving clothes away to family members and friends and (c) selling old or purchased-but-never-worn clothes. A few members stated that they have donated their clothes to local NGOs that work with people in need. Some others mentioned that they have given clothes away to their family members. For example, KM29 shared her story. She said that she gives to her cousins the in-good-condition clothes that do not fit her anymore. The researcher observed a give-away from KM3. KM3 gave away an evening gown to one of the KS-F members. Her post read, *“Hello my favourite fashion-enthusiasts. I express my will to give this evening gown away to anyone of you, who need it. The gown is designed by Emina's Fashion in Ferizaj.”* In addition to the text, she attached a picture of the outfit. In addition to KM3, the researcher noticed that several KS-F members engaged in selling old and purchased-but-never-worn clothes in the ‘sales day’. A few others, such as KM17, shared their Instagram page, where they sell such clothing items.

6.3.1.2 CSR Awareness and Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Kosovo

The researcher noticed that, during the three-month period of investigation, none of the KS-F members mentioned CSR or any interchangeable term (such as ethical fashion, sustainability or conscious fashion consumption). Regardless of the lack of CSR discussion, the researcher could not claim that KS-F members are unaware of CSR and CSR activities. The researcher claimed that KS-F members do not tend to discuss about CSR. The members did not discuss about any CSR dimension or activity, with the exception of few philanthropic activities from fashion companies. For instance, KM31 posted about a philanthropic activity of a small Kosovar company during

COVID-19; the said company produced face masks and gave them away for free during a time when the country faced a face-mask shortage. KS-F members applauded it, but did not share any other perception about the company. The researcher did not observe any information about CSR application from Kosovar fashion SMEs. The researcher did not intend to ask Kosovar consumers about their perceptions of CSR application from fashion SMEs. As stated at the beginning of this subchapter, the researcher followed a hybrid stance of netnographic research. The researcher could have adopted an active netnographic stance, but, given that this research conducted three focus groups that provided information in the afore-mentioned topics, the active stance did not seem appropriate. The researcher could have adopted an active stance if netnography was employed as a stand-alone interpretation in this research.

6.3.2 Netnographic Findings of Albania Fashion Consumers

The researcher investigated an Albanian fashion online community in the form of a blog. At the time of the investigation, this community was managed by one blogger, who posted about different fashion-related topics. The blog posts were public to every commenter. The blog posts received a relatively good engagement from commenters. The interactions occurred in Albanian language. The data collection and analysis were conducted by the researcher. The data collection lasted for three months. The blog was denoted by AL-B. AL-B was a public fashion online community, that, at the time of the investigation, discussed a variety of fashion trends, facts, and companies from the Albanian consumer perspective. The blog provided 53 posts and countless comments during the investigation period. The blog had shared goals and values. The interactions were driven by specific rules. The researcher identified four themes as a result of the thematic analysis. In addition, the researcher pseudonymised the blogger and the commenters. The blogger's pseudonym is AB1, and the commenters' pseudonyms are AC1, AC2, AC3 etc.

6.3.2.1 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Albania

The researcher observed the interactions of the blogger and commenters and noticed the main consumption modes and practices. Commenters only highlighted the act of buying as a monetary practice. In several posts, they shared their habit of purchasing. For instance, AC8 commented on a post about the trendiest brands among Albanian consumers. AC8 said, *"I recently purchased a*

dress from Zara, the yellow one that got trendy this season...” The blogger (AB1) also mentioned the act of gifting clothes (a monetary practice). As non-monetary practices, the commenters mentioned gifted clothes. Several commenters shared their gifts from loved ones in a blog that suggested gifting ideas. AB1 also noted swapping as a consumption practice, but the idea did not receive enough attention among commenters. The afore-mentioned modes and practices are illustrated in Appendix 6.7

The researcher identified the main fashion companies mentioned by the blogger and commenters and categorised them into two groups: (a) international large companies (such as, Nike, Zara, Bershka etc.) and (b) local SMEs (companies that sell imported clothes and companies that produce clothing items). The international large companies are mainly fast-fashion companies, which, according to the blogger, have spread in Albania in the recent years. The tendency to purchase from fast-fashion companies was observed in the conversations among commenters. The researcher observed that the blogger and commenters mentioned other international large companies, such as Gucci, Prada and Chanel. They, however, claimed that only Instagram influencers are able to afford such brands. The blogger and commenters also highlighted the presence of local SMEs. They claimed that the majority of their purchases take place in local SMEs, which import clothes from Turkey and Greece. For example, the blogger said, “... *I purchase clothes from shops located in Myslym Shyri. I cannot afford a Chanel bag, Gucci shoes or Dolce and Gabbana accessories...*” AB1 acknowledged also a few local SMEs that produce and sell their own products. In addition to her, commenters discussed a few other local SMEs. AC7 mentioned a medium-size company, which happened to be the company managed by A4, whom the researcher interviewed. AC7 in her comment highlighted the responsible nature of that company. She said, “... *I’ve heard that they take care of their employees...*”

6.3.2.1.1 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Albania

The researcher explored the purchasing and consumption drivers of the blogger and commenters. The main identified drivers are presented below in Table 6.20 The researcher noticed that the majority of commenters put their emphasis on drivers, such as price, style and trend. Only AC15

mentioned philanthropy as a consumption driver. AC15 was the only consumer among the four countries to mention philanthropy.

Driver	Participant	Quote
Price	AB1	<i>"... I purchase clothes from shops located in Myslym Shyri. I cannot afford a Chanel bag..."</i>
	AB1	<i>"<u>Price</u> is an important factor in our economy, price determines our purchases..."</i>
Style	AC8	<i>"... I buy pieces that define my <u>style</u> – the 'street style'..."</i>
Trend	AC11	<i>"...I follow the <u>latest trends</u> and make purchases based on them..."</i>
	AC3	<i>"My purchases are always influenced from the <u>Paris fashion week</u>..."</i>
Quality	AC21	<i>"... I appreciate a piece of high-quality..."</i>
Fit	AC14	<i>"...When I want to purchase a jacket, I always see if it <u>fits me and my body shape</u>..."</i>
Philanthropy	AC15	<i>"I once purchased from a small shop in Toptani because they claimed that for every purchase above 3,000LEK, they give an accessory to young Romani people in a community center..."</i>

Table 6.20 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Albania based on the Netnographic Research

6.3.2.1.2 Post-Consumption Practices

The researcher investigated the post-consumption practices in the AL-B. AB1 posted two blogs focusing on such practices. In one of the posts, AB1 highlighted the act of reusing and repurposing old clothes. AC23 said that they have tried to do a DIY in an old shirt and the result was satisfactory. In the other post, AB1 mentioned the act of donating. Commenters expressed their views about it. Several of them admitted to donating clothes to people. AC4 claimed that she has donated clothes to an international NGO (Caritas). AC7 shared her experience; she said that she has donated old clothes to Strehëza, a residential center for homeless people in Albania. She said,

"... It was an easy procedure. I dropped them off at their center. I called a phone number stated at the door. I was told to leave them in front. Once they arrived, they informed me that they got the box with the clothes ..."

6.3.2.2 CSR Awareness and Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Albania

The researcher observed the interactions of the blogger and commenters for three months and noted that they showed a low level of CSR awareness. None of them mentioned the exact terminology – corporate social responsibility (CSR) in any of their interactions during the period of investigation. AB1, nonetheless, seemed to be informed about social responsibilities. She briefly talked about responsible and ethical production and responsible consumption. In a post, she showed that she perceives social responsibility as an obligation. She said, “...*It is the company's obligation to produce ethically-made clothes of high quality...*” AC7 also commented on the responsible nature of the company managed by A4. AC19, on the other hand, discussed about the unfair prices among Albanian brands. She commented,

“There is also a problem regarding the brands in Albania, because they abuse with prices. So, you can find a brand in US with a real price, in Albania you can find it with a price that's three times higher, and above all it is a product of 2019 or 2020, not a brand-new product...”

After considering the afore-mentioned and other interactions in the community, the researcher concluded that the blogger and commenters understanding of CSR mainly focuses on the ethics dimension.

6.3.2.3 Impact of CSR on the Purchasing Intention and Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Albania

The researcher noticed that commenters did not directly discuss about the impact of CSR activities in their purchase. Unintentionally, a few of them mentioned the influence of CSR activities in their purchasing behaviours. As previously stated, AC15 purchased an accessory because of the philanthropic nature of a company. She said, “*I once purchased from a small shop in Toptani because they claimed that for every purchase above 3,000LEK, they give an accessory to young Romani people in a community center...*” AC15's comment showed the impact of CSR activities in consumers' purchasing decision. None of the other commenters discussed the influence of CSR in their purchasing intentions. The researcher could have asked the blogger and commenters about their views and understanding of the CSR impact in their purchasing behaviour and purchasing

intention. Nonetheless, the researcher did not decide to change her stance to active, as focus groups helped understand Albanian consumers views about the afore-mentioned topics. The researcher's intention was to unobtrusively view Albanian consumers conversations about their consumption practices.

6.3.3 Netnographic Findings of Croatian Fashion Consumers

This netnographic research explored the Croatian consumers interactions in a fashion online community in the form of a blog. This community is among the most-well known communities in Croatia. The community is present in the form of a Facebook group and Instagram page. Its Instagram page has 155,000 followers, and its Facebook group has 28,756 members. The researchers, after using the criteria recommended by Kozinets (2002; 2020), considered that the blog form was the most suitable one for this investigation. The interactions in the blog were in Croatian. The researcher deemed it crucial to re-emphasise that this netnographic research was conducted with the help of another researcher (a Croatian subcontractor), who helped with the data collection process. The process of thematic analysis and the discussion of findings was done by the researcher (not the Croatian subcontractor). Hereafter, the blog is denoted by CR-B.

The main focus of CR-B is fashion. During the three-month investigation, the blog presented several blog posts about a variety of fashion-related topics. The bloggers and commenters interacted about their consumption drivers, consumption practices and post-consumption practices, among others. The blog provided 181 posts and countless comments during the three-months investigation period. Several bloggers expressed their tendency to make conscious consumptions. Similar to them, several commenters shared their preference towards socially responsible consumption practices. The Croatian researcher noticed that the community had shared values and goals. Bloggers and commenters used a formal language in their discussions, and they avoided the usage of emojis. In the analysis process, the researcher differentiated among bloggers and commenters. The researcher referred to the former as CB1, CB2, CB3 etc. and to the latter as CC1, CC2, CC3 etc. The thematic analysis produced six themes. The next subchapters discuss these themes in detail.

6.3.3.1 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Croatia

The researcher observed that bloggers and commenters mentioned only monetary practices in their discussions. None of them mentioned any non-monetary practice. All of them highlighted the act of purchasing. They discussed about their purchasing practices and their preferred fashion companies. For example, CB1 and CB2, who wrote a joint blog post, provided their view about a Croatian SME. The post was titled, *“We know where you can find the best hand-made handbags in Zagreb.”* The researcher deemed it important to mention that none of the bloggers claimed to have been endorsed by these companies. In addition to the act of purchasing, some bloggers such, as CB4 and CB27, wrote blog posts about gift recommendations. CB4 recommended unique gifts for Christmas or winter holidays. CB73 recommended gifts for Valentine’s Day. The commenters in both blog posts provided further gifting recommendations for these two celebrations. The aforementioned consumption modes and practices are depicted in Appendix 6.8.

The researcher identified the fashion company types frequented by Croatian bloggers and commenters. The four types of fashion companies are (a) international large companies, (b) local SMEs, (c) international SMEs and (d) second-hand shops. The netnographic findings revealed that Croatian consumers purchase from fast-fashion companies (such as Zara, Nike, Adidas, etc.) and eco-friendly large companies (such as Patagonia, Veja, Levi’s, etc.). For example, CC8 said, *“I always purchase Veja sneakers. Since Veja was established in 2005, it has followed ethical values and has committed towards environmental protection in the fashion industry”*. Other bloggers and commenters mentioned local SMEs. A few of them, such as CB16, highlighted the importance of purchasing from local (Croatian) fashion SMEs. In addition to local SMEs, bloggers and commenters claimed that they purchase from international SMEs. They mentioned several companies and provided feedback on countless clothing items. A few of them also mentioned second-hand stores and their willingness to purchase from them. For example, CC19 said, *“As a millennial, I prefer purchasing clothes from second-hand stores. I have preferred second-hand clothes even as a teenager...”* The researcher noted that several bloggers and commenters, who referred to themselves as conscious consumers, suggested eco-friendly companies or second-hand stores. CB7 said, *“... I don't buy from fast fashion companies anymore. Now, I mostly buy from local companies and second-hand stores...”*

6.3.3.1.1 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

The researcher investigated the purchasing and consumption drivers of bloggers and commenters of CR-B for three months. The identified drivers are presented below in Table 6.21. The researcher observed that, the netnographic research identified additional purchasing and consumption drivers of Croatian consumers, such as ethical production, ‘buying local’ concept and comfort. CB12 said,

“In the last four years, I have only worn Croatian designers. I no longer support fast-fashion companies. I have completely moved away from them. I support only local companies. Since I discovered Fasada Studio, I did not need to purchase elsewhere.... I love the experience and the pleasant feeling of purchasing from local companies...”

Driver	Participant	Quote
Ethical Production	CC11	<i>“I make extremely carefully purchases. I always take into account <u>ethics</u> and sustainability...”</i>
	CB12	<i>“I purchase and wear only <u>ethically produced clothes</u>... this is my goal...”</i>
	CB7	<i>“... I purchase <u>ethically produced pieces</u> because I know that I am not exploiting women in the Far East...”</i>
Environmental-Friendly Company	CC10	<i>“...I purchased <u>Veja sneakers</u> because they are <u>eco and vegan</u>...”</i>
	CC11	<i>“For me, it is essential that the company I purchase from takes <u>measures to protect the environment</u>...”</i>
	CB5	<i>“I love <u>environmental-friendly</u> fashion and I buy only from <u>environmental-friendly brands</u>...”</i>
“Buying Local” Concept	CB12	<i>“In the last four years, I have only worn <u>Croatian designers</u>...”</i>
	CB21	<i>“Recently, I am purchasing only from <u>Croatian fashion companies</u> because I am aiming to encourage local production...”</i>
Comfort	CC15	<i>“I purchase clothes that are <u>comfortable</u> for me...”</i>
Quality	CC43	<i>“...I try to only purchase <u>quality pieces</u>...”</i>
	CC44	<i>“... I buy pieces with <u>good quality</u> that last long...”</i>
Style	CB17	<i>“...I am a lover of the styles of the 50s and 60s, so I purchase from fashion companies that offer this style...”</i>
	CB16	<i>“...I like <u>timeless romantic pieces</u>... I don't like tight, short, low-cut pieces...”</i>
	CC28	<i>“I mostly buy sporty and trendy items...”</i>

Fit	CC27	<i>“I purchase clothes that... perfectly fit my body shape”</i>

Table 6.21 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Croatia based on the Netnographic Research

6.3.3.1.2 Post Consumption Practices

The researcher observed a few blog posts that discussed about the post-consumption practices. A few blog posts focused solely on such practices, and a few others partly considered such practices. A blog post by CB6 mentioned seven ways of saving old clothes in order not to end up in landfills. He shared his experience with each approach and recommended various local NGOs, recycling companies, DIY artists, animal shelters and others, that have helped him in his journey of saving old clothes. Other bloggers and commenters (in other blog posts) mentioned donation points in Zagreb. None of the bloggers or commenters claimed to throw away their clothes. A few of them stated that they tend to reduce, reuse or recycle their old clothing items. Precisely, the ‘3Rs’ were mentioned five times during this three-month investigation. CC20 shared information about a social enterprise, which gathers old clothes and reuses or recycles them. She said, *“You can always give clothes to Humana Nova, a social enterprise, which has done an amazing work in this field...”*

6.3.3.2 CSR Awareness and Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Croatia

The researcher observed the interactions of bloggers and commenters and noticed that they are well-aware of Corporate Social Responsibility. Bloggers, in particular, highlighted their knowledge about socially responsible companies and responsible purchasing practices. The researcher deemed it important to state that the ‘corporate social responsibility’ term was not always used by bloggers and commenters to describe socially responsible companies and their activities. Often times, other terms that explain the application of CSR were mentioned. In many cases, bloggers and commenters used words, such as slow fashion, sustainability, environmentally friendly company, recycled, environmentally friendly material, carbon footprint, responsible shopping, donation and functionality. Bloggers shared the products and activities of many socially responsible companies. For example, CB31 wrote a blog post titled, *“A chic collection of handbags made from recycled plastic bags”*. She shared her feedback on the work (products) of a socially

responsible Croatian SME. This investigation showed that CR-B bloggers and commenters are well-informed of CSR, and they have an all-embracing understanding of the CSR and its dimensions (legal, ethical, economic and philanthropic).

6.3.3.3 Croatian Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion SMEs in Croatia

CR-B bloggers and commenters expressed their views about Croatian fashion SMEs and their approach towards CSR. The researcher noted that several bloggers claimed in their posts that Croatian fashion SMEs apply CSR activities. Several of them, such as CB12, CB24 and CB31, highlighted the ethical nature of SMEs. CB12 took the example of Fasada Studio; CB24 mentioned Svoya; and CB31 mentioned Mirjam Krajina. They mentioned that the fashion industry in Croatia is increasingly ‘creating’ new ethical and conscious fashion companies. Similar to bloggers, commenters applauded the ethical and conscious approach of Croatian fashion companies. For example, CC16 said, *“I am grateful that Croatian companies have embraced conscious and ethical fashion. It has offered us the opportunity to choose among ethical companies...”* Several commenters, nevertheless, disapproved the prices of clothing items offered by such fashion companies. CC17 stated, *“Although I am also grateful of the growth of ethical companies in Croatia, I’d like to state that, unfortunately, the prices are rarely affordable for consumers belonging to working class...”*

6.3.3.4 Impact of CSR on the Purchasing Intention and Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Croatia

The researcher investigated the purchasing intention and behaviour of CR-B bloggers and commenters and noticed that CSR and CSR activities highly influence their purchasing choices. Several bloggers mentioned the importance of CSR activities, such as ethical production, environmental-friendly material, recycled material and low carbon footprint, in their purchasing intention and behaviour. Previous quotes in this sub-chapter indirectly illustrated the impact of CSR. An example of such influence was highlighted by CB34, who claimed, *“I purchased a few times from Svoya because of the slow fashion nature of the brand, the eco-friendly materials and the ethical process of production...”* A commenter (CC51) shared similar views with CB34 and

claimed that these elements affected her purchasing decision. The CSR impact on consumers purchasing intention was not illustrated as much as its impact on the purchasing behaviour. Yet, the researcher observed that commenters expressed their willingness to purchase clothing items from socially responsible companies after receiving factual information from bloggers.

6.3.3.5 Croatian Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs

The researcher noticed that bloggers and commenters did not deliberately discuss about CSR communication and communication tools. Nevertheless, bloggers and commenters mentioned a few successful tools. The website and social media accounts appeared to be the most effective ones from both bloggers and commenters. A few commenters, such as CC37 and CC41, emphasised the effectiveness of fashion SMEs' websites. In the bloggers' posts, the researcher noticed another communication tool – events. A few bloggers, such as CB16 and CB17, highlighted the importance of events to promote socially responsible products.

6.3.4 Netnographic Findings of Greek Fashion Consumers

The researcher conducted a netnographic research among Greek fashion consumers. The researcher investigated (1) an online community in the form of a Facebook group and (2) two YouTube videos from a YouTube channel focusing on conscious fashion consumption. The consumers discussions were in Greek language. Accordingly, the netnographic research among Greek consumers was conducted with the help of another researcher (a Greek subcontractor). The researcher deemed it important to restate that the researcher and the Greek subcontractor were in continuous contact through every step of data collection for three months. Data analysis and presentation of findings was implemented solely by the researcher. Initially, the researcher intended to select one fashion online community for investigation. After discussing the richness and relevance of data with the subcontractor, the researcher decided to investigate other online communities. The subcontractor recommended including YouTube videos, as she had noticed lively discussions of Greek consumers in such platform. Accordingly, the researcher included two YouTube videos. The Facebook group was denoted by GR-F and the YouTube videos by GR-Y1 and GR-Y2.

GR-F is a Facebook group, which had been present on Facebook since August 2014. At the time of investigation, it was administered by four admins and two moderators, and it had 12,357 members. GR-F is a private group; therefore, the administrators were informed about the netnographic research from the first day. The community had shared rules (precisely 10 rules) for the interactions of the members. The majority of its members were of Greek nationality, and the interactions in the community were in Greek language. GR-F provided daily interactions among members, who shared their perceptions about a variety of topics related to fashion. On average, it generated five posts per day and 150 posts per month. Members shared a preference towards discussions about ethical fashion and conscious consumption. They shared their views and suggestions within the community. The subcontractor identified the most socially involved and highly-engaging members because these members tend to be opinion leaders and impact the views and behaviours of other members (Kozinets, 2019; Xharavina et al., 2021). This identification provided the researcher with the opportunity of investigating the impact of responsible behaviours in Greek consumers' purchasing decisions.

GR-Y1 and GR-Y2, on the other hand, are videos published by a YouTube channel that shared tips about conscious fashion consumption (in Greek language). The videos generated 70 and 37 comments, respectively. The researcher analysed only the on-topic comments. Since the videos were public, the researcher did not contact the person who managed the YouTube channel. So, this supplementary netnographic research followed a passive stance. The researcher referred to the commenters as GC1, GC2, GC3 etc. The findings from the YouTube videos and the fashion online community were included in one thematic analysis. The analysis generated six themes and several sub-themes. The identified themes are discussed in the next subchapters. Similar to focus group findings, the netnography findings are categorised into two groups: (a) consumers' consumption process and (b) CSR and its impact on consumers.

6.3.4.1 Fashion Consumption Practices of Consumers from Greece

The researcher observed that GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters, similar to focus group participants, follow consumption practices that belong to one of the following modes – monetary and non-monetary. They shared a preference towards the purchasing practice. While GR-

F members showed that they make responsible and unmindful purchases, GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters showed a tendency to make responsible purchases. The researcher considered that this tendency is a result of the nature of the YouTube channel (conscious fashion consumption). In addition to purchasing, some GR-F members mentioned gifting as a consumption practice. The researcher observed a few posts of GR-F members asking about ideas for gifts and a few posts of GR-F members sharing the gifts they got for their loved ones. For example, GC12 gave GC21 a gift recommendation. She said, “... *buy him a timeless piece, but please avoid buying from fast fashion...*” Some GR-F members mentioned renting as alternative practice, but none of them shared their renting experience. A few other members commented on GC21’s post about the gift recommendations, and they shared the gifts they have received. GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters discussed about a few non-monetary practices as alternatives to the act of purchasing. GC23 shared with the other commenters her non-monetary practice. She said that she has claimed pieces from her mother’s wardrobe. The monetary and non-monetary practices are presented in Appendix 6.9.

The researcher observed that members and commenters mainly purchase clothes from (a) small local fashion companies and (b) large international fashion companies. The researcher observed that the majority of GR-F active members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters prefer Greek fashion companies and second-hand shops. A few of them mentioned that they purchase from large international fashion companies, such as luxury, fast-fashion and slow-fashion companies. The majority of them criticised the wasteful practices of fast-fashion companies. The researcher observed that, GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters (who considered themselves as conscious consumers) recommended alternatives to fast-fashion companies and justified the importance of avoiding such companies. For example, GC40 said,

“... Indeed, a fast fashion T-shirt may cost less than an equivalent ethical fashion one, but if everybody thinks about whether they really need this T-shirt and purchase only these that are indeed necessary (even from fast fashion if nothing else can be done) for sure in the future, they will save... Why can’t every human be content with 5-10-20-even 50 - clothing pieces? ...”

6.3.4.1.1 Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Greece

While observing the interactions of GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters, the researcher identified several purchasing and consumption drivers. The researcher noticed that some of these drivers are similar to the ones identified in the findings of the focus groups. The analysis of netnographic research identified other important drivers, such as ethical production and comfort. In their interactions, both, GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters, highlighted the impact of ethical production and environmental-friendly nature of the company in their purchases. For instance, GM18 said,

“I don’t buy from outlets because it is not considered ethical to buy from outlets, because basically you immediately support each of these companies financially, plus you help them clear the storages so they can produce again and bring the consumers new products...”

The afore-mentioned and other drivers identified are presented below in Table 6.22.

Driver	Participant	Quote
Ethical Production	GC41	<i>“...I personally only know and buy from two <u>Greek ethical companies</u>. I would like to know if you could suggest other Greek ethical companies? (heart emoji)”</i>
	GC35	<i>“Recently, I am purchasing only <u>ethically-made</u> and <u>sustainable</u> clothing pieces because I know that little by little, the companies will be forced to respond to these demands...”</i>
Environmental-Friendly Company	GM9	<i>“...For me, they have to have the whole package. Both <u>friendly to the environment</u> and to your foot...”</i>
	GM32	<i>“I recently bought a jacket from the new collection which featured the <u>plant-based (cactus) leather</u> as a material...”</i>
	GM27	<i>“I have bought the first <u>vegan trainers</u>!! They are wonderful (...) a little expensive but I hope they are worth it. Time will show of course...”</i>
Necessity	GC40	<i>“... I purchase clothes that are indeed <u>necessary</u>...”</i>
Comfort	GM9	<i>“... Both <u>friendly to the environment</u> and <u>to your foot</u>...”</i>
Quality	GM25	<i>“... I was very pleased with the <u>quality</u> of the Yuta shoes that I have bought from the winter collection. I wore them a lot and they did not get wrinkly or peeled off like some low-quality leatherette.”</i>

	GM67	<i>“...they offer great steadiness. I want to see if they will soften while I exercise. You know how much I care about <u>quality</u> and the quality is good, yes!! Nothing has broken...”</i>
Price	GM7	<i>“...I am glad that your experience is positive, because their price is very high! I want to buy them but I am not sure because of the <u>price</u>...”</i>
	GM77	<i>“... To be honest, I tend to check the <u>price</u>...”</i>
Style	GM51	<i>“...It has to fit my <u>style</u>...”</i>
	GC41	<i>“... I like it when it also fits my <u>style</u>”</i>

Table 6.22 The Purchasing and Consumption Drivers of Fashion Consumers from Greece

6.3.4.1.2 Post-Consumption Practices

The researcher noticed that GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters extensively discussed the post-consumption practices. The majority of them claimed that they donate their clothes. They mentioned several donation points in Athens and Thessaloniki. A few of them mentioned that they give clothes away to people they know in-person (acquaintances or friends). Many of the GR-F members shared their recycling experiences. The researcher observed several posts of members asking about advice on the recycling process. An example of such discussion is presented in Appendix 6.10. A few GR-Y2 commenters recommended swapping as a potential post-consumption practice. Their suggestion received a lot of criticism due to the risky nature of this practice because of the COVID-19 pandemic. None of them claimed to have adopted such practice. In addition to giving away, GC18 mentioned selling as another practice of hers. She said, *“... I think it is acceptable to claim that we do not like some of our clothing items anymore and then sell or give them away. Personally, I do it...”*

6.3.4.2 CSR Awareness and Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Greece

The researcher observed that none of the GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters mentioned the term corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their daily interactions. Nevertheless, the researcher cannot say that they are unaware of CSR, as the majority of them, when providing feedback about any peculiar company, mentioned their ethical, philanthropic and legal

expectations (CSR dimensions) towards that company. Their posts and comments showed that most of them are aware of socially responsible companies. The term ‘ethical company’ was used by almost all GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters and by more than half of GR-F active members. Their interactions provided the researcher the opportunity to comprehend consumers’ understanding of socially responsible companies. Appendix 6.11 shows an example of a post in GR-F that generated an active discussion about the nature of a company. In the afore-mentioned post, GM8 asked the members whether they perceived a specific Greek SME as an ethical company and in their answers, the researcher was able to depict their understanding of socially responsible companies.

6.3.4.3 Greek Consumers Perception of CSR adoption from Fashion Companies in Greece

GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters were unreserved about their views. In the three-month period, they expressed their opinions about several Greek fashion SMEs. An example of such discussions was previously provided in Appendix 6.11. The researcher observed several other posts and comments similar to the one presented in Appendix 6.11 and came to a conclusion. Most of them (in GR-F, GR-Y1 and GR-Y2) are content with Greek fashion SMEs that consider themselves as ethical and environmental-friendly. However, they are discontent with multinational fast-fashion companies, such as those owned by Inditex, and Greek companies (mainly SMEs) that do not adopt an ethical approach. Some of the GR-F members expressed their discontent also with the outlets in Greece. They claimed that outlets are unethical and they avoid buying from such places. Some GR-Y1 commenters provided their opinion about the ethical production in Greece. GC19 said,

“... In Greece, we have fallen behind on this subject, but I see that the new companies are more open to changes and have a bigger social sensitivity. This is why I am optimistic that we will reach that point, too.”

6.3.4.4 Impact of CSR in the Purchasing Intention and Behaviour of Fashion Consumers from Greece

The researcher observed the interactions of GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters and noted that most of them purchase or are willing to purchase clothing items based on the nature of the companies (socially responsible nature) and their CSR practices and activities. Some of the GR-Y1 commenters expressed their interest about and willingness to purchase new clothes from socially responsible companies. For example, GC22 said, “...*Thank you for your tips on conscious fashion! I would like from you to suggest some Greek or foreign ethical companies that produce partywear, so that I avoid buying from fast fashion...*” In addition to the purchasing intention, the researcher noticed the impact of the nature of the company and their CSR-related practices and activities on their purchases. For instance, GM24 asked the members suggestions about a pair of vegan shoes. A few of the members recommended an eco-friendly small Greek company that produces vegan shoes. GM24 considered their suggestions and claimed, “*Thank you, a lot, for your suggestions for the Yuta shoes! I got them yesterday and I really like them. They seem very well-made.*” GM1 also asked the members about their views about a clothing item produced from a Greek company with recycled polyester. The responses in the post criticised the items produced by that particular company and recommended an alternative company. Similar to GM24, GM1 was impacted by the ethical nature of the recommended company and purchased the product. The researcher also observed that the members or commenters influence the purchasing practices from socially responsible companies. Such influence within online communities have been documented by several scholars (Xharavina et al., 2021; Maglakaras et al., 2023). While observing the responses, the researcher also noticed that some of the members and commenters claimed that they are willing to or have paid a premium price for an item produced or sold by socially responsible companies. GM27 said, “*I have bought the first vegan trainers!! They are wonderful (...) a little expensive but I hope they are worth it. Time will show of course...*” On the other hand, a few commenters, such as GC32, were not willing to pay a premium price. GC32 said, “*I’d really appreciate it if you showed me ethical brands that are affordable because those that I have found so far are very expensive and I cannot afford...*”

6.3.4.5 Greek Consumers' Perceptions of their Impact on the CSR of Fashion SMEs

Similar to responses in the focus groups with Greek consumers, comments in the GR-F, GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 highlighted the impact of consumers' behaviours in the application of CSR. For example, GC35 said that because of the demands of conscious consumers, "... *the companies will be forced to respond...*" Similar to GC35, GC18 said, "... *once our mentality starts to change, the practices of the companies can change, too.*" Among the interactions, the researcher noticed a comment by GC10, who highlighted another potential influencer – schools.

*"... The standards that dominate today are overly encouraging the consumption, and I truly believe that these matters have to be approached already from **schools**. I was concerned (troubled) by the huge lines of young kids outside of fast fashion stores every time they opened during lockdown... I am very glad that nowadays more people are responsible for their purchases, but educating young kids is crucial, too... By educating them, we change the business model of fast fashion, which is problematic to begin with..."*

GC10's comment provided another perspective; their comment showed a way to improve CSR awareness among young consumers. Similar to GC10, several other commenters highlighted the tendency of young consumers to purchase from fast-fashion companies. These views differ from the to-date findings on Generation Z. Scholars have claimed that Generation Z are the most ethically and environmentally conscious consumers (Vatamanescu et al., 2021).

6.3.4.6 Greek Consumers Perceptions about the CSR Communication of Fashion SMEs

GR-F members and GR-Y1 and GR-Y2 commenters provided some viewpoints on the communication of socially responsible practices and activities. GC1 shared her experience. She said, "... *concerning the composition and production of clothing items, I'd say that around 90% of established small companies mention that on their website...*" A few other members (such as, GC3, GC11 and GC16) shared a similar view. Given their comments, the researcher considered the website as a successful communication tool. GC11 said that whenever she cannot find information on websites about ethical practices of a particular company, she "... *send[s] them a message in their social media accounts...*" GC3 suggested Greek SMEs to use clothing tags. She claimed, "... *the composition should be written on each piece of clothing. I look for it in many of*

them and they do not have it...” GC4 added, “... the companies should at least write basic information on the tags...”

6.4 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter answers the last research question – (RQ 2) How do fashion consumers from South-East Europe understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities? It answered this research question through the view of one social entity – consumers – in two different versions. The focus group findings and netnography findings helped this research to fully grasp the CSR concept from the offline and online ‘world’. Different from focus groups, netnography findings showed responses from fashion consumers in an unobtrusive manner. For Kosovo and Albania participants, netnography proved that they truly do not consider CSR activities in their purchasing behaviours. On the other hand, for Croatian and Greek participants, it showed that focus groups did not capture the importance that CSR and CSR activities have for some particular consumers (in this case bloggers, members and commenters). Separately, each one provided the researcher with the opportunity to interpret findings on various CSR-related topics. They offered valuable information about CSR awareness, CSR understanding, CSR implementation, and about the impact of CSR in their purchasing intention and behaviour.

7. Discussion and Contributions

7.1 Introduction of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the three-part findings presented in the three previous chapters. Although this research presented preliminary discussions in the overview subchapters of the three-part findings, this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the main topics. Initially, it presents the multifaceted reality of CSR. It shows the perceptions of CSR from stakeholders' perspectives (SME owners'/managers' and consumers' perspectives). It identifies the views of SME owners/managers and consumers on the resemblance of CSR and sustainability. It discusses the voluntary-versus-mandatory nature of CSR and contributes to this debate. This chapter demonstrates the impact of context on CSR understanding. It presents the four different contexts that shaped the understanding of CSR in this research: (1) company nature, (2) company size, (3) industry and (4) country. It provides a conceptualisation of CSR, which encompasses the context-specific characteristics of this research, and it recommends a new designation. This conceptualisation embodied five dimensions of CSR – economic, legal, ethical, social and environmental. Most importantly, this chapter presents the process of CSR implementation and the steps recommended by this research – (1) CSR Awareness, (2) CSR Understanding, (3) CSR Embedding, (4) CSR Communication and (5) CSR Evaluation. It discusses the impact of context in the process of CSR implementation. It focuses on the impact of the EU as a regional actor in this process. It also depicts the consumption and purchasing behaviours and intentions of fashion consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. It explains their consumption process and types of consumption. It portrays the difference in CSR perception and implementation between developed (Croatia and Greece) and developing (Kosovo and Albania) countries. Lastly, it depicts the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions. It highlights the main theoretical contributions across eleven literatures. It presents the four main methodological contributions. It discusses the practical contribution and thoroughly explains the recommendations to several stakeholders.

7.2 Discussion

7.2.1 The Concept of CSR

The literature review presented the global spread and prevalence of the CSR concept among practitioners and researchers. Scholars interest in CSR reflected on the maturity of the concept, which was mirrored in the academic literature included in this thesis. Their interest also created variety in CSR conceptualisation (Gatti et al., 2019; Carroll, 2020; Hunoldt et al., 2020; Carroll, 2021;). Several CSR scholars criticised the abundance in CSR conceptualisation. They considered that it created confusion among practitioners and researchers (Gatti et al., 2019; Santana et al., 2020). Contrary to them, the findings of this research showed that the academia needs variety of CSR conceptualisation. The reason for this variety is two-fold: (1) CSR has an evolving nature (Grimstad et al., 2020; Carroll, 2021) and (2) CSR depends on the context (Aguinis and Glava, 2017). The afore-mentioned reasoning provided this research the opportunity to further investigate the CSR concept.

As mentioned in the literature review, the researcher does not perceive the CSR definition as a “one-size-fits-all” definition. The researcher’s claim was based on the three chapters of findings, which showed that one cannot provide a general explanation of the CSR concept. Similar to Aguinis (2011), Sheehay (2015), Aguinis and Glava (2017) and Carroll (2021), this research stated that CSR understanding depends on the social construction of CSR. From the beginning, this research intended to portray the multifaceted reality of CSR through stakeholders' perspectives. It presented the multifaceted reality through (1) owners’/managers’ and (2) consumers’ perspectives. Both stakeholders (throughout the fifth and sixth chapters) portrayed the multi-dimensional nature of CSR. Their explanation of CSR resembled the Carroll’s four-part definition framework; the majority of them mentioned the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions. Similar to Meynhardt and Gomez (2019) and Carroll (2021), the findings revealed that this definition framework has remained a CSR centrepiece. Similar to them, the researcher deemed this framework applicable in the academic and practical world. Yet, the findings showed that to embrace the progressive evolution of CSR, this framework should be modified. This modification is presented in the next sub sub-chapter, and it is context-specific.

Findings revealed that CSR is a relatively known concept among scholars researching the region, owners/managers and consumers of the SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). Scholars who investigated CSR in SEE, owners/managers and consumers, at times, tend to use CSR interchangeably with other terms, such as sustainability, sustainable development, social responsibility and business ethics, among others. The tendency to use these terms interchangeably, especially among fashion owners/managers, was also highlighted by other scholars (Strand et al., 2015; Gatti et al., 2019; Szegedi et al., 2023). Findings of this research challenged Carroll's (2015) claim; Carroll (2015) stated that CSR is a "centerpiece of these competing and complementary frameworks (p. 87)." Findings from CIS review showed that sustainability is the centerpiece of these terms, especially among studies in Kosovo, Albania and Croatia. This can be a result of the 'trendiness' and proliferation of sustainability concept in recent years among these countries (Gazzola et al., 2020; Rosmarin, 2020). On the other hand, findings from Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek interviewees (owners and managers of fashion SMEs) showed that CSR is a centerpiece of the afore-mentioned terms. The majority of the interviewed owners and managers (from the four investigated countries) displayed a relatively high level of CSR awareness and engagement; most of them were familiar with the term and implemented CSR activities. The few SME owners and managers, who mentioned interchangeable terms claimed that CSR is the principal term in their organisations. A4 was the only one, who stated that CSR is part of their sustainability embracing. In light of these observations, this research contests the study of Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020), which stated that fashion managers lean towards sustainability.

The tendency to link CSR and sustainability was observed in the interviews with Albanian owners and managers. Findings showed that Albanian owners and managers either (a) equate the terms, (b) embed CSR in sustainability or (c) embed sustainability in CSR. Previous scholars, such as Sheehy (2015) and Elmualim (2017), indicated that this tendency is a result of the indivisible linkage between the two terms. In addition to the linkage, findings revealed another factor – the nature of the enterprise. The researcher observed that three out of five Albanian SMEs considered themselves as sustainable fashion enterprises. Reasonably, sustainability is the centerpiece of their concepts. The tendency to link these two terms was also noted in the focus group discussions of Croatian and Greek consumers. Croatian consumers in the second focus group discussed this

linkage. A few Croatian consumers and a couple Greek consumers, similar to Carroll (2021), considered that sustainability is part of CSR. Only two Croatian consumers used CSR interchangeably with sustainability. Figure 7.1 presents the perceptions of interviewees and consumers (focus group participants and online community members and commenters) on CSR and sustainability. As presented, this research identified four groups of views: (a) CSR and sustainability are distinct terms, (b) CSR and sustainability are synonymous, (c) sustainability is part of the CSR concept and (d) CSR is part of the sustainability concept. Although these groupings resulted from findings, this research revealed that the majority of interviewees, focus group participants and online community members/commenters consider CSR and sustainability as different terms.

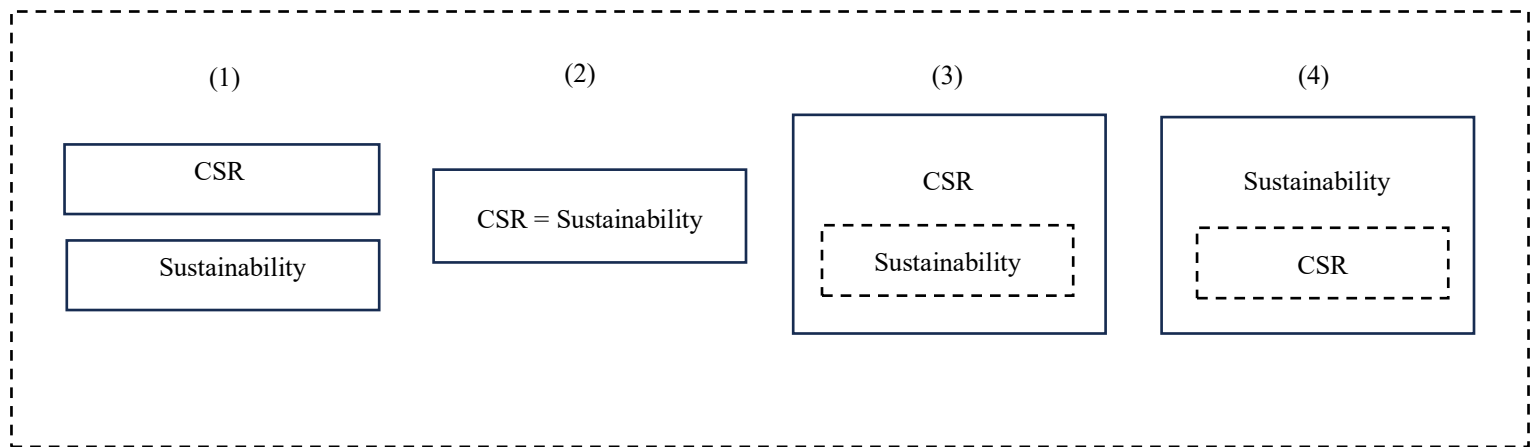


Figure 7.1 Perception of Interviewees and Consumers on CSR and Sustainability

This research deemed that CSR and sustainability are distinct terms, yet, they share an inseparable linkage, as, besides companies, national, regional and international actors sometimes create overlapping legislation and guidelines (Ingram, 2018; GreenKPI, 2020).

7.2.1.1 The Concept of CSR from Stakeholder's Perspective: Owners and Managers

This research showed that the interviewed fashion SME owners and managers appreciate and comprehend CSR. It revealed that their understanding of CSR depends on their individual characteristics and nature of company. The researcher identified a few characteristics that influence the interviewees' CSR understanding: (a) personal conviction, (b) altruism, (c) education and (d)

work experience (past and current). Other scholars, such as Aguinis and Glavas (2012), Hunoldt et al. (2020) and Úbeda-García et al. (2021), mentioned the influence of owners and managers perceptions on CSR understanding. This research highlighted the characteristics of the owners and managers, and it challenged Zu and Song's (2009) findings that claimed, "[m]anagers' personal characteristics per se are not significant in determining their CSR (p. 105)." The researcher deemed it important to emphasise that this claim applies only to owners and managers of small and medium-sized companies. Additionally, findings showed that owners and managers of SMEs created on responsible grounds, provided a more inclusive conceptualisation of CSR. Accordingly, this research agreed with the findings of Lu et al. (2020) that claimed that CSR understanding of owners and managers depends on the nature of company. A few scholars, such as Elhajjar and Ouaida (2020) and Thanh and Podruzsik (2018), highlighted the impact of the size of company on the CSR understanding of the owners and managers. This research claimed that, for the majority of the interviewed SME owners and managers, the size of company does not affect their CSR understanding; however, the size of company influences the process of their CSR implementation. Their conceptualisation of CSR went beyond the financial gain. They underlined the ethical, social and legal dimensions. Several of them highlighted the environmental aspect of CSR. Similar to Aguinis' (2011) and the European Commission's (2011) conceptualisations, this research identified the importance of context in interviewees understanding. This importance is discussed in the 7.3 subchapter.

7.2.1.2 The Concept of CSR from Stakeholder's Perspective: Consumers

The importance of consumers' perceptions of CSR has been highlighted by several scholars in the last two decades (Öberseder et al. 2014; Brunk and Boer, 2020; Harrison and Huang, 2022). CSR scholars, such as Öberseder et al. (2014), Brunk and Boer (2020) and Safeer and Liu (2023), called future scholars to focus on the consumers perceptions. While at the beginning of 2000s, scholars paid attention to consumers' perceptions of CSR, in the last five years, scholars have paid little attention to such perceptions. This research considered it crucial to explore the understanding and conceptualisation of CSR from consumers' perspective. The reason for this exploration was three-fold: (1) CSR has an evolving nature, and scholars should continuously investigate it (Carroll, 2021; Singh and Mistra, 2022), (2) so far, most CSR scholars focused on consumers' perceptions of companies applying CSR (e.g., Kim et al., 2020) and not on their perceptions of the CSR

concept, and (3) consumers' perceptions are vital to gain a multifaceted understanding of the concept (Vera-Martínez et al., 2022). The CSR perceptions of Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers helped this research explore the evolving nature of CSR and gain a multifaceted understanding of the concept.

This research indicated that the majority of focus group participants provided a comprehensive understanding of CSR, and online community members and commenters showed a CSR understanding. Vuković et al. (2020), who investigated CSR perceptions of consumers from a post-socialist country in SEE, emphasised the importance of personal history records. They highlighted age, gender, education, employment, income and region. This research revealed that Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers' understanding of CSR depends on several individual factors. Their understanding is shaped by their (a) work experience (past and current), (b) education, (c) peers, (d) participation in informal education and (e) companies that implement CSR. This research agreed with Vuković's et al. (2020) findings about the influence of education, employment and region. But it did not identify age, gender and income as factors that determine consumers' CSR understanding. Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers conceptualised CSR by identifying the main CSR dimensions and stakeholders. In terms of CSR dimensions, they highlighted the ethical dimension. In terms of stakeholders, the majority of them emphasised employees (employee needs), consumers and environment. The focus of participants in employee-needs was also highlighted by Vuković et al. (2020), who investigated a SEE country. Different from Vuković et al. (2020), in this research, employees were mentioned by consumers of both, post-socialist countries and capitalist countries.

7.2.1.3 Voluntary-versus-Mandatory Nature of CSR

The explanation of the concept by interviewees and focus group participants contributed to the debate on the voluntary-versus-mandatory nature of CSR. The nature of CSR continues to be under discussion in the CSR literature (Sheehy, 2015; Wang et al., 2016; Gatti et al., 2019). In the last decade, most scholars and practitioners highlighted the voluntary nature of CSR (Sheehy, 2015; Wang et al., 2016; EU, 2023). Szegedi et al. (2023) claimed that the majority of fashion owners and managers view CSR as voluntary. From an academic perspective, Gatti et al. (2019) stated that

most CSR definitions emphasise voluntariness. Yet, they emphasised that CSR's nature is shifting from voluntary to mandatory. The findings of this research agreed with the findings of the above-mentioned scholars. In their conceptualisations, the majority of interviewees interpreted CSR as a voluntary approach. They claimed that the voluntary approach was driven by their personal conviction and altruism. Nevertheless, during the interviews, SME owners and managers shared their practices. They claimed that they incorporate voluntary and mandatory practices. In some cases, Croatian and Greek interviewees even referred to their mandatory practices as voluntary. Similar to SME owners and managers, most consumers highlighted the voluntary nature of CSR. Some consumers emphasised the need to include mandatory practices. A few interviewees (mainly from Kosovo and Albania) and a few participants even called their governments to embrace an obligatory approach towards CSR. These findings, similar to Gatti's et al. (2019) findings, stated that CSR nature is shifting from voluntary to mandatory. The researcher, similar to Gatti et al. (2019), considered that CSR has a hybrid nature. The researcher viewed that, currently, CSR embraces a hybrid nature which inclines towards voluntarism. With the inclusion of Kosovo and Albania, in EU, CSR's nature in these countries can change.

7.2.2 The Importance of Context in CSR Understanding

By portraying stakeholders' perspective, the research captured the importance of context in the comprehension of the social phenomenon of CSR. Other scholars, such as Carroll (2021), Oduro et al. (2021) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), have highlighted the impact of context on CSR understanding. This research identified four different contexts that shape the understanding of CSR: (1) company nature, (2) company size, (3) industry and (4) country. Findings offered the opportunity to recognise the influence of the afore-mentioned contexts in the comprehension of CSR.

Company Nature: Based on the findings, the researcher identified three types of companies: (1) commercial companies, (2) social enterprises and (3) sustainable companies (companies that adopted slow fashion or zero-waste policy). The researcher noted that the CSR understanding of owners/managers and consumers differs in accordance with the company type. So far, most studies have emphasised the importance of company nature in the CSR implementation of a particular

company (e.g., Pasricha et al., 2017; Palakshappa and Grant, 2018; Igwe et al., 2018). This research explored the influence of company nature (type) in the CSR understanding of owners and managers. Findings revealed that, in most cases, SME owners/managers of commercial companies put emphasis on the economic dimension of CSR; SME owners/managers of social enterprises put accent on the social dimension of CSR and SME owners/managers of sustainable companies emphasised the environment.

Company size: CIS and interview findings showed that company size plays an important factor in the CSR understanding. Similar to Chaudhri (2016), Tran and Jeppesen (2016) and Lähdesmäki et al. (2019), CIS findings revealed that company size – large, medium or small – impact the CSR understanding. Typically, managers of large companies implied the strategic and tactical nature of CSR. Small and medium-sized owners and managers highlighted the philanthropic nature of CSR. Interview findings revealed an important development. The understanding of CSR among owners/managers of small-sized companies differed from the understanding of owners/managers of medium-sized companies. The interviewees who owned/managed small-sized companies viewed CSR in a more informal and individual manner compared to interviewees who owned and managed medium-sized companies. Owners and managers of small-sized companies focused on the ethical dimension of CSR. Owners and managers of medium-size companies defined CSR from a managerial point of view. They referred to CSR as a strategy and stressed the social and economic dimension of CSR.

Industry context: Similar to Pan et al. (2018), Apaydin et al. (2021), Bhattacharya et al. (2021), Pelikanova et al. (2021) and Rienda et al. (2023), findings of this research – from CIS, interviews, focus groups and netnographic research – showed that the industry context largely shaped their understanding of CSR. CIS findings showed that the definition of CSR varies according to the industry. For example, practitioners from banking and telecommunication sectors focused on the strategic and tactic nature of CSR and considered CSR through the economic and social dimension (this could also be related to their size; typically, companies in these industries are large in size). Food and education industry viewed CSR through the ethical and legal dimensions. Interview findings also presented the influence of industry in the CSR conceptualisation. The impact of industry context was especially noticed among Croatian and Greek SME owners and managers,

who mainly defined CSR through this industry. They also mentioned their familiarity with the negative image of fashion in environment. Consequently, they added environment element in their conceptualisation (because of the industry influence). The impact of industry context was noted among consumers, too. Similar to Vatamanescu et al. (2021) and Gazzola et al. (2022), focus group and netnography findings among Croatian and Greek consumers also showed the influence of industry in their conceptualisations. The majority of consumers highlighted unethical production and the negative impact of the industry in the environment and they defined part of CSR in terms of these issues.

Country context: Similar to Jamali and Karam (2018) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), the overall findings of this research demonstrated the impact of country context in the understanding of the CSR concept. As seen in the chapters of CIS, interview, focus group and netnography findings, this research presented the difference of CSR understanding across countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. This research presented CSR understanding for each country in the three-part findings chapters and it compared and contrasted the views of interviewees, participants, members and commenters of the four SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) in the overview subchapters. It also attempted to provide a SEE-focused CSR definition in the CIS findings. Through each discussion, this research highlighted the impact of country context in the CSR understanding.

7.2.3 Conceptualisation of CSR: New Designation, Same Abbreviation

The perception of interviewees, focus group participants, online community members and commenters were pivotal to the understanding of CSR. Each of them provided a side of the multiple reality of this phenomenon. After considering the previously-mentioned elements, the researcher considered that the adopted definition of Aguinis (2011) and European Commission (2011) could be altered to encompass the context-specific characteristics of this research. This research suggests a five-part definition of CSR – economic, legal ethical, social and environmental. This suggestion is illustrated below in Figure 7.2. This definition embraced the four dimensions mentioned by Carroll (1991). It added the dimension of environment after considering the emphasis of CSR scholars (Lythreatis et al., 2019; Sendlhofer, 2019) and responses of

interviewees, focus group participants, online community members and commenters. Besides them, the industry context highly influenced the inclusion of environmental dimension.

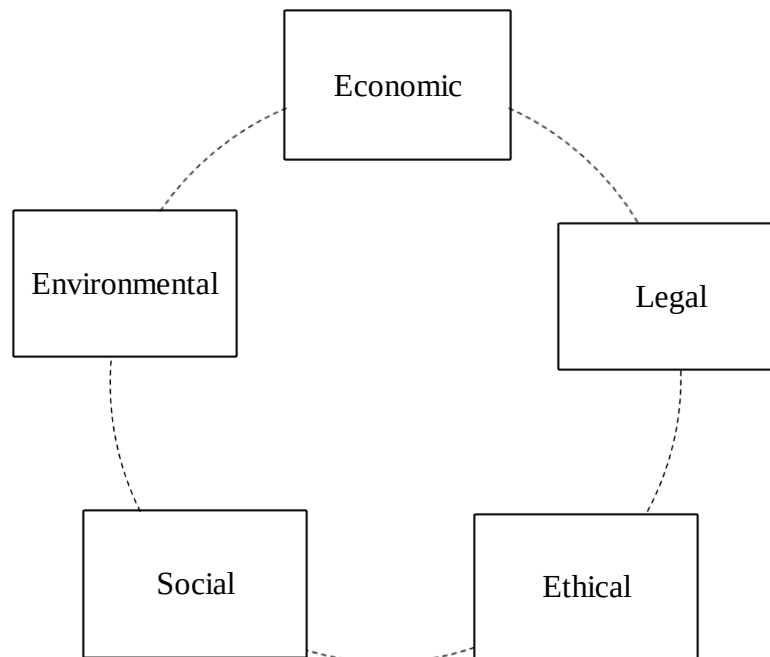


Figure 7.2 Five-Part Definition of CSR

Some responses of interviewees and focus group participants highlighted an important issue, which was also noticed by the researcher – the misperception created to small-sized and medium-sized enterprises from the ‘corporate’ word in the ‘corporate social responsibility’ term. Even though the CSR abbreviation is embraced globally by practitioners and scholars, the researcher also deemed the term ‘corporate’ inappropriate. The term ‘corporate’ neglects SMEs, which are the backbone of developed and developing economies. Scholars have used other terms, such as social responsibility, sustainability and sustainable development (Strand et al., 2015; Gatti et al., 2019) to refer to CSR for SMEs. Yet, the researcher considered that they are not appropriate. As previously discussed, the researcher considered sustainability and sustainable development as distinct from CSR. Social responsibility was used in the early years of the concept (Carroll, 1991), but it did not have a long life among practitioners and scholars. Given the prominence of the CSR abbreviation, the researcher suggests a new name with the same abbreviation – Company Social

Responsibility (CSR). This new designation is deemed appropriate as national, regional and international actors are increasingly including SMEs in their CSR goals and programs (Jamali et al., 2017; Sendlhofer, 2019).

7.2.4 The Process of CSR Implementation

This research followed the recommendation of Fatima and Elbanna (2023), and, accordingly, it investigated CSR implementation through (1) multi-level analysis – individual (owners and managers), company (SMEs) and country levels, (2) theoretical underpinning – stakeholder and institutional theory, and (3) diverse geographical location – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Literature review showed that few studies have focused on CSR implementation in small and medium-sized enterprises (Li et al., 2016; Stoian and Plakoyiannaki, 2023). Scholars who researched this matter typically have investigated large and multinational companies (for instance, Chaudhri (2016) and Osagie et al. (2016)). Accordingly, this research followed the suggestions of scholars like Stoian and Plakoyiannaki (2023) and Szegedi et al. (2023), and it focused on the CSR implementation of SMEs owners and managers. Findings revealed that the process of CSR implementation is impacted by three factors: (1) company size, (2) industry, and (3) country. Each of them shaped the process of CSR implementation.

This research interpreted the CSR implementation of fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece through Fatima and Elbanna's (2023) four steps: (1) CSR awareness, (2) CSR communication, (3) CSR embedding and (4) CSR evaluation. Findings revealed that, while Fatima and Elbanna's (2023) steps were deemed the most suitable ones, these steps should be modified to depict the CSR implementation among fashion SMEs in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). Findings revealed that another step – CSR understanding – should be added. Interviewees responses demonstrated that CSR understanding is pivotal to the process of CSR implementation. Similar to Fatima and Elbanna (2023), interview findings revealed that CSR awareness is the foundation of this process. This foundation, nevertheless, cannot support the next steps without the pillar of CSR understanding. Findings presented the importance of CSR understanding for the next steps, particularly for CSR embedding. Similar to this research, Maon et al. (2009) and Van and Nguyen (2019) also pointed out the importance of CSR understanding.

Maon et al. (2009) referred to this step as CSR definition and vision; their CSR implementation process was depicted through nine steps. While Maon et al. (2009) did not differentiate among company sizes, this research focused on small and medium-sized companies. Lastly, interview findings, similar to Sendlhofer (2019), Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020) and Szegedi et al. (2023), highlighted the impact of company size in the implementation of CSR. Particularly, findings showed that the steps of CSR implementation differ between (1) small-sized companies and (2) medium-sized companies. The researcher observed that all small-sized companies from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece omitted the fourth step of this process (recommended by Fatima and Elbanna (2023)) – CSR evaluation. This step was taken only by medium-sized companies.

Accordingly, this research concluded that the CSR implementation process depends on the size of the company; it differentiated between small-sized and medium-sized companies. For small companies, this research claimed that the next four steps illustrated the process: **(1) CSR Awareness, (2) CSR Understanding, (3) CSR Embedding and (4) CSR Communication.** For medium-sized companies, this research identified the following five steps: **(1) CSR Awareness, (2) CSR Understanding, (3) CSR Embedding, (4) CSR Communication and (5) CSR Evaluation.** The identification of the CSR implementation process contributed to the CSR implementation literature, as to researcher's knowledge, no previous researchers have considered managers'/owners' perceptions of CSR implementation undertaken by fashion SMEs, particularly in these four countries (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). The CSR implementation process in small-sized and medium-sized companies is presented below in Figure 7.3

Figure 7.3 illustrated the steps in the CSR implementation process. Steps for both (a) and (b) are sequential. The researcher considered the (b) version to be the ideal process of CSR implementation for both small and medium-sized companies. This claim is supported by owners/managers and CSR scholars. In the interview findings chapter, owners/managers of medium-sized companies highlighted the importance of evaluation for the whole process. This step was neglected by owners/managers of small-sized companies. Similar to this research, other research in CSR implementation (Maon et al., 2009; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Helmig et al., 2016; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023) recommended not neglecting this step. This process also serves

as a guideline for managers/owners of small and medium-sized companies intending to familiarise with and adopt CSR.

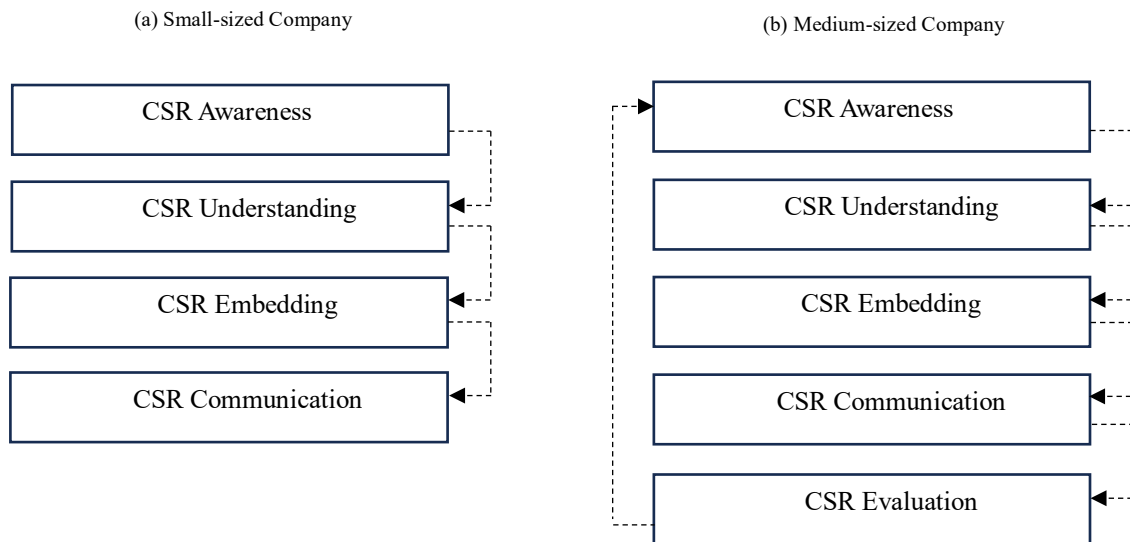


Figure 7.3 CSR Implementation Process in (a) Small-sized Companies and (b) Medium-sized Companies

CSR Awareness: As previously mentioned, this step is the foundation of the CSR implementation process. This step refers to the awareness of (a) owners or managers of small or medium-sized companies and (b) their primary stakeholders. In this step, SME owners and managers should identify their stakeholders and distinguish them as primary and secondary (as recommended by Clarkson (1995)). Interview findings highlighted that fashion SME owners and managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece do not intentionally identify their primary and secondary stakeholders. Nonetheless, they highlighted that consumers are crucial to their existence. Accordingly, the researcher deemed it essential that the SMEs identify the CSR awareness of consumers (primary stakeholders) of small or medium-sized companies. The CSR awareness of fashion SME owners or managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece is influenced by (a) individual, (b) company, (c) national, (d) regional and (e) international factors. These factors were portrayed in Figure 5.1 and discussed in detail in 5.2.5 sub sub-chapter. The CSR awareness of

fashion consumers of small or medium-sized companies from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece, is influenced by (a) work experience, (b) education, (c) companies' CSR activities, (d) peers, (e) documentaries, (f) online search and (g) training sessions. These factors were portrayed in Figure 6.2 and discussed in detail in 6.2.2.5 sub sub-chapter. This step helps the company comprehend the CSR understanding of the primary stakeholders; it shapes the CSR understanding.

CSR Understanding: This step refers to the CSR understanding of owners and managers of SMEs (primarily) and other primary stakeholders. Similar to Maon et al. (2009) and Van and Nguyen (2019), this research found that their CSR understanding is crucial to the CSR implementation because it shapes the following steps of this process. The researcher deemed that CSR understanding is equally important for SMEs and primary stakeholders. Owners' and managers' understanding influence the nature of CSR activities. Interview findings illustrated the influence of fashion SME owners and managers on the CSR embedding of their companies. The understanding of primary stakeholders, such as consumers, have a similar impact on the CSR implementation. Such influence was noticed in the findings chapters and it was mentioned by other CSR scholars (Brunk and Boer, 2020; Harrison and Huang, 2022). This step requires SME owners and managers to conceptualise CSR, identify the CSR nature and distinguish their primary stakeholders. Once they attain this, they can go to the next step.

CSR Embedding: This step incorporates the CSR practices and activities taken by SMEs. Similar to Graafland and Smid (2019) and Carroll (2021), this research considered this step to be of high importance. For many scholars, CSR embedding is equivalent of CSR implementation. However, for the research, this step is part of the whole CSR implementation process. Similar to Mory et al. (2017) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), the researcher deemed that SMEs should distinguish between internal and external CSR activities. Internal activities deal with CSR in the inner environment of the company; external activities deal with CSR directed towards consumers, community, media, partners or the general public. In the interview findings, the researcher categorised internal and external activities into implicit and explicit (the research followed Matten and Moon (2008; 2018) suggestions). Other scholars have considered such categorisation as successful; particularly, Kim et al. (2013) stated that during the CSR implementation, companies must decide on implicit or explicit CSR. This categorisation helps future researchers understand

the nature of CSR activities within a company, and it also helps the company identify the types of their CSR activities. Nevertheless, the researcher, based on interview findings, concluded that CSR activities can also be of hybrid nature (explicit-implicit). The researcher noticed that some of the fashion SMEs in the region adopted a hybrid nature and they referred to it as successful. By identifying CSR activities into the afore-mentioned groups, SME owners and managers can identify the right means of communication.

CSR Communication: This step offers SMEs the opportunity to illustrate their CSR activities, connect with their stakeholders, gain loyalty and demonstrate credibility (Lee et al., 2019). Similar to Fatima and Elbanna (2023), findings showed that CSR communication is essential for a successful CSR implementation. Several focus group participants highlighted the lack of CSR communication from fashion SMEs. The researcher considered that many fashion SMEs in the region, with some exceptions, are not aware of the importance of this step. Similar to Falchi et al. (2022), the researcher suggested that SME owners and managers should not under-communicate CSR activities (they should avoid greenblushing). To capture the CSR communication of fashion SMEs and help future SMEs willing to communicate their activities, this research illustrated the process in Figure 5.2. By following it, SMEs owners and managers should be able to correctly communicate their CSR activities. This research depicted the following key elements of CSR communication among fashion SME: (a) mean of communication, (b) message, (c) receiver, (d) channel and (e) outcome.

CSR Evaluation: This step serves as an assessment of all the actions taken to achieve a CSR implementation. Similar to Fatima and Elbanna (2023), findings showed that most SMEs neglect this step. Findings, nonetheless, revealed an important development. Medium-sized companies apply CSR evaluation. Small-sized companies neglect CSR evaluation mainly because of the lack of economic resources (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013). The researcher considered that it is important for small-sized companies to include this step in this process. Similar to Maon et al. (2009), this research revealed that CSR evaluation provides the SMEs with the opportunity to understand if the employed activities helped them attain their goals. Additionally, this step offers small-sized companies the opportunity to ensure effective application and communication of CSR activities.

7.2.5 The Impact of Context in CSR Implementation

Previous CSR scholars, such as Sendlhofer (2019), Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020) and Szegedi et al. (2023), highlighted the impact of context in the implementation of CSR. Similar to the afore-mentioned scholars, findings showed that context influences the implementation of CSR. Previous discussions highlighted the impact of company size, company nature, industry and country in the CSR understanding. Findings showed that the afore-mentioned contexts influence the CSR implementation. The latter factor (country) provided the opportunity to understand the cross-national differences among SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) regarding CSR implementation. The country context offered the opportunity to identify the impact of the regional institutionalisation. Findings revealed that the country's position in the region largely influenced the CSR implementation.

7.2.5.1 The Impact of the Regional Actor – the EU – in CSR Implementation

Similar to Jamali et al. (2020) and Jamali et al. (2021) claims, this research concluded that the country's position in the regional arena also plays a crucial role in the implementation of CSR. The unique position of each of these four SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) further iterated the impact that country's position in the region has on CSR implementation. Findings revealed that the regional actor in SEE – the EU, is the principal institutional distinction among these four countries. Melović et al. (2019) highlighted the presence of EU in SEE, but it did not investigate the role of EU. This research showed that there are differences in the application of CSR between SMEs located in the EU and non-EU member states in SEE. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first research to identify a difference of CSR implementation among EU and non-EU member states. The CIS and interview findings showed that companies located in Greece and Croatia (members of the EU) must adhere to regional legislation and guidelines (e.g., Directive 2014/95/EU on non-financial reporting; Apospori, 2018; Aureli et al., 2020). They also revealed that EU positively impacts the performance of CSR among these EU-member states (Croatia and Greece) compared to non-EU member states (Kosovo and Albania) in the region. So, this research concluded that a regional actor (like the EU) impacts the success of implicit CSR practices. Similar to Butković et al. (2021), this research found that, besides the regional level, this actor impacts the individual and national levels of CSR operation.

Through institutional theory, this research investigated CSR implementation in different institutional (the presence and lack of the EU) and national (four SEE countries) contexts. Precisely, it extended Matten and Moon's (2008; 2020) and Jamali and Karam's (2018) framework. Matten and Moon (2008) predicted that explicit CSR will expand towards all of Europe. While explicit CSR expanded towards Europe, the CSR in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece was not entirely explicit in nature. The afore-said SEE countries adopted a hybrid approach. The hybridisation of CSR was highlighted by Jamali and Karam (2018) and Matten and Moon (2020). Yet, this research did not fully agree with their claims. Jamali and Karam (2018) claimed that developing countries adopt hybrid CSR; this research showed that both developed (Croatia and Greece) and developing countries (Kosovo and Albania) follow hybrid CSR. Matten and Moon (2020) stated that explicitisation is common among developing countries and implicitisation is common among developed countries. Similar to Matten and Moon (2020), this research revealed that Croatia and Greece (developed countries; EU member states) adopted an implicitisation of CSR. However, Albania (a developing country and a non-EU member country) also inclined towards the implicitisation of CSR. Kosovo followed a 'coexistent' hybridisation. This research conceptualises 'coexistent' hybridisation of CSR as a simultaneous incorporation of explicit and implicit CSR, and it considers that this approach is common across newly-established countries. Kosovo, as a newly-established country trying to refrain itself from the past history (Kosovo was an autonomous province in the ex-Yugoslavia), created new norms, rules and laws. Accordingly, Kosovo is embracing implicit and explicit CSR simultaneously. This embracement can be a result of the unique position of Kosovo and the involvement of regional and international actors in Kosovo (as a post-war country). Most importantly, this research suggested that the presence or lack of the EU, as an institutional actor, changes the application of CSR. This research concluded that a higher political and economic union, such as the EU, has an immense impact on the implementation of CSR in the region.

7.2.6 CSR, Consumption and Consumers Behaviour

Several CSR scholars highlighted the consumers' increasing interest towards CSR in the recent years (Harrison and Huang, 2022; Lee et al., 2012; Vuković et al., 2020). Given that, this research

investigated fashion consumers' purchasing behaviour and intention from socially responsible SMEs. The researcher identified (a) their consumption practices and (b) the impact of CSR in their purchasing behaviour and intention. This research, different from other research, focused on consumers, who purchase from SMEs.

7.2.6.1 Consumption Process and Types of Consumption

Findings identified the consumption process among fashion consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. This research, similar to the work of Ferioli et al. (2022) and Lee and Lin (2022), claimed that consumption process is a pivotal element in understanding CSR and CSR-impacted consumption practices. As a result of the findings, this research created an empirical framework of consumer consumption process, which was presented in Figure 6.1. The framework identified (a) consumption drivers, (b) consumption mode, (c) consumption practices and (d) post-consumption practices. It depicted consumers consumption process. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the framework is the first one that illustrates this process from consumers' perspective. It served as a foundation for the rest of the investigation on consumers' behaviour. It identified the genuine responses of consumers about CSR prior to discussing the CSR topics.

In recent years, scholars have identified new consumption practices, such as sustainable (Lim, 2017; Mukendi et al., 2020; Dabas and Whang, 2022), slow (Jung et al., 2014; Domingos et al., 2022) and sufficient consumption (Freudenreic and Schaltegger, 2020; Garcia-Ortega et al., 2023). This research identified two types of consumption among fashion consumers in SEE region. The researcher referred to them as: (1) conscious and (2) unconscious consumption. Unconscious consumption can be (a) responsible and (b) irresponsible. The conscious consumption includes fashion consumers, who take into account factors, such as ethical production, environmental protection, quality of product and philanthropic activities, when doing their purchases. Other scholars, such as Vatamanescu et al. (2021) and Kim and Kim (2023), also used the term 'conscious consumption' to describe such practices. On the other hand, the unconscious consumption involves fashion consumers, who do not consider the afore-mentioned factors in their purchases.

7.2.6.2 Consumers' Purchasing Behaviour and Intention

This research agreed with Gazzola et al. (2022), Kadic-Magljalic et al. (2019) and Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2019), who claimed that Gen Zers and Millennials care about companies' social responsibilities because they are aware of the consequences of their consumption. Similar to Gheorge and Matefi (2021) and Gazzola et al. (2022), findings revealed that fashion consumers require transparency from the companies. Focus group and netnography findings, nonetheless, showed that consumers purchasing behavior differs across countries. Croatian and Greek fashion consumers consider CSR in their purchases, and CSR activities of fashion SMEs impact or have impacted, at least once, their purchasing decisions. On the other hand, Kosovar and Albanian fashion consumers rarely consider CSR in their purchases. This is a result of (a) consumers' unawareness of CSR and its impact and (b) fashion SMEs unawareness of CSR and their lack of CSR implementation. The differences among consumers of these four SEE countries can be ascribed to the influence of national context. This research concluded that consumers in developed countries consider CSR in their purchases and tend to be impacted by CSR activities of fashion SMEs. Consumers in developing countries tend to not consider CSR activities. Findings of this research revealed that SMEs in developed countries implement CSR compared to SMEs in developing countries, which apply only a few dimensions of the CSR. Accordingly, this research agreed with Vatamanescu et al. (2021) and Huo et al. (2022), who claimed that the national context, in addition to CSR implementation of fashion SME, impacts the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

Findings also revealed the purchasing intentions of focus group participants. The majority of participants, who were not familiarised with the CSR concept in the focus groups, stated their will to purchase from socially responsible SMEs. The researcher, similar to Kadic-Magljalic et al. (2019), noted that young consumers' will can be ascribed to their emotional intelligence and concerns about ethical work. Findings also showed participants willing to pay a premium for products/services offered by socially responsible SMEs. Focus group participants and online community members and commenters were divided into two groups: (a) they put CSR over price and (b) they put price over CSR. Their views depended on a few factors, such as (a) CSR perception, (b) financial status and (c) perception on the added-value of the purchased items. These

findings challenge the findings of Diallo et al. (2021), whose research concluded that consumers are not willing to pay a premium price for CSR activities. Findings on premium price provide an attention-grabbing outcome, as Kosovar and Albanian consumers claimed to put emphasis on price when purchasing from fashion SMEs, yet, they express their willingness to pay a premium price for products/services offered by socially responsible SMEs.

7.2.7 Developed versus Developing Countries

In essence, this research contributed to the literature on CSR in developed countries and CSR in developing countries. Precisely, it developed the literature, which compares CSR among these two types of economies. Findings revealed that CSR interpretation and implementation differs between developed and developing countries. This research showed that every aspect of CSR (which was investigated in this research) differs between these two types of economies. First, findings showed that the bedrock of CSR – CSR awareness is perceived differently among (a) Kosovars and Albanians and (b) Croatian and Greeks. The former SME owners/managers and consumers were not familiar with the concept. The latter ones, on the other hand, were well-aware of CSR. These findings are similar to the findings of Bhatia and Makkar (2020), who claimed that consumers in developing countries are not aware of CSR and consumers in developed countries are well-aware of the concept. Second, findings revealed that CSR interpretation varies between SME owners/managers and consumers of developed and developing countries. Third, CSR implementation process amend according to the type of the economy. This research supported the well-known claims of many CSR scholars (Spence, 2016; Jamali et al., 2017, 2019; Sendlhofer, 2019), who investigated the difference in CSR implementation between SMEs located in developed and developing countries. It showed that CSR differs in developed and developing countries, even when such countries are neighbors and located in the same region. The researcher also recognises the impact of the EU on the development of these four countries and on CSR awareness and implementation (as it was previously presented in this chapter).

Findings of this research agree with findings of the work of Marquis and Raynard (2015), Soundararajan et al. (2018) and Khan et al. (2021), which state that CSR in developing countries lacks institutionalisation and faces institutional complexity. They also agree with the work of

Bhatia and Makkar (2020), who emphasised that CSR in developed countries is embedded into the majority of companies (regardless of size). Findings also showed a different perception of CSR from SME owners/managers and consumers of developing countries. Contrary to Jamali et al. (2017), this research's findings disclosed that CSR is not primarily philanthropic in nature neither rooted in religious and cultural values in developing countries. CSR implementation in developing countries embraces all of its dimensions, but such embracement depends on other factors, as discussed in length in this discussion chapter.

7.3 Theoretical, Methodological and Practical Contributions

7.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research contributed to theory, methodology and practice. The theoretical contributions of this research are presented below.

(1) First, this research contributed to the **CSR literature**. While Carroll (2021) underlined that CSR is a global concept, this research poses a subtle challenge to that claim. The findings of this research (grounded on multiple methods and multiple perspectives) revealed that CSR is not as well-known across South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). This research also questions the claims of scholars like Fayyaz et al. (2017), Jamali and Carroll (2017), Lythreathis et al. (2019) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), who state that CSR is a Western idea. The investigated countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) are located in Europe, and Greece and Croatia are EU member states; yet, CSR is a relatively new concept for many of them.

(2) This research also contributed to the **conceptualisation of CSR**. Similar to Aguinis (2011), Gatti et al. (2019) and Sheehy (2015), the findings of this research showed that the CSR concept should not neglect specific contexts and embrace the “one-size-fits-all” mindset. Consequently, this research generated two context-specific concepts of CSR. Initially, it provided an understanding of CSR from the South-East Europe (region-specific) perspective. This understanding stemmed from the critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) of 39 articles investigating CSR across four SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece). Secondly, this research offered a fashion-specific CSR conceptualisation. It created a five-part definition of CSR –

economic, legal, ethical, social and environmental. Similar to Carroll (2021), the researcher found the four dimensions concept of Carroll (1991) relevant. The researcher, nevertheless, expanded the four dimensions concept of Carroll (1991) by adding the dimension of environment. While this conceptualisation is specific to the fashion industry, the researcher considers that it can be embraced by other industries. Similarly to Kolk (2016), this research claims that the environment should be a decisive factor in CSR understanding regardless of industry. Most importantly, this research, grounded on the size context of CSR, suggested a new designation of CSR relevant to all companies irrespective of size. It recommended renaming corporate social responsibility to **company social responsibility** as a result of the misinterpretation of the word ‘corporate’ among SME owners/managers and consumers. Similarly to this research, Jenkins (2004) emphasised the interpretative distortion of the ‘corporate’ in the CSR term. Given the prominence of the CSR abbreviation, this new designation has the potential for long-term endurance.

(3) This research contributed to the enrichment of **CSR in SME literature**. It responded to the Hamann et al. (2017) and Jamali et al. (2017) call to investigate how and why SMEs implement CSR. The importance of investigating SMEs was emphasised throughout this research. Similarly to Lähdesmäki et al. (2019) and Magrizos et al. (2021), this research showed that SMEs should be investigated ‘in their own right’, as they have different particularities from large companies, and in the realm of SMEs, CSR is unique. The literature review pointed out the importance of understanding the perceptions of SME owners/managers about the concept of CSR, and it highlighted the absence of CSR studies in this area. Different from Elhajjar and Ouaida (2020) and Thanh and Podruzsik (2018), the findings of this research presented that SME owners and managers do not perceive CSR differently from managers of large and multinational companies. Nonetheless, this research stated that the size of the company impacts CSR implementation. By exploring the CSR awareness and understanding of fashion SME owners/managers, this research enriched the literature on owners/managers, particularly the literature on SME owners/managers and added to the individual-level analysis of CSR. Among others, this research, similar to Oduro et al. (2021), indicated that CSR drivers in SMEs differ across countries. The strongest contribution of this research in this literature (CSR in SMEs) is the identification of CSR implementation steps for (1) small-sized and (2) medium-sized companies. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, prior CSR scholars have not attempted to understand and compare this process between small-

sized and medium-sized companies. Findings revealed that CSR implementation differs between small-sized and medium-sized companies (a thorough explanation of these differences is presented in the eighth section).

(4) This research added to the literature on CSR in developed versus CSR in developing countries by investigating CSR in Croatia and Greece (developed countries) versus CSR in Kosovo and Albania (developing countries). In particular, it extended the literature on CSR in developing countries by focusing on Kosovo and Albania, rarely investigated developing countries. Their unique position – located in Europe and surrounded by developed countries – provided an alternative reality of CSR in developing countries. The findings of this research, as supported by multiple perspectives, showed that regardless of the position, Kosovo and Albania have not embraced an inclusive CSR mentality. CIS findings also depicted that CSR has not received the attention of the scholars in the field. Similar to Spence (2016), Jamali et al. (2017), Jamali et al. (2019) and Sendlhofer (2019), the findings of this research claimed that CSR is perceived and implemented differently in developed and developing countries (even if these countries are situated in the same region). The choice of these countries aided this research's contribution to another important area – the institutional context of CSR in developing and developed countries. This research followed the recommendations of Jamali and Karam (2018) and Khan et al. (2021) and investigated CSR in different institutional contexts – in the presence and lack of the EU. To the researcher's knowledge, this research is the first to identify the differences in CSR understanding and implementation between EU and non-EU member states located in Europe, precisely in the SEE region (a detailed explanation of this institutional-context contribution is presented in the eleventh section).

(5) By investigating Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece, this research provided new insights on CSR across countries literature. Prior CSR studies mainly focused on Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Soulsby et al., 2021) or a single state (e.g., Vlachos et al., 2017; Koleva and Meadows, 2021), and they lacked a multi-country investigation in the SEE region (with few exceptions; e.g., Melović et al., 2019). Accordingly, by researching these countries, this investigation offered a new understanding of CSR in a unique region, such as the SEE region, and it provided cross-national research of countries that have rarely caught the attention of CSR

scholars. Similar to the findings of Jamali and Karam (2018) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), the findings of this research demonstrated that country context influences CSR understanding and implementation. Among others, this research agreed with Bhatia and Makkar (2020) that CSR drivers differ across countries.

(6) This research agreed with Apaydin et al. (2021) and Bhattacharya et al. (2021) and claimed that the industry context is a salient factor in CSR processes. In particular, this research contributed to the literature on **CSR and the fashion industry**. This research disagreed with Vatamanescu et al. (2021); it found that fashion SMEs located in SEE have not received notable criticism and have not faced public scrutiny. It also contradicted the findings of Castillo-Abdul et al. (2022) and Szegedi et al. (2023), who stated that criticism (mostly for unethical labour practices and air pollution) is the primary CSR driver for fashion companies. The findings of this research depicted that the owners' and managers' perceptions of environmental issues, ethical issues, environmental care and social causes are among the main CSR drivers for SEE SME owners/managers in the fashion industry. By far, most CSR research has attempted to understand CSR in fast-fashion companies. This research enhanced the understanding of CSR and the fashion industry by providing other facets of this industry: (a) commercial, (b) social and (c) sustainable companies. Similarly to Colucci et al. (2020), this research showed that the core business influences the CSR awareness and application of fashion SMEs; in most cases, social and sustainable fashion SMEs implement more than one dimension of CSR. The findings of this research, similar to Szegedi et al. (2023), found that Albanian fashion SME owners/managers have the tendency to overlap CSR and sustainability. Different from Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020), this research revealed that fashion SME owners/managers lean towards CSR (not sustainability). This research also contributed to the consumption process of fashion consumers in SEE. It portrayed the consumption process in the country's context. It disclosed that fashion consumers in developing countries (Kosovo and Albania) are aware of CSR, yet CSR does not influence their purchasing behaviour. Similarly to Vatamanescu et al. (2021) and Garcia-Ortega et al. (2023), this research showed that fashion consumers in developed countries (Croatia and Greece) are more aware of CSR and adopt conscious consumption practices.

(7) This research also added to **CSR and consumer behaviour literature** because it understood the impact of CSR activities undertaken by SMEs on fashion consumer behaviours and intentions. This research is among the few in CSR focused on consumers who purchase primarily from SMEs. Similarly to Rahman and Norman (2016), this research revealed that consumers prefer to buy from smaller companies that apply or do not apply CSR activities.

(8) This research further added to the **CSR implementation literature**. Specifically, it expanded the knowledge of CSR implementation among small and medium-sized fashion companies. It is among the few research that considered SME managers'/owners' perceptions of CSR implementation, particularly in these four SEE countries (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Findings showed that Fatima and Elbanna's (2023) steps (CSR awareness, CSR communication, CSR embedding and CSR evaluation) are suitable but should be altered to portray the company-size context. The findings of this research claimed that CSR understanding should be added as a second step. While this research deemed these five steps ideal, findings showed that all the interviewed small fashion companies avoided the CSR evaluation. In addition, this research enriched the current knowledge of CSR awareness and CSR communication. It developed empirical frameworks for each step. The first framework depicted the influences on CSR awareness of SME owners and managers, and the second one showed the CSR communication process from an SME's perspective. Lastly, this research responded to CSR scholars' call, particularly Fatima and Elbanna's (2023) call, to understand the implementation process of CSR across different contexts. This research enhanced the understanding of CSR in three contexts: (1) company size (small and medium), (b) industry (fashion) and (c) country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece).

(9) This research responded to CSR scholars' call (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023) and provided an understanding of **CSR and CSR implementation through multi-level analysis**. It investigated CSR through individual (consumers and owners/managers), company (SMEs) and country (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) levels. In addition, it investigated it through multiple theoretical underpinnings (institutional and stakeholder theory) and diversification of the geographical location (four SEE countries; developed versus developing countries; EU versus non-EU member countries). By adopting a multi-theory approach, this

research advanced the integration of theory in CSR studies in accordance with Wang et al. (2020) recommendation.

(10) By exploring the perception of owners/managers and consumers, this research added to **stakeholder theory**. Initially, this perspective served to identify the main stakeholders of each chosen fashion SME by adopting Clarkson's (1995) primary and secondary stakeholder framework. Similarly to Rhee et al. (2021), this research identified consumers and managers/owners as primary stakeholders. Similarly to them, this research found them indispensable for the CSR concept, as these stakeholders largely impacted CSR implementation. In addition, this research agreed with Thijssens et al. (2015) and stated that secondary stakeholders (such as NGOs, educational institutions and media) are also imperative to CSR. Findings revealed that secondary stakeholders are critical to the first two steps of the process (CSR awareness and CSR understanding).

(11) Lastly, this research extended the **institutional theory**. In particular, it added to Matten and Moon's (2008; 2020) and Jamali and Karam's (2018) frameworks, and it challenged Matten and Moon's (2008; 2020) prediction. This research, through the lens of institutional theory, developed a typology for the CSR process taken at the actor level. This typology identified 1) company, 2) national, 3) regional, and 4) international level. It led to a four-level conceptual framework, which presented the process of CSR and CSR activities taken at the level of each actor. The research considered it important to note that this framework's contribution was also supported throughout the discussion of this research. As presented, this typology was considered helpful when presenting the overviews and discussions of this research. This framework adopted Matten and Moon's (2008) implicit-explicit framework and Jamali and Karam's (2018) hybridisation. It depicted the influence of institutions on the CSR process in SEE. It added to the current literature on CSR implementation and institutional pressures for CSR. In addition, this research identified a new form of hybridisation of CSR – 'coexistent' hybridisation. It conceptualised this form as the simultaneous incorporation of explicit and implicit CSR, and it considered this approach fit for a newly-established country (like Kosovo). Most importantly, this framework showed that the presence or lack of the EU as an institutional actor changes the application of CSR. This research challenged the predictions of Matten and Moon (2008) that explicit CSR will expand towards all of Europe. The investigated countries followed a hybrid CSR approach. It also disagreed with Jamali and

Karam's (2018) claim that CSR in developing countries adopts a hybrid approach; this research showed that Kosovo, Albania (developing countries) and Croatia and Greece (developed countries) follow a hybrid CSR. Lastly, it disagreed with Matten and Moon's (2020) claim that CSR in developing countries takes the form of explicitisation of CSR. This research showed that it did not take form; developing countries, depending on their situation, either adopt an implicitisation or a 'coexistent' hybridisation of CSR. The researcher considered that the unique composition of the SEE region challenged some of their findings.

7.3.2 Methodological Contribution

This research contributed to four aspects of the methodology.

(1) First, it employed qualitative research in a field dominated by quantitative research (Zaman et al., 2022; Fatima and Elbana, 2023). By employing qualitative research, this research supported the adoption of qualitative research for topics which require rich and deep insights. This approach was suitable for this research, as it helped yield insights into different contexts of the phenomenon of CSR and helped co-construct the multifaceted reality of the phenomenon of CSR through the lenses of managers and consumers. Most importantly, this approach gained insights into the individual experience of CSR. This research also contributed to a sub-field of the qualitative approach – the online approach. It showed that online interviews are potent for understanding the perceptions and behaviours of fashion SME owners/managers dispersed geographically. It also indicated that online focus groups are resourceful for investigating the perceptions of fashion consumers about CSR and its processes. Online interviews and focus groups were revealed to be cost-effective and environmentally friendly (the researcher reduced the carbon footprint). By combining three primary methods, this research also demonstrated that multiple qualitative methods are valuable for CSR scholars who intend to address the multifaceted reality of a phenomenon like CSR.

(2) Second, this research contributed methodologically to the development of the critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) approach in the management field, particularly in the CSR field. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, CSR scholars have never applied this approach before for their

reviews. This research established CIS as a successful approach for interpreting the literature on corporate social responsibility across several countries. By adopting CIS, this research further developed the knowledge of literature review approaches. The researcher extended the approaches identified by Snyder (2019) and prompted by Depraetere et al. (2021), as it distinguished three types of literature review approaches: (1) semi-systematic, (2) integrative/critical and (3) qualitative semi-systematic and pointed out CIS position amongst these approaches.

(3) Third, it contributed to the development of netnographic research. This research contributed to the netnography field through two published conference papers, which adopted netnography as a stand-alone method. It supported the claim of Kozinets (2020), who acknowledged netnography as a stand-alone method. It added further knowledge to the netnography process by creating and conceptualising another stance in addition to the active and passive stances identified by Kozinets (2002; 2020) – the hybrid stance. The hybrid stance amalgamates the active and passive stance. It suggests that the researcher investigating an online community should not reveal their identity to the community members but inform the administrator/s of the group for the ongoing research and gain permission to access the group. This research also showed that netnography is a successful method for unobtrusively understanding the perceptions and behaviours of consumers.

(4) Lastly, this research contributed to thematic analysis, as it adopted this approach to investigate perceptions of owners/managers and consumers among four different countries. It showed that this approach is efficient for a multi-country investigation. By providing a detailed application of the thematic analyses across four countries, this research contributed to the methodological literature of the approach. The approach also helped this research identify themes and sub-themes that contributed to the development of new theoretical insights.

7.3.3 Practical Contributions and Recommendations

In addition to theory and methodology, the findings of this research provided valuable insight and guidance for real-world application. The researcher highlighted the practical contributions throughout this research. These contributions encompassed CSR awareness, CSR understanding, CSR communication and CSR implementation, among others. They were tailored for different

stakeholders: (1) SMEs, particularly SME owners/managers, in SEE (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) in the fashion industry, (2) fashion consumers from these four SEE countries, (3) policymakers, (4) NGOs, (5) fashion industry associations, (6) fashion influencers and advocates, (7) fashion companies and (8) educational institutions operating in the above mentioned SEE countries. This sub sub-chapter further enriches the contributions of this research by addressing the main practical contributions and providing specific practical recommendations identified in the findings.

(1) Findings unveiled a lack of CSR awareness among fashion SME owners/managers in Albania and Kosovo. Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners/managers aware of CSR would gain multiple benefits. Most importantly, they would be induced to adopt CSR into their activities. At the company level, fashion SMEs in Kosovo and Albania would gain from CSR activities as such activities offer organisational value, contribute to competitive advantage, create a positive impact on brand value, gain loyal employees and positively influence companies' environment (Vlachos et al., 2017; Stojanović et al., 2021). At the national level, fashion SMEs embracing CSR would help their respective countries enhance the income index and economic competitiveness, improve worker rights, encourage innovation and urge environmental protection measures. At the regional level, fashion SMEs would help regional actors, like the EU, achieve collective goals that “create a world in which everyone can thrive through social, environmental, and economic progress” (CSR Europe, 2023). At the international level, these companies would help society provide positive social value and achieve the prosperous goals set by international actors.

Increasing CSR awareness among fashion SME owners/managers in Kosovo and Albania requires the involvement of several local, national, regional and international stakeholders. Stakeholders should be aware that Kosovo and Albania do not provide fertile grounds for CSR. Cultural attitudes claiming that businesses should focus only on profit-making are crucial factors contributing to this situation. The lack of CSR awareness among fashion consumers and the general population further hinders it. To create an environment conducive to CSR in Kosovo and Albania, such an initiative will require intensive work from governments, policymakers, civil society organisations, NGOs and regional and international actors located in the region. Figure 5.1 revealed the individual, company, national, regional and international influences on CSR awareness of fashion SME

owners and managers from SEE countries. Based on them, this research suggests a few activities, presented below in Table 7.1, aimed at increasing CSR awareness among Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners/managers and introducing them to the multiple benefits of CSR.

	Suggestion	Messenger(s)	Communication Approach(es)	Justification
1	Interactive Workshop	Albanian CSR Network	Direct outreach (phone and email invitations), organisations' webpages and social media pages, and targeted social media advertising	CSR workshops are effective for in-depth learning of CSR (Roy and Marsafaw, 2021)
		Kosovo CSR Network		
2	Online Training	NGOs and fashion industry association(s)	Direct outreach (email invitations), organisations' / associations' webpages and social media pages, and targeted social media advertising	Online training is flexible, practical and accommodating to the busy schedule of owners/managers (Stobierski, 2021)
3	Roundtable Discussion	Government agencies	Direct outreach (phone and email invitations), government agencies' webpage(s) and government agencies' social media	Roundtable discussions are impactful approaches to raise awareness of CSR (Samson, 2023)
4	Coverage: (a) Success Stories	(a) Successful socially-responsible fashion SMEs	National TV, local TV, radio and newspapers	Media coverage is considered a trusted information source for SME owners/managers in Kosovo and Albania
	(b) Interview with Experts	(b) CSR experts		
5	Booklet: CSR in SEE	Regional agencies (e.g., RCC) in collaboration with CSR experts (e.g., the researcher)	Regional agencies' webpage(s) and social media page(s)	Regional agencies continuously create booklets to encourage CSR awareness (e.g., ILO booklets)

Table 7.1 Potential Activities aimed at Stakeholders Willing to Enhance CSR Awareness among Fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

Unlike the rest of the activities, the booklet (depicted in the table above) would be targeted predominantly at SMEs from all SEE countries regardless of industry. It would incorporate the CIS findings. The booklet would familiarise SMEs in the region with the CSR concept by presenting the (a) conceptualisation of CSR from the SEE perspective, (b) CSR mentality in the region and (c) CSR institutional mechanisms.

(2) Findings also indicated a low level of CSR awareness among fashion consumers in Kosovo and Albania, mainly due to the exclusion of CSR from daily discussions and the absence of CSR in local companies. Kosovar and Albanian fashion consumers aware of CSR would contribute to broader societal goals, become aware of the social and environmental impact of fashion consumption, make informed purchasing decisions aligned with CSR, adopt conscious consumption habits, prioritise ethical sourcing and demand greater accountability from fashion SMEs, among others (Luger et al., 2022). Ho et al. (2021) and Khan et al. (2021) also put emphasis on a few company benefits resulting from fashion consumers being aware of CSR – customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. The findings of this research also confirmed these claims. Most CSR scholars claim that CSR awareness of consumers relies upon the companies (Luger et al., 2022; Rayne et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2019). Therefore, this research recommends that SMEs should undertake activities to spread CSR awareness among fashion consumers.

Increasing CSR awareness of fashion consumers in Kosovo and Albania would require efforts from the SMEs. Kosovo and Albania provide limited access to information channels or platforms that raise awareness of CSR for consumers. There is a lack of education on the CSR concept. Consumers are accustomed to prioritising affordability and style in their purchasing decisions. Accordingly, SME owners/managers would have to raise awareness about the importance of ethical consumption and shift cultural attitudes towards socially responsible conscious behaviour.

This research outlined particular recommendations to fashion SMEs to encourage CSR awareness of fashion consumers in Kosovo and Albania. Refer to Table 7.2 to find these suggestions. The

following suggestions stem from SME owners/managers and fashion consumer perceptions of current and ideal CSR communication tools for fashion SMEs (part of them are presented in Table 6.15, Table 6.16, Table 6.17 and Table 6.18). These suggestions are directed primarily towards Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners/managers, yet they are also useful for Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners/managers. The fashion SME owners/managers (from these four SEE countries) willing to increase CSR awareness among fashion consumers would be advised to apply the empirical framework presented in Figure 5.2, which explains in detail the steps required for communicating CSR-related topics. The owners/managers would also be suggested to refer to Figure 6.2 for other potential means for increasing consumer CSR awareness.

	Suggestion	Messenger(s)	Communication Approach(es)	Justification
1	Social Media CSR Awareness Campaign	Socially-responsible fashion SMEs in collaboration with fashion influencers	Company's social media pages and fashion influencers' social media pages	A social media campaign raises CSR awareness and builds socially conscious consumers (Lee et al., 2021; Samson, 2023)
2	CSR Awareness Content (e.g., Educative Video, Blog Post, Infographic)	Socially-responsible fashion SMEs	Company's webpage and company's social media pages	Information authenticity and specificity increases consumers' CSR awareness (Pérez et al., 2020; Samson, 2023)
3	Product Packaging and Labels	Socially-responsible fashion SMEs	Company's webpage, company's social media pages, packages, and tags	CSR informative packaging and labels influence consumers' CSR awareness (Benedetto, 2017)
4	In-Store Events	Socially-responsible fashion SMEs in collaboration with fashion influencers	Company's social media pages, fashion influencers' social media pages and news coverage	Engaging in-store events raise CSR awareness among consumers (Benedetto, 2017)
5	Storytelling	Socially-responsible fashion SMEs	Company's webpage, company's social media pages, packages and news stories	Storytelling spreads CSR awareness and positively impacts

				brand returns (Hall et al., 2023)

Table 7.2 Potential Activities aimed at Fashion SMEs Willing to Enhance CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers from Kosovo and Albania

Similar to Gupta and Wadera (2021), the findings of this research revealed the impact of other stakeholders on spreading CSR awareness among fashion consumers from Kosovo and Albania. Considering the importance of consumer CSR awareness, this research proposes the following activities to government agencies, NGOs, consumer advocacy groups, fashion advocates, CSR experts, public high schools and public HEIs. Refer to Table 7.3 to see a detailed explanation of each activity.

	Suggestion	Messenger(s)	Communication Approach(es)	Justification
1	(Digital) CSR Awareness Campaign	Coalition of NGOs, consumer advocacy groups and fashion advocates	Social media advertising from all messengers	Ideal for raising CSR awareness and educating fashion SME owners and managers on CSR (Lee et al., 2021)
2	Short-Documentary	Government agencies	National TV, local TV, government agencies' webpage(s) and government agencies' social media	CSR-oriented documentary films have proven impactful in raising CSR awareness (Fougère, 2022)
3	Roundtable Discussion	NGOs and consumer advocacy groups	Email invitations, targeted social media advertising	Roundtable discussions are impactful approaches to raise awareness of CSR (Samson, 2023)
4	'Introduction to CSR' Class/Workshop	Public high schools and public HEIs in collaboration with CSR experts and government agencies	High schools and public HEIs social media and email invitations	CSR classes and workshops are ideal for introducing CSR insights to students (Roy and Marsafaw, 2021)

Table 7.3 Potential Activities aimed at Stakeholders Willing to Enhance CSR Awareness among Fashion Consumers from Kosovo and Albania

The tables above identified potential activities tailored to increase CSR awareness of fashion consumers and fashion SME owners/managers from the region. In addition, this research suggests creating activities that simultaneously target different stakeholders, such as a one-day event (e.g., CSR Fashion Showcase) in the cultural centre in Tiranë (the capital city of Albania). The event would present fashion collections from local fashion SMEs promoting ethical sourcing, fair labour practices and responsible production methods; it would also emphasise the impact of fashion on environmental and social issues. It would offer (a) a fashion show, (b) exhibition booths, (c) CSR informative workshops, (d) a networking session and (e) a CSR award ceremony. The event would involve local fashion SMEs, consumers, fashion industry professionals and fashion influencers.

(3) Similar to Sitaloppi et al. (2021) and Fatima and Elbanna (2023), this research highlighted the importance of CSR incorporation into businesses and their activities. It also portrayed the benefits of applying CSR to SMEs pursuing CSR implementation. Regardless of the multitude of benefits, findings also revealed an absence of CSR implementation among fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. Therefore, this research offers recommendations to stakeholders (policymakers, NGOs, CSR networks, fashion industry associations and educational institutions) willing to encourage fashion SMEs in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece to embrace a CSR mindset and apply CSR activities. These recommendations are depicted in Table 7.4 below. The first suggestion ‘Step-by-Step CSR Guide for SMEs in SEE’ would be based on several findings of this research, which possess noteworthy practical implications. It would serve as a roadmap for new and established fashion SMEs willing to implement CSR. The guide would present the CSR implementation steps for (a) small-sized and (b) medium-sized companies in the fashion industry in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece (as identified in the Discussion chapter). It would offer fashion SME owners/managers direct access to the fashion consumer consumption processes and show them the influences on the CSR awareness of fashion consumers. It would also include a refined version from CSR practitioners of the four-level conceptual framework (depicted in Figure 4.7). Through the four-level conceptual framework, SMEs would identify the CSR process through each actor level (company, national, regional and international). Lastly, to ensure the guide is

practical, the guide would depict the main internal and external CSR activities of fashion SMEs from the region (Table 5. 3 to Table 5.10). The researcher, who has a well-established network of policymakers in the region, has already deliberated on the idea of developing this particular guide with the heads of two international NGOs operating in Kosovo. The creation of this guide will significantly enhance practical contributions.

	Suggestion	Messenger(s)	Communication Approach(es)	Justification
1	Step-by-Step CSR Guide for SMEs in SEE	Government agencies in collaboration with NGOs, fashion industry association(s) and CSR experts	Webpage(s) of the messengers, TV advertising and targeted social media advertising	Governmental guidelines are fundamental for compelling CSR strategies (Zueva and Fairbrass, 2021)
2	Consultating Service	CSR networks and CSR experts	CSR networks webpages and social media pages	CSR consulting is essential for companies (Ray, 2024)
3	Certification Program	Government agencies and CSR networks	Government agencies and CSR networks webpages and social media pages	CSR certificates are substantive for successful business performance (Dahlin et al., 2020)
4	Interactive Workshop	CSR experts (the researcher) in collaboration with NGOs	Direct outreach (phone and email invitations), organisations' webpages and social media pages and targeted social media advertising	Majority of owners prefer interactive workshops for CSR career development (Roy and Marsafaw, 2021)
5	Online Training	EU-based NGOs	Direct outreach (email invitations), organisations' webpages and social media pages and targeted social media advertising	Online training is a successful practice for conducting CSR capacity buildings (Roy and Marsafaw, 2021)

Table 7.4 Potential Activities aimed at Fashion SMEs from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece Willing to Implement CSR in their Companies

Findings revealed another stakeholder that has the power to impact the CSR implementation – the HEI. This research recommends CSR experts deliver classes or workshops in HEIs in the respective SEE countries. Given the lack of CSR discussions in public HEIs, this research suggests that public HEIs, in particular, facilitate such classes and workshops. These classes/workshops could be based on the findings of this research on CSR implementation steps or the CSR communication process, among others. They would be designed for business or fashion design students and could be delivered by a CSR expert. The researcher has already contributed to this realm by presenting two classes to Master students at CITY College, University of York Europe Campus (private HEI) based on this research’s findings and considered them successful.

	Suggestion	Messenger(s)	Communication Approach(es)	Justification
1	CSR Classes and/or Workshop in HE Institutions	CSR experts (the researcher) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in each respective country and HEIs	Direct outreach (email invitations) and HEIs social media pages	CSR classes and workshops are ideal for conveying CSR insights to students (Roy and Marsafaw, 2021)

Table 7.5 Potential Activity aimed at Stakeholders Willing to Enhance CSR Implementation among Future Fashion SME Owners/Managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

(4) The overall findings of this research revealed the impact of country context in the understanding and implementation of CSR among fashion SME owners/managers and fashion consumers in SEE. This impact can create several dilemmas for regional and international actors in SEE, as they embrace an all-encompassing CSR understanding and create guidelines without considering the country context. This research recommends region and international actors operating in SEE (such as the European Commission or RCC) alter their existing guidelines into country-specific ones.

(5) Findings also indicated that CSR communication is essential for a successful CSR implementation. The lack of CSR communication by fashion SMEs was emphasised from several focus group participants. Findings showed that Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers are not aware of the importance of this step. Therefore, the researcher suggests that fashion SME owners and managers should invest time and resources in communicating CSR activities. They should avoid under-communicating the CSR activities and greenblushing (Falchi et al., 2020).

(6) Findings revealed that fashion SMEs, particularly small-sized companies, neglect CSR evaluation. This neglect comes as a result of the lack of economic resources. The researcher deems that including CSR evaluation in the CSR implementation process is crucial. This step provides SME owners/managers with the opportunity to understand the effectiveness of their CSR activities and ensure successful application and communication of CSR activities.

(7) This research unveiled that the majority of fashion consumers unfamiliar with the CSR concept expressed their willingness to purchase from local socially responsible SMEs. This research also showed that fashion consumers are willing to pay a premium price for products/services provided by local socially responsible SMEs. Fashion SME owners and managers from the region should take these intentions into account. Considering and responding to consumer preferences can lead to several benefits, such as enhanced brand image and reputation (Singh and Verma, 2017).

(8) Given the notable impact of key societal actors – governments and policymakers – in compelling CSR application (Zueva and Fairbrass, 2021), this paragraph is exclusively directed towards the governments and policymakers of Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. This sub sub-chapter presented several recommendations tailored for the previously-mentioned governments and policymakers. In addition to them, the findings of this research revealed the need to (a) introduce regulations and laws in Kosovo and Albania, (b) strengthen the regulations and laws in Croatia and Greece, (c) incentivise CSR practices/activities, (d) foster partnerships with socially-responsible companies to promote CSR, (e) launch CSR awareness campaigns, (f) promote transparency and accountability and (g) provide capacity buildings programs for SMEs. The

findings of this research satisfactorily support that each of these recommendations should be based on country context, company-size context and industry context. Additionally, these suggestions should be grounded in the regional institutional presence of each country and the CSR driving forces of the Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs (such as the ones depicted in Table 5.2). This research also proposes regional policymakers to establish a regional CSR network as such network would actively spread CSR awareness, promote CSR practices within the region and encourage cross-border cooperation between SMEs in EU and non-EU countries.

7.4 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter delved deep into the importance of this research. It supported the relevance of context to CSR conceptualisation. Most importantly, it provided and illustrated a five-part context-specific CSR concept composed of economic, legal ethical, social and environmental CSR. It made a supporting argument about the misinterpretation of the word ‘corporate’ in the CSR concept. It recommended a new designation with the same abbreviation of CSR – Company Social Responsibility (CSR). It interpreted the CSR implementation process, and it pointed out an idyllic CSR implementation for SMEs composed of five steps: (1) CSR Awareness, (2) CSR Understanding, (3) CSR Embedding, (4) CSR Communication and (5) CSR Evaluation. It illustrated the importance of CSR evaluation in spite of the lack of it among the investigated small fashion companies. It supported the claims of several CSR scholars, who emphasised the impact of context on CSR understanding and CSR implementation. It reinforced the impact of the EU, particularly on the CSR implementation. It explained the findings on fashion consumers in relation to the academic literature. It critically discussed an important contribution of this research – CSR in developed versus CSR in developing countries. Lastly, it presented the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions.

8. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

8.1. Conclusions

This research investigated the social phenomenon of corporate social responsibility (CSR) across three contexts: (1) company size, (2) country and (3) industry. Particularly, it explored CSR in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece in the fashion industry. It explored the afore-mentioned contexts through two distinct stakeholders – owners/managers and consumers. It achieved the afore-said exploration through employment of qualitative methods (CIS, interviews, focus groups and netnographic research). It answered three research questions, which were created based on a detailed literature review (presented in Chapter 2). Chapter 4, 5 and 6 answered each of the following research questions.

RQ: How is CSR perceived across countries?

RQ 1: How do fashion SME owners/managers from South-East Europe understand CSR and its implementation?

RQ 2: How do fashion consumers from South-East Europe understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities?

This exploratory research was led by the first broad question, which focused on CSR and CSR implementation across the four chosen SEE countries. Through critical interpretive synthesis (CIS), this research reviewed 39 papers, which depicted the diversity and dynamics of CSR in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. The review presented a lack of CSR mentality in the society and an absence of a thorough implementation of CSR amongst companies. It showed that CSR implementation is not voluntary, but mainly occurs due to the pressure of national, regional and international actors. It revealed that companies located in these countries mainly perceive CSR as a strategic tool. Yet, the perception of CSR varies across company size and industry. Although only a few papers focused on SME, those investigating SMEs claimed that SMEs rarely implement CSR because SME owners and managers perceive CSR activities as expensive. Large companies, to a certain extent, implement and report CSR; they consider CSR as a strategic tool that aids their organisational goals. The review showed that the CSR perception and implementation differ amongst industry sectors, too. CSR is strategic among banking and telecommunication, and it is

ethical and legal among food and education sector. The review showed that national context influences the implementation of CSR among companies. The unique situations of each of the four countries shape the application of CSR. The review also presented the importance of a regional actor, such as the EU, in the CSR application. EU impacts the CSR implementation in a national level. Particularly, EU impacts the CSR implementation among these four SEE countries. The review showed that companies in EU-member states in SEE (Croatia and Greece) implement CSR to a larger extent than companies in non-EU member states in the region (Kosovo and Albania). The review ascribed this greater performance to the regional legislation and guidelines (e.g., Directive 2014/95/EU on non-financial reporting) directed towards companies in EU member states (Croatia and Greece). The review presented the legislation, guidelines, standards, forums, and prizes/awards for each country – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. It contributed in three areas. First, it provided an initial attempt of CSR conceptualisation in SEE context. Second, it developed a typology, which led to a four-level conceptual framework. The framework presented the institutional pressure faced by companies embracing CSR (in these four countries). It identified four actor levels: 1) company, 2) national, 3) regional, and 4) international level. The framework can serve as a guide for companies located in SEE willing to adopt CSR. Third, the review served as a base for the rest of the research. It supported the researcher's investigation choices by pointing out new research gaps and reinforcing the identified research gaps in the academic literature. It showed that (1) CSR scholars in SEE neglect SMEs, (2) CSR studies in SEE lack theoretical application, (3) CSR studies in SEE lack industry-focus, (4) CSR studies among these countries have insufficient quality appraisal, (5) EU plays a crucial role in the CSR application in the region and (6) no previous study investigated this group of countries and no previous study explored the differences between companies in EU and non-EU member countries in SEE.

The first broad research question led to the wording of the second narrowed research question (denoted as RQ 1), which asked: How do fashion SME managers/owners from South-East Europe understand CSR and its implementation? This research answered this question through 22 face-to-face and online one-to-one semi-structured interviews with SME owners and managers. It depicted the SME owners' and managers' understanding of CSR and its implementation. Throughout this investigation, the researcher noticed differences (a) at individual level, (b) company level, (c) national level and (d) regional institutionalisation level. Interview findings showed that the

majority of SME owners and managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece are informed of CSR and understand the term. Their awareness depended on their age, education, curiosity and current and past work experiences. In addition, the nature of company (commercial, social and sustainable) impacted their familiarity with the concept. Their awareness differentiated between countries. Croatian and Greek interviewees were well-informed of CSR. Kosovar and Albanian interviewees recognised CSR, but neglected important dimensions of it. The latter, also were only introduced to the term during the last decade. Interview findings revealed that the country's development and regional position impacted interviewees' awareness and understanding of CSR. Owners and managers of SMEs located in Croatia and Greece (part of the EU) have a more inclusive definition of CSR than owners and managers of SMEs located in Kosovo and Albania (not part of the EU). The former SME owners and managers addressed CSR through contexts (mainly the fashion industry context) and identified several stakeholders in their conceptualisations. The latter neglected the context-specific conceptualisation and focused mostly on employees. In terms of CSR implementation, the findings showed that implementation differs according to the company size, company nature and company location. Medium-sized companies followed a five-step process (as presented in the Discussion chapter). They apply more diverse and wide-ranging CSR activities than small-sized companies. Small-sized companies follow a four-step process; they neglect the evaluation of CSR activities. They apply less formal and less-inclusive CSR activities mainly due to the lack of economic resources. Findings also demonstrated that the company nature shapes the CSR implementation. Commercial SMEs focus on activities that highlight the ethical and economic parts of CSR; social SMEs put emphasis on activities related to the social and environmental dimensions, and sustainable SMEs adopt activities that emphasises their work on the environmental and ethical aspects of CSR. In terms of location, interview findings showed that there is also a difference amongst countries. SMEs located in Kosovo and Albania focused on internal CSR activities; SMEs located in Croatia and Greece applied internal and external CSR activities but put emphasis on the external activities. The former SMEs were advised to follow guidelines on CSR; the latter were obliged to follow CSR legislations. Lastly, by answering this research question, this research contributed in several areas. First, it presented the perceptions of SME owners/managers of a region which has rarely grabbed the attention of CSR scholars (compared to other regions). Second, it showed the factors influencing the CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in these four SEE countries. Third, it

provided an exploration of the process of CSR implementation across different contexts – it identified the main steps in this process. Fourth, it illustrated the process of CSR communication among SMEs in an empirical framework (Figure 5.2). Fifth, it provided the SMEs with a detailed illustration of the CSR implementation process.

This research answered the last research question, depicted as RQ 2 – how do fashion consumers from South-East Europe understand CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is the consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities? It answered it through the help of nine focus groups and four netnographic research in each of the four-mentioned SEE countries. First, it depicted the consumption process of Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion consumers. It identified the modes of consumption, purchasing frequency, purchasing drivers and post-consumption practices for each country investigated. This first part provided this research with genuine responses of focus group participants and netnography members and commenters about their consumption process. This part was illustrated in an empirical framework (Figure 6.1). Focus group and netnographic findings showed that Kosovars are the only fashion consumers, who did not claim or show conscious practice (with few expectations). A few practices, such as donating and giving clothes away, were unconsciously responsible practices. Albanian consumers mentioned their conscious practices, but such practices were not observed in the netnographic research. Croatian and Greek consumers, on the other hand, mentioned and showed several conscious practices of theirs (such as environmental-friendly purchases, less purchases and ethically produced purchases). Second, this research portrayed the CSR awareness, understanding and its impact on purchasing decisions of Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek fashion consumers. Kosovar and Albanian fashion consumers were not truly aware of CSR. Croatian and Greek fashion consumers were well-aware of the concept. The former (Kosovars and Albanians) consumers understood CSR as company's responsibility towards consumers and employees. The latter (Croatian and Greek) consumers viewed CSR as the responsibility towards employees and the environment. In terms of purchases behaviour and intention, this research showed that the CSR implementation of Croatian and Greek fashion SMEs influence the purchases of the participants from these countries. CSR implementation of Kosovar and Albanian fashion SMEs does not impact the purchases of participants from these countries. Focus groups discussions revealed consumers' views about their impact on the CSR implementation of fashion SMEs. Their views

were mainly divided into two groups: (a) consumers can influence the CSR application of fashion SMEs and (b) consumers cannot influence the CSR application of fashion SMEs. Kosovar participants were the only ones, who claimed that the influence is achieved through a joint effort (consumers and fashion SMEs). Lastly, the focus group and netnographic findings showed that Kosovar and Albanian consumers were not content with the CSR communication from fashion SMEs in their countries. Croatian and Greek consumers were content with the CSR tools applied by fashion SMEs in Croatia and Greece, respectively.

Overall, this research provided the cross-national differences among four SEE countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece – regarding CSR awareness, understanding and implementation. It presented the multifaceted reality through two social entities – owners/managers and consumers.

8.2. Limitations and Future Research

8.2.1. Limitations

Despite its valuable contributions, this research does not lack limitations. The methodological limitations were discussed in detail throughout Chapter 3. This section provides some of the other limitations. First, the four-level theoretical framework (Figure 4.7) does not necessarily cover every SEE country. Its authenticity applies only to the chosen SEE countries – Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece. This research employed Matten and Moon's (2008) framework for explaining the levels of CSR operation, whereas it could have used other frameworks to avoid neglecting other relevant aspects of CSR. During the CIS review, this research reviewed only journal and conference articles and neglected individual, national, regional and international reports, book chapters and theses. This review did not focus distinctly on the individual level of CSR operation. Such a focus could have led to a different framework. In terms of the fashion industry, this research focused only on B2C fashion SMEs. The four investigated countries have a large number of B2B fashion companies, and they could have offered this research another perspective of CSR. Lastly, this research did not present the impact of COVID-19 on CSR implementation and consumer behaviours.

8.2.2 Future Research

It would be informative to explore/examine other SEE countries that this research did not include, such as Romania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Future scholars can cover different industries (besides the fashion industry) and contribute to the industry context of CSR. Scholars willing to understand CSR in the region could use alternative review approaches, depending on their review objectives. They could compare states of voluntary or binding practices by employing different methods. Future scholars aiming to review the CSR in the SEE region could apply a different time limit, for instance, a ten-year-long period. A longer period could present differing findings. Scholars willing to adopt institutional theory in their research could explain the levels of CSR operation through Scott's (2008) three pillars of institutionalism or any other pillars/frameworks. Scholars could apply other theories relevant to their purposes. By providing a theoretical lens in their research, they could advance the integration of theory in CSR studies (Wang et al., 2020). Lastly, future research could apply or test the (1) four-level conceptual framework, (2) CSR awareness frameworks (on consumers and SME owners and managers) and (3) CSR communication framework. They could support or verify their authenticity and application in other developing countries or test the framework applications by involving CSR specialists.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 2.1 Evolution of CSR definitions (the table is adopted from James (2012), McGeough (2015) and Kim et al. (2018), but it is created based on the researcher's understanding)

Author/Year	Definition	Main Dimensions	Focus Area	
Bowen (1953)	"It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society (p. 6)".	Social	Philanthropic CSR: Community development; Poverty alleviation; Responsibility to the society;	1950s and 1960s
Heald (1957)	"CSR is recognition on the part of management of an obligation to the society it serves not only for maximum economic performance but for humane and constructive social policies as well (p. xi)".	Economic Social Altruistic		
Davis (1960)	"Businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest (p. 70)".	Managerial Economic		
Frederick (1960)	"[Social responsibilities] mean that businessmen should oversee the operation of an economic system that fulfils the expectations of the public. And this means in turn that the economy's means of production should be employed in such a way that production and distribution should enhance total socio-economic welfare (p. 57)".	Economic Social		
McGuire (1963)	"The idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations			

	but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations... the corporation must take an interest in politics, in the welfare of the community, in education, in the “happiness” of its employees, and, in fact, in the whole social world about it. Therefore, business must act “justly,” as a proper citizen should (p. 144)”.	Economic Legal Social Ethical		
Davis and Blomstrom (1966)	“Social responsibility, therefore, refers to a person’s obligation to consider the effects of his decisions and actions on the whole social system. Businessmen apply social responsibility when they consider the needs and interest of others who may be affected by business actions. In so doing, they look beyond their firm’s narrow economic and technical interests (p. 12)”.	Social Ethical		
Friedman (1970)	“There is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud (p. 55).”	Economic		1970s and 1980s
Committee for Economic Development (1971)	“CSR refers to the “business functions by public consent and its basic purpose is to serve constructively the needs of society—to the satisfaction of society (p. 16)”.	Social		
Johnson (1971)	1. “A socially responsible firm is one whose managerial staff balances a multiplicity of interests. Instead of striving only for larger profits for its	Stakeholder		

	stockholders, a responsible enterprise also takes into account employees, suppliers, dealers, local communities, and the nation (p. 50)”. 2.” Social responsibility states that businesses carry out social programs to add profits to their organization (p. 54)”. 3. “A socially responsible entrepreneur or manager is one who has a utility function of the second type, such that he is interested not only in his own well-being but also in that of the other members of the enterprise and that of his fellow citizens (p. 68)”. 4. “The goals of the enterprise, like those of the consumer, are ranked in order of importance and that targets are assessed for each goal. These target levels are shaped by a variety of factors, but the most important are the firm’s past experience with these goals and the past performance of similar business enterprises; individuals and organizations generally want to do at least as well as others in similar circumstances (p. 73)”.	/Social Economic Altruistic Competitiveness	Regulated CSR: Socio-economic priorities; Corporate reputation; Ethical and legal responsibilities Additional CSR responsibilities /commitments; Stakeholder relationship management; Bridging/narrowing the ‘governance gap’	
Eells and Walton (1974)	“In its broadest sense, corporate social responsibility represents a concern with the needs and goals of society which goes beyond the merely economic. Insofar as the business system as it exists today can only survive in an effectively functioning free society, the corporate social responsibility movement represents a	Social		

	broad concern with business's role in supporting and improving that social order (247)".			
Backman (1975)	"Social responsibility usually refers to the objectives or motives that should be given weight by business in addition to those dealing with economic performance (e.g., profits) (p. 2)".	Social		
Carroll (1979)	"The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time (500)".	Economic Legal Ethical		
Jones (1980)	"Corporate Social Responsibility is the notion that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law and union contract. Two facets of this definition are critical. First, the obligation must be voluntarily adopted; behaviour influenced by the coercive forces of law or union contract is not voluntary. Second, the obligation is a broad, extending beyond the traditional duty to shareholders to other societal groups such as customers, employees, suppliers, and neighbouring communities (p. 59-60)".	Obligation Stakeholder Voluntariness Social		
Epstein (1987)	"Corporate social responsibility relates primarily to achieving outcomes from organizational decisions concerning specific issues or problems which (by some normative standard) have beneficial rather than adverse effects	Economic Stakeholder		

	on pertinent corporate stakeholders. The normative correctness of the products of corporate action have been the main focus of corporate social responsibility (p. 104)".	Normative		
Carroll (1991)	"The CSR firm should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical, and be a good corporate citizen... There is a natural fit between the idea of corporate social responsibility and an organization's stakeholders. The word "social" in CSR has always been vague and lacking in specific direction as to whom the corporation is responsible. The concept of stakeholder personalizes social or societal responsibilities by delineating the specific groups or persons business should consider in its CSR orientation. Thus, the stakeholder nomenclature puts "names and faces" on the societal members who are most urgent to business, and to whom it must be responsive (p.43)".	Economic Legal Ethical Social Voluntariness/ Philanthropy Stakeholder		1990s and 2000s
Hopkins (1999)	"Corporate social responsibility is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a socially responsible manner. Stakeholders exist both within a firm and outside. Consequently, behaving socially responsibly will increase the human development of stakeholders both within and outside the corporation (p. 12)".	Stakeholder		
Khoury et al. (1999)	"Corporate social responsibility is the overall relationship of the corporation			

	with all of its stakeholders. These include customers, employees, communities, owners/investors, government, suppliers and competitors. Elements of social responsibility include investment in community outreach, employee relations, creation and maintenance of employment, environmental stewardship and financial performance (p. 37)".	Stakeholder Social Economic Environmental	Strategic CSR: Competitive strategy; Internationalisation of CSR standards; Transparency and accountability; Environmental protection	
World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000)	"Corporate social responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large."	Ethical Economic Social Stakeholder		
Commission of the European Communities (2001)	"A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis."	Social Environmental Economic Stakeholder Voluntariness		
Marsden (2001)	"Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is about the core behaviour of companies and the responsibility for their total impact on the societies in which they operate. CSR is not an optional add-on nor is it an act of philanthropy. A socially responsible corporation is one that runs a profitable business that takes account of all the positive and negative environmental, social and economic effects it has on society (p. 332)".	Economic Environmental Social Ethical		

McWilliams and Siegel (2001)	“Actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law (p. 504)”.	Social Voluntariness Legal		
Hopkins (2003)	“CSR is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner. ‘Ethically or responsible’ means treating stakeholders in a manner deemed acceptable in civilized societies. Social includes economic responsibility. Stakeholders exist both within a firm and outside. The wider aim of social responsibility is to create higher and higher standards of living, while preserving the profitability of the corporation, for peoples both within and outside the corporation (p. 127)”.	Stakeholder Ethical Economic Social		

Appendix 3.1 Literature review approaches (adopted by Snyder (2019) and prompted by Depraetere et al. (2021) findings)

Approach	Semi-systematic	Integrative/critical	Qualitative semi-systematic
Typical purpose	Overview research area and track development over time	Critique and synthesise	Overview research area and synthesise
Research questions	Broad	Narrow or broad	Open question; narrow or broad
Search strategy	May or may not be systematic	Usually not systematic	May or may not be systematic
Sample characteristics	Research articles	Research articles, books, and other published texts	Research articles, books, and other published texts
Analysis and evaluation	Qualitative/quantitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
Examples of contribution	State of knowledge; themes in literature; historical overview; research agenda; theoretical model	Taxonomy or classification; theoretical model or framework	State of knowledge; themes in literature; taxonomy or classification; research agenda; theoretical framework

Appendix 3.2 Search terms for each academic database for the four countries

Search Engine	Search Terms/Criteria and Filter	Number of Results
Google Scholar	Search Terms: “Corporate Social Responsibility” AND “CSR” AND “Albania”	2370
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	1250
	Search Terms: “Corporate Social Responsibility” AND “CSR” AND “Croatia”	6650
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	3780
	Search Terms: “Corporate Social Responsibility” AND “CSR” AND “Greece”	17700
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	8480
	Search Terms: “Corporate Social Responsibility” AND “CSR” AND “Kosovo”	1700
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	755
EBSCOHost	Search Terms: TX corporate social responsibility AND TX CSR AND TX Albania	78
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	36
	Search Terms: TX corporate social responsibility AND TX CSR AND TX Croatia	253
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	161
	Search Terms: TX corporate social responsibility AND TX CSR AND TX Greece	956

	Time Filter: 2017-2022	607
	Search Terms: TX corporate social responsibility AND TX CSR AND TX Kosovo	49
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	25
StarPlus	Search Criteria Search for: Everything Material Type: All Items Search Filters: Any field contains Corporate Social Responsibility AND Any field contains Albania	36
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	14
	Search Criteria Search for: Everything Material Type: All Items Search Filters: Any field contains Corporate Social Responsibility AND Any field contains Croatia	324
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	137
	Search Criteria Search for: Everything Material Type: All Items Search Filters: Any field contains Corporate Social Responsibility AND Any field contains Greece	391
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	173
	Search Criteria Search for: Everything Material Type: All Items	76

	Search Filters: Any field contains Corporate Social Responsibility AND Any field contains Kosovo	
	Time Filter: 2017-2022	25

Appendix 3.3 CIS data-extraction template

Authors	Year of Publication	Journal or Conference Title	Country Focus	Level of Analysis	Methodological Approach	Theoretical Approach
Jupe and Bejko	2020	Muhasebe Bilim Dünyası Dergisi	Albania	Industry (banking)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires and secondary data: financial reports)	None
Nure	2017	4 th International Conference on Education and Social Sciences- Challenges towards the Future	Albania	Industry (banking)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: 6 websites; annual reports, codes of conduct, social responsibility reports)	Legitimacy Theory
Proda	2017	European Journal of Research and Reflection in Management Sciences	Albania	Company (43 companies)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: legal acts)	None
Thanasi-Boçe and Kurtishi-Kastrati	2021	Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy	Albania and North Macedonia	Industry (education)	Empirical: Quantitative/ (Secondary data: 14 websites)	None
Levkov and Palamidovska-Sterjadovska	2019	Management Research and Practice	Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia	Cross-cultural (6 countries)/ Industry (banking)/ Company (102 banks)	Empirical: Quantitative (Secondary data: 102 websites)	Legitimacy and Stakeholder Theoretical Perspectives
Minoja, Kocollari and Cavicchioli	2022	International Journal of Cross Cultural Management	Albania, Italy and Germany	Individual (360 business students)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None

Serafimova	2017	Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management	Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey and Rumania	Cross-cultural (5 countries)/	Conceptual Paper	None
Melovic, Milovic, Backovic-Vulic, Branislav Dudic and Bajzik	2019	Sustainability	Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia	Cross-cultural (5 countries)/ Individual (2410 employees)	Conceptual and Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Barić, Omazić and Aleksić	2021	Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems	Croatia	Industry (manufacturing, motor vehicles and motorcycles industries)/ Company (78 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Arraino and Hategan	2019	European Journal of Sustainable Development	Croatia and Bulgaria	Cross-cultural (11 countries)/ Company (275 companies)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: reports)	None
Butković, Tomšić and Kaselj	2021	Business Systems Research: International Journal of the Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy	Croatia	Industry (construction)/ Company (12 companies)	Conceptual and Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Collaborative CSR Strategy Model
Dropulić and Čular	2019	Management : Journal of Contemporary	Croatia	Industry (insurance)/ Company (24 companies)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: annual	None

		Management Issues			reports and 24 websites)	
Golja	2019	E-Journal of Tourism	Croatia	Industry (hospitality)/ Company (17 companies)/	Conceptual and Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Leadership and Trait Theory
Perić and Turalija	2018	Econviews: Review of Contemporary Business, Entrepreneurship and Economic Issues	Croatia	Company (95 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: online questionnaires)	None
Vučemilović	2019	Econviews: Review of Contemporary Business, Entrepreneurship and Economic Issues	Croatia	Industry (food processing)/ Company (4 companies)/ Individual (50 employees)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Vukusic and Peronja	2018	27th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development	Croatia	Industry (banking)/ Individual (102 clients and 73 employees)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Licastro and Sergi	2021	Cleaner Engineering and Technology	Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia and Serbia	Cross-cultural (4 countries)	Systematic literature review	None
Lu, Ren, Zhang, Qiao, Kovacova, and Streimikis	2020	Technological and Economic Development of Economy	Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro	Cross-Cultural (3 countries)/ Individuals (30 entrepreneurs, 30 policy makers and	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Institutional Environment Approach

				30 academic experts)		
Apospori	2018	Sustainability	Greece	Industry (tourism)/ Company (104 companies)	Conceptual and Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Three-Dimensional Framework
Chatzoglou, Chatzoudes, Amarantou and Aggelidis	2017	EuroMed Journal of Business	Greece	Company (80 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Three-Dimensional Conceptual Framework
Costopoulou, Ntaliani, and Ntalianis	2018	9th International Conference on Information, Intelligence, Systems and Applications	Greece	Industry (food and beverage)/ Company (222 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Secondary data: websites)	None
Glaveli	2021	European Management Review	Greece and Bulgaria	Cross-cultural (2 countries)/ Industry (telecommunication)/ Individual (514 customers)	Conceptual and Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: online and hardcopy questionnaires)	Stakeholder Theory
Magrizos, Apospori, Carrigan and Jones	2021	European Management Journal	Greece	Company (102 companies)	Empirical: Mixed methods (Qualitative Prestudy and Quantitative Study)	Stakeholder Approach (Mitchell et al.'s (1997) model)
Panagiotopoulos	2021	International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility	Greece	Industry (15 industries)/ Company (15 companies)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: websites and reports)	CSR Theory
Papacharalampous and Papadimitriou	2021	Human Resource Development Quarterly	Greece	Company (23 companies)/ Individual (260 employees)	Conceptual and Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Social Identity Theory and Organisational Theory (positive organizational behavior)

Papacharalampos, Papadimitriou, and Anagnostopoulos	2019	Journal of Global Responsibility	Greece	Company (50 companies)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: CSR reports, annual reports and websites)	Institutional Theory, Legitimacy Theory and Stakeholder Theory
Partalidou, Zafeiriou, Giannarakis, and Sariannidis	2020	Benchmarking: An International Journal	Greece	Industry (food)/ Company (45 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Secondary data: annual data from Thomson Reuter Global Equity Index)	Instrumental Stakeholder Theory; Natural Resource-Based View; and Legitimacy Theory
Pitoska, Giannakis and Sdraka	2018	Journal of Governance and Regulation	Greece	Company (420 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Proikaki, Nikolaou, Jones, Malesios, Dimitrakopoulos and Evangelinos	2018	Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics	Greece	Individual (858 residents)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Trivellas, Dekoulou, Polychroniou and Tokakis	2021	International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences	Greece	Industry (tourism)/ Individual (245 employees)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Competing Values Framework
Trivellas, Rafailidis, Polychroniou and Dekoulou	2019	International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences	Greece	Individuals (94 employees)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Tsourvakas and Yfantidou	2018	Social Responsibility Journal	Greece	Company (2 companies)/ Individual (153 employees)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Vlachos, Panagopoulos, Bachrach and Morgeson	2017	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Greece	Individual (427 employees and 45 managers)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Attribution and Social Learning Theories/ Multilevel Social Influence Theory (developed)

Bekteshi, Alshiqi and Ramushi	2021	Baltic Journal of Economic Studies	Kosovo	Individual (390 employees)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: online and hardcopy questionnaires)	None
Berisha, Ismail and Hoxha	2022	Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review	Kosovo	Organisation (12 organisations)/ Industry (education)	Empirical: Qualitative (Secondary data: legal acts, reports and documents, and primary data: structured interviews)	Legal Framework
Grabner-Kräuter, Breitenacker and Tafolli	2021	Business Ethics, the Environment and Responsibility	Kosovo	Individual (297 employees)	Empirical: Mixed methods (Qualitative Prestudy and Quantitative Study)	Needs-based Approach
Nimani, Zeqiraj and Spahija	2022	Journal of Governance and Regulation	Kosovo	Company (40 companies)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	None
Tafolli and Grabner-Kräuter	2020	Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society	Kosovo	Individual (434 employees)/ Industry (banking)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: questionnaires)	Social Learning Theory and Theory of Social Exchange
Vila, Sklavounos, Vergos, Rotsios, and Shabanaj	2020	KnE Social Sciences	Kosovo	Company (TITAN-Sharrcem Company)/ Individual (174 residents)	Empirical: Quantitative (Primary data: online and hardcopy questionnaires)	Stakeholder Lens

Appendix 3.4 Journal titles and conference names

Journal Title	Count
Baltic Journal of Economic Studies	1
Benchmarking: An International Journal	1
Business Ethics, the Environment and Responsibility	1
Business Systems Research: International Journal of the Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy	1
Cleaner Engineering and Technology	1
Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review	1
Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society	1
Econviews: Review of Contemporary Business, Entrepreneurship and Economic Issues	2
E-Journal of Tourism	1
EuroMed Journal of Business	1
European Journal of Research and Reflection in Management Sciences	1
European Journal of Sustainable Development	1
European Management Journal	1
European Management Review	1
Human Resource Development Quarterly	1
Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems: INDECS	1
International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility	1
International Journal of Cross Cultural Management	1
International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences	2
Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics	1
Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management	1
Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy	1
Journal of Global Responsibility	1
Journal of Governance and Regulation	2

Journal of Organizational Behavior	1
KnE Social Sciences	1
Management Research and Practice	1
Management: Journal of Contemporary Management Issues	1
Muhasebe Bilim Dünyası Dergisi	1
Social Responsibility Journal	1
Sustainability	2
Technological and Economic Development of Economy	1
Total of Journals	36

Conference Name	Count
27th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development	1
9th International Conference on Information, Intelligence, Systems and Applications	1
4th International Conference on Education and Social Sciences- Challenges towards the Future	1
Total of Conferences	3
TOTAL	39

Appendix 3.5 Interview guiding questions

As seen in the table below, the researcher followed the suggestions of Castillo-Montaya (2016) and ensured the interview questions included (1) introductory questions, (2) transition questions, (3) key questions and (4) closing questions. The questions below served as a baseline for the interviews. Due to the flexible nature of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher created room for follow-up and prompt questions based on the interviewees' responses. Forethoughtfully, the researcher developed potential follow-up questions (presented in the table below).

<u>INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS</u>
<i>Basic information about the participant and their company</i>
a) Interviewee name b) Job position c) Company information i) Company nature, ii) Employee count, iii) Customer categories/demographics iv) Geographic sales allocation
1. Are you familiar with the term ‘Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)’? Potential follow-up questions: When were you first introduced to it? By whom? a) According to you, what does ‘Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)’ mean? 2. According to you, what is a responsible company? a) Do you think that the size of the company matters regarding a company’s responsibility? b) Why/Why not?
<u>TRANSITION QUESTIONS</u>
3. Do you refer to your company as a responsible company? a) Why/Why not? 4. Could you define a responsible manager/owner in your own words? a) Do you refer to yourself as a responsible manager/owner? b) Why/Why not?

KEY QUESTIONS

5. Could you please describe how your company engages with CSR, CSR practices or activities?

Potential follow-up question: Does your company have a specific department that deals with CSR activities?

- a) If yes, how does it work? How big is the CSR team?
- b) If not, under which department it goes?

6. What are the main barriers you face when implementing CSR activities?

7. How do you communicate these CSR practices to your stakeholders (consumers, employees, media, local community, interest groups etc.)?

8. How do you track or measure the Corporate Social Responsibility impact?

a) Is CSR integrated into financial measurement, reporting, goal setting or decision-making?

9. Could you please provide some examples of the activities/practices you have implemented during the last two years to show that you are responsible?

a) Could you provide a few examples of the activities that you have taken in the last two years to build/achieve a productive employee-owner relationship?

b) Could you provide a few examples of the activities that you have taken in the last two years to build/achieve a consumer-owner relationship?

10. In your opinion, what are the main motives a small and medium company in the fashion sector employs a CSR strategy?

a) Could you explain the reasons your company follows such a strategy?

11. Do you consider the CSR actions taken by your company to have any impact on it?

Potential questions about CSR implementation by SMEs during the COVID-19

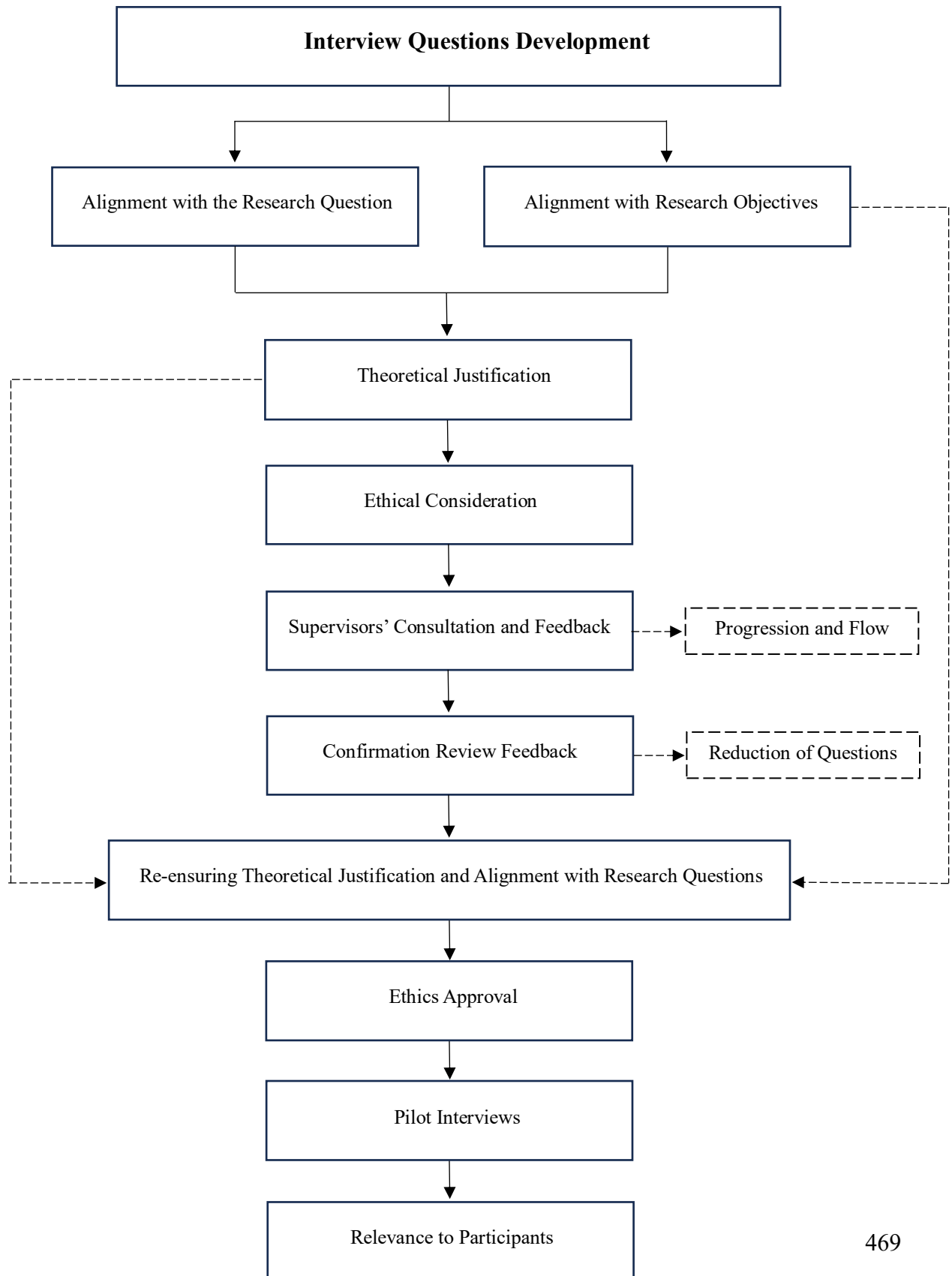
How did you tackle the social, economic and environmental challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Potential follow-up question(s):

- a) What CSR activities did you take as a company during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- b) Why did you engage in CSR activities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- c) How did you communicate your CSR messages to your customers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- d) Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way your company deals with CSR? If yes, how?

<u>CLOSING QUESTIONS</u>
12. Is there any suggestion you would like to provide to SME owners/managers implementing CSR?
Is there anything that you would you like to add, that we have not discussed during this interview?

Appendix 3.6 Development of interview questions, their theoretical justification and their alignment with the research objectives



Developing the final set of questions for the in-depth semi-structured interviews with fashion SME owners/managers included careful consideration. The figure above portrays the factors involved in this process and visualises each step of it. The researcher followed Castillo-Montaya's (2016) suggestions about the interview questions development. As illustrated in the figure above, the researcher ensured this process involved (1) alignment of interview questions with the research question(s), (2) inquiry-based questions, (3) feedback and (4) pilot interview(s). Initially, the questions were created based on **RQ1** and its objectives presented in the confirmation review document. The questions were also related to the concepts identified in the theoretical framework presented in the confirmation review document (theoretical justification). The researcher considered the ethical implications of each question and ensured the questions provided no harm or discomfort to interviewees (Bell and Bryman, 2009; Bryman, 2015; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Both supervisors offered feedback; they recommended that questions had progression and flow. The researcher took into consideration their recommendations. The researcher presented the fifteen interview questions in her confirmation review document and received feedback from examiners. Examiners suggested reducing the number of questions to fit the busy schedule of elite interviewees. Consequently, the researcher (in consultation with the supervisors) decided to decrease the number of questions. The researcher also considered the suggestions of Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), Brinkmann (2016; 2020) and Roberts (2020) and reassured the questions were theoretically justified and aligned with the refined **RQ1** – How do fashion SME managers/owners from South-East European countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand and implement CSR? – and its objectives. As seen in Appendix 3.5, the researcher established non-judgmental, open-ended and inviting unique-interpretations-of-experience questions (Roberts, 2020). The University Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved the interview questions. Furthermore, the researcher confirmed the questions generated valuable insights by conducting two pilot interviews. The pilot interviews offered the opportunity to refine the questions; they helped the researcher determine the final set of guiding questions and sub-questions. For instance, in addition to the first question, the researcher added mini-tour questions (refer to questions 2-4 in Appendix 3.5) to attain additional detail to the interviewees' awareness and understanding of the CSR concept. Given the nature of the elite interviews, the researcher followed the recommendations provided by Ma et al. (2021) and Solarino and Aguinis (2021). Accordingly, before the interviews, the researcher considered each interviewee's background to

build trust and respect between the interviewer and the interviewee, and she ensured questions were relevant and adaptable to them. The researcher assured to follow Roberts' (2020) suggestions and embraced an informant-centered attitude during the interviews. The table below portrays the final set of guiding questions and sub-questions, their theoretical justification and their alignment with the research objectives.

Question/ Sub-question	Theoretical Justification	Alignment with Research Objectives
1. Are you familiar with the term 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)'? Potential follow-up questions: When were you first introduced to it? By whom? a) According to you, what does 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)' mean?	Justification: Literature shows a lack of studies focusing on managers' perceptions in small and medium-sized enterprises. Literature: Li et al. (2016); Stoian and Plakoyiannaki (2023) Justification: SMEs provide a thought-provoking ground for future studies focusing on managers' perceptions of CSR. Literature: Stoian and Plakoyiannaki (2023); Szegedi et al. (2023)	(1) Investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion SME managers/owners from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about CSR
2. According to you, what is a responsible company? a) Do you think that the size of the company matters regarding a company's responsibility? b) Why/Why not?		(1) Investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion SME managers/owners from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about CSR
3. Do you refer to your company as a responsible company? a) Why/Why not?		(1) Investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion SME managers/owners from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about CSR

4. Could you define a responsible manager/owner in your own words? a) Do you refer to yourself as a responsible manager/owner? b) Why/Why not?		(1) Investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion SME managers/owners from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about CSR
5. Could you please describe how your company engages with CSR, CSR practices or activities? Potential follow-up question: Does your company have a specific department that deals with CSR activities? a) If yes, how does it work? How big is the CSR team? b) If not, under which department it goes?	Justification: There is a need to understand how SMEs implement CSR practices because they have a crucial role in the national, regional and global economy. Literature: Hamann et al. (2017); Jamali et al. (2019) Justification: The CSR field lacks the conceptualisation of CSR implementation. Literature: Fatima and Elbanna (2023) Justification: CSR scholars should investigate the process of CSR implementation through diversification of the geographical location. Literature: Fatima and Elbanna (2023)	(2) Understand the process of CSR implementation by fashion SME in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
6. What are the main barriers you face when implementing CSR activities?	Justification: Different industry sectors may be influenced by different barriers in the CSR implementation process. Literature: Zhang et al. (2019)	(2) Understand the process of CSR implementation by fashion SME in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
7. How do you communicate these CSR practices to your stakeholders (consumers, employees, media, local	Justification: It is important to investigate if and how CSR communication affects consumer behavior. Literature: Bartikowski and Guido Berens (2021)	(2) Understand the process of CSR implementation by fashion SME in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)

community, interest groups etc.)?	Justification: Investigating CSR communication tools is vital as CSR communication “enables enhancing corporate and product brands with positive associations, improving customer and other stakeholder responses (p. 386)” Literature: Fernández et al. (2022)	
8. How do you track or measure the Corporate Social Responsibility impact? a) Is CSR integrated into financial measurement, reporting, goal setting or decision-making?	Justification: Most CSR scholars have neglected CSR evaluation in the CSR implementation process. Literature: Fatima and Elbanna (2023)	(2) Understand the process of CSR implementation by fashion SME in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
9. Could you please provide some examples of the activities/practices you have implemented during the last two years to show that you are responsible? a) Could you provide a few examples of the activities that you have taken in the last two years to build/achieve a productive employee-owner relationship? b) Could you provide a few examples of the activities that you have taken in the last two years to build/achieve a consumer-owner relationship?	Justification: CSR scholars emphasise the differences in CSR practices across countries. Literature: Kim et al. (2013); Hah and Freeman (2014); Kanji and Agrawal (2016) Justification: Future CSR scholars should explore CSR practices and activities through cross-country CSR studies. Literature: Mazboudi et al. (2020)	(3) Identify CSR practices/activities employed by fashion SME in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
10. In your opinion, what are the main motives a	Justification: There is a need to understand why SMEs	(4) Identify the main CSR drivers/motives of fashion

small and medium company in the fashion sector employs CSR? a) Could you explain the reasons your company applies CSR practices/activities?	implement CSR practices because they have a crucial role in the national, regional and global economy. Literature: Inyang (2013); Jorge et al. (2016); Spence (2016); Hamann et al. (2017); Jamali et al. (2019) Justification: Future studies should focus on drivers/motives of CSR in SMEs across different countries. Literature: Hamann et al. (2017); Jamali et al. (2017); Oduro et al. (2021) Justification: CSR drivers are embedded within specific contexts. Literature: Carroll (2021) Justification: CSR drivers in SMEs differ across countries and regions. Literature: Hamann et al. (2017); Rienda et al. (2022)	SMEs in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
11. Do you consider the CSR actions taken by your company to have any impact on it?	Justification: “[W]e know relatively little about the impact of CSR on SMEs (p. 292)” Literature: Magrizos et al. (2023)	(5) Uncover the opportunities CSR practices/activities present to fashion SME in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
12. Is there any suggestion you would like to provide to SME owners/managers implementing CSR?	Justification: Ending elite interviews with an open-ended discussion is important. It would especially be beneficial if the interviewee revealed new relevant information that was not discussed beforehand. Literature: Solarino and Aguinis (2021)	Possible alignment with all objectives
Closing remarks: Is there anything that you would like to add, that we have not discussed during this interview?		Possible alignment with all objectives

Appendix 3.7 Focus group guiding questions

Similar to the interview questions, the researcher adhered to the recommendations of Castillo-Montaya (2016) and ensured the focus group questions involved: (1) introductory questions, (2) transition questions, (3) key questions and (4) closing questions. The table below presents the guiding and follow-up questions. During the discussions, the researcher created room for other potential follow-up and prompt questions based on the responses of focus group(s) participants to delve deeper into areas of interest.

<u>INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS</u>
<i>Basic information about the participants</i>
a) Participant(s) name b) Age c) Gender d) Occupation e) City or region of residence
1. Could you please explain what you consider (take into account) when purchasing clothes from a small or medium shop? a) Could you describe why these factors are important to you?
<u>TRANSITION QUESTIONS</u>
2. What is your understanding of a socially responsible corporation? a) Are you familiar with the term ‘Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)’? b) According to you, what makes a company responsible? c) Could you explain how you perceive a responsible manager/owner by providing some examples?
3. How do you feel about small and medium companies implementing CSR practices? a) Do you, as a consumer, think that the size of the company influences a company’s social responsibility? i) Could you please support your argument?

KEY QUESTIONS

4. If the brand you intend to purchase from provides decent jobs, respects human rights, protects the environment, or gives charity – could you tell me if that will impact your purchasing intention and why?
- a) Could you describe other factors influencing your buying intentions?
5. Do you remember what clothes you bought the last time you went shopping?
- a) Did companies' responsible actions influence your buying?
- i) Could you tell me why or why not?
- b) What stood out to you when you decided to buy it? Why?
6. How many times have you purchased clothes from a brand/store because you considered that they are socially responsible?
- a) Could you please explain why did you act that way?
- b) How often do you follow your favorite fashion brand's CSR activities?
- c) Did you ever pay a premium price for any clothes because you deemed the brand as responsible?
- i) Why or why not?
7. Do you believe that as a consumer, you can impact such companies' will to adopt more responsible actions?
- a) Could you tell me why or why not?

Potential Questions about consumer perception of CSR implementation of fashion SMEs during the COVID-19

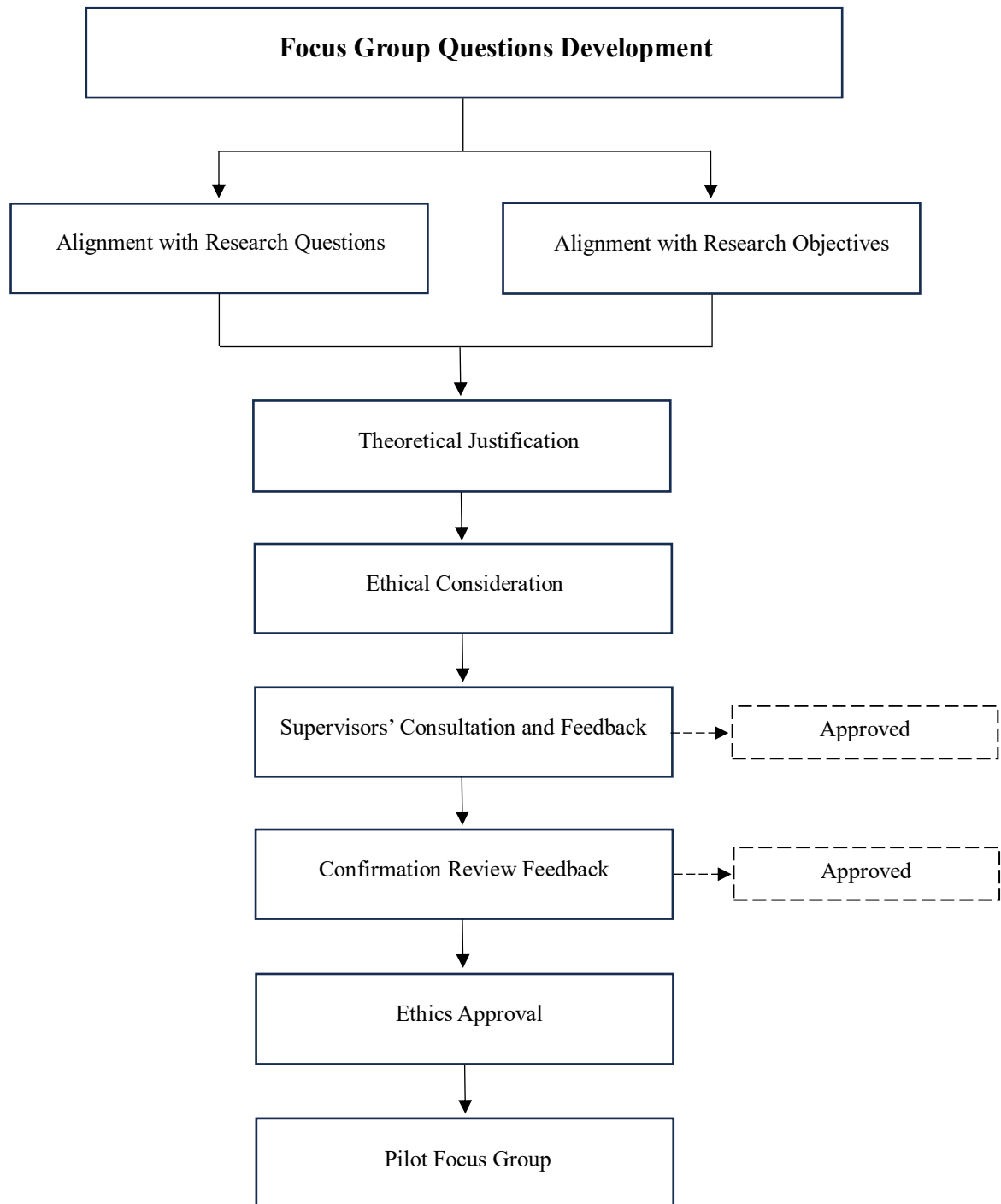
- a) How aware are you of CSR activities taken by fashion SMEs in response to COVID-19?
- b) How important is it for you to support fashion SMEs that prioritise CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- c) Have you engaged with any CSR activities undertaken by fashion SMEs to address COVID-19 challenges?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

8. Is there any suggestion you would like to provide to SME owners/managers who implement CSR practices within their organisations?

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed so far?

Appendix 3.8 Development of focus group questions, their theoretical justification and their alignment with the research objectives



Similarly to the in-depth semi-structured interview questions, the researcher ensured a well-thought-out development process for focus group questions. The figure above displays the process of developing these questions. The researcher followed Castillo-Montaya's (2016) suggestions and ensured the focus group questions (1) aligned with the research question(s), (2) followed an inquiry-based approach, (3) considered supervisors, examiners and UREC feedback and (4) evaluated using a pilot focus group. Firstly, the questions were aligned with **RQ2** – How do fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) understand CSR and CSR activities implemented by SMEs, and how, if at all, is consumers' behaviour affected by CSR activities? – and its objectives. Secondly, each question was theoretically justified (refer to the table below). The researcher followed Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) suggestions; she ensured ethical consideration for each question and avoided leading or biased questions. The researcher constructed engaging and productive questions and organised the questions to facilitate progression and flow. The questions were refined in accordance with the supervisors' feedback. The examiners in the confirmation review approved the suggested focus group questions. The University Research Ethics Committee also affirmed the questions. The researcher confirmed that questions generated valuable insights by conducting one pilot focus group. The researcher noticed that the questions contributed to two other objectives (in addition to the RQ2 objectives). The questions helped the researcher (i) uncover the fashion consumption practices of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece and (ii) understand the use of CSR and sustainability terms from SEE fashion consumers. The table below shows each focus group question and sub-question, their theoretical justification and their alignment with the research objectives.

Question/ Sub-question	Theoretical Justification	Alignment with Research Objectives
1) Could you please explain what you consider (take into account) when purchasing clothes from a small or medium shop? a) Could you describe why these factors are important to you?	Justification: Scholars claim that investigating the consumption practices among fashion consumers is crucial for understanding the impact of CSR activities.	(i) Uncover the fashion consumption practices of consumers from Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

	Literature: Jiang (2022); Vock (2022); Kim and Kim (2023)	
2) What is your understanding of a socially responsible corporation? a) Are you familiar with the term ‘Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)’? b) According to you, what makes a company responsible? c) Could you explain how you perceive a responsible manager/owner by providing some examples?	Justification: Scholars highlight the need to investigate further the perceptions of consumers about CSR, as most of the studies focus on attitudes and behavioural intentions, and “little research attends to perceptions (p. 444)” of CSR. Literature: Brunk and Boer (2020) Justification: Consumer perceptions differ across countries Literature: Vuković et al. (2020) Justification: Studies that focused on SMEs provided CSR conceptualisation of consumers from managers' perspectives (Musso and Risso, 2013; McCaffrey and Kurland, 2015) or did not highlight the company size (Bui, 2010). Given the lack of research in this context, the researcher deemed it important to understand the CSR perceptions of SME consumers. Literature: Safeer and Liu, (2023)	(1) Investigate the awareness and understanding of fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about CSR (ii) Understand the use of CSR and sustainability terms from SEE fashion consumers

3) How do you feel about small and medium companies implementing CSR practices? a) Do you, as a consumer, think that the size of the company influences a company's social responsibility? / Could you please support your argument?	Justification: The existing knowledge on consumers' perceptions and behaviours to CSR strategies implemented by SMEs is mainly based on consumers' perceptions and behaviours of CSR activities taken by large firms – large companies present a very different context from SMEs. Literature: Hamann et al., 2017; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019	(2) Explore the perceptions of fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about CSR activities implemented by fashion SMEs in SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
4) If the brand you intend to purchase from provides decent jobs, respects human rights, protects the environment, or gives charity – could you tell me if that will impact your purchasing intention and why? a) Could you describe other factors influencing your buying intentions?	Justification: Scholars call for future research to contribute to the CSR literature in the fashion industry by investigating the impact of CSR and its initiatives on consumer perceptions, attitudes and purchasing preferences. Literature: Lee and Lee, 2018; Zhang and Cui, 2018; Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Gazzola et al., 2022; Kim and Kim, 2023	(3) Uncover the impact of CSR on the purchasing intention and behaviour of fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
5) Do you remember what clothes you bought the last time you went shopping? a) Did companies' responsible actions influence your buying? i) Could you tell me why or why not? b) What stood out to you when you decided to buy it? Why?	Justification: CSR scholars recommend focusing on the impact of CSR and its initiatives on consumer attitudes and purchasing preferences in the other countries to see the impact of national context. Literature: Vatamanescu et al., 2021; Huo et al., 2022	(3) Uncover the impact of CSR on the purchasing intention and behaviour of fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)

6) How many times have you purchased clothes from a brand/store because you considered that they are socially responsible? a) Could you please explain why did you act that way? b) How often do you follow your favorite fashion brand's CSR activities? c) Did you ever pay a premium price for any clothes because you deemed the brand as responsible? / Why or why not?		(3) Uncover the impact of CSR on the purchasing intention and behaviour of fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
7) Do you believe that as a consumer, you can impact such companies' will to adopt more responsible actions? a) Could you tell me why or why not?	Justification: Most scholars investigating the impact of CSR on consumers and their purchasing decisions focused on the company perspective and avoided consumer perspective (e.g. Bhattacharya et al. 2020; Kuokkanen and Sun, 2020).	(4) Interpret the perceptions of fashion consumers from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece) about their (potential) impact on the CSR of fashion SMEs from SEE countries (Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece)
8) Is there any suggestion you would like to provide to SME owners/managers who implement CSR practices within their organisations?	Justification: Ending focus groups with an open-ended discussion provides valuable insights for the findings and creates feedback loop. Literature: Stewart and Shamdasani (2015)	Possible alignment with all objectives
Closing remarks: Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed so far?		Possible alignment with all objectives

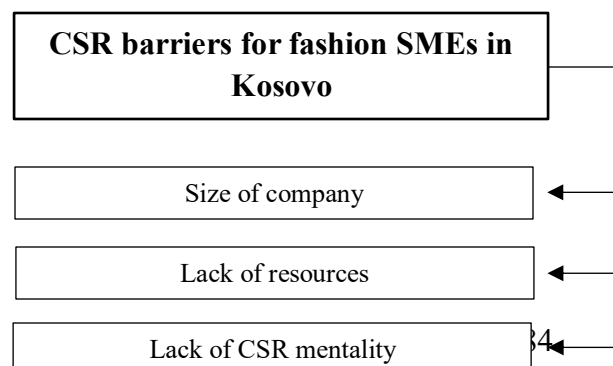
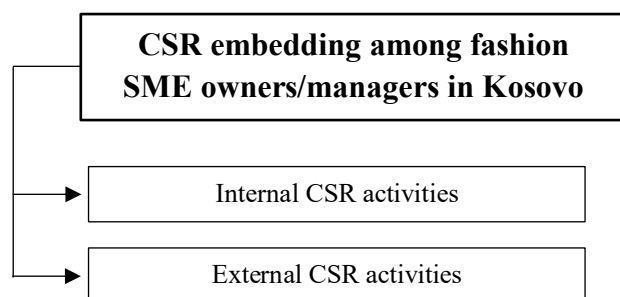
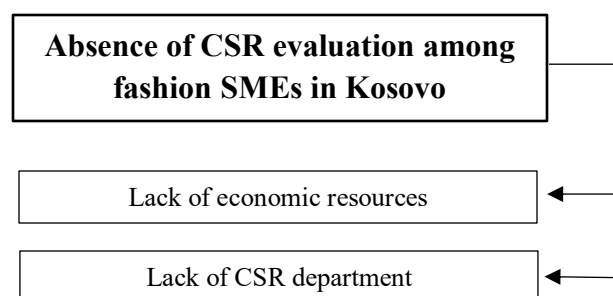
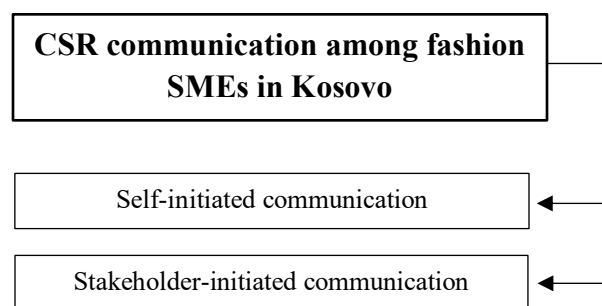
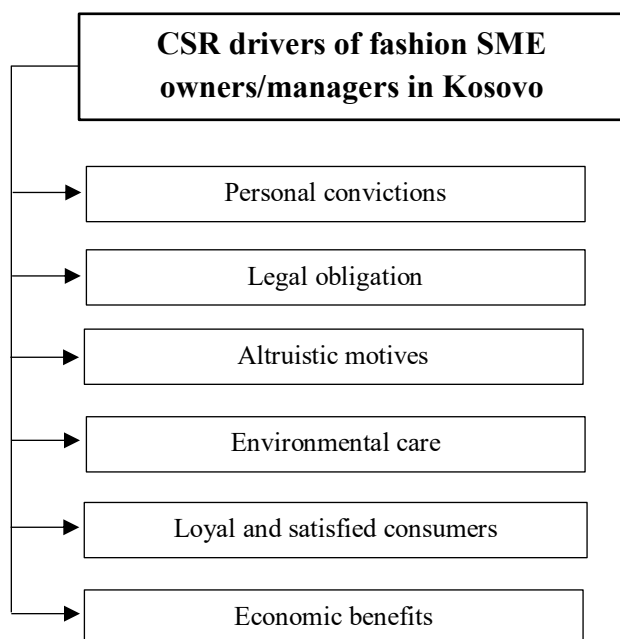
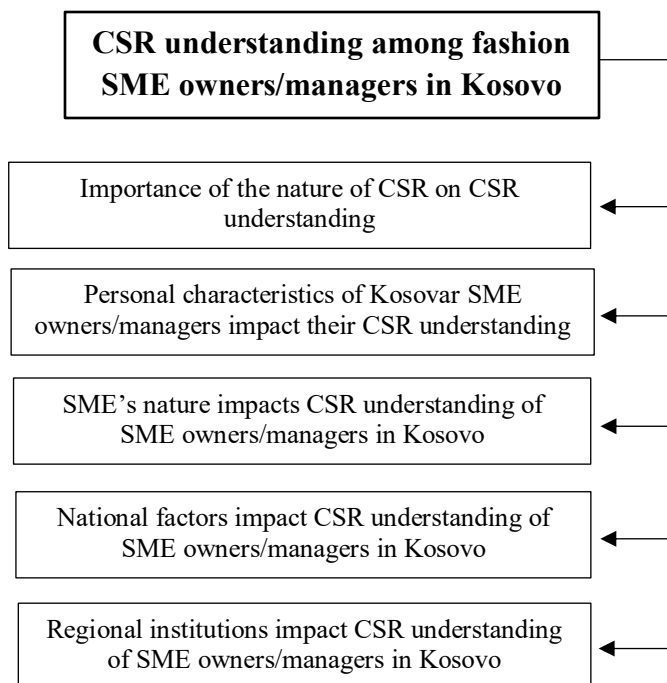
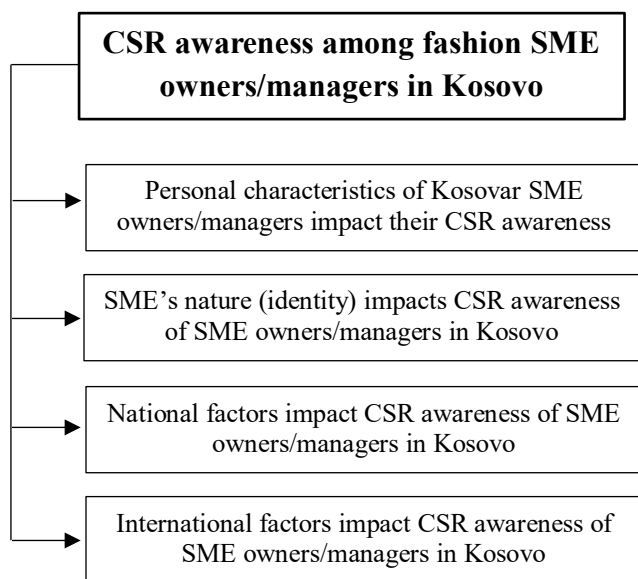
Appendix 3.9 Thematic analysis conducted for interviews with fashion SME owners/managers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

This appendix portrays in detail every step applied during the thematic analysis process of interviews for each of the four SEE countries – (1) Kosovo, (2) Greece, (3) Albania and (4) Croatia.

(1) Interviews in Kosovo

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
The researcher listened actively to the six audio interviews without taking notes. The researcher manually transcribed the interviews in the original language (Albanian) and then translated each into English. After the verbatim data transcription, the researcher printed thirty-one pages with data. The researcher immersed herself in the data by reading and re-reading the entire data set and writing down some preliminary notes (in her notebook). A few of these notes turned into initial codes. For instance: Note: Some of the interviewees were not enthusiastic about discussing their understanding of CSR Note: The main focus of discussion for all interviewees was employees, and a few others talked about the environment
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
The researcher started highlighting and writing down initial codes. The researcher conducted this process systematically throughout the entire data set. At first, the researcher generated around two hundred codes. They were data-driven (inductive). Afterwards, the researcher went back and forth a few times. During this phase, the researcher noted that she had produced similar codes. She decided to check the codes in relation to the first research question (theoretical-driven approach). The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2019) recommendation and assured to code every aspect of the data set, including the departing stories. The researcher visited a few times to this phase to refine codes until the last phase (writing of the findings). At the end of data coding, the researcher had mainly semantic coding. An example of semantic coding is presented below. Code: Traditional media as frequent means of CSR communication among Kosovar SME owners and managers Below is presented one of the data extracts for coding. <i>"We usually use the media to convey our CSR activities to different groups. Lately we've been very present in the traditional media. We've been covered by local and national media, mainly by radio stations and TV channels. Our enterprise has gained an outstanding attention..."</i> The researcher also adopted latent coding. For instance:

Code: Age impacts CSR awareness of fashion SME owners and managers from Kosovo The researcher generated such latent coding based on a combination of data extraction and context of discussion.
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
After coding the entire data set, the researcher generated initial themes and sub-themes based on the above-mentioned initial codes. The generated themes and sub-themes were data-driven. The researcher created a potential thematic map, which included five main themes and eighteen sub-themes. This map helped the researcher organise an overall conceptualisation of the key data patterns.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
The researcher checked if the themes and sub-themes worked well in relation to initial codes. The researcher noted the need to revise themes, sub-themes and codes. Before that, the researcher checked how each theme, sub-theme and code work in relation to RQ1 and the theoretical concepts (theoretical approach). The researcher noticed that a few changes were required. For example, after considering the theoretical concepts, the researcher renamed two codes from (a) self-initiated CSR activities and (b) stakeholder-initiated CSR activities into (a) implicit CSR activities and (b) explicit CSR activities. The researcher renamed the first theme from (1) lack of CSR awareness to (1) CSR awareness among fashion SME owners/managers in Kosovo. Although Byrne (2022) recommended naming themes similar to the initial version, the researcher deemed the second version a better fit for attaining readability for research of this complexity. During this phase, the researcher deleted a few codes and generated new themes and sub-themes. A new theme identified during this phase was “Absence of CSR evaluation among fashion SMEs in Kosovo.” The researcher portrayed all these changes in the map and the coding list. The researcher generated six themes and twenty-four sub-themes.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher generated clear definitions for each theme and sub-theme. The researcher assured to depict the latest changes in the thematic map. The final thematic map for interviews in Kosovo is presented at the end of this table (next page).
Phase 6: Writing the report
Once the researcher was satisfied with the final themes, sub-themes and codes, she wrote the report. This report was depicted in the Findings chapter (Chapter 5), precisely, from subchapter 5.1.1 until subchapter 5.7.1 Given the introductory nature of this research for Kosovo, the researcher adopted a combination of analytical and descriptive narrative to write the report and deemed it useful. This report was focused solely on Kosovo.



(2) Interviews in Greece

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
The researcher engaged in ‘active listening’ of the six audio interviews. The researcher transcribed the audio records into textual data and ensured a rigorous and verbatim transcript. Afterwards, the researcher printed the textual data (thirty-five pages). The researcher read a few times the transcript to get a thorough understanding of the data. The researcher documented the familiarisation notes in her notebook. A few examples of these notes are presented below. Note: Interviewees were eager to discuss about CSR and its importance Note: Interviewees mentioned several stakeholders throughout their discussions
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
During this phase, the researcher identified features in the data set and highlighted data extracts that had the potential to generate meaningful patterns. The researcher generated more than two hundred codes. As explained in the text, the researcher applied this phase to printed papers. At this phase, all codes were inductive in nature (data-driven). After re-reading the codes, the researcher deleted a few of them and renamed some others. The researcher also checked the codes in relation to the first research question (theoretical-driven approach) and refined some of them in relation to the question. Similar to coding interviews in Kosovo, the researcher adopted semantic coding. An example of semantic coding is presented below. Code: Website as a preferred communication tool among fashion SMEs in Greece Data extract: <i>“We use multiple channels to convey our strategy to all of our stakeholders. Our main channel is our website. We have devoted a section in our website for our ethical, social and environmental activities...”</i> The researcher also adopted latent coding. Code: Socially-responsible nature of the SMEs impacted the CSR awareness of Greek SME owners/managers
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
The researcher put the initial codes into candidate themes and sub-themes. Initially, the researcher generated these themes and sub-themes inductively (based on data). After generating the themes and sub-themes, the researcher created a thematic map. The map had four themes and twenty sub-themes.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
The researcher reviewed the abovementioned themes and sub-themes in three instances. First, themes and sub-themes were reworked in relation to the codes. Second, they were revised in relation to the first research question and theoretical concepts identified in the literature review. Third, the researcher compared them to the themes and sub-themes generated in the previous

analysis of Kosovar SME owners/managers. As a result of these instances, the researcher had to shift the thematic map and rename, revisit and add some themes and sub-themes. A new sub-theme generated in this phase was “Greenwashing from large fashion companies”, which referred to greenwashing as the main barrier to successful CSR implementation of fashion SMEs. The researcher depicted these alterations in the thematic map. During this phase, the researcher had to alter also the coding list. At the end of this phase, the researcher generated six themes and twenty-three sub-themes.

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

The researcher assured to name the themes and sub-themes in accordance with the previous analysis applied among Kosovar SME owners/managers. The researcher employed this naming approach after considering the cross-national nature of this research. Next, the researcher defined each theme and sub-theme. These definitions were necessary to differ among analyses of each country. They also immensely helped the researcher with the writing of the report. The researcher ensured displaying of the latest adjustments in the thematic map. The thematic map is presented on the next page.

Phase 6: Writing the report

The researcher followed a combination of analytical and descriptive narrative approaches when writing the report of the previously mentioned analysis. The descriptive approach ensured the reader received the necessary information about the investigated topic. The analytical approach engaged the reader and provided depth and authenticity of analysis. The report was depicted in Chapter 5 precisely, in subchapters 5.1.4 – 5.7.4. The report was focused only on Greece.

CSR awareness among fashion SME owners/managers in Greece

- Personal characteristics of Greek SME owners/managers impact their CSR awareness
- SME's nature (identity) impacts CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Greece
- National factors impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Greece

CSR understanding among fashion SME owners/managers in Greece

- Importance of the nature of CSR on CSR understanding
- Personal characteristics of Greek SME owners/managers impact their CSR understanding
- SME's nature impacts CSR understanding of SME owners/managers in Greece
- National development impacts CSR understanding of Greek SME owners/managers

CSR drivers of fashion SME owners/managers in Greece

- Ethical issues in the fashion industry
- Environmental issues in the fashion industry
- Social issues in the fashion industry
- Altruistic motives
- Moral obligation
- Employee care
- Conscious consumers pressure
- Sustainable future

CSR communication among fashion SMEs in Greece

- Self-initiated communication
- Outsourcing communication services

Absence of CSR evaluation among fashion SMEs in Greece

- Lack of CSR-oriented team/department

CSR embedding among fashion SME owners/managers in Greece

- Internal CSR activities
- External CSR activities

CSR barriers for fashion SMEs in Greece

- Size of company
- Lack of resources
- Greenwashing from large fashion companies

(3) Interviews in Albania

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes The researcher started getting familiarised with the data set by listening actively to the five audio interviews. The researcher rigorously transcribed the interviews in Albanian and translated them into English. Similarly to Braun and Clarke (2020), the researcher considered the transcription process a key interpretative act. Afterwards, the researcher printed the transcript and read the entire data set a few times. The researcher noted some preliminary understandings of the data set. Some of the notes turned into initial codes. Other notes only helped the researcher get familiarised with the data. For instance: Note: Compared to Kosovar interviewees, Albanian interviewees used more CSR-related terms to describe the CSR implementation process. Note: Some of the interviewees were eager to criticise the current CSR situation in the region The researcher noticed that although such notes were not involved in the code and theme development, some were useful for the final report.
Phase 2: Systematic data coding During this phase, the researcher highlighted the data extracts and noted initial codes. This process was conducted systematically throughout the entire data set. Initially, the generated codes were data-driven (inductive). The researcher reviewed the codes and created a thorough list of codes. She ensured the generated codes worked with the first research question (theoretical-driven approach). In addition to this revision, the researcher revised the codes in the upcoming phases. The researcher coded every aspect of the data set. The codes were both semantic and latent. A few examples of semantic coding are presented below. The first code displays an example of how one code works for more data extracts. Code: Women empowerment serves as a drive for CSR embedding Data extract (1): <i>“... we have grown up with the horror stories of the bad treatment of women in their work environment in Albania, so this is the reason, we are committed to ethical labor practices...”</i> Data extract (2): <i>“...we provide opportunities for women who are economically marginalised...”</i> Code: CSR offers the owners/managers with brand awareness in international market Data extract: <i>“...While our CSR efforts haven't noticeably influenced our presence in the Albanian market, they have significantly bolstered our positioning when introducing our collections to international markets, where there is a greater awareness and appreciation of such practices in the fashion industry...”</i> During this phase, the researcher also noticed that the same code could be latent and semantic. For instance, the following code, ‘Age as an important factor in CSR awareness’, had a semantic nature among Albanians, as it was mentioned explicitly in the discussion. Refer to the data extract below.

Data extract: <i>“as a Gen-Z business founder, I have grown with lots of information about climate change...”</i> Whereas, in Kosovo, this code adopted a latent approach because it derived from the context.
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
After coding the entire data set, the researcher organised codes into potential themes and sub-themes. The researcher identified six themes and twenty sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes were predominantly driven by data. Based on them, the researcher created an initial thematic map. Similarly to the other analyses, the researcher preferred using paper to depict the map as it enhanced productivity.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
Similar to the previous analysis, the researcher reviewed themes and sub-themes in relation to three instances. Initially, the researcher revised themes and sub-themes in relation to the codes. Secondly, the researcher reworked them in accordance with the first research question and theoretical notions. Thirdly, the researcher revised them in relation to the final themes and sub-themes generated in the previous analyses of Kosovar and Greek SME owners/managers. During this phase, the researcher renamed some of the themes, sub-themes and codes of the three analyses. The researcher reflected on the changes in all three thematic maps. The researcher ensured to note all the changes in the coding list. At the end of this phase, the researcher generated six themes and twenty-one sub-themes.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher identified the meaning of each theme and wrote a description for each. The researcher reflected on the process and noted the predominant explicit nature of themes in this analysis. The researcher also noticed that each reflexive thematic analysis started to embrace a more theory-driven approach as the researcher reviewed the themes, sub-themes and codes in relation to the previous analyses. At the end of this phase, the researcher revised the thematic map again. The final thematic map for the interviews in Albania is presented on the next page.
Phase 6: Writing the report
The researcher documented all the themes, sub-themes and codes generated during this interview in the report. The report followed a hybrid approach of analytical and descriptive narrative. The report was presented in Chapter 5, precisely in subchapters 5.1.2 to 5.7.2. The report was focused solely on Albania.

CSR awareness among fashion SME owners/managers in Albania

Personal characteristics of Albanian SME owners/managers impact their CSR awareness

SME's nature (identity) impacts CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Albania

National factors impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Albania

CSR drivers of fashion SME owners/managers in Albania

Social responsibility/causes

Environmental issues

Ethical issues in the country

Personal convictions

Moral obligation

Recognition and good reputation

Employee perspectives

CSR embedding among fashion SME owners/managers in Albania

Internal CSR activities

External CSR activities

CSR understanding among fashion SME owners/managers in Albania

Importance of the nature of CSR on CSR understanding

Personal characteristics of Albanian SME owners/managers impact their CSR understanding

SME's nature impacts CSR understanding of SME owners/managers in Albania

National development impacts CSR understanding of Albanian SME owners/managers

CSR communication among fashion SMEs in Albania

Self-initiated communication

Stakeholder-initiated communication

Absence of CSR evaluation among fashion SMEs in Albania

Lack of CSR-oriented team/department

CSR barriers among fashion SMEs in Albania

Lack of finances

Size of company

(4) Interviews in Croatia

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes Initially, the researcher listened actively to the five audio interviews. Then, the researcher transcribed the verbal data into written data. The researcher ensured a thorough verbal and non-verbal verbatim of the data. The researcher printed the transcript (twenty-seven pages) and read it several times. Similar to the other analyses, the researcher recorded the initial perceptions of the data set. The notes from the three previous analyses impacted the researcher's notes. An illustration of this impact is presented below. Note: Croatian SME owners/managers (similar to Greek ones) embraced CSR more intensely than Albanian and Kosovar SME owners/managers
Phase 2: Systematic data coding The researcher followed the same procedure as for the previously-explained analyses. The researcher highlighted the key features in the data set and turned them into codes. The researcher adopted a systematic coding of the whole data set. The initial codes leaned towards an inductive approach. Nevertheless, the researcher noted that the previous analyses impacted her coding approach, as the researcher got familiarised with the theoretical concepts and the previously generated codes. The researcher reviewed the codes again in a later phase. Some coding examples and data extracts of this analysis are presented below. Code: National media as a CSR awareness factor Data Extract: <i>"I got introduced to it years ago through media but learned more about it mainly from practice..."</i> The following code was initially named 'Women advancement serves as a CSR driver', but after cross-checking the codes with the previous analyses, the researcher adopted the same name as the code in the Albania analysis. Such a tactic was employed a few times as the researcher considered it adequate for the cross-national nature of the research. Code: Women empowerment as a drive for CSR embedding Data Extract: <i>"... Our company collaborates with women-owned small businesses..."</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data After coding the data, the researcher put codes into candidate themes and sub-themes. Due to the influence of the previous analysis, the researcher adopted a hybrid approach (inductive-theory approach) in the theme development. The inductive approach helped the researcher identify a few sub-themes; a couple of them are presented below. Sub-theme: Summit participation impacts the CSR awareness of Croatian SME owners/managers Data extract:

<i>“...Me and the co-founders participated in a fashion summit, where we got introduced to CSR in fashion...”</i> Sub-theme: Lack of consumer interest as a CSR barrier Data extract (1): <i>“... In all sincerity, international tourists visiting Croatia appreciate more our environment-conscious products compared to our own [Croatian] consumers, locals...”</i> Data extract (2): <i>“...I am aware that the fashion industry in Croatia is not what it used to be, but there are local [Croatian] brands offering unique and trendy pieces while using eco-friendly materials, supporting fair trade... but Croatian people buy ready-to-wear products from fast fashion brands...”</i>
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
First, the researcher reworked themes and sub-themes in relation to the codes. Second, the researcher revised them in accordance with the research questions and theoretical concepts identified in the literature focused on Croatia. Third, the researcher revised them in relation to the final themes and sub-themes generated in the previous analyses of Kosovar, Greek and Albanian SME owners/managers. During this phase, the researcher revised the initial thematic map. The researcher also reviewed the three previous thematic maps and reflected on the changes. At the end of this revision, the researcher generated six themes and twenty-two sub-themes.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher wrote a description for each of the generated themes. These descriptions helped the researcher with the written report presented in the findings. At the end of this phase, the researcher revised the final thematic map. The map for the interviews in Croatia is displayed on the next page.
Phase 6: Writing the report
Once the researcher was satisfied with the previous phases of analysis, the researcher wrote the findings. Please refer to subchapters 5.1.3 to 5.7.3 for a detailed report of each theme.

CSR awareness among fashion SME owners/managers in Croatia

Personal characteristics of Croatian SME owners/managers impact their CSR awareness

SME's nature (identity) impacts CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Croatia

National factors impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Croatia

Regional institutions impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Croatia

CSR understanding among fashion SME owners/managers in Croatia

Importance of the nature of CSR on CSR understanding

Personal characteristics of Croatian SME owners/managers impact their CSR understanding

SME's nature impacts CSR understanding of SME owners/managers in Croatia

National development impacts CSR understanding of Croatian SME owners/managers

CSR drivers of fashion SME owners/managers in Croatia

Environmental issues

Personal beliefs

Socially-responsible nature of the company

Altruistic motives

Successful stories of other companies

Responsibility towards employees

CSR trend

CSR communication among fashion SMEs in Croatia

Self-initiated communication

Stakeholder-initiated communication

Absence of CSR evaluation among fashion SMEs in Croatia

Lack of CSR-oriented team/department

CSR embedding among fashion SME owners/managers in Croatia

Internal CSR activities

External CSR activities

CSR barriers among fashion SMEs in Croatia

Lack of consumer interest

Size of company

As presented in the main text, the researcher added another phase to this process – the country comparison report. The researcher considered that this phase is necessary for cross-national research. To attain that, the researcher collated all themes, sub-themes and codes generated from the four analyses presented above. An example of this collation is presented in the table below. The table also depicts the link between the first and second theme, their subsequent sub-themes and codes. To ensure visual apprehensibility, the researcher adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2022) recommendation and presented it in the table format. During the compilation of this country comparison report, the researcher found the four thematic maps presented above helpful. In this report, the researcher discussed analytically the six themes generated from the abovementioned analyses. The researcher compared and contrasted each theme in relation to each country (Kosovo, Greece, Albania and Croatia).

Theme	Subtheme	Code
CSR awareness of fashion SME owners/managers	Personal characteristics of fashion SME owners/managers impact their CSR awareness	Age as an important factor in CSR awareness
		Education as a CSR awareness factor
		Curiosity as a CSR awareness factor
		Current work experience as a CSR awareness factor
		Past work experience as a CSR awareness factor
		Internet browsing as a CSR awareness factor
		Social media as a CSR awareness factor
		Conscious consumer as an important factor in CSR awareness
		Summit participation as a CSR awareness factor
	SME's nature (identity) impacts CSR awareness of fashion SME owners/managers	Commercial nature as a factor in CSR awareness
		Socially-responsible nature as an important CSR awareness factor
		Country development as a CSR awareness factor

	National factors impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers	National media as a CSR awareness factor
		National universities as CSR awareness factors
		Informal education as a CSR awareness factor
		Associations as CSR awareness factors
	Regional institutions impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers	Country's EU membership as a CSR awareness factor
		EU-funded programs as CSR awareness factors
		Partners located in EU as CSR awareness factors
		Universities located in EU member countries as CSR awareness factors
	International factors impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers	International NGOs as CSR awareness factors
CSR understanding of fashion SME owners/managers	Importance of nature of CSR on CSR understanding	CSR as a voluntary concept
		CSR as an obligatory concept
		Hybrid CSR (explicit-implicit)
	Personal characteristics of SME owners/managers impact CSR understanding	Education as an important factor in CSR understanding
		Work experience as a factor in CSR understanding
		Conscious consumer as an important factor in CSR understanding
		Summit participation as a factor in CSR understanding
	SME's nature impacts CSR understanding of SME owners/managers	Commercial nature as a factor in CSR understanding
		Socially-responsible nature as a factor in CSR understanding
	National differences among SME owners/managers in CSR understanding	Broad definitions of CSR among Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners/managers
		Context-specific definitions of CSR among Croatian and

		Albanian fashion SME owners/managers
		Identification of several stakeholders among Croatian and Greek fashion SME owners and managers
		Identification of two stakeholders – employees and the environment – among Kosovar and Albanian fashion SME owners and managers
	Regional institutions impact CSR awareness of SME owners/managers in Croatia	Higher level of awareness among SMEs located in a EU member state
		Lower level of awareness among SMEs located in a non-EU member state

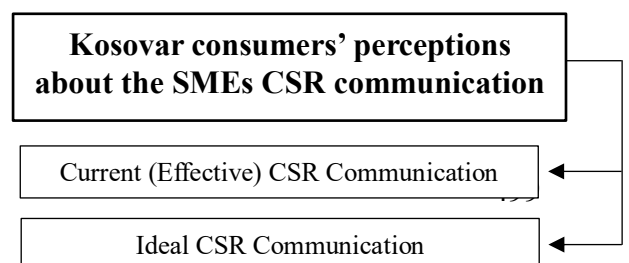
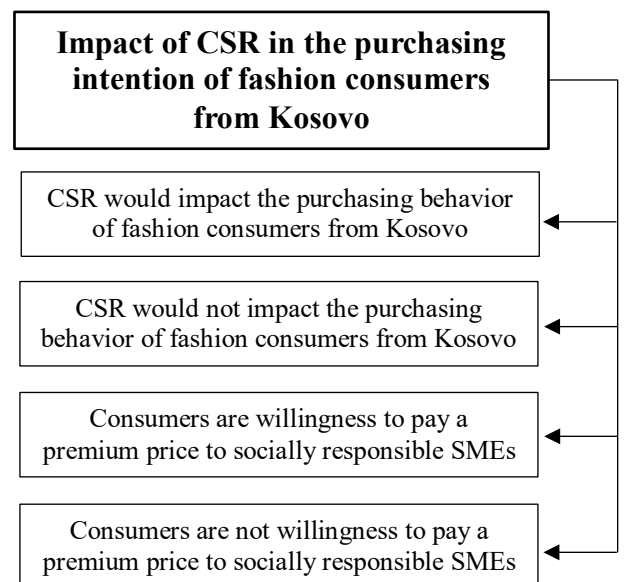
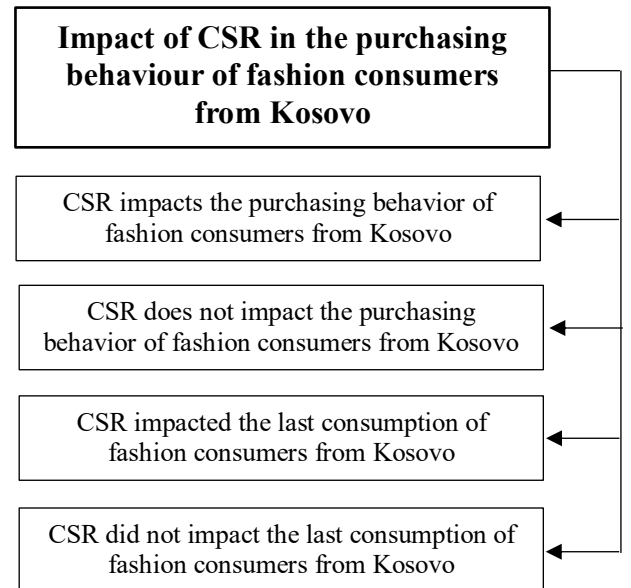
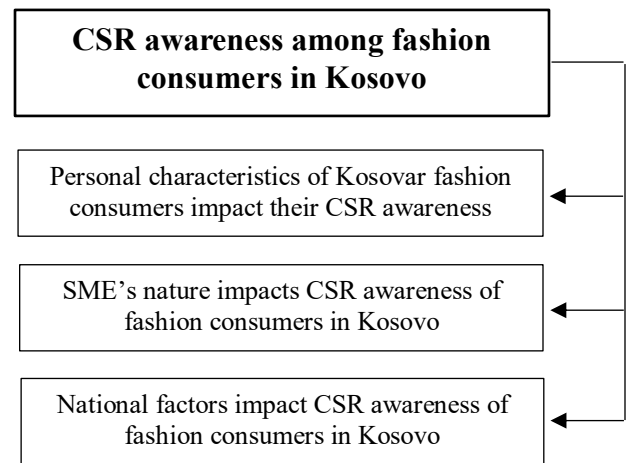
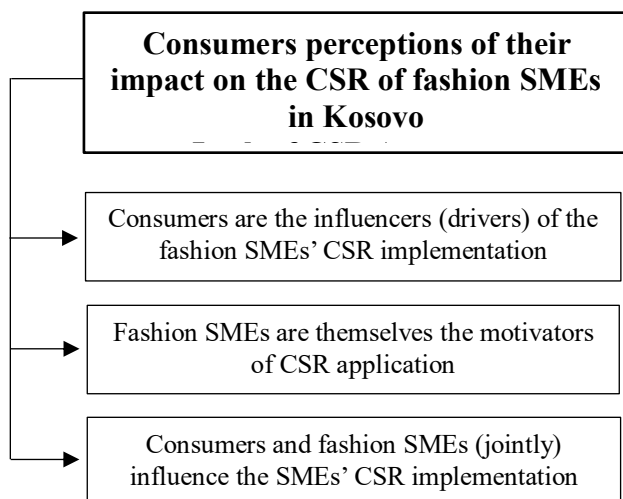
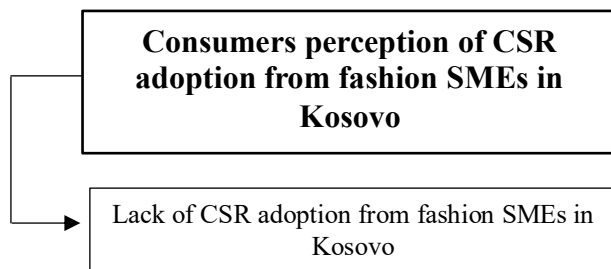
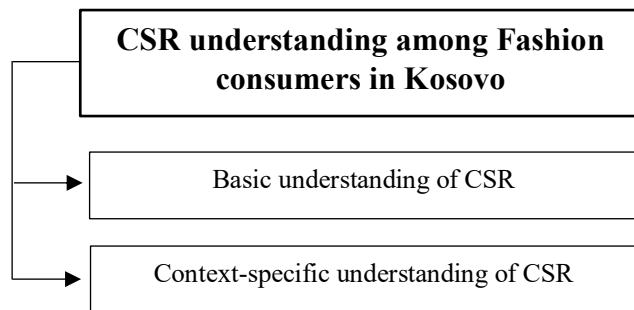
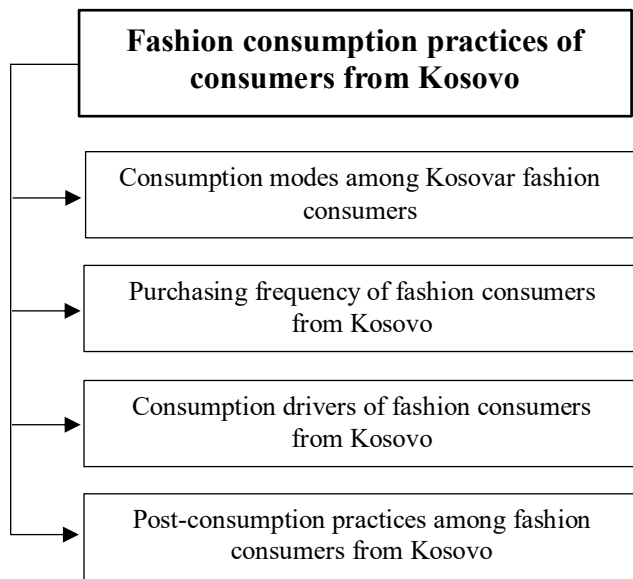
Appendix 3.10 Thematic analysis conducted for focus groups with fashion consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

This appendix portrays in detail every step applied during the thematic analysis process of focus groups for each of the four SEE countries – (1) Kosovo, (2) Albania, (3) Greece and (4) Croatia.

(1) Focus groups in Kosovo

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
The researcher started familiarising herself with the data by actively listening to these focus group discussions in Kosovo. Initially, the researcher transcribed the discussions in Albanian language. Then, a translator translated each of them into the English language. Similarly to interview analyses, the researcher printed the transcripts. The researcher read and re-read the entire data set a few times. In the meantime, the researcher wrote initial notes about the discussions. These notes helped the researcher with the coding phase. A couple of examples of the notes are presented below. Note: The participants across the three focus groups were unfamiliar with the CSR notion. Yet, they grasped its meaning and were willing to engage in the discussion Note: Participants from the second focus group considered one or more dimensions of CSR in their last consumption
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
The researcher highlighted the main features in the data set and identified initial codes. Coding of data was conducted manually on the printed papers by the researcher. Initial codes were generated inductively (data-driven). Afterwards, the researcher reviewed all the initial codes. The researcher removed a few codes and renamed some others. The researcher checked again the codes in relation to the second research question (RQ2) and revised some of the codes. Throughout the analysis, the researcher revisited this phase to refine codes. At the end of it, the researcher had mostly semantic coding. An example of semantic coding is presented below. Code: The absence of CSR's impact on the purchasing decisions as a result of the current economic and political situation in Kosovo Data extract: <i>"I think that we are a post-war society that went through a transitional phase that lasted very long, and the first thing we look at is the price, so I think that this social responsibility thing is somewhere at the bottom of the things we look at... it doesn't mean that we shouldn't start thinking like that..."</i> Code: CSR is more important than price Data extract:

<i>“Yes, it’s worth it. Of course, I’d do it for something that’s worthy. It’s worth paying for charity, for employees, for environment, because there’s no harm in donating for a good deed.”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
During this phase, the researcher noticed a set of codes not belonging to any themes or theoretical concepts. The researcher put those codes under a ‘miscellaneous’ theme. In total, the researcher generated seven initial themes and twenty-two sub-themes. The researcher depicted them in a potential thematic map. The ‘miscellaneous’ theme was not included in the initial thematic map. Themes and sub-themes generated during this phase were inductive in nature.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
The researcher checked the initial themes and sub-themes in relation to the initial codes. The researcher deemed it necessary to break a theme into two themes. Particularly, the researcher decided to divide the theme ‘Impact of CSR in the purchasing behaviour and purchasing intention of fashion consumers from Kosovo’ into two themes: (1) ‘Impact of CSR in the purchasing behaviour of fashion consumers from Kosovo’ and (2) ‘Impact of CSR in the purchasing intention of fashion consumers from Kosovo’. In addition, the researcher analysed how each theme, sub-theme and code worked in relation to RQ2 and the theoretical concepts. During this phase, the researcher deleted a few codes and generated a new sub-theme, named ‘post-consumption practices among fashion consumers from Kosovo’. The researcher depicted all these alterations in the coding list and the thematic map. In total, the researcher generated eight themes and twenty-three sub-themes.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher defined each theme. The definitions helped the researcher with the organisation of the sub-chapters. During this phase, the researcher also assured to depict the latest changes in the thematic map. The final thematic map for focus groups in Kosovo is presented on the next page. The researcher deemed it important to note that the map was revised several times during this process; the last revision was undertaken after the final map for focus groups in Greece was generated.
Phase 6: Writing the report
At the end of the analysis, the researcher wrote the findings. The researcher adopted a hybrid writing approach (analytical-descriptive). The findings were focused solely on Kosovo. They were presented in Chapter 6, precisely in sub-chapter 6.2.1.1 – 6.2.6.1.



(2) Focus groups in Albania

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes Initially, the researcher engaged in active listening of the first focus group discussion and transcribed the audio into text in Albanian language. The researcher applied the same undertakings for the second focus group. Then, the translator interpreted both discussions from Albanian into English. The researcher read the transcripts a few times. During this phase, the researcher noted the initial perceptions of the data set. The researcher also reflected upon the notes documented during the data collection and combined a few of them. Some examples of these notes are presented below. Note: Albanian participants of both groups were eager to discuss the topic with each other even after the discussion ended Note: Albanian participants tend to use a multitude of words to articulate their views compared to Kosovar participants Note: Most Albanian participants did not take CSR into account in their purchases
Phase 2: Systematic data coding Next, the researcher created initial codes from features they noticed across the entire data set. The development of codes was data-driven (inductive). The researcher went back and forth a few times to ensure codes were adequate. The researcher checked the codes in relation to the second research question. The researcher renamed a couple of the codes and generated new ones. The researcher noticed the impact of the codes generated from the previous analysis in the development of these codes. In terms of semantic-latent coding, this analysis produced mainly semantic codes. An example of a semantic code is illustrated below. Code: Education as a factor in CSR awareness Data extract: <i>“When I did my <u>master's degree in business administration</u>, we had a topic on social responsibility and we even had a coursework...”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data During this phase, the researcher put the initial codes into candidate themes and sub-themes. The researcher generated six themes and twenty sub-themes. The researcher attempted to produce the previously mentioned themes and sub-themes inductively. Nevertheless, the previous analysis influenced the nature of theme development; the researcher could not generate pure inductive themes. The researcher visualised the potential thematic map on a paper. This map was revised several times. The last version of the thematic map is presented after the sixth phase of this analysis.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes

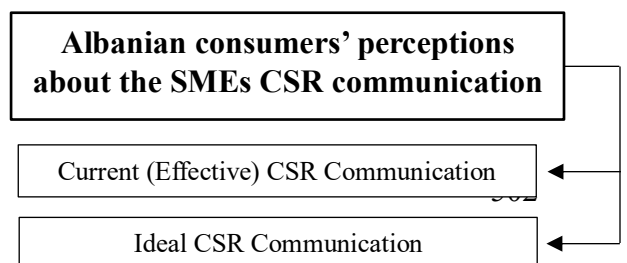
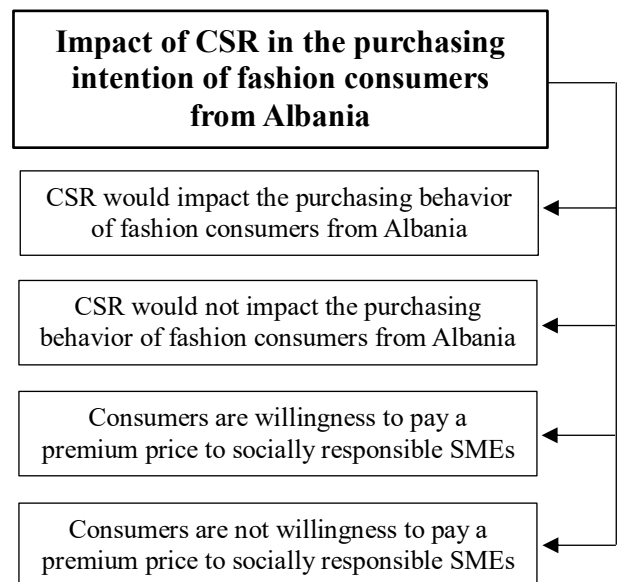
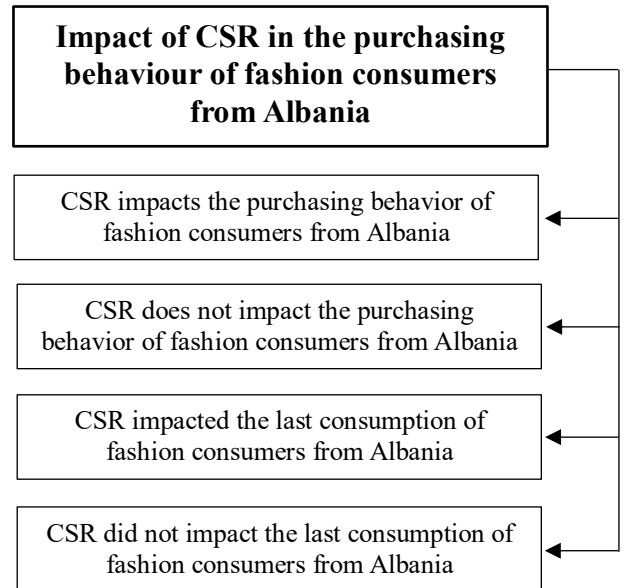
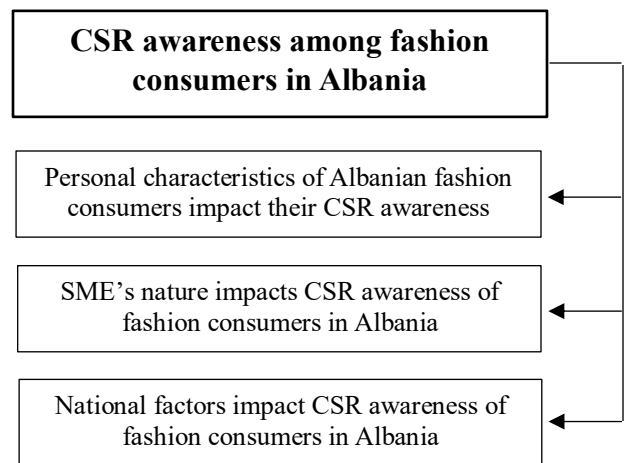
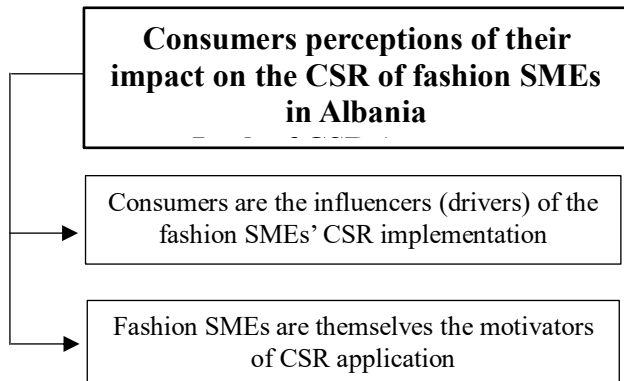
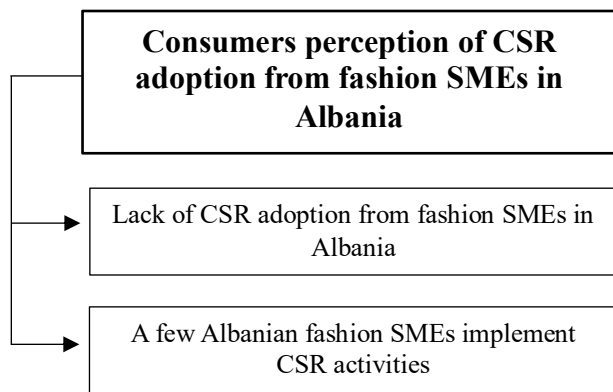
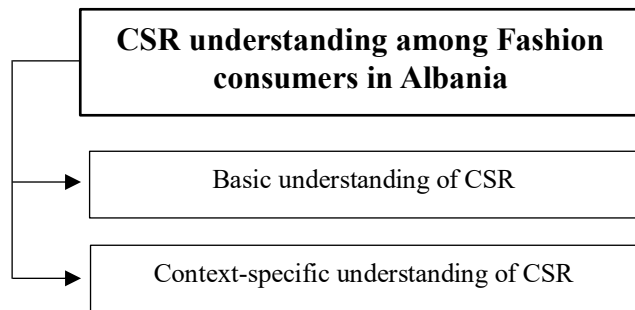
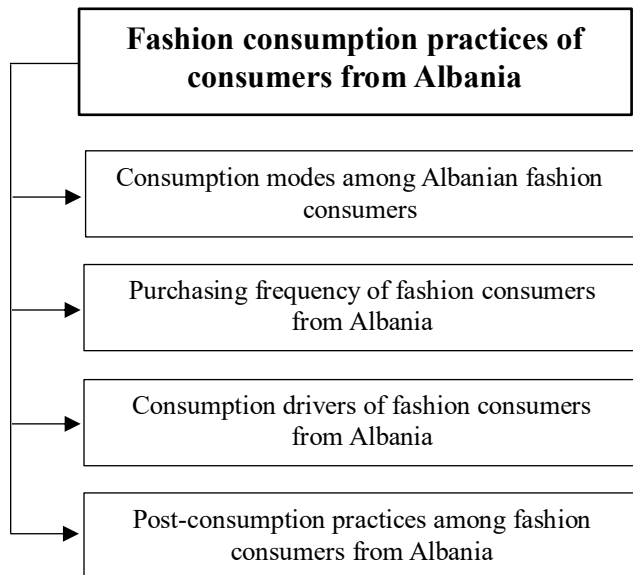
The researcher revised the initial themes and sub-themes. It is important to know that the revision happened several times until the final themes and sub-themes were selected. The reviewing process occurred in three instances. Initially, the researcher reworked the potential themes and sub-themes in relation to the codes. Secondly, the researcher reviewed the themes in reference to the second research question and the theoretical knowledge. Thirdly, the researcher compared them to the themes and sub-themes generated in the previous analysis and adopted similar themes and sub-themes (when appropriate) to ensure a well-organised presentation of the patterns in the findings. During this process, the researcher altered the thematic map and the coding list. In the end, the researcher generated eight themes and twenty-three sub-themes.

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

During this process, the researcher renamed one of the themes. Initially, the researcher named the theme 'Consumers' views about CSR among fashion SMEs in Albania'. The researcher renamed it to 'Consumers perception of CSR adoption from fashion SMEs in Albania' as it better encompassed the sub-themes and codes linked to it. The researcher ensured to portray the latest changes in the thematic map of this analysis and the previous one. The researcher defined each theme and sub-themes. The definitions eased the writing process for the researcher.

Phase 6: Writing the report

Lastly, the researcher composed the findings, which were focused solely on the fashion consumers from Albania. The findings were presented in Chapter 6, precisely in sub-chapter 6.2.1.2 – 6.2.6.2. Similarly to the previous report, the researcher adopted a hybrid writing approach (analytical-descriptive).



(3) Focus Groups in Greece

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes At first, the researcher listened once to each focus group discussion. After that, the researcher transcribed the spoken data into written data. The researcher printed the transcripts (thirty-one pages) and read them once. The researcher recorded initial notes for each discussion. The notes from the previous analysis impacted some of these notes; they offered the opportunity to compare them at the country level. A couple of examples from these comments are depicted below. Note: Different from Kosovar and Albanian participants, more than half of Greek participants were familiar with the concept of CSR Note: Greek participants eagerly discussed the importance of environmental protection
Phase 2: Systematic data coding The researcher identified notable features throughout the entire data set and turned them into codes. Similarly to the other phases, the coding phase was manually conducted by the researcher. The initial codes started to embrace a hybrid nature (inductive-theoretical) due to the influence of the earlier analyses. During this phase, the researcher also checked the codes in relation to the second research question. The researcher was indirectly impacted by the codes generated in the two previous analyses. The researcher developed one hundred and two codes in total. Most codes were semantic in nature; a few codes were latent. During this analysis, the researcher identified a similar code to the one in the interview reflexive TAs. This code, which is presented below, had an immense impact on the findings of this research. It was reflected in the sub-chapter “Conceptualisation of CSR: New Designation, Same Abbreviation”. Code: Mislabeling of CSR shapes CSR understanding Data Extract: <i>“I don't think that they should call it CSR as this is associated more with larger companies...”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data Once the researcher coded the entire data set, the researcher put codes into potential themes. The themes were generated inductively and theoretically. The two previous analyses influenced the theme development. The researcher generated seven themes and twenty-one sub-themes. The researcher depicted them in a potential thematic map.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes Afterwards, the researcher reviewed themes and sub-themes in relation to the codes and ensured to document all the changes in the coding list. The researcher also revised themes and sub-

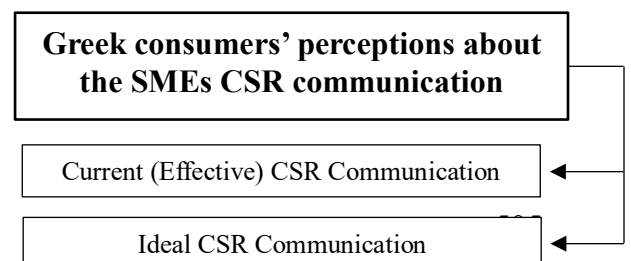
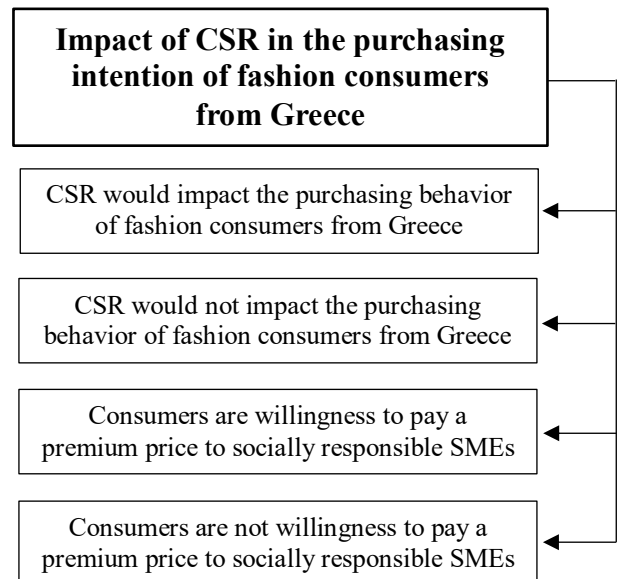
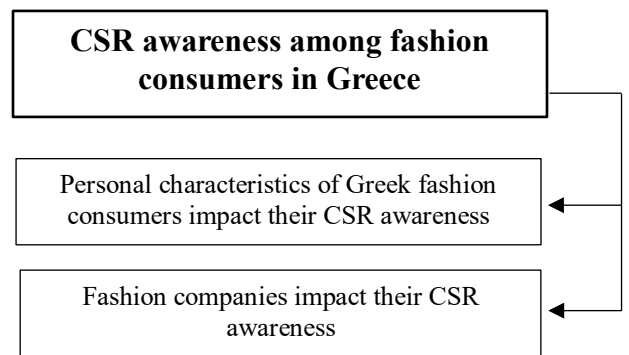
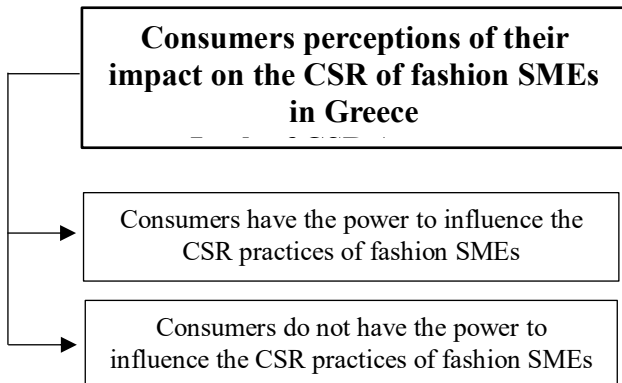
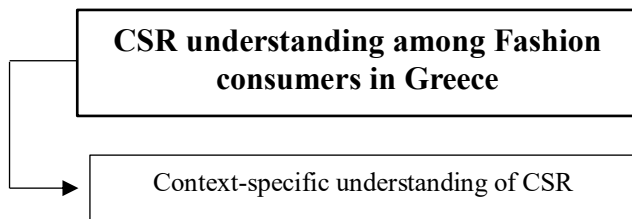
themes in relation to the second research question. The researcher noticed that by this stage, the themes and sub-themes were greatly influenced by the two previous analyses. Thus, the revision in relation to the previous analyses occurred implicitly. During this phase, the researcher renamed some of the themes, sub-themes and codes of the three analyses.

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

During this phase, the researcher refined, renamed and defined the themes and sub-themes. The refinement process of this step impacted all the other thematic maps generated in the previous analyses. The researcher renamed two sub-themes in this particular analysis. Sub-theme (1): 'Consumers have the power to influence the CSR practices of fashion SMEs' and sub-theme (2): 'Consumers do not have the power to influence the CSR practices of fashion SMEs'. The researcher considered these sub-theme names presented the perceptions of Greek fashion consumers in this analysis adequately. The researcher purposefully did not reflect these changes in the previous analyses among fashion consumers in Kosovo and Albania. For this analysis, the researcher generated eight themes and twenty-one subthemes. Lastly, the researcher wrote a detailed explanation for each generated theme and described the relation of each theme with the RQ2 and its objectives.

Phase 6: Writing the report

The researcher wrote the report, which was partially depicted throughout chapter 6. The report was precisely presented in sub-chapter 6.2.1.4 – 6.2.6.4. The report focused solely on Kosovo. Similarly to the previous reports, the researcher followed an analytical-descriptive writing approach.



(4) Focus Groups in Croatia

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
The researcher immersed herself in the data set by engaging in active listening of the focus group discussions. Afterwards, the researcher conducted a thorough verbal verbatim of the entire data. Similarly to the previous analyses, the researcher wrote down familiarisation notes. A few examples of such notes are presented below. Note: Most Croatian participants were enthusiastic to discuss their consumption practices Note: Many Croatian participants mentioned that the impact of a CSR practice in their last consumption
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
The researcher underlined the key features in the data set and turned them into codes. The researcher adopted a systematic coding for the entire data set. The researcher followed the same procedure of coding as for the previous analyses. Some coding examples and data extracts of this analysis are presented below. Code: Fashion consumers avoid CSR when purchasing basic outfits Data extract: <i>“Basic pieces of clothes such as shirts and tops, for me, are a thing of necessity and will usually choose the cheapest option,”</i> Code: Fashion consumers prefer supporting important social causes Data extract: <i>“I often buy my fits from a small shop in Zagreb. The shop does not throwaway clothes and it reuses them or sells them with a low price in the off season...”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
During this phase, the researcher grasped how codes link with sub-themes and themes. The previous analyses influenced the researcher. This influence was depicted in the initial thematic map, which resembled the previous thematic maps. This resemblance occurred mainly due to the cross-national nature of the research. At this phase, the researcher generated eight sub-themes and twenty-one sub-themes. These themes were reviewed in the following two phases.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
The researcher assured to review the themes and sub-themes in relation to the second research question. The researcher also compared the themes and sub-themes to the previous analyses. The researcher ensured depicting similar thematic maps to provide well-organised findings across the four countries. The researcher also reviewed themes and sub-themes in relation to the codes and documented all the alternations in the coding list. During this phase, the researcher

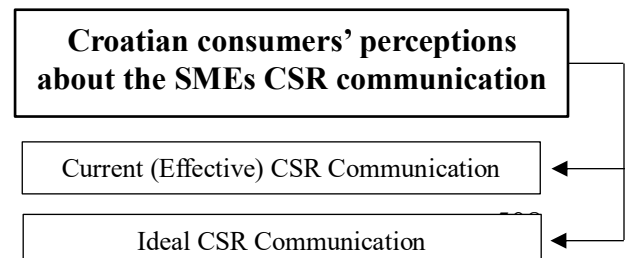
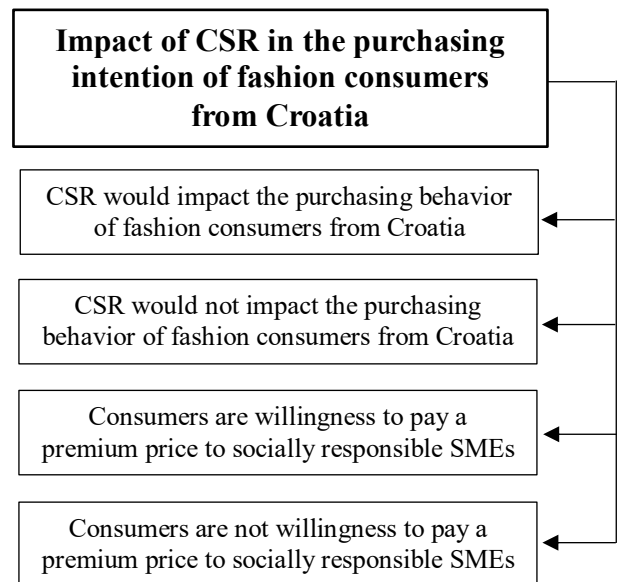
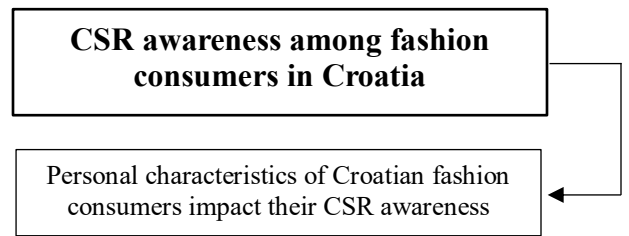
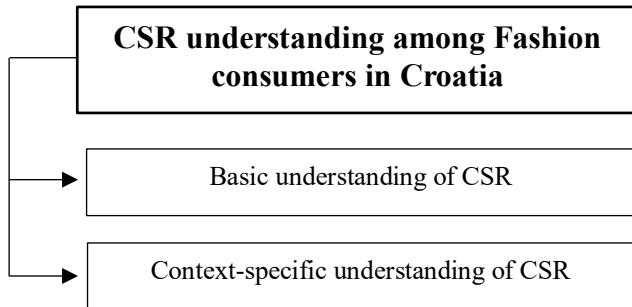
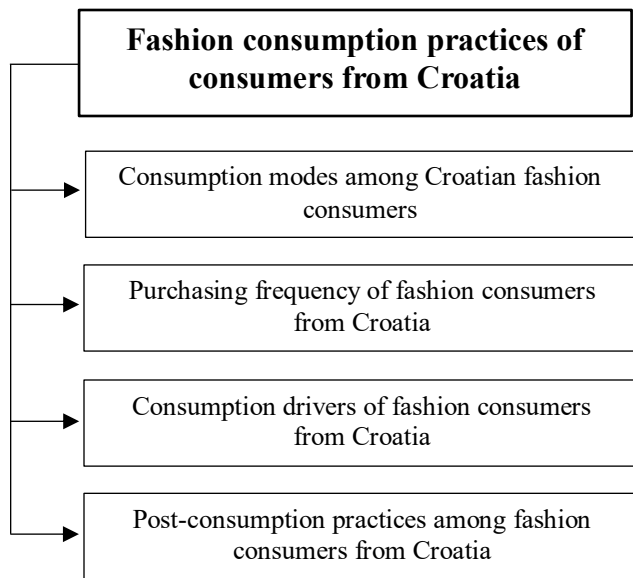
noticed that the perceptions of Croatian fashion consumers could be categorised under only one sub-theme “Satisfactory CSR adoption of fashion SMEs in Croatia”. Such sub-themes noted by the researcher provided this research with the opportunity to discuss cross-national differences.

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

To ensure the analysis adhered to quality criteria, the researcher refined and defined each theme and sub-theme. Due to the cross-national nature of the research, the researcher applied this process to all three previously mentioned analyses. The researcher ensured to depict the alterations in all four thematic maps. As a result of this process, the researcher merged two sub-themes ((1) Size-specific understanding of CSR and (2) Fashion-specific understanding of CSR) into one sub-theme: Context-specific understanding of CSR. This alteration impacted all three previous analyses and code names. During this phase, the researcher also renamed the ‘miscellaneous’ theme into ‘Fashion consumption practices of consumers from (the respective country)’. At the end of this analysis, the researcher generated eight themes and twenty subthemes. The researcher also wrote a description for each generated theme.

Phase 6: Writing the report

Lastly, the researcher compiled the report. Regardless of the influence of the previous analyses, the report discussed only the findings from Croatian fashion consumers. The report was presented partially in sub-chapters 6.2.1.3 – 6.2.6.3. Similarly to the preceding reports, the researcher embraced a hybrid writing style (analytical-descriptive).



Similarly to the interview-grounded reflexive thematic analyses, the researcher applied the country comparison report. The researcher reviewed all four analyses and compiled a final report considering their differences and similarities. The researcher collated all themes, sub-themes and codes. As a result of this process, the researcher revised the four thematic maps and depicted the alterations. The researcher assured themes, sub-themes and codes were linked to each other and jointly presented the cross-national nature of the research. A few examples of these collations are depicted in the table below. The final report, informed by this table, was mainly analytical. Such an approach provided the researcher with the opportunity to compare and contrast the findings from Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Croatia.

Theme	Subtheme	Code
CSR understanding among fashion consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece	Basic understanding of CSR	Consumers understand CSR through one dimension
		Consumers understand CSR through multiple dimensions
	Context-specific understanding of CSR	Consumers' CSR understanding depends on the company size
		Consumers' CSR understanding depends on the industry
		Consumers' CSR understanding depends on the country
	Current (Effective) CSR Communication	Consumers perceive news stories as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Kosovar consumers
		Consumers perceive word-of-mouth as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Kosovar consumers
		Consumers perceive company's website as an effective CSR communication tool

Consumers perceptions about the CSR communication for fashion SMEs		Description: Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive company's social media as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive an event as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Croatian consumers
		Consumers perceive a philanthropic activity as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Croatian consumers
		Consumers perceive eco-friendly packaging as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Croatian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive zero-waste philosophy as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Croatian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive an eco-friendly product as an effective CSR communication tool Description: Greek consumers
	Ideal CSR Communication	Consumers perceive company's website as an ideal CSR communication tool Description: Kosovar, Albanian, Croatian and Greek consumers

		Consumers perceive word-of-mouth as an ideal CSR communication tool Description: Kosovar consumers
		Consumers perceive packaging as an ideal CSR communication tool Description: Kosovar, Albanian consumers
		Consumers perceive company's social media as an ideal communication tool Description: Kosovar, Albanian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive a TV story as an ideal communication tool Description: Kosovar consumers
		Consumers perceive a creative advertisement as an ideal communication tool Description: Albanian consumers
		Consumers perceive a mini documentary as an ideal communication tool Description: Albanian consumers
		Consumers perceive the embracing of zero-waste philosophy as an ideal communication tool Description: Croatian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive eco-friendly packaging as an ideal communication tool Description: Croatian and Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive employee-focused advertisement as an ideal communication tool

		Description: Croatian consumers
		Consumers perceive an influencer as an ideal communication tool Description: Croatian consumers
		Consumers perceive an event as an ideal communication tool Description: Croatian consumers
		Consumers perceive a philanthropic activity as an ideal communication tool Description: Croatian consumers
		Consumers perceive an eco-friendly product as an ideal communication tool Description: Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive a healthy working environment as an ideal communication tool Description: Greek consumers
		Consumers perceive the CSR implementation as an ideal communication tool Description: Greek consumers

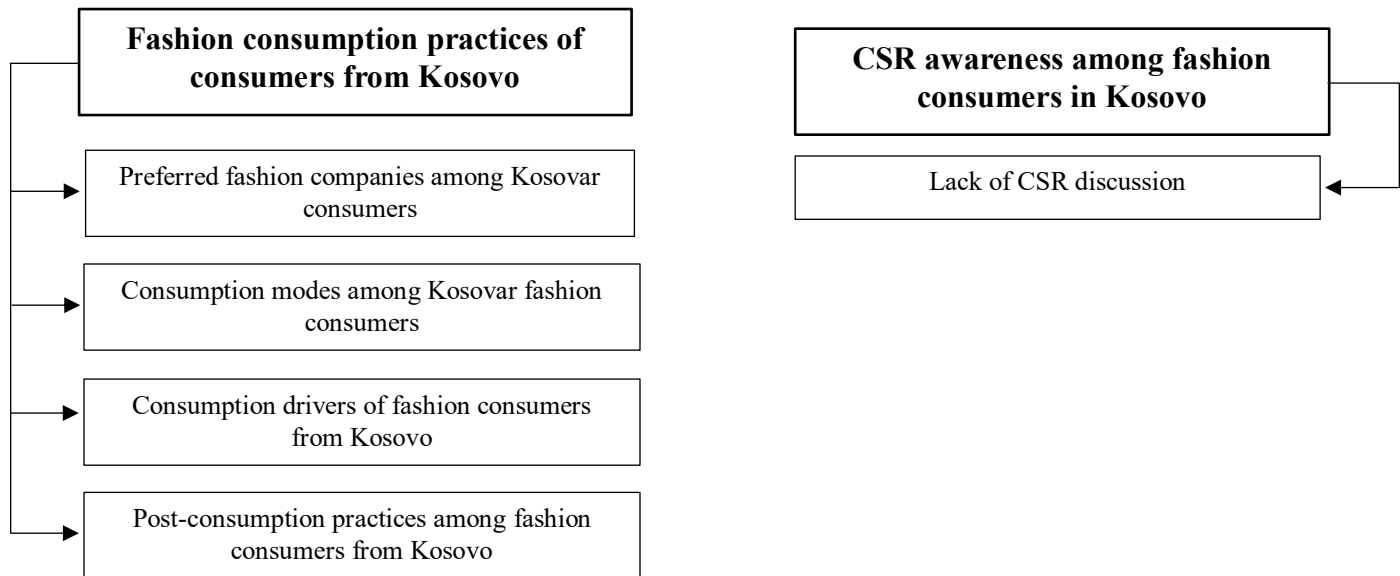
Appendix 3.11 Thematic analysis conducted for netnographic research with fashion consumers in Kosovo, Albania, Croatia and Greece

This appendix portrays in detail every step applied during the thematic analysis process of netnographic research for each of the four SEE countries – (1) Kosovo, (2) Albania, (3), Greece and (4) Croatia.

(1) Netnographic research in Kosovo

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
The researcher familiarised herself with the data when she started implementing the first step of the netnographic research (step 1: making cultural entrée). The transcription of data occurred digitally; it happened as the researcher was collecting the data. During this period, the researcher translated the on-topic data from Albanian into English. To further familiarise herself with the conclusive data set, the researcher read the transcript a few times. Since the beginning of this phase, the researcher documented familiarisation notes. A few examples of these notes are provided below. Note: Online community members did not discuss about CSR Note: Online community members preferred to talk about style, fit and sales Note: Online community members preferred discussing their purchasing practices and experiences
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
The researcher conducted this step digitally. The researcher highlighted the main features in the data set and identified initial codes through the comment function in Microsoft Word. Initially, codes were generated inductively. Afterwards, the researcher revised the initial codes in relation to the second research question. The researcher reviewed the codes a few times during this analysis. Some of the later codes were built upon the codes generated from the reflexive TAs of the focus groups (theoretical approach). The final codes were mainly semantic. A few examples of these codes are displayed below. Code: Trend as a consumption driver for fashion consumers Data extract: <i>“... I got this crochet top for night-outs [attached a photo] ... It’s so <u>trendy</u> and looks so <u>stylish</u>. I’m happy with my purchase.”</i> Code: Self-initiated post-consumption practices among fashion consumers Data extract:

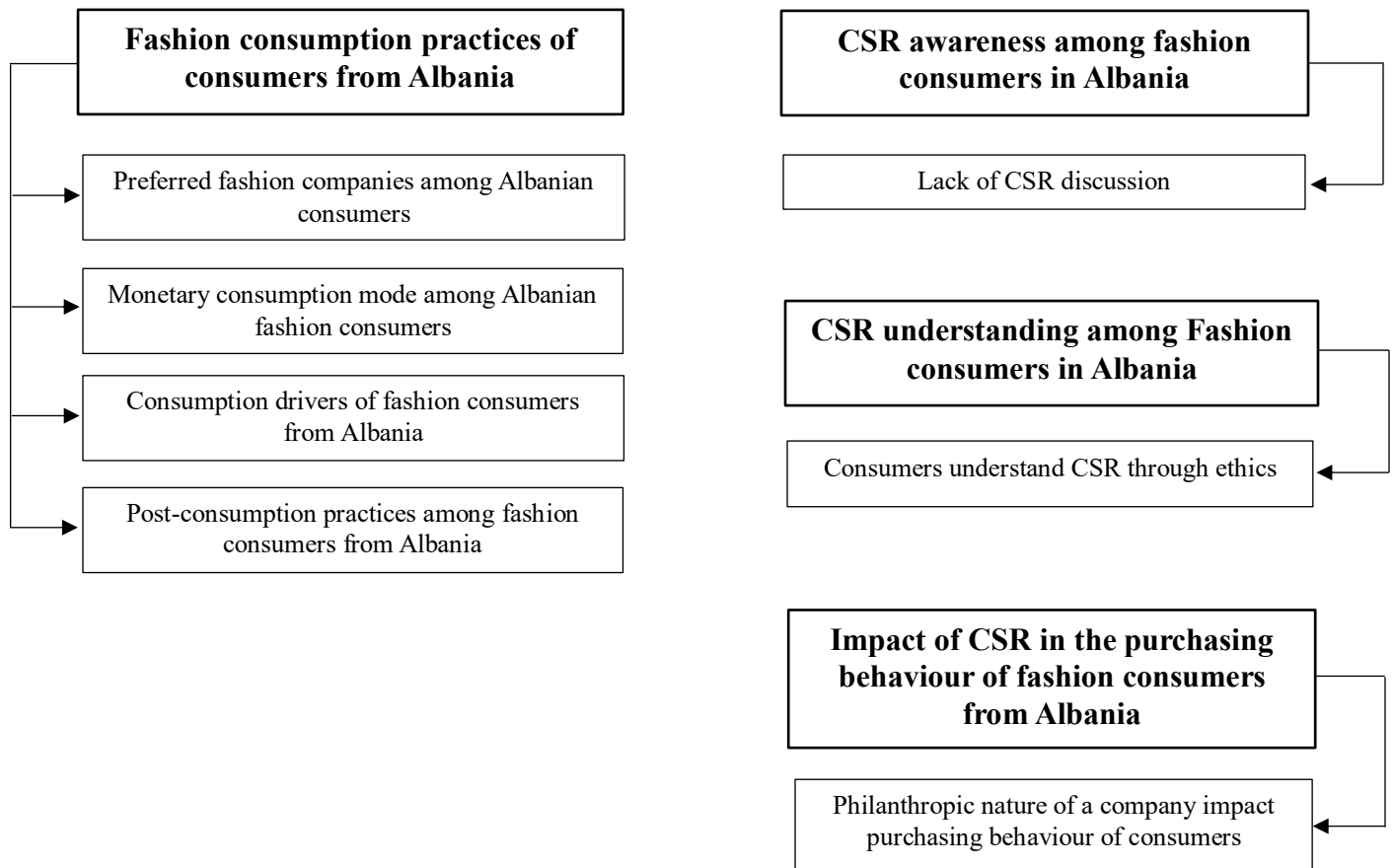
<i>“Hello my favourite fashion-enthusiasts. I express my will to give this evening gown away to anyone of you, who need it. The gown is designed by Emina's Fashion in Ferizaj.”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
The researcher generated three initial themes and six sub-themes. Two out of three themes stemmed from data. One of them was built upon the ‘miscellaneous’ theme, which was generated in the previous focus group analyses. The researcher visualised the above-mentioned themes and sub-themes in a potential thematic map.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
The researcher reviewed the potential themes and sub-themes. Initially, the researcher analysed how each theme and sub-theme worked in relation to RQ2. The researcher noticed the lack of themes related to RQ2. Regardless, the researcher considered that the data set was adequate, as it was authentic. The researcher also checked the above-mentioned themes and sub-themes in relation to the theoretical concepts. Next, the researcher considered these altered themes and sub-themes in relation to the previous themes and sub-themes from the focus group analyses. The researcher discerned the opportunity to rename the then-existing themes similar to the ones from the focus group analyses. This renaming provided the opportunity to enhance the triangulation of data. The researcher showed all these alterations in the coding list and the thematic map.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher wrote a description for each theme and sub-theme. The researcher found these descriptions useful for the next step (the write-up report). The researcher ensured to portray all the changes in the thematic map. The final thematic map for the netnographic research in Kosovo is presented on the next page. As illustrated, the final map is composed of two key themes and five sub-themes.
Phase 6: Writing the report
Lastly, the researcher wrote the findings. The findings were concentrated only on Kosovar fashion consumers. They were depicted in sub sub-chapter 6.3.1. The researcher adopted a hybrid writing approach (descriptive-analytical); nevertheless, the writing leaned towards the descriptive approach.



(2) Netnographic research in Albania

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
Similar to the previous analysis, the researcher familiarised with the data set during the data collection process. The transcription of data also happened during the same process. The researcher translated the data once the three-month data collection process ended. The researcher read and re-read the transcript in English once. During this phase, the researcher wrote preliminary notes. The researcher had digitally recorded other notes during the data collection. Some examples of these notes are presented below. Note: The blogger and commenters did not directly talk about CSR Note: Similar to Kosovar online community members, the Albanian blogger and commenters preferred discussing their purchasing practices and experiences Note: A few times, Albanian commenters discussed the ethics element of CSR
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
The researcher identified initial codes systematically through the entire data set. Given the lack of discussion concerning CSR, the researcher coded to the greatest extent possible. Similar to the previous analysis, coding occurred digitally through Microsoft Word functions. At first, the researcher generated the codes from the on-topic data. Afterwards, the researcher reviewed them in relation to the second research question. Most codes were semantic in nature, with a few latent exceptions. An example of a latent code is provided below. Code: Unfair practices determine the CSR understanding of Albanian fashion consumers

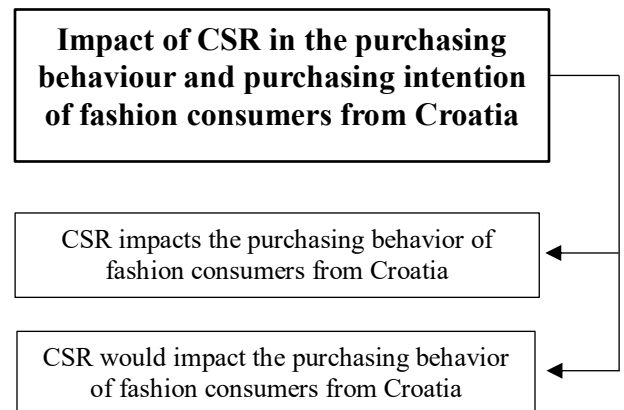
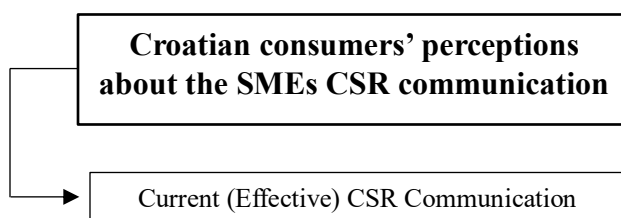
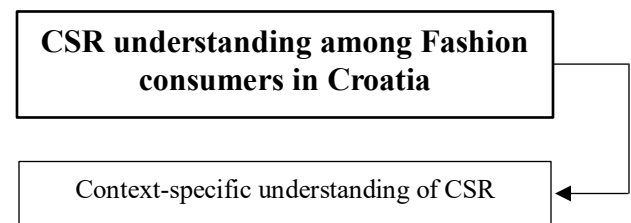
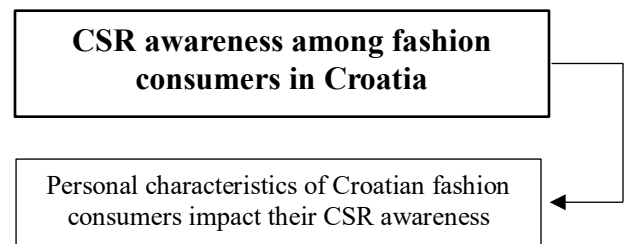
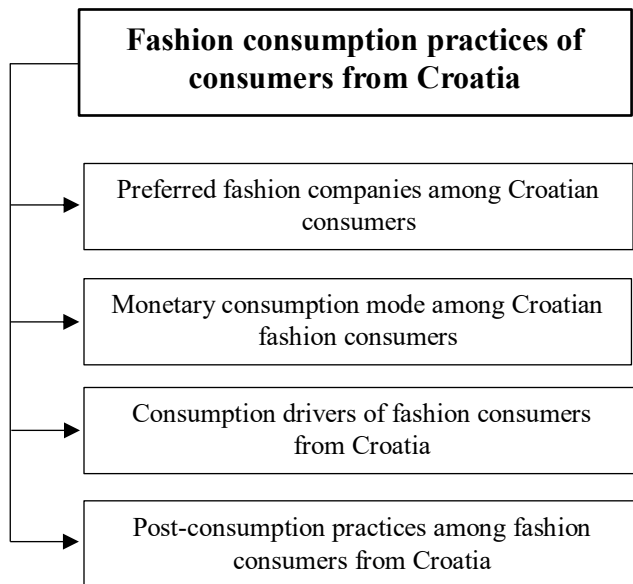
Data extract: <i>“There is also a problem regarding the brands in Albania, because they abuse with prices. So, you can find a brand in US with a real price, in Albania you can find it with a price that’s three times higher, and above all it is a product of 2019 or 2020, not a brand-new product...”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
Based on the codes, the researcher generated four initial themes and seven sub-themes. All themes were grounded in past analyses (focus group analyses and netnographic analysis). The researcher noticed the opportunity to link the codes with the ‘miscellaneous’ theme (‘Fashion consumption practices of consumers’). The researcher depicted these themes and sub-themes in an initial thematic map.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
Afterwards, the researcher revised the initial themes and sub-themes. The reviewing process occurred in three instances. First, the researcher checked the themes and sub-themes in relation to the second research question. Second, the researcher considered the relation of the codes with the theoretical concepts identified in the literature review. Third, the researcher revised the themes and sub-themes in accordance with the previous analysis conducted among Kosovar fashion consumers. The researcher implicitly named the themes similar to the previously mentioned analyses. At this phase, the researcher generated four themes and seven sub-themes. The researcher portrayed all these themes and sub-themes in the thematic map.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher defined each theme; these definitions provided a clear idea for writing the report/findings.
Phase 6: Writing the report
The researcher carefully compiled the report, which was used as a sub sub-chapter of the findings (Sub Sub-chapter 6.3.2). Similar to the other analysis, the researcher embraced a descriptive-analytical writing approach. The researcher decided to put together two themes under one sub sub-chapter. Instead of (1) CSR awareness among fashion consumers in Albania and (2) CSR understanding among fashion consumers in Albania, the researcher composed one inclusive title: “CSR Awareness and Understanding among Fashion Consumers in Albania”.



(3) Netnographic research in Croatia

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
The familiarisation phase with the data set from the netnographic research among Croatian fashion consumers was slightly different compared to the two previous analyses. As explained in the text, the researcher conducted this netnographic research with the help of a subcontractor. The initial familiarisation phase was conducted by the subcontracted. Regardless, the researcher was informed about every happening throughout the process. The subcontractor provided the researcher with the on-topic data. The researcher read the transcript several times. While reading, the researcher noted initial notes expressing the initial perceptions of the data set. The researcher considered the records taken by the subcontractor. Some notes written by the researcher are portrayed below. Note: Bloggers and commenters actively talked about CSR and similar terms Note: Compared to Kosovar and Albanian online community members, Croatian bloggers and commenters were eager to consider CSR in their purchasing decisions.

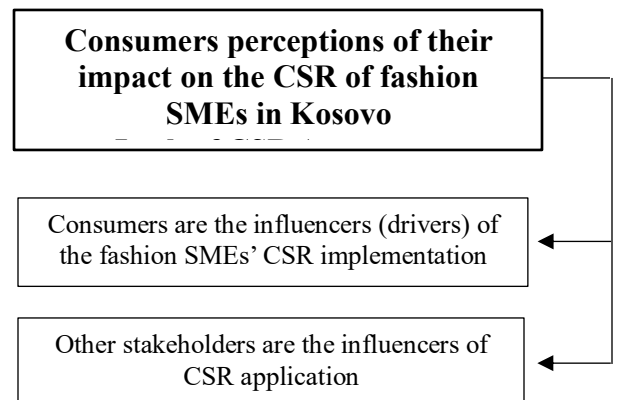
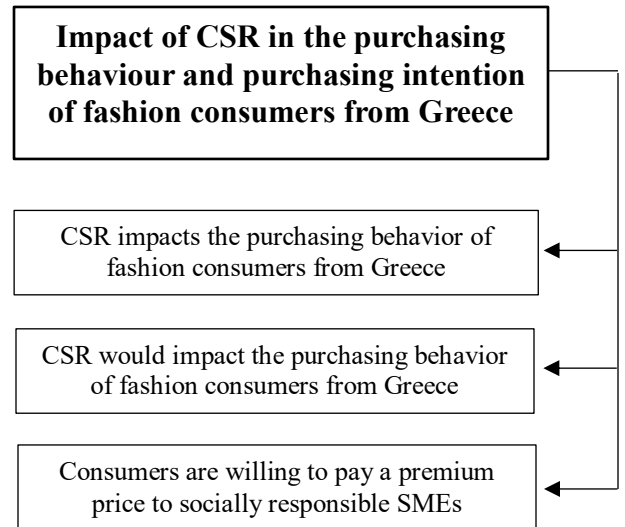
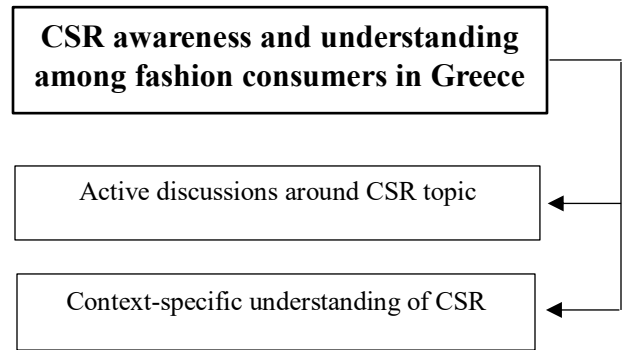
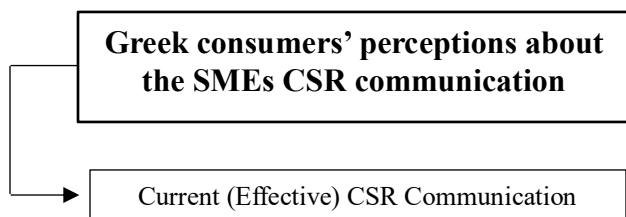
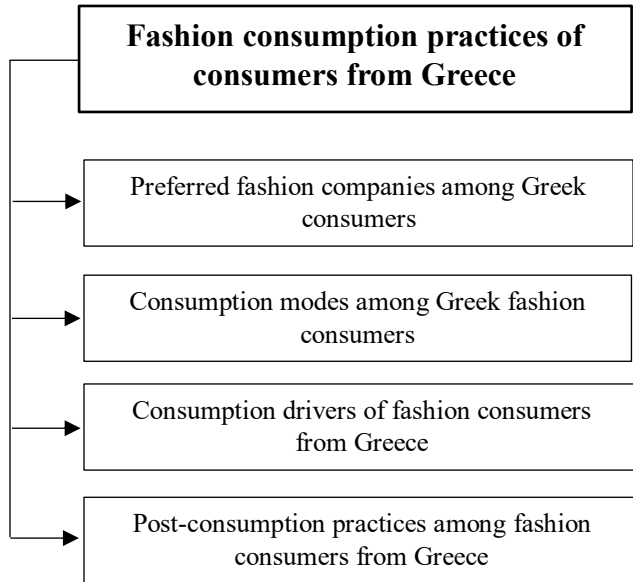
Phase 2: Systematic data coding The researcher created initial codes based on the data set. The coding was computerised; the researcher used Microsoft Word to portray the initial codes. After generating the initial codes, the researcher reviewed the codes in relation to the research question (RQ2). The researcher observed a close relation between the codes and the RQ2. Similar to the previous analysis, codes had a mainly semantic nature. A few examples of the codes generated by the researcher are presented below. Code: The negative impact of the fashion industry influences the purchasing behaviour of fashion consumers from Croatia Data extract: <i>“I don't buy from fast fashion companies anymore. Now, I mostly buy from local companies and second-hand stores...”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data During this phase, the researcher created six themes and ten sub-themes. Similarly to the previous analyses, the researcher was immensely influenced by the preceding themes and sub-themes. The research observed similar patterns related to the ‘Fashion consumption practices of consumers’ and generated the same theme. The researcher illustrated the afore-said themes and sub-themes in a potential thematic map. The map was visualised on a paper by the researcher.
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes The researcher revised themes, sub-themes and codes. Initially, the researcher considered the relation between themes and the research question (RQ2). The researcher observed that themes in this analysis were sufficient to address the RQ2. Next, the researcher revised themes and sub-themes in relation to the previous analyses (focus group analyses and netnography analyses). The researcher assured to apply similar naming to the previous analyses when deemed appropriate. By the end of this phase, the researcher created six themes and ten sub-themes. All themes and sub-themes were portrayed in a thematic map.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes The researcher refined the themes’ names. In addition, the researcher provided a description for each theme. The descriptions were useful for the next phase – the writing of the report.
Phase 6: Writing the report The researcher wrote the report. The report served as the basis for sub sub-chapter 6.3.3 (findings sub sub-chapter). The researcher followed a descriptive-analytical approach when writing this report. The report focused solely on the findings generated from the netnographic research among Kosovar fashion consumers



(4) Netnographic research in Greece

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
Similar to the analysis in the netnographic research in Croatia, this phase was conducted jointly with a subcontractor. The subcontractor informed the researcher about the data familiarisation from the beginning of the data collection process. The subcontractor provided the researcher with the translated transcript and familiarisation notes. The researcher reviewed the transcript several times. The researcher wrote preliminary notes about the discussions among Greek fashion consumers in the three different digital spaces. An example of the notes is presented below. Note: Online community members were eagerly discussing the ethical companies in Greece Note: Neither online community members nor YouTube commenters mentioned the term ‘CSR’. Yet, they all mentioned their ethical, philanthropic and legal expectations towards the companies being discussed
Phase 2: Systematic data coding
The researcher gave equal attention to each data item and generated initial codes. The researcher used Microsoft Word to highlight the data extracts and create the codes. The initial codes were mostly based on the data. The researcher revised these initial codes in relation to the research question (RQ2). The final codes were mainly semantic in nature. Some of the codes were identical to the codes generated in the previous analysis in Croatia. An example of such a code is depicted below. Code: The negative impact of the fashion industry influences the purchasing behaviour of fashion consumers from Greece Data extract: <i>“... Indeed, a fast fashion T-shirt may cost less than an equivalent ethical fashion one, but if everybody thinks about whether they really need this T-shirt and purchase only these that are indeed necessary (even from fast fashion if nothing else can be done) for sure in the future, they will save... Why can’t every human be content with 5-10-20- even 50 - clothing pieces? ...”</i>
Phase 3: Generating initial themes from coded and collated data
After coding the data, the researcher put codes into candidate themes and sub-themes. The researcher created six themes and fourteen sub-themes. These themes were implicitly and explicitly affected by the preceding analyses. After generating candidate themes and sub-themes, the researcher created an initial thematic map. Different from the other phases of this research, the thematic map was illustrated on a paper.

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
During this phase, the researcher reviewed themes, sub-themes and codes. The researcher reworked themes and sub-themes in relation to the codes and depicted the changes in the coding list. The researcher also ensured the themes and sub-themes linked to the RQ2. Throughout this process, the researcher considered the generated themes and sub-themes in relation to the preceding themes and sub-themes. The researcher merged the second and third themes into a unified theme. Accordingly, ‘CSR awareness among fashion consumers in Greece’ and ‘CSR understanding among fashion consumers in Greece’ turned into ‘CSR awareness and understanding among fashion consumers in Greece’. At the end of this phase, the researcher generated six themes and ten sub-themes. All themes and sub-themes were visualised in the final map, which is presented on the next page. The researcher ensured to link the themes, sub-themes and codes. An example of how each link with each other is depicted at the end of this appendix.
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
The researcher offered an explanation for each theme. These explanations were beneficial for the next phase of analysis.
Phase 6: Writing the report
Based on the themes, sub-themes and codes, the researcher compiled the report. The researcher presented the report in sub sub-chapter 6.3.4. Similar to the preceding analyses, the researcher adopted a descriptive-analytical approach. The report focused solely on the netnographic research among Greek fashion consumers.



Theme	Subtheme	Code
Fashion consumption practices of consumers	Preferred fashion companies among consumers	Local small and medium-size fashion companies
		International large fast-fashion companies
		International small and medium-size fashion companies
		Second-hand shops
	Consumption modes among fashion consumers	Monetary consumption mode
		Non-monetary consumption mode
	Consumption drivers of fashion consumers	Style as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Trend as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Quality as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Necessity as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Comfort as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Price as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Fit as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Ethical Production as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Environmental-Friendly Company as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
		Philanthropy as a consumption driver for fashion consumers
	Post-consumption practices among fashion consumers	Self-initiated post-consumption practices among fashion consumers

		Company-initiated post-consumption practices among fashion consumers
		NGO-initiated post-consumption practices among fashion consumers

Appendix 3.12 UREC Approval Letter



Downloaded: 15/04/2023
Approved: 14/04/2021

Natya Xharavina
Registration number: 180284867
Management School
Programme: PhD

Dear Natya

PROJECT TITLE: Corporate Social Responsibility in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in South-East Europe in the Fashion Industry: An Investigation into Organisational Practices and Consumer Behaviour
APPLICATION: Reference Number 036662

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 14/04/2021 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 036662 (form submission date: 13/04/2021); (expected project end date: 11/03/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1088046 version 1 (23/02/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1088047 version 1 (23/02/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1088048 version 1 (23/02/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1089939 version 1 (13/04/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1089938 version 1 (13/04/2021).
- Participant consent form 1089937 version 1 (13/04/2021).
- Participant consent form 1089936 version 1 (13/04/2021).
- Participant consent form 1088049 version 2 (13/04/2021).
- Participant consent form 1088050 version 2 (13/04/2021).
- Participant consent form 1088051 version 2 (13/04/2021).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Sophie May
Ethics Administrator
Management School

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 4.1 Journal titles, publishers and quality indicators for journal papers and conference names, years and locations for conference papers

Journal Title	Publisher	Impact Factor (2022)	ABS List (AJG 2021)	Scopus CiteScore (2023)	Scimago Journal	Count
Baltic Journal of Economic Studies	Baltija Publishing	0.5	NA	NA	NA	1
Benchmarking: An International Journal	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	5.6	1	9.4	Q1	1
Business Ethics, the Environment and Responsibility	John Wiley and Sons Ltd	2.1	2	6.2	Q1	1
Business Systems Research: International Journal of the Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy	Sciendo	1.5	NA	2.3	Q3	1
Cleaner Engineering and Technology	Elsevier	5.37	NA	4.5	Q1	1
Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review	Virtus Interpress	0.75	NA	0.9	Q4	1
Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	5.6	2	9.8	Q1	1
Econviews: Review of Contemporary Business, Entrepreneurship and Economic Issues	Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek	NA	NA	NA	NA	2
E-Journal of Tourism	E-Journal of Tourism (Universitas Udayana)	3.1	NA	NA	NA	1
EuroMed Journal of Business	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	5.2	1	8.9	Q1	1

European Journal of Research and Reflection in Management Sciences	Progressive Academic Publishing	1.64	NA	NA	NA	1
European Journal of Sustainable Development	European Center of Sustainable Development	0.62	NA	NA	NYA	1
European Management Journal	Elsevier	7.5	2	11.1	Q1	1
European Management Review	John Wiley and Sons Ltd	3.7	3	6.4	Q1	1
Human Resource Development Quarterly	John Wiley and Sons Ltd	3.3	2	6.6	Q1	1
Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems: INDECS	Croatian Ministry of Science and Education	1.9	NA	NA	NA	1
International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility	Springer Publishing	6.2	NA	NA	NA	1
International Journal of Cross Cultural Management	Sage Publishing	2.4	1	3.1	Q1	1
International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	2.6	1	4.8	Q2	2
Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics	Elsevier	1.6	2	2.3	Q1	1
Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management	The Bucharest University of Economic Studies Publishing House	NA	NA	NA	NA	1
Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	2.4	NA	5.8	NA	1

Journal of Global Responsibility	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	1.6	1	4.7	Q2	1
Journal of Governance and Regulation	Virtus Interpress	0.81	NA	0.85	Q4	2
Journal of Organizational Behavior	John Wiley and Sons Ltd	6.8	4	9.0	Q1	1
KnE Social Sciences	KnE Publishing	0.9	NA	NA	NA	1
Management Research and Practice	Bucharest University of Economic Studies	NA	NA	NA	NA	1
Management: Journal of Contemporary Management Issues	Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism Split	1.3	NA	NA	NA	1
Muhasebe Bilim Dünyası Dergisi	Dergi Park Akademik	0.5	NA	NA	NA	1
Social Responsibility Journal	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	3.2	1	6.4	Q1	1
Sustainability	MDPI AG	3.9	NA	5.8	Q1	2
Technological and Economic Development of Economy	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	5.9	NA	9.1	Q2	1
Total of Journals						36

Conference Name	Year	Location	Count
27th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development	2018	Rome, Italy	1
4th International Conference on Education and Social Sciences- Challenges towards the Future	2021	Virtual	1
9th International Conference on Information, Intelligence, Systems and Applications	2018	Zakynthos, Greece	1
Total of Conferences			3
TOTAL			39

Appendix 6.1 Perceptions of Kosovar consumers about CSR

Participant	Quote
KP9	<i>“When for example a company owner or director chooses better quality material so that they don’t deceive the clients.”</i>
KP8	<i>“To be responsible when it comes to the client, for example to have materials that don’t cause allergy or sickness, because they can get sued for that.”</i>
KP2	<i>“I think it’s their responsibility to produce qualitative material based on people’s needs because there are people who are allergic to some specific materials.”</i>
KP3	<i>“I’m allergic to the black dye that’s found in jeans and I think it’s necessary that they put symbols that imply that a specific article has an ingredient that can cause an allergy.”</i>
KP1	<i>“I think there should be responsibility towards the client for the defects in the articles as well as the material that the clients look for.”</i>
KP7	<i>“For example, when a company makes sure to only use recyclable material which also makes them closer to their clients. All the materials they use in general...”</i>

Appendix 6.2 Perceptions of Kosovar consumers about CSR and company sizes

Participant	Quote
KP5	<i>“When a business is launched, no matter the size, it should have responsibilities towards the clients, the materials etc. So, it doesn’t mean that responsibilities fall only on the big businesses, but the small middle-size and small ones as well.”</i>
KP4	<i>“I think so too, it doesn’t matter what size the business is when it comes to responsibilities... they should equally be responsible...”</i>
KP9	<i>“I think that responsibilities are the same, because no matter if the company is small or big, you still have to work at the same capacities for the products. It’s the same as a person doing a job for a small group and for a big group, yes the size is different but the quality is the same.”</i>
KP11	<i>“I think responsibilities are the same.”</i>

Appendix 6.3 Albanian consumers' understanding of CSR based on CSR dimensions and stakeholders

CSR Dimension	Stakeholder	Participant	Quote
(1) Philanthropy	(1) Community	AP8	<i>"... Social responsibility is related to the things companies offer in the community... for example, a company operates in a country and <u>gives back to the community</u> of that country where it operates..."</i>
(1) Economy (2) Philanthropy	(1) Community (2) Partners (3) Consumers	AP11	<i>"So, the company tries to turn all the activities into a <u>benefit</u>, but not necessarily in a <u>monetary value</u>. It might create funds, partnerships. I don't know how it work at a corporate level, but maybe to get the benefit of a certain target group which needs that product or service that you are offering..."</i>
(1) Ethics (2) Philanthropy	(1) Society	AP5	<i>"... social responsibility is related <u>proper conduct of the company</u> and to <u>what the company is giving to people</u>. Not only <u>monetary aids</u> and stuff like that, but also this case with children (<u>donations</u> of products to children in need) ..."</i>
(1) Legal	(0)	AP10	<i>"... I think that social responsibilities come in this perspective, how companies follow the <u>laws</u> and how far are they willing to go not to break the laws to achieve their economic goals."</i>
(1) Economy (2) Philanthropy	(1) Environment (2) Community (3) Employees (4) Consumers (5) Society	AP7	<i>"I think that a company except the <u>profit</u> it makes, during all times should also have a plan with social responsibility for its <u>environmental surroundings</u>. Here, it must include all these factors that are related to environment and it should also take care and help people who live in that <u>community</u>."</i>

			<i>“Also, the treatment of its own <u>employees</u>, the willingness of the employees to work and treat <u>consumers</u> properly. Of course, also <u>the image of the company</u> in the public eye. Also, sponsorships, events that this company may create in <u>communities</u>.”</i>
(1) Legal (2) Economy (3) Ethics	(1) Company (2) Employees	AP1	<i>“All corporations have some bigger responsibilities other than physical part – offering employees fair salaries, or gaining profit to survive and thrive – as well as the social and psychological part...”</i>

Appendix 6.4 Kosovar consumers' views about the lack of CSR practices

Participant	Quote
KP7	<i>"...there are also clothes – hoodies that are covered with rubber, which even sometimes smell of sulfur. I bought a hoodie recently and I had to wash it three time to get rid of the smell. <u>They didn't consider the consumer's health.</u> Until recently, even these international companies have had plastic bags. Cardboard bags which are recyclable have showed up very late in our market."</i>
KP19	<i>"As I'm informed regarding the fashion brands, here in Kosovo the social responsibility isn't very good, they don't incorporate it much."</i>
KP9	<i>"There are cases where there's <u>no protection for the employees</u>, they have <u>no contracts.</u>"</i>
KP13	<i>"They've worked without work contract until recently."</i>
KP15	<i>"If we talk about Kosovo, I <u>haven't noticed that there is any initiative</u>, except if we talk about another field of business, Pro Credit has taken a mini-initiative to reduce the carbon footprint. But there is very little of these things at the fashion industry, and they overdo it by printing, by mistreating the employees, which then makes this social responsibility equal to zero."</i>
KP8	<i>"...medium and small companies use plastic bags all the time and damage the environment."</i>
KP3	<i>"For example, in Gjakova, <u>employees work for a salary of 150€ in a small shop</u>, and it's very common. Everyone knows that you don't expect to get a salary of 300, 400€ from these shops. For example, the minimum salary in ZARA is 400€ which means that there are differences considering the size of the company."</i>
KP12	<i>"Sometimes, these small companies that sell clothes which they import from the foreign countries, aren't honest neither with the consumers nor with employees. They buy the material cheaper and sell it with an unreasonable price, which doesn't justify the amount of money that I as a consumer spend to buy it."</i>

Appendix 6.5 Kosovar consumers' drivers in their last consumptions

Driver	Participant	Quote
Pricing	KP4	<i>"I got the last item because of the <u>discount</u>. I took advantage of the discount because you cannot find such discounts often. I was influenced by the price."</i>
	KP11	<i>"It was very cheap"</i>
	KP13	<i>"I bought a dress. I got it because of the reasonable price. I didn't contemplate on my decision. [Researcher asked "Why?"] Maybe the lack of information, because the store I bought it from wasn't a very unique one, and I had no reason to know more information, because judging from the price you could see that it wasn't unique, it didn't have any special material. If it was a more special store, I'd like to know more about it."</i>
Matching Outfits	KP1	<i>"The last time I bought a pair of shoes. To be honest, before buying them I thought about what <u>clothes I could match them with</u>. I didn't ruminate on the purchase."</i>
Preference	KP15	<i>"I liked it, so I purchased it."</i>
Fit	KP12	<i>"The item fit me very well."</i>
Need	KP6	<i>"I needed a new pair of shoes. I couldn't repair my old ones."</i>
	KP19	<i>"I needed that."</i>

Appendix 6.6 Consumption modes and practices of fashion consumers from Kosovo

Mode	Practice	Participant	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	KM37	<i>"... I enjoy buying new clothes ... shopping makes my day better..."</i>
		KM19	<i>"... I <u>bought</u> it online..."</i>
	Renting	KM31	<i>"... this summer, I have <u>rented</u> all the evening dresses for our family events... it saved me a lot of money and time..."</i>
Non-monetary	Gifted	KM29	<i>"They got me a dress from Label Nue..."</i>
	Borrowed	KM54	<i>"I've seen many of you renting evening dresses, I <u>borrowed</u> two dresses from my sister. I don't think it's worth spending this much..."</i>
	Lending	KM57	<i>"I also lend my dresses to my sisters..."</i>

Appendix 6.7 Consumption modes and practices of fashion consumers from Albania

Mode	Practice	Participant	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	AC8	<i>"I recently <u>purchased</u> a dress from Zara, the yellow one that got trendy this season..."</i>
		AC15	<i>"... I have also <u>bought</u> a similar..."</i>
	Gifting	AB1	<i>"Best Gift Ideas for your Loved Ones [title of the blog post]"</i>
Non-monetary	Gifted	KM29	<i>"My boyfriend <u>gifted</u> me a dress once. I was surprised, it fit me and my style..."</i>
	Swapping	AB1	<i>"I have seen among other bloggers the practice of <u>swapping clothes</u>..."</i>

Appendix 6.8 Consumption modes and practices of fashion consumers from Croatia

Mode	Practice	Participant	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	CC21	<i>"I recently <u>purchased</u> a similar pair of cashmere pants."</i>
		CC15	<i>"I <u>purchase</u> clothes that are <u>comfortable</u> for me..."</i>
		CB7	<i>"... I mostly <u>buy</u> from local companies..."</i>
		CC8	<i>"I always <u>purchase</u> Veja sneakers..."</i>
		CB1 and CB2	<i>"We know where you can find the best hand-made handbags in Zagreb [title of the blog post]"</i>
	Gifting	CB14	<i>"... You can <u>gift</u> him a personalized scarf with his initials..."</i>
		CC67	<i>"Last time, I got him matching pajamas and he loved them..."</i>

Appendix 6.9 Consumption modes and practices of fashion consumers from Greece

Mode	Practice	Participant	Quote
Monetary	Purchasing Clothing Items	GM32	<i>"I recently <u>bought</u> a jacket from the new collection which featured the plant-based (cactus) leather as a material..."</i>
		GC19	<i>"... I <u>buy</u> from charity shops, flea markets, online..."</i>
	Gifting	GC3	<i>"I got my boyfriend a vintage Fila hoodie..."</i>

	Renting	GM76	<i>"I know some friends that have also <u>rented</u> their wedding dresses..."</i>
Non-monetary	Gifted	GC2	<i>"My girl got me a manga hoodie..."</i>
	Reusing	GC23	<i>"I "rescued" so many pieces from my mom's wardrobe that were not sent to the village [laughing emoji] the truth is they are still in a good condition and look stylish..."</i>

Appendix 6.10 Greek consumers' views on recycling

GM11: <i>"Goodmorning! I have some old underwear that do not fit me. I do not want to throw them away... Any ideas what I can do with them? Recycling maybe?"</i>	
GM12	<i>"Fabric Republic"</i>
GM13	<i>"Dusting rags?"</i>
GM11	<i>(Responded to GM13) "Good idea! But not all of them are cotton"</i>
GM7	<i>"I have also been wondering myself how to recycle the non-cotton ones with "less" (a small amount of) fabric."</i>
GM14	<i>"Why don't you give them to an association of abused women? That way you will do a great deed."</i>
GM15	<i>"Red recycling bin of Recycom"</i>
GM16	<i>"They do not accept everything and even if they see that a piece of cloth-underwear is in a good condition they do not take it straight to recycling... They give them to infrastructures that need them"</i>

Appendix 6.11 Greek consumers' views about the nature of SMEs

GM8: <i>"Good evening, I wanted an opinion for companies that claim to be produced in Greece like bubblegun? Are they ethical?"</i>	
GM21	<i>"Bubblegun is a Greek company. Its clothes are designed, cut and sewed in Thessaloniki"</i>
GM8	<i>"Yes, the raw materials are probably not Greek or ethical because they have a low cost and they do not clarify anywhere where they come from."</i>
GM21	<i>"I think that additionally most of the clothes are synthetic which is a "havoc" of microplastics.... "</i>
GM10	<i>"Touni (an influencer) has said that the fabrics are from Turkey"</i>
GM8	<i>"Can they be ethical from Turkey?"</i>
GM22	<i>"As far as I also know it is a company that manufactures them in Greece but the raw materials are of unknown origin. Also, a friend that has purchased from them"</i>

	<i>told me that she was not pleased with the quality and considered it of very cheap quality. Now the last time I visited the site the prices did not look that cheap to me.”</i>
GM17	<i>“It does not matter in which country the label of the clothes is put. Because that does not mean that the product is made in Greece. All of their production line is unknown. From the harvest of the cotton until the last stage. Also, there are sweatshops in Greece too. Nothing ensures the ethics behind a company except only the certifications. Besides, you can also understand from the prices that there is no way that there is an ethical production line behind. How would they manage to pay everyone with these kinds of low prices? You can see, for example how much the products of Heel (a Greek ethical company) cost! Nothing like it! Not comparable!”</i>
GM8	<i>“Yes, do we know where the fabrics come from because I have no idea what kind of certifications there are?”</i>
GM17	<i>“If there were any certifications, they would mention them everywhere and they would advertise them. Just like any ethical company that respects itself. We would not be wondering. I do not know them either but I know that when a company is ethical, they put it on Instagram and certainly in the about us on its site.”</i>
GM21	<i>“(Posted a video from YouTube) Here we can see a few things about their production. I have not purchased anything from the company myself, I do not like the aesthetic of their clothes at all, so I do not have a personal opinion on quality.”</i>