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# **Performing Sustainability in Fast Fashion Retailing**

*A Netnography Inspired Study of Sustainable Marketing in Fast Fashion*

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## **Abstract**

This paper stems from understanding how fast fashion retailers market their sustainability and how the retail space drives different forms of sustainable performances and consumption. Departing from a practice-based approach and practice theory, the study gives insights on how retailers actions in the production chain are translated in-store and online for consumers sense-making, performances, and consumption practices. The study indicated that, fast fashion retailers are putting in efforts in becoming sustainable, where sustainability is viewed beyond material dominated discourses and put into perspective as integrated in processes right from material production, design process, through to retail space. Though certain material combinations and lack of control due to complexities and knowledge on certain parts of the production chain might sabotage the retailers sustainability work, sustainability in fast fashion extends beyond ethical, labour issues and environmental friendliness of materials. Fast fashion retailers take active roles in action, where stages of retailers processes have to consider sustainability in various phases. Processes ranging from material type, material composition, design, style, care, fit, store display, type of labels and tags, communications on tags, positions of tags on the product and even be mindful of practices that are promoted within the retail space. Through the lens of practices theory, sustainability signage as presented in-store has the tendency to be ignored by consumers due to the understanding that, practices that are encouraged by the retailers may devoid the consumers of sensemaking in-store in relation to the sustainable materials. Sustainable practices in the retail space require overly tactile ways of doing. This also embodies the use of technical jargons in representations that may not resonate with the consumer. Hence the fast fashion consumers' sense-making of sustainable concepts in the retail space is critically challenged in ways that do not encourage the consumer to seek meanings in sustainable products.

**Keywords:** *fast fashion; sustainability; marketing; practice theory; sustainable consumption.*

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*Cynthia Nerker Salkovic*

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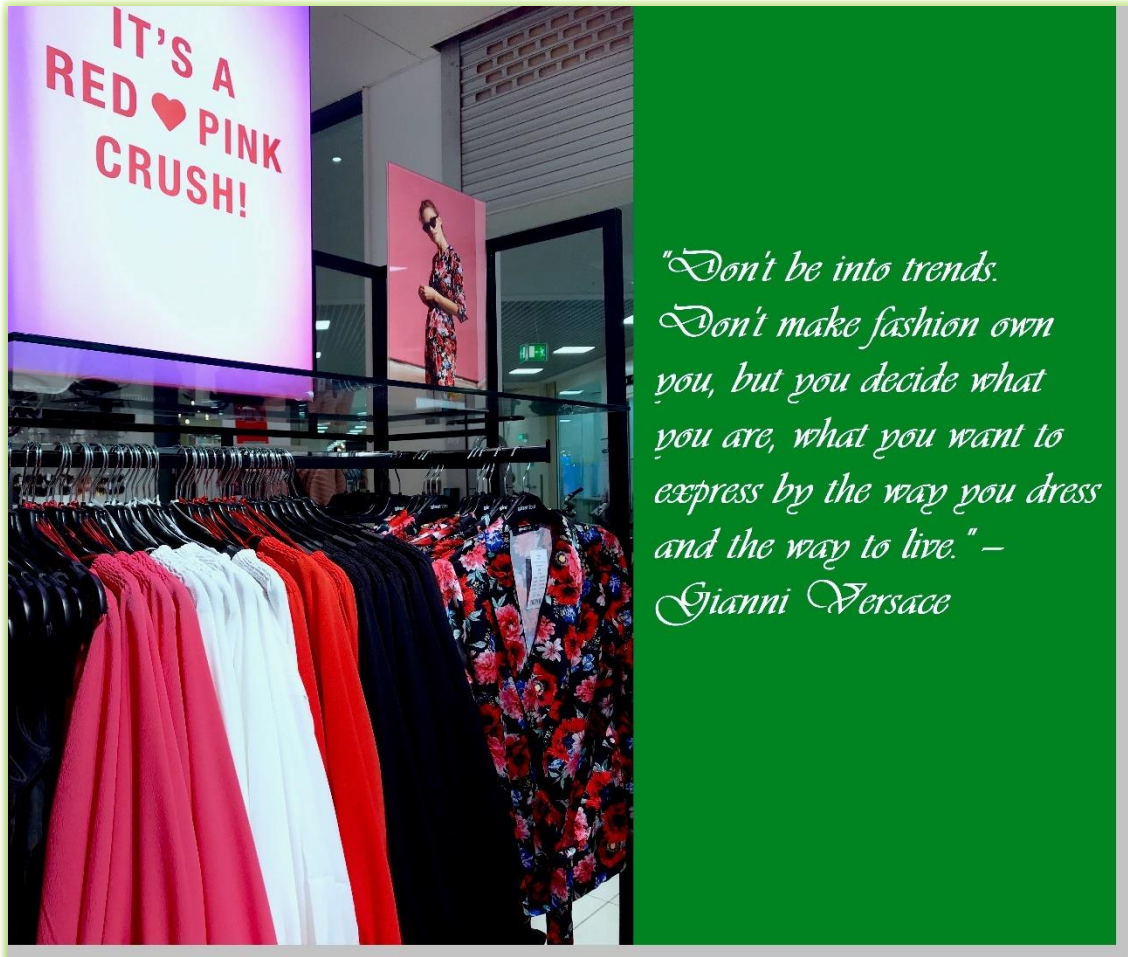
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## “Trends or Sustainable Fast Fashion”



“You never change anything by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that make the existing model obsolete” - R. Buckminster Fuller

## 1. Introduction

The fashion industry has come under immense scrutiny in recent years due to environmental issues relating to pollutants from garment industry, and ethical issues as a result of poor labour conditions such as child labour among others. There has been concerns and increased awareness of social sustainability among fashion retailers and consumers at large (Chow et al., 2017). Even more so with the onset of fast fashion as a social phenomenon poised on increasing consumption (Claudio, 2007; Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015) and abrasively changing the way fashion consumption is practiced due to the cutting-edge trendy fashion items with quick response system which is widely contested as unsustainable. Sustainability in the fashion industry is rather underdeveloped as in contrast to the food industry that has clear division within the various sustainable concepts and sections, ranging from fair trade goods, eco food, organic goods and so forth (Tanner & Kast, 2003; Oosterveer et al., 2007; Leander, 2015).

In the fashion industry it is rather limited and dominantly viewed through the generation of excessive garment waste from the fashion industry, for example (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Some authors focus on the re-use of garments that have not ended their life cycle yet, in the form of second-hand goods (Zamani et al., 2017; Fredriksson, 2013) as there is a growing interest in ethics, environment and social responsibility. However not all second-hand goods are associated with sustainability, some use of second-hand are rather oriented to aesthetic expressions (Fredriksson, 2013). Whereas authors like Johnstone and Tan (2015) centered on the working conditions and use of child labour in the garment manufacturing countries for garments production, the use of toxic chemicals in fashion products that are harmful for human and the environment at large has also been touched upon (Fransson & Molander, 2013). Other authors like Ritch (2012) find it imperative to contrast the fashion industry to the food industry through the lens of sustainability, due to the level of sustainable development and consumption in the food industry as food consumers are perceived to be more conscious of sustainability issues (Ritch, 2012).

Environmental Sustainability issues are mostly dominated by the excessive production of waste from the garment industry thereby creating overloads of garment waste at landfill sites (Domina & Koch, 1997,1999; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). This perspective encouraged researches into garment recycling to aid in curbing the problem of excessive garment waste of which some retailers take on post-retail initiatives and responsibilities for. This is in the form of taking back old garments in exchange for incentives such as discounts coupons among others (Kant Hvass, 2014). This is a common concept among fast fashion retailers.

The returned garments are either donated to charity organisations for resale or recycled. Though textiles are nearly 100% recyclable and nothing in the textile and apparel industry should be wasted (Hawley, 2006), not all garments can be recycled back to the same use. Some must be repurposed while others have to be downgraded to be useful in anyway, for example, Trans-America is one of the biggest of about 3,000 textile recyclers in the United States. At its 80,000-square-foot sorting facility, workers separate used clothing into 300 different categories by type of item, size, and fiber content. About 30% of the textiles are turned into absorbent wiping rags for industrial uses, and another 25–30% are recycled into fiber for use as stuffing for upholstery insulation, and the manufacture of paper products. So overall about 55% of the textile are repurposed in use leaving approximately about 45% of these textiles continue their life as clothing (Claudio, 2007).

Recycling of garments for re-use come with its own barriers and challenges, however contrasting it with fresh garments proves that the recycled garments are far better in reducing environmental burden as in contrast to new clothing made from virgin material (Wooldridge et al., 2006). For instance, the manufacturing of polyester and other synthetic fabrics is an energy-intensive process requiring large amounts of crude oil and releasing of harmful emissions including volatile hazardous gases and compounds (Claudio, 2007). According to the EPA evaluation, under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, many textile manufacturing facilities are hazardous waste generators.

### **1.1 Situating Fast Fashion in the Fashion Industry**

Fast fashion is situated as a perplexing problem of contemporary lifestyle and has brought about a different way of consumption in the garments and apparel industry. It is centered on versatility and is said to be considered to offer immediate gratifications from new products to its consumer (Samsioe, 2017; Memic & Minhas, 2011). Fast fashion by their very onset is perceived to impede on sustainability concepts as it encourages more consumption practices and embodies unsustainability. Due to the swift and frequent availability of new assortment and the cost leadership strategies by retailers. But also due to the highly effective supply chain managements (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015; Hines & Bruce, 2007 p.41). The quick response (QR) and swift assortment changes are one of the main capabilities of fast fashion retailers. However, the QR system is said to encourage a “throwaway culture” where consumers discard garments before their real-life cycle or technical lifespan ends, partly due to the availability of new trends (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Shen et al., 2012; Zamani et al., 2017). The fast fashion retail industry has the same problems as the general garment industry and even more so, due to the QR and cost leadership strategies that allows them to sell cheaply. Some social context like equitability



and labour issues, for instance use of child labour and poor labour conditions has been associated with the fast fashion industry (Shen et al., 2014). As well as infrastructural problem from producing countries, for example the Savar building collapse, Rana Plaza industrial accident in Bangladesh in 2013.

To enhance the sustainability of production, fashion retailers are encouraged to adopt information system such as integrating environmental management systems into their operations (Shen, 2014). Fast fashion brands are also trying to strengthen their brand names by adopting sustainable practices in their supply chain (Shen, 2014). The conventional practice is ISO 14000 standard. The ISO certification can be evidence of the retailer's achievement in environmental management and sustainability. There are also others like the ISO 14001, 9001:2015 which can improve the supply chain performance in the retail sector through quality in supply chain management (SCM). Some retailers follow the ISO 14000 standard to establish their environmental-related operations and workflows (Shen et al., 2014). Fast fashion retailers have come to the realization of the different consumer segments and some pressure from the system to push through with sustainability in their offering to reduce environmental impact. And also curb questionable social issues as a result of their fashion production systems. Most fast fashion retailers are also realising the benefits of incorporating sustainable products and strategies in their offering thereby making efforts to incorporate sustainability in their operations (Shen et al., 2014). Sustainable fashion is described as "fashion products with a conscience to care about labour conditions and environmental responsibility" (Shen et. al., 2014, p.12).

## **1.2 Problematization**

Fast fashion retailers have received a great deal of attention in literature. There has been much talk about fast fashion product and behavioural practices due to the quick product disposal and limited timeframe for going out of style fashion thus, "perceived perishability" (Choi et al., 2010; Cook & Yurchisin, 2017). On the other hand, fast fashion products have base products that are not produced with the quick response system. The core or base products can make up about 80% while only about 20% accounts as fast fashion (Bruce & Daly, 2006). The fast fashion type of system is a flexible system that combines minimal lead times, QR channels, the ability to identify emerging trends, rapid prototyping and cheap production (Samsioe, 2017; Hines & Bruce, 2007). There has been series of research that look at fast fashion supply chain with focus on business model and buyer behaviours (Bruce & Daly, 2006; Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015).

Sustainability in retail has also gotten quite some attention, different retailers and authors has different points of focus for sustainability. Some align sustainable development (SD) to corporate social responsibility (CSR) (e.g. Leander, 2015; Fredriksson and Fuentes 2014) and tend to use it synonymously. However, CSR can also be situated at a social strand of SD. Because retailers who focus on CSR has to “treat employees fairly and equitably, operate ethically and with integrity and to respect basic human rights” (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006 p.8). These standards can be situated within the social dimensions of SD as well. For instance, fast fashion retailers who aim to be sustainable are also looking at labour issues relating to ethics, fairness, integrity, respect, and welfare of workers in production countries (see e.g. BCI and Fairtrade). In retail study, authors like Fredriksson and Fuentes (2014); Fuentes (2015) took a top bottom approach and looked at how retailers create meaning and values for sustainable products. They came to the actualization that, retailers have variants of ways of dealing with sustainability. Sustainability is redefined during implementation in the retail organization to fit into the different purposes of each business. It is also linked to beliefs about who the sustainable consumer is (Fredriksson & Fuentes, 2014). Other authors take the individual behavioural change approach to sustainability thus, the micro level where individual choices are key intervention targets (Martenson, 2017; Connell, 2011; Connolly & Prother, 2008).

The general fashion industry and sustainable development has also been researched by many authors for example (Goworek, 2011; Joy et al., 2012; Jung & Jin, 2014; Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Sustainable fashion labels and consumers relation to sustainability-labels on fashion products have been researched (Lindersson, 2017). Most of these researches take the consumer and individual behaviour and understanding standpoint. While those that look at retailers focus on the efficiency and QR systems (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). As expressed by Shove (2015), individual behaviours, understanding and meaning makings are systemic integrated and made normal through everyday mundane activities of the individual (Shove, 2005). In this regard it is important to look at how fast fashion retailers are responding to the need to be sustainable, since there is not much research done to understand how fast fashion companies market their sustainability. For instance, Turker and Altuntas (2014), centered on sustainable supply chain management in fast fashion. Their research rather took a management and stakeholders approach to understanding sustainability in the supply chain, thus how companies manage their supply chain. Untended the actual in-depth practice of doing sustainability in the supply chain. For example, how retailers actually practice sustainability in terms of materiality, concepts and competencies employed. Thus, the real action of retailers is missing in the study due to the emphasis on mapping out situations of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM). Generally, such

researches take a material information, capital flow and cooperation of relationship of companies along the supply chain perspectives. Fast fashion retailers have very important role in relation to piecing together consumption and sustainability (Fredriksson & Fuentes, 2014). As they stand at the threshold of the consumers and producers, but also, they have a grip over consumer segments that actively and frequently consumes. Their unique positioning affords them the opportunity to integrate and actively contribute to the creation of sustainable strategies and practices right from supply chain, to in-store organising for consumers. It also affords them the capabilities to translate sustainability strategies right from the supply chain into value to the end consumers. With that being said, there is a void in research that looks at understanding sustainability in fast fashion from production processes through to retail space.

### **1.3 Aim and Research Questions**

The aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, to gain understanding of how fast fashion retailers market their sustainability in terms of materials, concepts, product categories, skills and practices involved. Secondly, to take a consumer perspective in understanding how consumers relate to these sustainable marketing by the fast fashion retailers. The study employs practice theory and consumption practice in fulfilling the research aim and questions. The element of practice, as expressed by such authors as Shove et al., (2012); Shove & Pantzar, (2005), being meanings, competence, and material are engaged in fulfilling the research aim. The use of practice theory as bodily patterns, routinized mental activities – forms of understanding, know – how and motivations (Reckwitz, 2002: 255) are involved to understand how consumers make sense of retailers sustainable marketing. The focus here is on the fast fashion retailer, the consumer perspective is partly taken to understand how the sustainability is apprehended and performed in the retail space. This is to give an understanding of the service perspective of retailers sustainability marketing. The aim is also based on the assumption that the elements which constitutes practices requires actions as facilitators of practices. This means that there is an emphasis on the actual “doing and sayings”. *Retail space* as used in this thesis encompass the retail store and other online spaces where fast fashion retailers market their sustainability. The questions this research seeks to answer are:

*RQ1: How do fast fashion retailers market sustainability?*

*RQ2: How does the fast fashion retail space drive different forms of sustainable performances and consumption?*

This is significant in order to understand how retailers actually organise sustainability in fast fashion retail. And how these practices can drive sustainable performances and consumption practices in the retail space. In order to understand and aid retailers in incorporating effective sustainability in their business model in ways that fulfils and aligns with the end consumers' needs and expectations. And give the consumer opportunities to make meaningful choices in the retail space. Whiles gearing fast fashion retail towards sustainability without compromising their core values to a larger extent if possible.

#### **1.4 Research Outline**

The thesis is divided into seven main parts. Firstly, the introduction part, where a little background knowledge of the topic is introduced. Followed by discussing the problem, as well as the research aim and questions that, this research sorts to answer. The second part looks at the theoretical framework and historical understandings of the thesis. This comprise of elaborating on the concept of fast fashion, sustainability discussions as well as definitions of sustainability as used in this thesis. Preceded by theoretical conceptualisations, definition of theories. And a literature review section where the lens was cast on existing literature surrounding the top. The third part is the methodology part where the various methods employed in the investigation is highlighted on and justified. Also, how the empirical and other data were obtained and discussions of relevance. Ethical issues and analytical decisions and deliberations were critically looked at. Methodological deliberation and how the methods employed will aid in answering the research questions were also discussed. The fourth part looked at analytical deliberations, choices, and decision to analyses certain data and the processes involved in making certain analytical decisions. Followed by the real analysis of the data, where the theoretical framework was synthesized with the analysis to make sense of the findings within the broader knowledge of understanding. In the fifth part the findings were discussed, and conclusions drawn follow by the managerial implication. Limitations in the research were discussed and recommendations were made for future research. Then lastly the list of references used and appendix part containing field materials, tables, and some relevant contents.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Fast Fashion Concept**

Fast fashion is a contemporary business strategy employed by mass retailers like Zara, Mango, H&M, TopShop and Gina Tricot among others. The concept is said to have originated with brands like Zara with capabilities of constantly evolving production systems (Idacavage, 2016). Though the concept of fast fashion may be new, some of the retailers like

Zara, H&M, TopShop and Primark that adopt fast fashion has been around as smaller shops in Europe around the mid-twentieth century (Idacavage, 2016). The concept of QR that fast fashion is based on is said to have had its roots in the 1970s and through 1980s. As United States textile and apparel suppliers were said to experience extreme competitive pressure from Far East and low-cost supply countries (Hines & Bruce, 2007 p.40). Fast fashion has become a widespread phenomenon and the biggest trend for clothing on the high street. The concept of fast fashion has now been adopted in one form or another by most key own-label retailers in the UK and parts of the European fashion market (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). It entails retailers positioning themselves as swift “quick response” in relation to consumers’ needs by having a very effective supply chain that make stylish clothes readily available at cheap prices. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006 p. 259) defined fast fashion as: “a business strategy which aims to reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion product into stores, in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak”. Situating customer demand as a facet of fast fashion. However, the key concepts include building on the in-season buying, reduced lead time concept to incorporate “newness” as a key feature of fast fashion.

The Fast fashion styles mimic the high earned fashion brands that are presented on fashion week in standard two seasons of slow fashion being spring/summer and autumn/winter (“Fashion conscious or eco-conscious”, 2016; Memic & Minhas, 2011; Joy et al., 2012). However, the fast fashion product does not have the negative connotations that “knock off” brands usually have. Some key characteristics are the QR concept coupled with numerous micro- seasons per year, with very short lead time from the design to store. New clothing come out weekly for retailers like Zara and two to three weeks for retailers like H&M encouraging fast fashion consumers to visit stores very often. The productions are done in small quantities to eliminate mistakes and avoid keeping stock, whilst using scarcity as a way to create demand (Memic & Minhas, 2011). For Instance, H&M “here today gone tomorrow” concept which is also said to encourage hoarding behaviors due to merchandise availability constrained by short renewal cycle and limited supply (Byun & Sternquist, 2012).

Though most of the production are in smaller volumes and usually are not replenished, those that become high in demand are branded as “selling items” and reproduced for other markets. Fast fashion retailers seek to satisfy the consumer even better by understanding their needs. In this regard efficient and effective supply chains are used to manage customer demand and brand operations (Hines & Bruce, 2007 p.14). Quick response QR is not only tool and technique but the competence to manage network of suppliers to provide flexibility, most emphasis on QR is focused on pipeline modelling to reduce time throughout the supply

chain (Hines & Bruce, 2007 p.41). In order to have control over the supply chain, retailers like Zara with rapid stock turn around and vertical integration, own most of their supply chain, while those that they do not own are closely monitored and strategically positioned. That is to say fast fashion retailers are moving some of their sourcing away from the Far East, where shipping times can be as long as 6 weeks, to Eastern Europe, where shipping times can be as little as 2 to 3 days (Hines & Bruce, 2007).

Fast fashion has manifested the importance of supply chain management and the control structures it affords for the development of the industry. For instance, QR systems where demand data is captured in timely fashion for orders to be based on real-time data supported by data mining technological innovations that ensures that suppliers are up to date with information on inventory changes (Samsioe, 2017; Hines & Bruce, 2007). This also allows for well thought through processes such as floor-ready fashion items to be delivered to store in ways that make display easy, for example retail stores receive items with hangers, barcode tickets, pricing and security tags, ready to be sold (Samsioe, 2017; Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010).

## **2.2 Retail Space**

The fast fashion retail space is key to issues of consumption and marketing of sustainability in ways that aligns with consumer performances. The fashion retail space is made up of tangible, intangible and emotional cues. These are strategically situated in ways that promotes retailers distinctive image that is appropriate for the kind of fashion merchandise that the retailer specializes in (Barnes, & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Also, that the retail space is made up of ideological constructs that are constituted by traditional values involving the interplay of *obverse panopticism* (Sherry et al., 2001 p.466; Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Borghini et al., 2009). According to Kozinets et al., (2002) the retail space is made of variants elements and themes; ethereal and physical but also as culture and nature themes made up of interplays of cyberspace, mindscapes, landscapes and marketscapes (Kozinets et al., 2002). In that, products are increasingly associated with fantasy-oriented lifestyle advertising, which in turn changes the practical functionalities of retail space into more of an escapist oriented space (Sherry, 1998). Retailing within certain paradigms are intensely ideological in nature for example Borghini et al., (2009) argue that effective retailing within a themed brand manifests powerfully through diversity of different areas and features within the store. The distinct ideological themes in-store can be in the form mimicking other societal delineations. In agreement with Bäckström and Johansson (2006) that, retailers are also strongly focused on finding new ways of enhancing in-store experiences for consumers. However, to a larger extent consumers rendition of memorable in-store encounters are

enormously constituted by traditional values. Traditional values in the form of for example, design, atmosphere, display, selection, and price. Retailers today work with these aspects in new ways as a result of challenge relating to the dynamic nature of trends. Hence the need for retail store designs that are easily adaptable (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017). In addition, the retailer's overall brand initiatives are also based upon a detailed representation of moral and social values, presented in an extensive and intensive manner through the physical environment, and linked to actual moral action in the lives of involved consumers (Sherry et al., 2001).

In tracing the influence of ideology through consumers retail practices, it was perceived that, the centrality of retail place in ideological branding. In that, themed brand store retail environment has the power to affect consumer profoundly (Borghini et al., 2009). Sherry et al., (2001) argue that themed retail environments cater primarily to the visual impulse and have been theorized to both direct and misdirect attention in ways beneficial to retailers. Hence there is an instrumental relationship between retail space and consumers and their experiences. Consumers watch retailers as marketers in these spaces, as much as marketers watch consumers, a concept termed "*obverse panopticism*" Sherry et al., (2001 p.466). In fast fashion Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, (2010) argue that efficiencies and flexibilities in the fast fashion system has not been translated into the retail store environment. Though marketing activities may be evident in relation to aspects of fast fashion within the retail space, the availability and retail presence do not support the fast fashion propositions. The visual display of the retail space is perceived to be key and may act as retailer promotional tool with the affordance to infer quality (Bake et al., 1994; Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Even though it has been proven that store environment on store performance vary across segments (Kumar & Karande, 2000).

### **2.3 Discussions and Concepts of Sustainability**

The concept of sustainability is not contemporary, it has been around for a very long time. The ancient perspective on sustainability dwell on a very basic notion of humans living in harmony with nature (Washington, 2015). The late eighties clear definition of sustainability is the widely known definition of sustainable development. Being "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" according to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). However, this definition has sparked generous amount of challenges and arguments. For instance, questions such as the difference between sustainability and sustainable development is brought to bear with the question as to whether meaningful sustainability is the same as a 'sustainable development' based on endless growth (Washington, 2015 p.4).

For instance, critical issues like overconsumption that drives unsustainability. In the fashion retail sector this elucidates excessive production of cheap garments with low quality that encourages hyper-consumption practices and the production of excessive waste.

Secondly, the idea that, sustainability which is based on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future needs poses further questions. For example, how do we know the needs of the future generations or based on what assumptions do we place future generations needs on. Or are we assuming that our needs today will be the same as that of the future generations, and if that is the case then needs are different in different parts of the world. So which part are we basing that need on or rather could it be based on individual country or cultures needs and responsibilities (Washington, 2015). Another argument is that the definition of sustainable development is anthropocentric and ignores the old sustainability concepts that is basically for humans to live in harmony with nature.

Redclift (2005), situated 'sustainable development' as a contradictory term. And has prompted a number of discursive interpretations as discussed earlier above. Due to attributing both 'development' and 'sustainability' together, exposing the assumptions these discourses attempt to clarify. The author proposed that 'sustainable development' needs to be linked and be understood in terms of new material realities as well as epistemological positions (Redclift, 2005). The need to scrutinize the system in which new material reality influence the cultural constructions we place on the environment. Thus, challenge for critical thinking, and subsequently identify the ways in which material changes – in the physical environment, information technologies and the human body– require us to revisit the idea of sustainable development (Redclift, 2005). But also viewing it through the lens of the economic, by broadly situating it Keynesian paradigm of international economic relations, in the post-World War II period, to the neo-liberal certainties. The author argues that the imposition of market economics on the global environment had both paradigmatic and practical repercussions on sustainability. The focus on 'choices', for individuals and larger social groups, expressed through market preference, is creating growing disparities between social and political demands, and the allocations of the market. In theory and practices, our understanding of nature today is framed by the past, with concerns that, policies ignore the fact that nature/culture debates are being materially rewritten via genetics (Redclift, 2005). Thus, not only the environment but also the human genetics are equally being rewritten, this way human practices are being influenced through these material certainties.

In the confluence of all these contexts, it clear that it is quite easy to pinpoint the problems and critic. However, a constructive way of dealing with the discourses seem rather exigent.



Sustainability is a critical issue that ought to be addressed, though It is arguable often “more talk than action“ (Sukhdev, 2010) quoted by Washington, (2015). There is a need to necessitate recognition of all three categories in the sustainability trinity (social, environment and economic) in addressing the issue. As expressed by Urry, (2011) dominant economic models are reliant on sociology, economic sustainability is a useless concept on its own. Meaning that businesses have to acknowledge their impact by understanding the importance of their social responsibility in order for their economic models to be meaningful. Thus, to alter behaviours in our *resource constrained* world, the displacement and alteration of *dominant economic* and alter positing of anthropocentric behaviours (Urry, 2011 p.16). By addressing sustainability through business practices change that reduces negative impacts. Redclift (2005), also positioned the relation between society and the environment as a social issue. Environmental understanding and the articulation/solution of sustainability difficulties requires geographical and social context (Redclift, 2005). This shows how dominating social issues are in sustainability discourses and even more so with sustainability in reference to social practices and ideologies. And has become important for retailers to understand the social influences of their sustainable models in order to position their strategies in ways that are socially liable and beneficial.

### **2.3.1 Sustainability in Practices: CSR as a Social Strand of SD**

The term sustainable development (SD) mainly started to be used in the 1980's, the framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has already been established in the 1950's and 1960's. Bowen defined CSR in 1953 - as one of the first - as “... an obligation to pursue policies to make decisions and to follow lines of action which are compatible with the objectives and values of society” cited by Ebner and Baumgartner, (2006). However, SD posits a broader positioning, that situates CSR as a social strand of SD. Based on the argument that, not only does society influence the company, the implementation of corporate sustainability in companies also has positive effects on society in the long-term (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). This goes beyond what concept came first, the social positing of the concept in the broader social framework is what is considered here. So, CSR is positioned as a strand of SD in this thesis. Some retailers tend to focus of environmental aspects of sustainability more while other pick more on the social part or in combination. The ultimate aim for some retailers is to be able to achieve *closed-loop* supply chains (cradle to cradle). *Cradle to cradle* metaphor perceived material or resources as nutrients circulating in healthy safe metabolisms, it aims to produce efficient and waste free systems (Braungart & McDonough, 2002; McDonough & Braungart, 2010). However, attaining this level in the fashion retail world is farfetched. The cradle to cradle philosophy means that, products are eco-designed and eco-effective. Meaning that, as little energy and materials are used as

possible. But also, aspects of the material use could be reduced and complemented with services this way products are designed for longevity and can be complemented with services (Washington, 2015 p.76). At present it is generally cradle to grave situation with a few retailers that are actually striving towards eradicating grave reach. But the waste production in the supply chain makes it next to impossible to attain cradle to cradle. However, the recycling of garments for re-use without downgrading the material, and the use of environmentally friendly dyes may be said to be pushing towards cradle to cradle. Thereby making it seem feasible to achieve *closed-loop* supply chains (Chow & Li, 2018). Washington, (2015) also drew together some concepts on sustainable development definitions, for example that of Robert Costanza of the Australian National University, as follows:

“We want a future that is not only sustainable, but also desirable – a future that allows a prosperous and equitable economy embedded in a harmonious society that remains within planetary ecological boundaries. Our current ‘growth at all costs’ system and its trajectory are neither sustainable nor desirable...” -Robert Costanza, Australian National University, Australia- (Washington, 2015 p.4).

This definition casts a perspective on issues of resilience and a sense of equilibrium in the framing of sustainable development. Though it may seem more of technical terminology it is crucial in understanding what is being asked in terms of sustainability. Based on the dynamics that, there can be many levels of equilibrium that can also be said to be resilient. So, the incorporation of “desirability” and “boundaries” can be said to be insightful additions and views in defining sustainability as it stretches the definition beyond human survival to a desirable way of living, not only as humans but as systems.

As revealed by Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016), It is not enough for retailers to just offer sustainable or green product in store. Rather retailers can incorporate sustainability in in-store service offering, through successful integration and positioning of human competence, organisational artefacts and promotions to encourage sustainable consumption. Based on this, sustainability in the fast fashion could be addressed in two folds by looking at the retailer perspective with regards to how they market their sustainable offering right from the supply chain through to in-store and other sales channels.

## 2.4 Practice Theories

The field of practice is the appropriate place to study issues as diverse as meaning, agency, ethics, and power. The lens through which the social and its multiple productions are to be viewed (Fuentes, 2011 p.35). Focusing on sustainability concepts being implemented by fast fashion retailers through material organising, and skills employed as well as partnership to ensure sustainability is integrated into the production processes. In this regard the use of sustainability reports focuses on the concepts of sustainability in materiality, significant sustainable skills that are employed in processes and how that is translated and represented in the end product. The sustainable products are observed as materials and the consumer practices within the retail store space in relation to the sustainable products viewed from a practice perspective. This way the research is able to shed light on sustainability as is performed by the carriers of practice (Nicolini, 2017). This rests on the notion that practice cannot be reduced to just words. But foregrounds the roles of the body and artefact and posits that intelligibility and practical knowledge. Departing from a Cartesian dualism of body and mind and unifying the mental and material. The presence of material, meanings and competence are unified by practices with the agency of action in the retail space. In this light the “act of doing” is very important to understand how the fast fashion consumes may position themselves as sustainable in terms of not only product but also in their actions. So, then the appeal for the practice-based approach lies in the capacity to describe important feature of the retailers sustainable concepts. The nexus of practices as is routinely made and re-made in practice by consumers, using tools, discourse and materials in ways that aligns to sustainable practices. Shove (2016) in the matter of practice theory, argued that practice theory tends to focus on the end consumer, however systematic consideration of the matters of practices provides means of connecting otherwise separate realms of producing, manufacturing, making and doing. This have the advantage of demonstrating the relevance of practice for understanding processes that are commonly taken to be the preserve of disciplines that deal with specific field of study but lives of things and practices are mutually constituted and densely interwoven. This way the lens of practice is cast on retailers sustainability processes for understanding their sustainable marketing.

From this perspective, the use of practices theory in this thesis enables the situating of the various elements of practices and sustainability to be aligned into a meaningful array or assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in skilled, actions and materials. Schatzki (1996: 98) categorize practices into dispersed practices and integrative practices, where the dispersed appear in many sectors of social life like following rules. However, the latter integrative practices are more complex practices found and constitutive of particular domain of social life for instance business practices. Complex practices can also

give rise to Teleoaffective formations which are configurations across multiple practices that enjoin those practices to common ends. Ordering their affective engagements and offering general understandings along which participants make sense (Warde, 2005). For example, how different sustainable practices can synchronize into forming a whole. In that the production of a single product may have tendency to engage different sustainability concepts.

Sustainability has often been talked of as more talk than action (Sukhdev, 2010), so by using practice theory the focus is on the action and the way it is performed. This enables the research to be interpreted in a meaningful way and situate marketing as practice framework of understanding. Practices theory is a cultural theory which has been sketched and underpinned in sociology by such writers as Bourdieu, Giddens, Taylor, late Foucault, Butler and others. Practice theory is presented as a conceptual alternative to other forms of social and cultural theory (Reckwitz, 2002). It is social school of thought that makes practices as a central disposition to carry out and express as a central scrutinizing component and is predominantly used in the social sciences and organisational studies (Schatzki et al., 2001; Reckwitz, 2002).

Reckwitz (2002) defines a practice as: [...] a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016).

In this thesis the use of practice is gear towards the fast fashion retailer and the nexus of practices in sustainable development in relation to product, knowledge, skills and meanings. The use of practice theory is towards understanding the consumer perspectives of the fast fashion retailers sustainability marketing. This pragmatic orientation is to look at dynamics of the relation between emerging practices and the creation of valuable novel products (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Practices and associated cultures of consumption are always pieced together in a manner that is informed by previous and related practice (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). The diffusion of fast fashion consumption can be a successive and localized reinvention of an already existing phenomena. Fast fashion research is still in its infancy stages, this paper provides some unique insights into the phenomenon of sustainability in fashion retailing, which is intended to add to the body of research on sustainable fashion marketing studies.

### 2.4.1 Conceptualization of Practice Theory

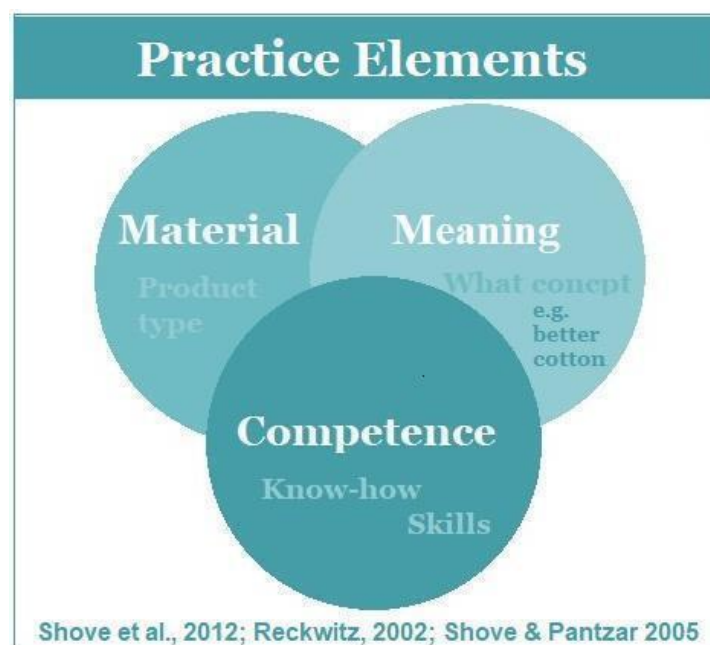
The point made by some authors indicates that practices, as recognizable entities, are made by and through their routine reproduction for example (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984; de Certeau, 1984). These authors situated practices in variant ways that connotes routines emphasize, shared habits, technique and competence cited by Shove and Pantzar (2005). On the other hand, Schatzki (2001: 3) position practices as consist of embodied materially mediated 'nexus of doings and sayings' shared meanings (Schatzki, 2003). Thus, practices assume the existence of requisite elements, images, objects and forms of competence. Based on the notion that, carrying out a practice mostly entails "using particular things in a certain way. For instance, in order to play football, we need a ball and goals as indispensable "resources" (Reckwitz, 2002: 253). Thus, knowledge requires practice to occur, and that, for practice theory, objects are necessary components of many practices – just as indispensable as bodily and mental activities. For instance, the use of electronic media mould social practices, (the social consist of nexus of practices) or better, they enable and limit certain bodily and mental activities, certain knowledge and understanding as elements of practices. The 'nexus of doings and sayings' within cultural context is understandable to the agents who carry it out, and also understandable to potential observers at least within the same culture. It is a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is comprehended (Schatzki, 2003).

A practice is social, as it is a 'type' of behaviour and understanding that appears at different locales, and at different points of time, and is carried out by different body/minds. However, the reverse is a tautology, it cannot be said that practices are "social practices" because this does not necessarily presuppose 'interactions'. The social in the sense of the intersubjectivists (Reckwitz, 2002: 253). Discursive practices are merely strings of signs, but in practice theory they are that and even more. They also are bodily patterns, routinized mental activities – forms of understanding, know – how and motivations – and above all objects that are linked to each other (Reckwitz, 2002: 255). These discursive practices can be used to understand the fast fashion consumers know-how and motivations in the "doings" in the retail space. Shove & Pantzar (2005), brought to bear that, the relation between material and practices remain under-theorized and situates practices with the notion that, it involves the active integration of materials, meanings and forms of competence. This could help this thesis understand how the material products of the fast fashion retailers enforces and reinforces certain practices and situates certain competencies within the sustainability framework. In the same light they proposed that, innovation in practice thus new practices consist of new configurations of existing elements in conjunction with those that already

exist. Innovation in practices are not generated by new products, images or skills. What actually matters is the way in which constituent elements fit together and that innovation in practice are ongoing (Shove & Pantzar, 2005) thus continuous. Practice theory often emphasizes the socio-material nature of practices and their performative nature. They are diverse, they make use of heterogeneous materials and transform them. Through practice, elements are interconnected and inscribed, conglomerated, made and remade (Fuentes, 2014).

#### 2.4.2 Elements of Practice Theory

Based on the above, practice theory can be categorized into three elements that shapes each other, being material, competence and meaning. Materials in this sense includes things, technology, tangibles, physical entities and stuff of which objects are made (Shove et al., 2012). Whereas competence encompass skills, knowledge and techniques. Meanings and also symbolic meanings includes ideas, and aspirations (Shove et al., 2012).



**Fig: 1** The elements of practice are interdependent and mutually shapes each other.

The defining elements of practice are materials (things), competences (skills) and meanings (social and symbolic significance) Shove et al., (2012). Among all three elements innovation can also be situated as an influencing factor of all three elements of practice and continually and constantly changing. Practice as an ongoing integration of elements. But in cases when requisite connections are no longer made, the stranded elements may become part of other practices and others may be discarded and reclassified as junk. For instance, in sustainable

practices within Jeans production, the realization and the use of certain dyes are considered harmful to the environment in this regard new kind of dyes are invented, that are made from organic materials and are environmentally friendly. If these new practices of using environmentally friendly dyes takes full effect, old harmful dyes become somewhat useless, some may be put in museums for historical reference others can just be discarded. But also, the different ways of handling dying activities may emerge that will influence other elements.

In perspective we see the changing materiality of doing, thus material traces of practice. So, in this light we can think about what happens to competence and meanings when no longer integrated in practice, as expressed earlier in elements of practice “competence” can lie dormant. Persisting in memories for years without being activated, and if activated it is done as elements of “doing history”. The “meaning” which is cognitive and emotional part of practice and even significantly it may be socially witnessed. The meaning in this regard is the use of sustainable dye with no burden on the environment, which may be witness by society in the form of for example, cleaner water bodies, less pollution, different methods of use etc. In this regard society as consisting of practices as continuous renewal, emergence and fragmenting of the elements. Competencies that affords meanings resulting in sustainable materials (Shove et al., 2012). But also, the highlighting on process by which various materials can be coordinated and show how one type material can translate into another (Fuentes, 2011 p.40).

### **2.4.3 Practices of Consumption**

Consumption is integrated into most spheres of daily life. It can be situated as engagement of agents with something tangible or intangible form, material or immaterial form for variant reasons. That is to say, it is not limited to or defined by market exchange. Base on this paradigm Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) focused on the symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic nature of consumption. A perspective that regard consumption experience towards the pursuit of fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Consumption in its basic term is the syncretic notion of two contrasting recognition of purchasing and of using-up. Warde, (2005) defined consumption as “a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation. Whether for utilitarian expressive, or contemplative purposes of goods, services, performances, information or ambience. Whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion”. In this research the use of consumption is to pay attention to the symbolic significance and the use of resources and products. Most practices warrant some form of consumption (Warde, 2005). However, consumption is not in itself a practice but is rather a moment in almost every practice. In that consumption is situated within practice. For example, the practice of window shopping may invoke the

consumption of the aesthetics beauty of the space within which the window shopping is taking place (see also for example Peñaloza, 1998).

Consumption is tightly viewed through facets of behavioural prepositions relating to mental construct such as multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage, product classes, experiences. Authors like Hirschman and Holbrook, (1982) delineate this as hedonic consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Babin, et al., 1994). This is particularly important in sustainability study and even more crucial in fast fashion, as efforts are made to curb waste and excessive resources consumption. Though these types of consumptions may be intangible, it is tightly connected to the presence of the tangible material. Utilitarian consumption in contrast to hedonic consumption is more pragmatic and quite useful in understanding the dark side of over consumption that is prominently posited to be unsustainable. More so, this consumption styles are one of the main distinguishing feature of fast fashion as situated in fashion discourse, see also (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982; Babin et al., 1994). Consumption through the lens of practice may be seen as the proposition that follows from the way practice is organized, rather than the outcome of personal choice. In that, standards of the practice guides behaviours which results in consumption (Warde, 2005). In this regard retailers' sustainability practices may have great influences on the outcomes of consumers personal choice and works as a framework for certain behaviours. Practices of fast fashion retailers can be used to understand how sustainable consumption precedes in-store. But also, sustainable consumption practices within the production stages as managed by fashion retailer through the employment of certain skills and techniques to reduce over consumption of resources use and ethical practices throughout the production process.

## **2.5 Literature Review: Sustainability in Fashion**

Concerns of sustainability in the prevailing retail fashion industry has been enormous, this is due to the realization of environmental impacts, social and ethical concerns of the fashion and garment industry broadly (Anderson & Cunningham,1972; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Fransson & Molander, 2013). These concerns are related to the use of hazardous chemical in garment production and even right from the cotton fields the use of pesticides, water waste and labour issues relating to poor wages. The use of child labour and poor working conditions among others (Johnstone & Tan, 2015), in the processing of garments, the use of certain toxic and unfriendly dyes that are hazardous to the environment and human health. Nevertheless, in the confluence of all these, there are standards and organisations that are position to aid in the cleansing of the garment and fashion industry for example Greenpeace, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), WWF among other and also Stockholm



International Water Institute (SIWI) who are also working closely with the fashion retailers in Sweden on water management in production countries.

### **2.5.1 Consumer Perspectives of Sustainable Consumption**

There has been series of researches on sustainable fashion over the years. Some researchers situate environmentally consciousness as a motive for green consumption. Thus, individuals who are more concerned about the environment are more likely to purchase green products (Sarumathi, 2014). Martenson, (2017) investigated what motivates consumers to choose the green alternative and why it is necessary to activate consumers pragmatic selves when aiming to predict purchase behaviour. They situated pragmatic self as that which is concerned with costs and reference prices. Their findings indicated that consumers buy benefits in the sense that consumers choose green alternative when it has a competitive advantage. Likewise, the propensity to choose green products is highest among consumers who see these products as a benefit. Over all green consumers have higher self-awareness and are very cost conscious. In this regard contrasting both Sarumathi, (2014) and Martenson, (2017) shows that consciousness plays an integral part in the sustainable consumers life, the consciousness in this regard has to do with the awareness or alertness in their existence in relation to the surroundings and other things that goes on in the world. Being enlightened aid consumers to consciously situate themselves within sustainability paradigm. It is also in this consciousness or self-awareness that Fuentes and Fredriksson, (2016) indicated that having sustainable products alone does not influence a consumer to be sustainable. But rather the services in-store, arranging streams of sustainable product, good response to consumer sustainability enquiries and promoting sustainability to green consumers in-store is important to this consciousness. This entails the performance of service staff capabilities, technological assistance, the alignment between consumer ideals, the retailer's sustainable motives, and ability for retailers to keep up and be dynamic with sustainability discourses and ramifications (Fuentes and Fredriksson, 2016).

### **2.5.2 Conscious Pioneers**

Bly et al., (2015) took an environmental and social aspect of sustainability to study pioneers of sustainable fashion. They look paradoxically at fashion consumption brought on by fashion systems that is dominated by business models that encourage consumption. In that, these systems are globalized systems that have detrimental impact on the social and environment sustainability issues. Their research situated a group of consumers as "pioneers of sustainable fashion consumers" (Bly et al., 2015 p.126). This group entails consumers who consciously and actively warrant the concept of sustainable fashion consumption in their own terms and liaised approaches (Bly et al., 2015). These pioneers

are influenced by contextual factors and motivations that shapes their view on sustainable fashion. Such as limiting their consumption of fashion through fewer and quality purchases, and purchasing second-hand fashion goods, as a form of resistance to over consumption. This is done for the value (cheap) or just “doing good” (Fredriksson, 2013), and also incorporating crafts like sewing in their fashion consumption. In the confluence of all these, the authors concluded that, concept of personal style is an imperative feature that influences consumers behaviour as well as goals to reduce quantifiable environmental influences or social impact (Bly et al., 2015). Their study adheres to the notion of sustainable consumption as an individual environmental or social commitment (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Paradoxically an individual view gives the affordance to understand the social embeddedness of the intensive and increasingly standardizing of excessive resources consumptions that are unobtrusive routinized in the social fabric (Shove, 2004) of everyday doings of the individual consumers. This is where fast fashion business sets in as trends that recognizes these individual styles and aid in helping the individual attain the concept of personal styles and individual fashion statements through rationing of fashion products which consequently causes over consumption (Memic & Minhas, 2011).

### **2.5.3 Different Ways of Consuming**

Samsioe, (2017) argue that there are different ways of consumption in fast fashion. The author applied the theory of consumer contextual learning to understanding these new consumptions styles, as brought on by the fast fashion industry. This consumption style incorporates a systematic technique for consumers to support the market through acknowledging and approving its speed. These consumption style also shifts away from the usual material object or artefact related kind of consumption and rather takes the turn of consumer display of competencies in the acquisition process. Where it is a collective contextual leaning that entails competencies like mimicking, studying, detecting, scrutinizing, and visualizing not only the space but in relation to other consumer of the same category or even seeking complimentary comments from store personnel as acknowledgment (Samsioe, 2017).

### **2.5.4 Fashion Renting Systems**

Fashion renting or lending has also been a phenomenon explored by some authors, it is said to be growing rapidly in the U.S. and China with companies like Rent-The-Runway (RTR) in the United States and Meilizu in China (Lai et al., 2018) becoming bigger and bigger. This model is rather situated with high earned fashion items, this means that fashion items that are branded and highly priced which put the focus of this system on strategies rather than sustainability. Swedish retailers like Filippa K. situates their lending with sustainability, with

the aim to give a new more sustainable alternative to traditional consumption; Lease the Look gives Filippa K. customers the possibility to rent unique runway pieces straight off the catwalk from the brand-new spring/summer season collections (filippa-k.com). In an effort to mimic this concept into fast fashion, authors like Zamani et al., (2017) tried to situate this model with fast fashion product to see the viability of this system being sustainable. This was done by conceptualizing collaborative consumption as an alternative way of consuming to the conventional model of ownership-based consumption. This is done with the intent to reduce environmental impact of fashion by prolonging the practical service life of clothes. This means giving clothing the affordance to be used for a full life cycle by introducing the concept of clothing libraries as a collaborative consumption business model. Their study revealed that the concept can increase garment use life span, however issues of logistic relating to transportation may hinder the sustainability of the concept. Thus, increase customer transportations can completely counterbalance the benefits of reduced production, which in the long run may rather prove to be unsustainable (Zamani et al., 2017). In this regard there is a need for further studies in to the logistics aspect of this concept. This also brings to light how some sustainability concepts end up being more harmful rather than “doing good”. For instance, the logistics aspects of UAC (for example Kant Hvass, 2014; Chow & Li, 2018) ought to be thoroughly examined from the individual level to the retailer’s system level to capture the entire logistics with right analysis. This could be coupled with recycling emissions in order to ascertain benefits, as these systems has the tendency to do more harm than good if not done in the right way. In this light a collaborative way of doing within the retail system may prove more beneficial than a single retailers initiative.

### **2.5.5 Used Apparel Collection System of Retailers**

The used apparel collection (UAC) programs employed by fashion retailers has also been studied (Kant Hvass, 2014; Chow & Li, 2018). This entails fashion retailers taking responsibility and initiatives to manage post-consumer waste as a sustainable approach. For example, fast fashion retailer like Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) employs this approach to sustainability with the ultimate goal “to make fashion sustainable and sustainability fashionable” (Chow et al., 2017 p. 299). One of such commitments includes the pledge to “reduce, reuse, recycle” (Chow et al., 2017 p. 299). Fast fashion company H&M was the first to introduces a global UAC program with no restriction on the brand, the type, or the condition of the collected textiles products. Of the collected items, an estimated 40–60% were perceived to be reusable as second-hand garments, 5–10% could be reused as other textile products, 30–40% could be recycled into textile fibres or insulation materials, and 1–3% of them for thermal utilization (Chow & Li, 2018). However, since the start of the UAC program in 2013, the number of collected clothing has been constantly growing every year.

The authors discuss and compare the different features of the UAC programs and suggest that, the type of UAC programs a fashion retailer adopt should fit with its business model. Further the suggested the need for further exploration into development of recycled apparels to make closed-loop fashion supply chains more feasible (Chow et al., 2017p. 236). This is in line with Stål and Jansson, (2017) research on sustainable consumption and value proposition which explore the product-service systems of fashion. Their findings indicated that the voluntary take back systems of the Swedish fashion retailers, evokes certain caveats and may ultimately legitimize increased material consumption through dubious assertions of recycling (Stål & Jansson, 2017).

### **3. Methodology**

This part explains the research design and methodological approach in relation to the research questions, how does fast fashion retailers market their sustainability? And how does the fast fashion retail space drive different forms of sustainable performances and consumption. This is done by employing a netnography inspired methodological tools comprising of, retailers sustainability report analysis, website and social media postings analysis, in-store observations, and shadowing through which empirical data was attained. Observations, were to give a deeper understanding of the retail space, as expressed by Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010), the visual display of the retail space is perceived to be key and may act as retailer promotional tool. So, an observation of retail space gives a deeper understanding of how sustainability is marketed in the retail space as a cite of performance, display and action (see e.g. Fuentes, 2011).

The research employs two Swedish fast fashion retailers Trensta Retail and Crystal Retail for the enquiry (Crang & Cook, 2007) to explore their sustainability concepts. The two companies were selected as they have built a reputation for incorporating sustainability in their fast fashion business. The research is designed with the employment of a multi-method qualitative approach. Qualitative method was selected to enable thick description to probe answers from the careful well thought through thematic document analysis and observations (Bryman, 2012 p.578). The qualitative research comprising of overt access observation in-store and online. The aim of the in-store observation is to know how sustainability is presented and marketed in-store and how consumers engage with it, followed by retailers sustainability reports analysis (document analysis): what sustainable concepts are engaged by the fast fashion retailers and how is that transient to the end consumer. Lastly, retailer's website and social media postings and communications analysis, to understand how retailers sustainable concepts are conveyed to the consumer, to be able to get the "doings

and the sayings”. The thesis is analysed through the lens of practice theory and framed within sustainable development and consumption concepts.

Theoretical considerations as used endeavours to capture the dynamics of society in order to situate concerns and issues within a framework of knowledge (May, 2011 p. 28). The fundamental of theory from a phenomenological approach is that, social reality has a meaning for human beings and thus human action is meaningful—, it has meaning for them and they act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and to the acts of others. The view of human behaviour as a product of how people interpret the world, in order to grasp the doings and sayings, I attempt to see things from the retailers and person’s point of view’ (Bryman, 2012 p.30). In that, it is my work to gain access to people’s “common-sense thinking” and hence to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view (Bryman, 2012 p.30-31). Based on this, the thesis uses practice theory to understand the productive and reproductive work of fast fashion retailers and consumers within the sustainability paradigm. Consequently, departing from retailers approach as a point of analysis to understanding sustainable development performances and practices within fast fashion.

### 3.1 Research Approach

The methods and procedures used in this thesis project is shown in fig: 2 below. This is by no mean a linear process, however the diagram is an overview of the non-linear repetitive steps involved in conducting the thesis project. The process itself comprise of going back and forth in between different methods and sections, as it involves a mix method approach and design.



**Fig: 2** P and S = Primary and Secondary Data

The field work of this study was conducted through a multiple method design using observations, shadowing, and document studies. The document studies were mainly conducted assessing sustainability reports, websites of the retailers and some social media posts of sustainable products by the fast fashion retailers.

### 3.2 Research Context

The empirical focus of this study is focused on two Swedish fast fashion retailers, Trendsta Retail and Crystal Retail. The names of the retailers have been withheld and replaced with pseudonyms for ethical reasons. The methods comprise of in-store observations, online observations, and reports analysis. The issue of sustainable development and fast fashion has been situated as a perplexing problem due to the faster pace of consumption, which in turn contradicts sustainable development. The context of this study is explored through a multi-method qualitative method, due to the complexities involved in social phenomenon. Thus, it calls for a qualitative approach to understanding retailers sustainable marketing practices. As expressed by May (2011 p.2) research methods are core to scientific activities and constitutes an integral part of scientific curricula and provides a means through which intellectual understandings of phenomena are enhanced (May, 2011). In the same light selecting a suitable method for a scientific research requires thoughtful consideration but does not necessarily mean engrossing in one specific method approach. Rather a researcher can combine different methods in ways that are appropriate in pursuance of the research aim and or questions (Silverman, 2013, p.136). This is sometimes termed *triangulation*, using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. The emphasis is tended to be on methods of investigation and sources of data (Bryman, 2012 p.392). Every individual method has its own limitations, the combination of methods can complement each other in ways that improves the data depending on ways in which they are employed. The main focus of this study is on the fast fashion retailer. The consumer perspective is taken to understand how sustainability is comprehended and performed in the space in practice but also to give a service perspective of retailers sustainability marketing.

### 3.3 Observations and Shadowing

The observations are done at two fast fashion retail stores Trendsta Retail and Crystal Retail. The choices were deemed appropriate because of their Swedish origin, and they are quite well known here in Sweden. additionally, here in Sweden, issues of sustainability are taken quite seriously and seem to be well integrated in the system. The two stores also seem to have very contrasting ideas in terms of setup and layout of concept. This was concluded on during a pilot study to see how the research questions could be tackled by using these stores as objects of study. It is often said in research, somethings cannot be told but rather has to be experienced by immersing myself in the routine activities of the place. This thesis took *observer as participant* role, this role calls for relatively more formal observation (May, 2011 p.173). It is used to observe how the retailers organized their sustainability concepts and the consumer interactions with it therefore. This is to give a thick

description of social settings. As expressed by Czarniawska (2014), observers are able to see options — and to distinguish among them just as actors can see options only in the moment of reflection, of observing, of not acting thus one has to step back in order to observe (Czarniawska, 2014 p.5). In this case it is in the field that the actual production of account is studied, taking an observer position gave me the ability to step back as a user of these stores and try to figure things out rather than speculate. Understand things through observing the space and the various actors within (Czarniawska, 2014 p.6).

The second part of the observation used the shadowing method. Here the focus is on participants who were followed in the store as they go about their shopping. Shadowing was deemed appropriate as opposed to interviews, as it is acknowledged that questioning of the carriers of a practice tend to generate limited insights into the structure of the practice itself especially in qualitative research methods. Thus, in reference to practice-based approach it is deemed fit to engage in discursive interactions as shadowing in-store, in exploring the connections of elements of practice. In this regard three female participants with ages 23, 26 and 40 years old respectively were employed for this part (see appendix 7.0) for more information of participants. The only requirement for the participants were that they must be familiar with shopping (patronisers) in the two retail stores that are being studied. The selections were random but gender specific as both stores specialize in women ware, therefore women were the targeted group to be employed as participants. The participants were approached and informed of the research context and purpose and their choice to take part voluntarily with the right to opt out with no questions asked. Shadowing was used to get actual consumer insights, thus capture what people actually do as they go about their shopping routine. Thereby allowing for contextual information about how they perform and respond to sustainable offerings in the retail space. This is to develop meaningful insights of the practices therefore. This way, I am able to ask question right in the settings to clarify issues that might otherwise be speculative if just observation is employed. As expressed by Czarniawska, (2014) in as much as shadowing is perceived to cause increased in psych and discomfort which by itself is a source of insight. It necessarily produces a rupture in the taken-for-granted on both observer and observed (Czarniawska, 2014). In this regard the shadowing method allows for detail relevant insight. The shadowing method were employed at the end of the general observations. This way, I have been able to understand the retail space before following through with shadowing the participant. This is to allow me to ask relevant questions in relation to the sustainable materials.

A total of sixteen observations were made with each observation lasting between 20 to 45 minutes over a period of approximately two months, an average of two observations per

week. The observations were done at Burlov and Helsingborg respectively. The reason being that one retailer has a smaller size shop in Burlov, so I felt it is appropriate to contrast it with the one in Helsingborg to see if there are differences in the way the small size store and the bigger sizes are organized. Observation started with a pilot study, to see the possibility of answering the research questions through observations. additionally, to try to understand the store setup and how its organized, here the observations were general. In these observations, permissions were not asked, it was a covert access, as the intention was to first get to know the space. After that, a well-structured observation was made with the idea of looking at specifics during each observation. With the second and subsequent observations, permissions were asked, and the observations were structured to see specifics. For instance, how the space is organized, the layout, type of sustainable products, what tags are on the sustainable product, how consumers engage with space and product as well as personnel and general sustainability communication in-store. The observations were done in different days of the week. This is to allow me to understand the possibility of different setting on weekdays and on weekend, and how the place change over time. The observation notes were taken after the observations but on the same day of the observation for retention purposes and many images were taken from the field as well (May, 2011, p.177; Bryman, 2012, p. 447). The observations generated about twenty pages of field notes and about hundred photographs of products, tags and labels, store spaces were taken as well as some thirty-seven pages of online community observation comments and screenshots.

### **3.4 Online Document and Community Observations**

This part entails solely the examination of online documents and interaction with no participation or intervention on my part. This Bryman referenced to as “lurking”. This also means that the authors of the materials are not aware of my presence and use of the materials (Bryman, 2012 p.663). Documents include reports, websites, and social media posts of the retailers. However, these are all publicly available documents with open access. The authors are aware of the possible use of these documents by third parties, so no special permission is required. Nevertheless, precautions are taken for the anonymity of the use of names or information that can be traced to individuals. Another thing is that the nature of community being studied plays important roles in the decision to take a covert access. For instance, this paper focus on the “communities online” and not “online communities” in this sense, the community in focus is the people that actually interact with the fast fashion retailers postings relating to sustainability. Creating a sense of network co-production of narratives. So, there is no sense of invasion due to the public nature of the utterances (Bryman, 2012; Kozinets, 2010).



The data premise of two sustainability reports of two fast fashion companies for the year 2016. Reasons being that, they are open and flexible to use, thus accessibility as a benefit. The information in the reports may otherwise be difficult to get. I choose to analyse the 2016 data because it is the latest data available on the issue. The reports were downloaded from companies' websites where they are made public. In this regard special permissions are not needed in order to use the documents, as there are no gatekeepers. They have been made available for public use (open access). The two sustainability reports were produced in accordance with the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards, thus GRI's latest guidelines for sustainability reporting. It is developed through a multi-stakeholder process, the framework helps organizations assess their economic, social, and environmental performance and impacts (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). The sustainability reports were made up of fifty and forty pages respectively for Trendsta Retail and Crystal Retail.

### **3.5 Data Collection and Ethical Issues**

The data were collected using ethical principles in social research, as they are very important. Diener and Crandall, (1978) narrowed down the ethical issues into four main areas that a social researcher might face troubles being, in the areas of harm to participants; lack of informed consent; an invasion of privacy; and deception is involved cited by Bryman (2012 p.136). In order to be ethically liable, consents were obtained from participants and the retail stores in order to grant access for observations. Photograph were carefully taken to avoid invasion of privacy of individuals, and the logos of the companies names are not used directly. Permissions were not obtained from the retailers in order to use the sustainability reports and websites because they are publicly available documents with open access. In order not to invade on the privacy of the store by overstaying and disturbing the customers, the observations were in short sequences. Decision to withhold the names of the retailers were as a result of not having official access to study their company as a whole. However, access was granted for the observations in the store. Participants names are also withheld and replaced with pseudonyms to ensure privacy, and they were informed of their right to participate willingly with no obligations. Meaning that they can redraw from the study anytime without questions asked. See entails in appendix.

### **3.6 Reflexivity and Trustworthiness**

I was self-aware of my own influences such as beliefs and assumptions on the research and reflective about the implications of methods, values, biases, and decisions for the acknowledgement of the social world that is generated. I was constantly reflective to my own cultural, and social context. As such, 'knowledge' from such reflexive position is always a

reflection of a researcher's location in time and social space as expressed by Bryman, (2012 p.393). A self-reflection entails an inward looking, self-consciousness and self-criticism in the research process. This is necessary because writing is much more pervasive in academic disciplines (Bryman, 2012 p.394). There is a constant interaction between ideas about the social world and the data collected on it. In this light an understanding of these issues is crucial for the researcher, because it allows for the researcher to understand the influence of wider social forces on the process of research such as assumptions arguments and the dynamic properties it contains (May, 2011 p.4).

*Trustworthiness* entails the canon of good practices and proper procedure in the research process such as credibility and dependability among others. *Credibility* refers to the feasibility of the account that the researcher arrives at that is going to determine its acceptability to others. To establish credibility of findings I ensure that the research is carried out in accordance with the canons of good practices. Due to the nature of this research, individuals involved were informed of what the study is about and their right to participate willingly. The data used were open access so there is no need for the researcher to validate findings with the retailer and online community postings, even more so when pseudonyms are used in place of original names (Bryman, 2012 p. 390). Images holding the names of retailers and visuals that could easily be traced back to retailers, communities and participants were edited and used in ways that ensures privacy and cannon of good practices in research.

*Dependability*, in order to be dependable, it is ensured that complete records of the research and research process are kept at all phases throughout the problem formulation through to data analysis decisions. In order to be able to give account of how far proper procedures are followed, in this regards all data used are kept safely in an external source except for the publicly available documents that are kept on a local source (Bryman, 2012 p. 392).

*Data:* Secondary data is mostly used as part of case study of the two retailers. In this case the sustainability report is borrowed and used to study the case of sustainability as conceptualized by the fast fashion retailers (Bryman, 2012 p.312). It is common to rely on secondary data (for example Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Shove et al., 2007). However, the limitations of using secondary data ought to be acknowledged. These reports were produced to promote and communicate the retailer's attentiveness and implementation of sustainability concepts and issues. This way the approach seems appropriate to understand how the retailers integrate, conceptualize, and categorize their sustainability commitments. Still, I was aware of bias issues as the reports are produced by the retailers. In that, it could be written

in ways that promotes the retailers own image. Though the reports were organised by external body it is important to be aware of inherent biases. In-store observations as a means to gather primary data for the research, this was specifically done to fulfil the research purpose. Data collected in these regards included field notes photographs of tags, labels, the store environments, types of sustainable products on display, layout of store and how consumers behave and interact with the space and products whilst in-store.

### **3.7 Reflections on Data and Boundaries**

The data from the sustainability reports are very broad, in this regard I had to focus it by eliminating the parts that does not fall within the boundaries of my research, though they fall within sustainability of the retailers. This is because my background is in service management with retail specialization. So, I had to limit the data coding and focus on my field of study for the research not to be overly broad. For example, workers right issues discussed by the report fall within human resource and international labour organisation (ILO) conducts. Though it may fall within management, it is not directly related to my field of study, so it has to be ignored in this study. In the process outliers like financial profitability and workers salary issued were ignore based on the focus of the research questions but growth (physical expansions) was put into perspective. This is to consider the consumption perspective of the research.

### **3.8 Analytical Deliberations**

The analytical deliberations and strategies employed for the data analysis were based on inductive approaches to data analysis with open coding (Bryman, 2012 p.556). The open coding process allows for the data to be broken down, examined, compared, and conceptualized, to yield concept that is turned into categories (Bryman, 2012 p.569). Thus, categorization of the data to make sense of the large size of qualitative data. I used three techniques to organize and analyse the empirical materials consisting of sustainability reports observation fields notes, photographs taken on the field, websites, and social media analysis notes. All these were categorized into the three sustainability concepts being environmental, social, and economic. However, the coding was more focused on the environmental and the social sustainability, as those two concept aligns more with the research purpose.

They were further labelled with theoretical significance with particular interest in component parts of theories with the three main elements of practices mentioned above (see also fig.1). With particular interested in the “action” thus “doings and sayings”. These themes and categories relating to the concepts and theories used in this research paper are used to sort

them in a meaningful way. The coding is a very important part of the research and it is connected to the research question. In that, the research questions were constantly in focus throughout the research. I conducted a thematic analysis to extract core themes that could be distinguished both between and within the reports and observation data. This also entails checking the data to establish if there are any obvious flaws (Bryman, 2012 p.13). This process also entailed going back to the field to confirm certain concerns and clarify certain codes. For instance, going back to the field to clarify whether the material codes for inner wears are all BCI or organic cotton, this is as a results of crossing sequences of codes across the various data sets. Some categories and codes; BCI, organic cotton, resources use, wages, chemical use, workers health, Fit, design, quality, sense making, meanings, display, material combinations.

I further search for recurring codes across all data sets to see the similarities and differences. The codes were also constantly compared for patterns, differences, similarities in order to group all the data into a whole sensible data set as the report data are from two different retailers. After using the sustainability concepts, patterns were also categorized with the aim to synthesize elements such as skills, techniques and materiality and align to social and environmental sustainability concept to make sense of the bulk of the data, by using coloured markings to represent different themes and elements and also using post it notes and word processing for grouping. At this point there is a lot going on, but the data is made manageable, and sense is being made of the data through the codes and the data are being interpreted. But also, at this point I link the process of making sense of data with research question and the literature relating to sustainable fast fashion and the theory (Bryman, 2012 p.13). This is where focused coding was applied to emphasize the most concrete codes that relates to the research and those that are seen as most revealing about the data, relating to the research questions (Bryman, 2012 p.569). For examples codes and themes like product positions, product type, product outlook, signage, communications, actions required, product quality, sense making, online communication, consumer concerns, materiality of product just to mention a few. these codes were from all the three methods employed in data collection and are not specific to particular data set. Some of the overarching themes are tools, techniques and skills, material, understanding, sense, doings, and routinized actions, among others.

Overall, the observations were coded into four main categories, in accordance to the way the observations were structured. The first codes focus on products; this gave an insight into how the sustainable products are positioned within the broader layout of the space. Specifically taking note of how the *sustainable product* are juxtaposed and arranged in

relation to other products and “hero pieces”. While paying more attention to the sustainable tags and labels since it is the only way to know if a product is sustainable or not. This entails identifying the product specifics in relation to the concept of sustainability implemented with the understandings of the reports data as well. This is in relation to the specific product category and how product positioning changes over time. The second category is *retail space communication and presentation of sustainability*, this covers how the retailers communicate and present the sustainable products. With particular focus on information dissemination and promotions. Observing if sustainable products are included on discounted items. Thirdly *type of consumers in the space and their interactions*; the focus here is how consumers interact with the products. And how they make sense and interact with the sustainable product tags and labels. But also, how the positioning of the sustainable product influences the consumers interactions with the product. The fourth part deals with *how the overall retail space outlook promotes sustainability*. Additionally, broader overarching view of the retail space on the aforementioned categories. The various categories were sub-categorized into different elements. This is with particular interest in material, competence and sustainable concepts. To help better understand the phenomenon of organisation sustainability in fast fashion, from the perspective of the actual “doings”. With the online websites observations, the focus is more on the sustainable product positioning and information on the platform, product type, communication, and overall theme of how sustainability is presented on the websites. Online communities observations were also categorised and themed into sustainability concerns, design, quality, communication, retailers presentation of sustainability, consumer perception, fit and errors, and design variations. Some outliers of fit associated with size and gender separation conundrums were ignored as they were not directly related to the research purpose. This part was done in the form of word document by highlighting themes in different colors and tagging them with the above-mentioned codes. The reports and observations were coded in similar fashion but with post it notes and highlighting on the printed materials. Here colors were used to separate themes and concepts before transferring the captured themes into a word document.

#### **4. Results and Analysis**

This part describes the findings of the research, the thesis used *triangulation* as various methods and sources of data were employed for this investigation (Bryman, 2012 p.392). This means that, the combination of methods complements each other in ways that improves the data by contrasting, comparing, and pairing them across methods. This also

means that the codes were not used directly here in the text. Rather they were synthesized into arching themes that are present below as the data is interpreted.

#### **4.1 The Companies Under Study**

The Trendsta Retail was founded in the 90s, as a retail chain that sold commercially viable feminine wear in Sweden. It has since then developed into an international fashion retailer that offers clothing and accessories for style-conscious women in 28 countries. They operate globally with their head office in Sweden. They specialize in women wear and are currently working towards contributing more to sustainable production of textiles and bettering lives. They work in contexts to affect change together with other actors such as BSCI, SWTI, the Bangladesh Accord and UNICEF cooperation in Dhaka. Their intent is to make real difference in the world through development and welfare-creation. Crystal Retail on the other hand, has been in fashion retail business for over six decades, established in the early 50s in Sweden, and has grown into a global retailer with about 475 stores in 16 countries with focus to continue to grow and be profitable and make sustainability a part of their daily business. They specialize in children and women wear. Their customers come first and are dedicated to meeting their expectations and making fashion feel good by offering fashion that is inspiring, affordable, and made responsibly. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals and UN Global Compact, they are driving change towards a more sustainable future by operating with consideration of the environment, safeguarding human rights, and ensuring ethical business practices. They work in partnerships with networks such as Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development, partnerships in supply chain, e.g. water management projects PaCT and STWI.

#### **4.2 Sustainable Practices in Production Phase**

To answer the research question How do fast fashion retailers market sustainability? This question is partly answerable through the report analysis and partly through the in-store observations. However, this section focuses more on the sustainability reports. Sustainability in the production process is grouped into two major concepts of environmental and social sustainability. However, this is further grouped into many sub categories that is shown in fig. 6 in the appendix, then further sorted and synthesized into material types, sustainable concepts being employed, skills employed and sustainability themes.

<b>List of Sustainable Materials Use by the Retailers</b>	
<b>Trendsta Retail</b>	<b>Crystal Retail</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organic cotton</li> <li>• BCI cotton</li> <li>• Flax</li> <li>• Tencel ®</li> <li>• ProViscose ®</li> <li>• ProModal ®</li> <li>• Lenzing viscose ®</li> <li>• Recycled materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organic cotton</li> <li>• BCI cotton</li> <li>• Recycled Cotton</li> <li>• Tencel ®</li> <li>• Birla excel®</li> <li>• Recycled materials</li> </ul>

**Fig.3 Blends of Materials Considered Sustainable by retailers**

#### **4.2.1 BCI Cotton Material and Traceability**

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is a not-for-profit organization that exists to make global cotton production better for the people who produce it, better for the environment it grows in and better for the sector's future. Better Cotton (BC) is neither an eco-label, nor a strict standard; rather, it is about taking the best practices of organic cultivation and putting them into a training program, however BC engages the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and water minimally, than the traditional system. And have better wages for farmers under the BCI umbrella. A minimum of 5% BCI cotton purchase and a future projection of 50% purchase within five years, warrants a retailer the opportunity to use the BCI labels and tags on products, and position the products as sustainable (BCI, 2018). However, it is the ways that they are used that makes it possible for BCI to be into particular resources category. The term resources-in-use denotes that it is the combination of thing and use that makes a resource (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011), so it is not enough to purchase BCI but how they are combined and used determines the sustainability positioning. The use of BCI in the fashion production process seem to have become a standard in the fashion industry. Both retailers studied so far are BCI users and many other major fashion retailers are under the BCI umbrella as well. It has become a sort of routine practice for the fashion retailers. This positions these routines as practices and potential resources as requiring practices to bring them into use as resources (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Nevertheless, the type of skills engaged determines the category of the resource and its position in products. For instance, Redclift (2005), proposed that 'sustainable development' needs to be linked and be understood in terms of new material realities as well as epistemological positions. The

blending of new material realities with old materials seem to create a different set of material realities in this regard.

Traceability of BCI cotton is impossible due to complexities in the system, and retailers are allowed to blend BCI with other unsustainable cotton. The blending of sustainable cotton with unsustainable cotton may create uncertainty on the sustainable motive. This brings to light the issue of reliability in the framing of products as sustainable. More so the concern on the quantity of BCI cotton that can be blended into the ordinary cotton for it to be able to bear the sustainability tag. The BCI cotton has concerns already because it is not fertilizer free, it is not pesticides free, it is not chemicals free and require the same labour force with slightly better labour conditions. However, it is said to use less water and less chemicals, but the proportion of chemical or water used is not readily available in the reports. Firstly, the BCI material may be sustainable but the affordance to blend with unsustainable cotton changes the meaning of the entire product that comes out of BCI blend.

The routinize ways of dealing with the BCI even by big fashion houses may aid in ignoring minor errors in labelling BCI as sustainable, thus as nature of routines. Theorizing routines as practices foregrounds the consequentiality of the actions that people bear as they are enacting routines. And both the prospect for change and the work that goes into reliability (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). In this regard BCI has the potential to allow retailers to incorporate greenwashing practices. Crystal Retail takes further steps by using environmentally friendly dyes in the production process in addition to BCI. This entails the use of new techniques that are less harmful to the workers, less water uses and less harmful dyes. In this way material and competencies employed offers and warrants sustainable practices in a form of sustainable choice product.

#### **4.2.2 Organic Cotton and Social Responsibilities**

Organic cotton is grown with consideration for the people who produce it and for the environment. The production of organic cotton has a lower negative impact on the environment because it sustains soil health and uses natural processes, rather than artificial inputs, which is beneficial to both people and ecosystems (Crystal Retail report, 2016). The organic nature implies no harmful chemical and non-genetically modified plants. This actually assures the quality and sustainable nature of the cottons produced this way. It also means the farmers and farm workers are not exposed to chemicals from the field. Organic cotton products obtain certification from accredited, independent, third-party organizations. The standard is to guarantee the *traceability* and *integrity* of the raw materials during all the manufacturing stages. Some well-known certifications are OCS (Organic Content Standard)



and GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard). However, OCS blended certification is used for products that contain just about 5% minimum of organic material blended with conventional or synthetic raw materials. Though there are 95 to 100% certifications too, while GOTS minimum blend of 70% for certification to use labels (GOTS; OCS, 2018). The focus of these products is on the environmental sustainability, hence further certification is required for social sustainability. Retailers can engage external examining bodies to ensure that concepts of social sustainability are followed through. This is in order for them to be able to use these efficiencies and competences to market sustainable products in-store. Or they have to use certified organic cotton that incorporates social sustainability as well, this comes in the form of the ILO norms. Not all certified organic cottons incorporate social sustainability for example see also ([aboutorganiccotton.org](http://aboutorganiccotton.org)). The routine ways of dealing with the OCS certified organic cotton has the same greenwashing potential as the BCI cotton. This is because they both employ the similar practices in the blending process and that has direct influence on the material being perceived as sustainable (e.g. Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

#### **4.2.3 Resource and Impact Reduction Techniques**

Tools and techniques to reduce resource consumption and offer better labour conditions and human workers impact are the main competencies in the production stage. They do not have to be engaged in all of the aforementioned competencies. But to be able to use aspects of these concepts and techniques affords a retailer the opportunity to tag or label a product as sustainable or “better” which connotes sustainability as well. These techniques and competencies are closely interlinked with materials and meanings in a way that it becomes quite difficult to separate them. However, for clarity purposes I will elaborate on how and what each of these encompass in relation to the retailer.

***Forest in Fashion and Animal rights:*** forest in fashion materials are very sensitive to sustainability because these kinds of fashion endanger certain plant species and creates imbalance in the biodiversity such materials include viscose. Not only plants, animals with fair also suffer the same fate. Manufacturing of synthetic fabrics are energy-intensive and produces harmful emission and volatile hazardous gases and compounds (Claudio, 2007). In light of these Crystal Retail has totally banned the use of viscose and fur in their production. They replaced the viscous with Tencel that is provided by an organisation that is managing the forest sustainability. By ensuring that proper processes and balance are created in the Tencel production. Trendsta Retail on the other hand uses by-product of animal from food production and has an organisation that monitors to ensure these rules are closely follow. Though they use some form of viscose, they use Tencel as well with monitoring from some organization.

**Chemical use:** this means the retailers ability to source raw materials that have been produced with as little or no chemicals as possible as the first phase (e.g. Fransson & Molander, 2013). This may involve the use of third party organisations to ensure the goals and requirements are met. The second phase is the affordance for the retailer to be able to use environmentally friendly, less harmful (follow standards) or less chemicals than usual, by employing certain techniques and tools in the dyeing process of materials. The new material type (dye) allows for the emergence of new tools and technique, eliminating *sandblasting for example*, a technique in jeans production that can cause severe respiratory problems for workers; thereby significantly reducing “hazards of the job” making it less strenuous and healthier for workers that engage in the dying process. These competencies allow for the end product to be labelled as sustainable.

**Water consumption and disposal:** This is one of the most important parts of sustainability in the industry. Since dyeing and bleaching processes are said to be intensive water consuming processes. Bearing in mind the cotton growing process as another water consuming stage. These means that skills put in place to reduce water use in the entire process are very crucial. But even more so with techniques and tools employed to incorporate and practice better waste water to avoid contaminating clean water bodies. Keeping in mind how fresh water is gradually becoming a scarce global resource (Kummu et al., 2016). Using fundamental concepts of shortage (impacts due to low availability per capita) and stress (impacts due to high consumption relative to availability) indicates difficulties in satisfying the needs of a population and overuse of resources respectively (Kummu et al., 2016). Under the period of study water consumption increased fourfold and nearly all sub-national trajectories show an increasing trend in water scarcity (Kummu et al., 2016). Due to these concerns it is important not only to consume water wisely but equally important to employ skills and tools to treat wastewater from production chains in a safe way and use proper disposing practices to avoid contaminating other water bodies. In that techniques and tools used to reduce water consumption if employed can be said to give the end product sustainable meaning.

**Energy use and Impact Reduction:** As mentioned earlier energy use and CO<sub>2</sub> and other harmful gases in the production chain as a result of production or logistics are one of the key areas retailers focus on. Less energy use is practices in the cotton production process. Most importantly Crystal Retail is aiming at reducing energy consumption by using led lamps that are said to be more efficient. They are implementing the use of solar energy in some parts of the factories to reduce consumption. Transportations are quite important in retailers getting

close to reaching sustainable goals. This includes choices of transport modes and systems that reduces the retailers carbon footprint. For instance, both retailers try to reduce their carbon footprint by choosing less carbon emission transport modes, but it gets more complex as they have to manage time and efficiency, considering the importance of time in the fast fashion retail system. This means planning has to be implemented to choose sustainable transport modes that fulfils all criteria. As high speed in transport modes equates to higher carbon emissions. If not taken seriously the emissions can completely counterbalance the benefits of reduction of footprint in production (Zamani et al., 2017). For example, Sea transport is better in footprint reduction than air transport. In order to be efficient, the system of loading or packing goods has to be monitored with care to reduce chances of transporting half-filled loads of good. This is where the competencies of third party logistics companies are employed for efficiency, to employ strategies that reduces the impact, though other companies also use fuels that reduces the impact considerably.

***Partnerships and Collaborations:*** The fast fashion production chain is a very complex one. Considering both sustainability reports of the two fast fashion retailers, it is clear that it is difficult for retailers to be able manage their own production process without external corporation, monitoring bodies and reliant on suppliers. So, this is made possible in the form of organisations both governmental and non-governmental corporation who are entrusted to monitor various concept and stages. This is done with specific focus that may entail all three dimensions of sustainability. The challenge with such organisations is that, transparency and traceability within the system can pose challenges for retailers. Especially in the third world production countries where they may have lesser control and will have to accept the words of cooperating partners. But also trust that proper and agreed procedures and rules are followed, though that is not always the case (Bruce & Daly, 2006). The buying activities play a crucial role through supplier selection and product decision-making. Buying is arguably changing from purely operational to incorporating more strategies for effective partnerships and portfolio management (Bruce & Daly, 2006). Crystal Retail in this regard tries to incorporate physical facility visits to examine situations for themselves. Nevertheless, it is impossible to do this for every sector, so rather it takes the form of random routine checks practices. Thus, the nexus of doings and sayings has to be aligned by the retailer in order for the requisite elements, embodied materiality to be mediated as meaningful (Schatzki, 2003).

Sustainable production process in retail can be perceived by theorizing resources as ontologically connected to the ways in which they are create through resources use and knowledge (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002: 253). This opens up new ways of understanding the underlying sustainable outcome of the retailer. This also provides

explanation for resisting old ways and embracing changes in practices that were once routinized. This means that new resources use creates new set of routinized practices that do not necessarily align in the same way. And that may even cause some sort of resistance (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). As these new ways of resources use that gives rise to new material products also changes the way retailers and production workers enact their schema that, they thought appropriate for their work. This means that practices from the production phase of material production is influenced by better technique and less resource use, skills of farm workers do not only end in the production phase but also influences if a product can be labelled as sustainable or not.

These practices continually connect onto the various stages and that may even change routines employed after the production phase. For instance, routinized way of engaging partners or collaborators may have to change in order to focus on specific aspects of production that may influence the out of the end products. This means that retailers may have to engage in new practices. This in turn will create a different set of resources that can create new practices which may displace old or outdated practice like in the design stages and continue on creating new resources for in-store practices. This is what Schatzki (2013) mean by practices as consist of embodied materially mediated 'nexus of doings and sayings' (Schatzki, 2003; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Creating new routines and continuous practices through making and remaking in organising the sustainable market. This means that through the lens of practice, the engagement of core logic of sustainable production practice is reinforced and changed with both intended and unintended consequences (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). In that sustainable material production for instance BCI may harm workers however, the intention is rather to create better livelihood for workers.

#### **4.3 Sustainability in the Fast Fashion Retail Space**

The aim of this section is twofold. firstly, I focus on how the retailer space and the sustainable products are organized and in reference to the various sustainability concepts in the production process discussed earlier. Secondly, is to understand the performance of sustainability in-store. This is to understand sustainability from the doings and performances of the carriers of practice (Nicolini, 2017). This rest on the concept that, practice cannot be reduced to just words but foregrounds the roles of the body, artefact, and skills. This allows for the interplay and performances of the consumer in the retail settings (Reckwitz, 2002). Here the addition of shadowing as an observation method allows for the embodiment of materials, artefact, body, and skills interplay in the retail space in unifying the mental and material. As expressed by Schatzki, (2001) practice is materially mediated nexuses of activity. In that the focus here take both the human agency and the materials approach to

understand the retail space and their interplay in sense making. Lastly, I want to critically discuss how the fast fashion retail space drive different forms of sustainable performances and consumption practices.

#### **4.3.1 In-store Themes and Displays**

Fast fashion retailers incorporate both tangible and intangible cues in their marketing in-store. This thesis focus on attributes which are closely related to the sustainable themes. For example, the mannequin display, layout and merchandising, signage, and tags, in order to answer how sustainability in-store is organized (Barnes, & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Retailers are strongly focused on finding new ways of enhancing in-store experiences for consumers. However, the consumers renditions are constituted by traditional values such as design and layout (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006). Both retailers are located in a mall with glass front display stores. The wide glass front run from end to end top to bottom covering almost the entire front of the store. The glass front allows for clear visibility for passers-by to have a clear view of the inside of the store. This is to attract passer-by into the store as much efforts seem to have been put into the design of the storefront to make it even more aesthetically appealing to passers-by. This is also done in the form of harmonizing colors and themes (see e.g. Bellizzi et al., 1983; Robert & John, 1982; Baker, et al., 1994). The entrances and exits of the store are very wide, with divisions but no indications of exits or entry points. However, seeing the checkout on the left side view is an indication that the right side is the entry, this applies only to Trendsta Retail. The left and right parts of the window are displays with clothing on racks in combinations of tops, trousers, skirts, and dresses arranged by categories and in color schemes and themes. The center part of the entrance is displayed with mannequins, styled mostly with “hero pieces” or trend of the week and other normal clothing that are not trends or new arrivals. This is mostly in the form of jeans trousers or other form of bottom clothing. Both stores have the same set up in the front part of the stores. Nevertheless, the themes in this regard are not as ideologically distinctive, as in for example Borghini et al., (2009). Rather it section in the form of product categories (e.g. stack of shirts arranged in same colors schemes, trousers, tops etc.) arranged and juxtapose in harmonizing colors in an aesthetically pleasing way.

...at the left entrance is the display of colourful sustainable t-shirts in glare view, with price tags on. However, the product surrounding the space are unsustainable. A few steps forward show a well organised pile of sustainable jeans on a three-tier rack, right close to the fitting room. The general store layout favours the display of the sustainable product, however the center displayed mannequins do not have sustainable products on them. (Field notes, 03-03-2018)

Trendsta Retail has a table right at the middle where the mannequins are positioned with folded clothing. The clothes in this section change often, sometimes it is a stack of folded sustainable jeans, other times it is stack of folded sweatshirts or stack of colourful sustainable t-shirts. Crystal Retail do not have a table rather have standing racks behind and beside the mannequins and hangs hero pieces there. Both positions the trend items in the middle of the store, which changes the outlook of the entrance of the store and make the storefront look different weekly. This is primarily to cater for the consumers visual impulse which in turn is very beneficial to the retailer (Sherry et al., 2001). Trendsta Retail has a system of organising the store weekly, so that the store looks very different every week. This includes moving furniture around and repositioning them to give a new look. There seem to be arrivals every week, so the entire store outlook and theme for Trendsta Retail changes weekly. These actions of the retail store mimics societal ideology of the fast fashion and social media symbiotic relationships where speed is of essence in both. Hence the weekly incomings of new products and store makeovers (redesign) also encourage an outlook for the fast fashion consumer. Borghini et al., (2009) suggest that effective retailing may have distinct ideological themes in-store that mimic other societal delineations. Crystal Retail store size is twice as bigger as Trendsta Retail, they seem to move around furniture intensively and redecorate about once a month but the center of the entrance where the trends are displayed gets weekly rearrangement not as intense as Trendsta Retail. The themed and dynamic nature of the storefront display and organizing try to respond to consumers clamouring for increasingly sublime experiences. The retailers do this, to attempt to facilitate buying (Kozinets et al., 2002), but also to keep up with the challenges imposed by fast shifting trends. As the store design has to be adaptable in order to keep up the pace of fast trends and high consumers demands in terms of sustainability as well (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017). See also fig. 4 below.



**Fig. 4** Store front displays of Trendsta Retail and Crystal Retail

#### **4.3.2 Organising Sustainable Products**

Both Trendsta Retail and Crystal Retail have very different ways of organising sustainability in-store. They both position sustainable products in prime positions in-store. Store front is typically used to communicate and create an impression of the store. In fast fashion this is a very important part of the store, as this is the place where trends are strategically positioned (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Here the sustainable products add to the agency of the marketing assemblage as they are dispersed or categorized in-store. The display of sustainable products takes the form of well-integrated in the entire store or categorized in specific locations in-store with regards to Crystal Retail and Trendsta Retail respectively. Crystal Retail has an integrated approach to sustainability, by integrated I mean that



sustainable products in-store are not confined to specific places in-store. Rather they are spread out in the entire store in a way that makes it difficult to see what is sustainable and what is not by just looking into the store space. Thus, both sustainable and unsustainable materials are all synthesized together in-store as one system from the analytical perspective. Whereas the categorised approach means that, the sustainable products are sectioned and confined to specific locations in-store (see also for e.g. Shove, 2005; Spaargaren, 2011; Connolly & Prothero, 2008).

Products with green tags indicating sustainability are integrated around the entire store, both from the adult section to the children section, with over half of the products on display in the store bearing the sustainability tags and labels. However, they are all not sustainable in the same way. Some are within social sustainability concepts and some are within the environment or a combination of both concepts. This way of presenting sustainability in-store seem to try forge an identity for the store. Tags have some information on them indicating category and aspect of sustainability that are being implemented. For instance, Crystal Retail categories of sustainable products in-store includes "Made with 60% recycled polyester, produced with water and energy saving process, Better cotton Initiative (BCI), Made with 52% Tencel, and one bottle one garment just to mention a few. The tags have some information on them indicating types of concepts of sustainability that are being implemented". Cited from field notes these are just some of the tags and labels found in-store at Crystal Retail. Crystal Retail seem to be trying to create a sustainable image as majority of the products are labelled sustainable in different forms but are not organized in-store by sustainable sections. The retailer uses material elements in the retail environment which converge to create a distinctive image appropriate to the fashion merchandise in which they specialize. And correspondingly, to create specific image for themselves. In this regard Crystal Retail is trying to create a sustainable image for itself by taking responsibility of the sustainability as a retailer's responsibility (see for example Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010).

Trendsta Retail groups their sustainable products as separate and categorized by type of sustainable product type and specific locations in-store. This may be termed individual product type approach, where specific locations in-store are allocated for sustainable products. Sustainable products are grouped in specific sections, most of their denim seem to be in the "good project", thus the better cotton initiative and the t-shirts, sweatshirts and inner wears has organic cotton labels. Those are the three main groups that has sustainability tags. Whereas within the "trendy" products some product contains Tencel that are not tagged sustainable but are labelled recyclable with special instructions for care. Most of the



sustainable products are within the base product category consistent with Bruce and Daly (2006). The layout of the store encourages clear visibility of the sustainable product:

“Trendsta Retail store layout in a way actually forces the consumers to go through the sustainable product position, as it is positioned in the left part of the store which is right opposite to where the cashier is. Usually the cashier lane is where the consumer is supposed to use as exit from the store.” (Field notes, 01-03-2018)

Even though the store setup and themes change every week, some things remain standard. Throughout the observation period the sustainable products seem to have the same attention as the other products especially the denim products. In general, the sustainable products are organised in sections, in-store communication that will direct consumer to the sustainable product is absent except for the denim products with “the good project sign” on top. In this regard it will take a consumer to browse in the entire store to find the sustainable product or will have to engage the assistance of store staff. The in-store communication and presentation of sustainability is very minimal except for the product presence and take back system boxes. So, it took about two observations to realize the under garments are sustainable and that entails consistent tactile practices to discover them. This way sustainable consumption is encouraged through personal choices, in that the way the store space is organized guides consumer consumption result. This Connolly and Prothero, (2008) argued that is sustainable consumption ought to be understood in the context of process of increasing individualization to allow individuals feel empowered and responsible for the various sustainable concepts and themselves (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Whereas in the case of Crystal Retail it is vice versa as the way the space is organised and sustainable products configured in-store indirectly promotes sustainable consumption as an organized practice, this aligns with Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) views on sustainability in in-store service work. Where sustainability is situated as a retailers responsibility by not just offering product but through the performance of sustainable service work, promotions, and other forms of congruence between retailers and version of sustainability they are enacting (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016).

Crystal retail has a voluntary take back box displayed in-store. The inscription on the take back box indicates that, the used products that are return to the store are donated to the Swedish Salvation Army charity organization. In this context the take back system did not offer any discount for returned items contrary to earlier research where retailers offer discounts as compensations for returned items (see e.g. Fredriksson, 2012). This type of

take back systems have been extensively being researched (e.g. Chow et al., 2017; Stål & Jansson, 2017) with critics that, the discount that is offered promotes more consumption practices. This is also arguably perceived to promote unsustainable consumption due to the possibility of creating an illusion of “doing good” by donation used garment. This way consumers may legitimize increased material consumption through asserting clothing donations as “doing good” (Stål & Jansson, 2017).

#### **4.3.3 Organising Sustainability on the Websites**

The websites themes are equally integrated in a similar way to the in-store themes. Trendsta Retail have a sustainable collection section on their website where consumers can click and find products marked with “the good project” tag on their website. A brown background with a white text “the good project” this can easily be seen without hovering the mouse over the image. When you click the image, you get a text close to the item description “Better Cotton Initiative - Thank you for supporting sustainable cotton cultivation.” On the extreme left is a BCI logo, sometimes the BCI logo appears on the left, beside the text displayed if the product is within that category. There seem to be lack of detailed information on what “BCI” entails and what is “the good project” for instance there is a 100% Viscose shirt marked with “the good project” tag. But there is not information why it is sustainable. Contrasting this with the production process indicates that, their viscose material production employs the use of third party agents. The agents ensure that, the forest in fashion products are produced with minimal impact. However, that competence was not embedded in the way the material was presented online. Looking at the tags examined in-store as well, these tags only bear sustainability without further explanation on what it entails, to give the consumer the affordance to enact and make meanings that align with the competencies involved in the material production.

With Crystal Retail the sustainable products are equally integrated online in the same way as the in-store display. Concepts are the same they are not categorized in a specific fashion. This makes it difficult to see exactly which products are sustainable. Nevertheless, you could use the mouse to hover over the product and get the information as to whether a product is sustainable or not. If sustainable, it writes under the product in green colour background and white text “sustainable” once you click on it you get further information down on the page on the specifics of sustainability of the product. For example, water saving, BCI, organic cotton, or energy saving. To find sustainable products only, the consumer has to use the word “sustainable choice” or “sustainable” in the search button. All the products in the results are sustainable products from different categories and concepts of sustainability. Both retailers

implement the same concept from in-store into their websites. Both websites redirect consumer to communicate through social media, phone and email.

#### **4.4 Ways of Doing Sustainability**

In as much as the integrated concept promotes the purchasing of sustainable products due to the way the products are integrated. Making it possible for both conscious and unconscious consumers to engage with it, as displayed by Crystal Retail. On the other hand, it could be more tedious for a conscious consumer to actually find specific sustainable products. Finding sustainable products is a highly tactile activity in the store as the only way to know if a product is sustainable is to reach for the tags and labels to study it. Sustainable and unsustainable product are juxtaposed and arranged in relation to other products.

” I saw here pieces today that I would like to know if they are sustainable or not, but it was a challenge, the clutter in the space is quite dense. It is not easy to spot the same clothes on the shopping floor. I had to search through the whole store moving back and forth. When I found it, I had to reach for the tags before I got to know that they are sustainable.”- (Field notes, 29-03-2018)

The excessive touching to discover the sustainable product also feels somewhat inappropriate. Though Trendsta Retail group the sustainable products together in a stack, the lack of directions to take the consumer to where the products are make it a bit difficult. But once the consumer finds the sustainable products, they are in a stack and easy to go through them.

Looking at it from the production process, and the way the sustainable products are organized, the skills, materials employed, and the sustainable concepts engaged in the production processes are translated into tags and labels in-store. This mean that for instance energy saving process in the production process are translated into sustainable concept and inscribed on the product, by tagging it as sustainable and labelling it with the specific competencies that were implemented. For example, some tag from Crystal Retail reads *“produced with water and energy saving processes”* BCI and also bears the recyclable logo, *“Made with 60% recycled Polyamide”* another typical example of Crystal Retail is the use of *“Organic Cotton tags with GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certification logo”*. Looking back at the production certification discussed earlier, this actually means that the product material is organically produced with concerns for social sustainability in perspective. Another example from Trendsta Retail is the website display of a sustainable

shirt as “the good project” where the only information is that the material is made of 100% Viscose. Considering the earlier discussions Viscose is an unsustainable material because it endangers certain forest trees. However, the retailer partners with third party organisations to ensure that the dangers are minimized in the viscose production. This warrants the material from these sources as sustainable. But this is understandable by knowing the production processes and searching deeper into the supply and production process to get acquainted with terms and symbolic meanings of the tags and labels. These sustainable tags are also put together with other ordinary labels and price tags. Below are some of the labels and tags that were observed in-store. For example, see also fig. 5 below:

Observing labels in-store today the tags have the following labels.

Made with 60% recycled polyester, produced with water and energy saving process, Better cotton Initiative (BCI), Made with 52% Tancel, One bottle one garment. (Field notes, 01-03-2018)



**Fig.5 Sustainability Labels on Products**

#### 4.4.1 Consumers Meaning Making of Sustainability Tags

These manifested in the form of some consumers perceiving all product in-store as the same and ignoring the sustainability labels. Due to lack of clear understanding of what is it that

makes the sustainable tag product better than the ordinary products. During the observation, as I shadow a participant in the Crystal Retail store, she was looking for indoors socks for a child. We entered the store and she strolled around in the store looking at some bags and clothes both sustainable and unsustainable and then finally she moves towards what she actually came to buy. She picked up the indoor socks she was looking for, it had a BCI label on it, she looked at it but was rather commenting on the prices that is too expensive, then I asked if she understand the BCI tag, she said no and then further tried to explain.., “but I think it's some kind of helping some people when you buy it...or something like that... After that I informed her it is a sustainable product, she was quite for a second.

Meaning of the BCI label looking at it...

...errm I don't know the meaning, but I think it's some kind of helping some people when you buy it...with a facial expression...they are all the same, it's just the price... - (Field notes, 30-03-2018)

She assigned the social sustainability meanings to the BCI tag because she is aware that retailers usually donate to certain social causes as a CSR which is situated under the concept of social sustainability as clarified earlier on in the text. BCI is social sustainable product as it ensures fair wage for workers, but not in a charitable way as she think (donation). Sustainability is rather beyond CSR in that, it is a key resource not only in competitive advantage but also in corporate survival (for example Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). However, she seems not to trust that the BCI is actually a sustainable product, not because, of the BCI itself but because the communication was not clear enough. And that uncertainty in information creates mistrust. The consumers tend to ignore the sustainable labels when the meanings are complicated for them to understand in ways that are personal to them. For instance, one participant I followed in-stores has previously bought a sustainable product without knowing that the product is sustainable.

...she stopped and looking at the jeans folded in stacks, and said I bought one of these jeans a couple of days ago, that's what I am wearing right now... they are good. -(Field notes, 21-03-2018)

Meaning of “the good project” BCI label looking at it.

... oh I didn't know that they are sustainable..., then she reached out for one of the labels on the stack of jeans pants and said oh yes! That's nice I didn't know that, they should have had some sign to show that this is a sustainable

product... It's nice to know that I bought a sustainable product, I feel good you know like am doing something good. - (Field notes, 21-03-2018)

Some consumers do not find personal meanings to the sustainable products that are displayed in the fast fashion stores. They are embedded in technical words that do not resonate with the ordinary consumers. For instance, during the shadowing observation the participant indicated that she is more interested in prices than the sustainable products, so she will buy sustainable products if the price is right.

“When I buy I don't really care or think about sustainability or environmental stuff, I just buy if the price is right for me, like am searching now”... so I can buy sustainable if the prices is good but it's not my goal. But I am aware that some things have some sort of social benefits or stuff like that, example the bag am carrying now if you buy it about 10% of the money goes to saving some special species of fox that are endangered” - (Field notes, 21-3-2018).

Though she has made her point clear that she cares more about the prices rather than if the product is sustainable. Further conversations indicated that the pricey bag (Fjällräven a popular Swedish backpack) she was carrying actually means something to her (see also e.g. Fuentes, 2011). She is aware of her social and environmental contributions to sustainability by buying that particular bag. She even tried to explain to me the particular species of fox that is saved by her purchased. But here it can be perceived that, being environmentally conscious alone does not postulate sustainable consumption (Sarumathi, 2014). In practices materials competencies and meanings are closely intertwined. The retailer's ability or inability to translate the various sustainable concepts and skills that are employed into the store environments directly changes the way consumer understands and make meanings of the sustainable products. The material products are attributed agency in and through practices. But also, that practice require the elements such as skills to enable meanings to be conveyed or made in an efficient way. The presence of only the material (sustainable denim and labels) alone is not enough, the material product agency is only one of many elements involved in practices. Much bigger efforts may be required in-store, like signage that specify the sustainable concepts employ for consumers social and symbolic significance in this regard (Shove et al., 2012). Linking this back to forest in fashion where similar efforts are put in place by fast fashion retailers to ensure sustainability of the forest in fashion product, through third party expertise and partnerships, to ensure the use of Tencel instead of Viscose (Sustainability report, 2016) as normative practice in retailers forest in fashion sustainability concepts. However, in the case of the retailers, these materials and the skills

employed to ensure forest safety are not conveyed in in-store environment in terms of service.

In this regard the practices are not continued in a way that brings the meanings to the end consumer, the consumers pragmatic self is not activated, in the form of motivations in the in-store environment (Martenson, 2017). And the material is deprived of the understanding due to the sporadic ways of presenting sustainability. For these sustainable practices to be continuous means that following through with practices and translate into services throughout the entire production through to in-store. This is quite consistent with Ritch (2014) findings indicate that, consumers rely on heuristics to guide sustainable preferences, due to lack of adequate guide. This implies that consumers who are not already conscious with sustainability have limited chances of making meanings with sustainability in-store. Being that, the 'nexus of doings and sayings' in the retail context must be culturally understandable to the agents who carry it out. Hence, it must be understandable to the consumer and also to potential observers, in this case retailers and other consumer (Schatzki, 2003). Based on the notion of obverse panopticism as expressed by Sherry et al., (2001 p.466) that, consumers watch retailers while retailers watch consumers. Here the watching embodies routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the retail space as comprehended by both observers as observed (Schatzki, 2003).

#### **4.4.2 Making Sense of Retailers Sustainability Concepts**

Crystal Retail online post on the use sustainable reusable bags instead of plastic bags show below:

“Help us reduce the use of plastic bags! We have designed a cool bag to put all of your stuff in. It really is as easy as that. Join our quest in making fashion more sustainable. Oh, and the bag is made from recycled PET-bottles. Find the bag in our stores and online.” – (online community 01-04-2018)

This post was very simple and clear however, some consumers do not see how the use of one bag is sustainable. Among the comments are that firstly, the bag will wrinkle the clothes that are bought because it is a soft foldable bag. Consumers act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them (Blumer, 1969b:2). The second comment was about using paper bags instead which is perceived to be more sustainable by the consumer. Another member was quick to ask: “You mean, therefore, that a non-recycled paperboard is better for the environment than a plastic bag that can be reused multiple times” her response was; “absolutely not but a thin paper cover is” (Crystal Retail Instagram, 12 April 2018,

14:30). This indicates the meanings that people assign to sustainability is based on their levels of understanding of what is sustainable. A counter argument for the first concern of clothes being wrinkled because of the bag was that, most people wash their purchased clothes before they use it. But obviously she is not within that frame or category of people. More so, the members themselves try to solve their sustainable questions without interference from the Retailer. The retailer only response when asked questions like how much is the cost of the product or where can one buy it, thus purchasing related questions then the retailer response.

Looking back at how sustainable concepts are organised in-store through the material displays being the product and the labels, it can be argued that the same understandings are being presented on the online platform as well. However, the in-store has personnel that can answer such questions if need be. Nevertheless, in the online platform these questions are left for the conscious gatekeepers thus conscious consumers and other unconscious consumers to try to sort it out and display their skills and competencies on sustainable conundrums. But also, that the conscious consumer is quick to point out the flaws in the retailers sustainable post in ways the can easily turn a positive initiative into a negative one. The conscious consumer actively warrants the concept of sustainable fashion consumption in their own terms (Bly et al., 2015), but they can act as gatekeepers for sustainability discussion, with knowledge sharing on green products (Shen et al., 2014). Therefore, the retailer tries to avoid those negative conversations by being silent on sustainability related community discussion online. This was particularly observed as some of the negative comments tend to disappear from the discussion sections, but also Trendsta Retail for instance, forehand warns the consumers of negativity in commenting.

#### **4.4.3 Consuming without Purchase**

Considering consumption practices, one of the key findings during the observations in-store is consumer practices of some of the younger consumers as they shop in groups of two and three. Previous understanding on fashion consumptions have posited retail store environments as places of variant consumption behaviours (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The understanding is that, store design and displays are much more than mere context. Instead they function as both consumption objects and vehicles for consumption meanings (Peñaloza, 1998).

...the youngsters are in companies of three and two as they shop, try on clothing and taking photos. With the way they strike the poses, it looks like they are going to post it on social media. They try on clothing and then come



out of the dressing room to get confirmations from their friends. They all seem happy about the look, so they took more photograph. They seem to be enjoying the shopping as they chat and giggle throughout. One person was the one doing the actual buying, while the other two are there for approving the looks. But they also took the chance to try on some clothes and take photographs of themselves, this way they can own the image of how the product looks on them without owning the material product itself - (Field notes 21-03-18).

Consumption is a moment in practice and not limited to or defined by market exchange (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). For example, Samsioe, (2017) argue that are there is different ways of consuming among fast fashion consumers. Where these consumption styles incorporate a systematic technique for consumers to support the market through acknowledging and approving its speed. The speed in this regard relates to the frequency of trends availability in-store. But also, these consumption style also shifts away from the usual material object consumption and rather takes a consumer display of competencies in the in the retail space and acquisition process. At this point it can be a collective action that incorporates competencies like mimicking, studying, detecting, scrutinizing, and visualizing (Samsioe, 2017). In practices, the trendy nature of fast fashion (Memic & Minhas, 2011) means that these youngsters sometimes use the clothing only once and then discard it in different ways, by selling as second-hand, donating them, or giving it away to family. This may be largely as a result of social media use as a stage for bringing to life fast fashion product. In the sense that, when a photograph of the consumer is posted on social media wearing the clothing items, then the purpose of the products is achieved. A form of ideological construct based on value as derived from social media. Consumers are watching other consumers in the social settings. This may be situated as new ways of consuming similar to for example (Lai et al., 2018; Zamani et al., 2017). But also, that products are increasingly associated with fantasy-oriented lifestyle advertising, which in turn changes the practical functionalities not only of the retails space into an experimental space (Sherry, 1998), but also product practical functionalities are also change. This way of consuming may not be economically sustainable and beneficial to the retailer but are inherently sustainable in the environmental sense.

#### **4.5 Sustainability in Design, Fit, Quality and Care**

The design stage of fashion clothing plays a major role in sustainability related matters, as this is where materiality, blends, style choices comes in focus, and all these are tightly related to sustainable development concerns. For instance, style may directly impact on

longevity of clothing product and use. Fit is key in design; tight fit may reduce the lifespan of clothing due to friction among others. Whereas timeless design will also increase longevity of use and reduce perishability. In the in-store observations while following a participant around she found a pair of sustainable jeans that she like. However, the fit was an issue, so she had to abandon the product in the end.

She searches through the sales section and picked up two items a sleeping top and a sustainable pair of jeans trousers. I followed her to the fitting area, sat on a bench waiting for her while she tried the clothes on. She came out to show me how the jeans fit, the legs hips fit very nicely but the waist was too small. She seems to like the fit very much, she rubs her hands on the thighs in approval of the fit. In the end she bought only the top leaving the jeans due to the fit. - (Field notes: 21-03-2018)

Here it can be understood the importance of fit in sustainability. Fit has the potential to reduce waste, as product design and fit plays a crucial role. A slightly bigger waist would have given a perfect fit, and that kind of fit also allows for a slightly smaller waisted person to use the Jeans with belt. Or even a more expanding waist band would have worked for different sizes of customers. Fit in practices could be planned with not just one size in mind in order to make it more sustainable.

Fit can also come in the form of error in packaging, for instance during the online observations a community member's complain is about having two different socks sizes in one packet. This is due to an error in the packing process. Though this may seem basic it is quite a costly and unsustainable error. The consumer will have to go to the store to return the product which has its own sustainability implications (CO<sub>2</sub> emission as a result of transportation) and also the retailer will have to discard this unused product as the size differences make it unfit for use. The latter calls for more concern as it affects all aspects of sustainable practices in a negative way. This sheds light on concerns that, sustainability in fast fashion is not just about frequency in material acquisition but also something that has to be well integrated in processes in ways that is constantly in focus in all sections. Crystal Retail for instance considered some of the design issue afore mentioned in the report, more specifically that of fit, where a dresses armpit depth can influence longevity.

Material blend choices do not only affect quality but also affect if a product can be recycled, this may be one of the stronger points for possible reaching close-loop sustainability. Since just about five percent of materials from the fashion industry are recycled. Material

composition can make recycling feasible and closed-loop fashion supply chains possible (Chow & Li, 2018). The blend composition is also a design stage decision. Another concern is the material blend and its impact on post-consumer care. Some blends even if made of sustainable materials might require more resources in terms of post-consumer care for the product and all that has to be considered as sustainability concerns. Decision to use more sustainable materials or less sustainable materials for example organic cotton or Tencel are all in the design stages. Materiality has also very big impact on quality, anticipation of use and material combinations work together. The online community discussion indicates concerns of quality with some sustainable children product as they break within short time span. However, these are outdoor clothes that are supposed to be strong and weather bad conditions (Girls Jumpsuit).

“Daughter's jumpsuit.. Not even used 4 months, never washed, not used daily...” - (Online community 16-03-2018)

The consumer showed photographs of holes in the cloths and the time frame of use and the number of wash as a way to evaluate the quality of product and material used. Below is another consumer quality concern which the retailer suggested that might be her fault in not following proper care instructions.

Hey, you guys should work more on meeting customer needs. When the garment we bought with you, used once at a party and washed according to instruction, loses color and breaks at the seams... I'm not looking to get the money back, but getting answers both from store and from your customer service that I must have washed it wrong and it's my fault it broke, just makes me get angry and feel like I never more want to shop from you ..... And yes, I washed it according to instruction, no other clothes lost color or broke and I felt in the drum so there were no sharp objects there. The customer is always wrong and lying to you is what you want to convey to me?

-(online community 10-04-2018).

There seem to be a quite some quality concerns among the community, as they lay out their complains, comments and complements. However quality problems are also closely linked to the setbacks in product care and are not only limited to sustainable products. From both in-store observation and existing literature it is clear now that, products of sustainable fashion are basically no different from the other fashion items in terms of looks, design and style (Shen et al., 2012). Trendsta Retail focuses much more on care complexities as a

sustainable strategy both online and in-store, post-consumer care for product are encourage. They advocate for consumers to reduce frequent washing of denim due to the high resource requirement in the washing process and the longevity of the product. This rhetoric has been highlighted quite a lot in Trendsta Retail sustainable marketing strategies both online and in-store on product labels.

#### **4.6 Practices of Looking at Sustainability In-store**

Throughout the shadowing process, observing participants shop, they tend to ignore the sustainability labels on the products. Their interaction is more focused on the materiality of the actual product by feeling it with fingers. The sustainability signage in-store seem to perform the role of in-store furniture in a way that may devoid it of its sustainability meanings. Consumers seem not to see the signals, this is particularly evident as I had to point it out to the participants before they look at it. The tags and labels are only reached for in reference to price. In instances where the price tag on the product is facing the consumers, thus if the price is already clearly visible on the product the tags are mostly not touched, and when it is touched, it is done in such a way that connotes its routinized nature (habitual practice), rather than seeking for any information or just an affirmation of price. This is evident in all the participant that were shadowed in-store, they realize there are tags, but they do not actually put in efforts to understand the tags or even make sense of it. The prints on the tags that can be read from a distance may not make enough sense to spark curiosity into taking further action of reading the fine prints.

Touching the product with fingertips to understand the material composition and quality is a skill or competence that may be said to have been practices for a while and has become routinised. This action comprises of skill sets that may have replaced the practices of actually looking and reading the labels to understand the material composition and make assumptions of quality of material. That is to say speculating through self-understanding, as encouraged by practice theory, a shifted self-understanding. Practice invites us to regard agents as carriers of routinized but also interpreting form of “knowing how” and “wanting” and of the usage of things (Reckwitz, 2002). This way a participant has multiple contextual information and assumptions. Just by touching the material, in a way, he or she may not only understand the material composition but may understand how to even care for the material without having to look at the labels.

In-store performances brought about by the agency of understanding material blends and quality without reading labels. One of the evident insight during the in-store shadowing is

that, the consumer seems to have contextual information just by touching and feeling the materiality of the product.

...she went straight to the center part of the store, which felt a little strange, because most of the trendy things are usually displayed in the front part of the store. She went straight to a colourful top and touched it with a stroke to the sleeve, then pulled it apart gently with two hands and then feel it with her finger tips in a way that seem like she is trying to understand the material composition. She looked at the price and flipped the dress around to look at it well then, she placed it back on the rack. She picked another one right beside it which had the green sustainable tags. She looked at it but didn't mind to read or touch the fine sustainable prints, she just wanted to see the price. I asked if she knows what the green round label is, she said no.... then she try to read it and said aha! Its reads "sustainable choice".... She looked again and said "me I don't pay attention to these things, mostly I look for colors and the material quality, and the price.... - (Field notes 23-04-2018)

Her navigation in-store indicates that she is not a price sensitive consumer, however she does seem to have an idea of what certain "material feel" should cost. But all the same her priorities are on colors and material quality of the product. She seems to have the skill to detect quality in material through touch. She did not look at the label for material composition but rather in practices she can feel the quality of the material without having to read information on labels. This is particularly important in understanding the consumers actions and reaction towards the sustainable labels.

#### **4.7 Tactile Performances**

The sustainability tags are juxtaposed right together with other labels like care and material composition labels. This make the sustainability labels and tags look more like additional information tags. But also makes the consumer flip through many labels before reaching the price sometimes. Nevertheless, that does not make them see the sustainable labels. Rather it encourages the consumer to treat these tags as noise or obstacles, which in practice are not given much attention, rather the attention is on reaching the price tag. This routinized way of presenting sustainability in-store creates routine performances by the consumer. These routines have the tendency to create "unconsciousness" in that until something goes wrong or there is a disruption before attention is called onto routine for renegotiations. This is also consistent with Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, (2010) findings that efficiencies and

flexibilities in the fast fashion system has not been translated into the retail store environment, in ways that allows consumers to align with these offerings in meaningful ways.

Touching product labels to see what sustainable concepts are employed is a highly tactile process that sometimes require removing the product from a rack and flipping labels. The tactility is incorporated in Crystal Retail website as well, where a consumer has to hover the mouse over the product image in order to see if it is sustainable or not. The in-store tactility feels a little inappropriate due to its tendency to make a mess of how the space is organized. But also, that it does not feel normal or acceptable to do that. This Schatzki (1996: 98) termed as dispersed practices where the dispersed appear in many sectors of social life like following rules either written or unwritten these practices are understood and followed in the form of rules, therefore overly touching creates a form of disturbance to the rules of the retail space. Giddens (1984 p.18) also argue that rules are typically intersected with practices in the contextuality of situated encounters, in that, rules can be contextualized in practices. Understanding sustainability in-store happens when lot of practices come together, but also the interdependence of these practices and how they come together in the retail space to create meanings for the consumer. This is done through the employment of skills and the presence of artefacts and materials to facilitate these meanings. According to Warde (2005), consumption through the lens of practice may be seen as the proposition that follows from the way practice is organized rather than the outcome of personal choice, in that, standards of the practice guides behaviours which results in consumption (Warde, 2005). In this regard consumers are guarded by practice, but they are not passive, they do not simply accept the enactment of the retailers' world in which products are marketed to have purpose. But rather they concurrently challenge, unsettle and negotiate bearing their own agency, embodied in performances and practices (Fuentes, 2011). In this regard a repositioning of the sustainable representations in-store may cause a disruption that will draw different ways of performing in-store.

#### **4.8 Elements of Practice in Fast Fashion Sustainability Performances**

Understanding the differences between theories of practice and other models based on human behaviors is by analysing different objects of analysis. By not analysing individual intention and subjective interests. Rather the focus here is on examination of practice itself as a carrier of performances (Nicolini, 2017). The purchasing of sustainable products is not just about being sustainable but rather actively involved in reproducing sustainability itself. The fast fashion retail space is themed, displayed and design in ways that promotes consumption. However, whether it promotes sustainable consumption is heavily reliant on the complex marketing assemblage. Spreading out sustainable products in-store or categorizing

it in specific places, elements like in-store service, promotions, personnel, and materials also plays a vital role in sustainable consumption (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010; Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016). This embodies continues organising and reorganising of the space to promote specific ways of consuming. In this light some sustainable consumption practices are made more possible than others and equally appeal to or made visible to certain consumers more. In practice, sustainable material elements in-store in the form of products and labels are assumed to remain stable (Shove et al., 2012), however the retailers different ways of enacting or making available these materials may change the way sustainable consumption is practices and performed in the store.

These sustainable products alone in themselves have no value, rather value is instilled in them when integrated into practices with the other preconditions of elements of practices being competence and meaning (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). The way sustainable material is position can also change practices and ways of seeing. This is if the sustainable label is given the agency of routine through positioning it in a space where actions within that framed space are routinized. Then the labels and tags become a part of shared habits and routine practice (Shove, 2004). Consequently, it may not appeal to the unmindful self and the consumer may see but may not look, since the practices are routinized (Reckwitz, 2002). The tags may assume similar meanings of the labels that were there before the sustainable tags were added, as layer of background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, knowledge based on the previous (Reckwitz, 2002). Retailers may create disruptions in routines by positioning sustainability paraphernalia in ways that disrupts the normal routinized ways of doing. This is to gain the consumers conscious attention on the sustainable product. Sustainable objects and artefacts in-store like signage also has the potential to become a part of the store furniture in a way that does not add value to the sustainability purpose. Considering that the fast fashion space is not the conscious consumers ideal place (Bly et al., 2015). Meaning that, consumers who patronize fast fashion are more likely to be in the “unconscious” category therefore a disruption in practice may be needed to create attention to allow for the reproduction of practices and activate consumers pragmatic selves.

## **5.0 Conclusions and Discussion**

### **5.1 Summary of the Study**

This paper departed from understanding how fast fashion retailers market their sustainability and how the fast fashion retail space drive different forms of sustainable performances and consumption. Sustainability in fast fashion production process takes the form of material

acquisition and production processes where environmental and social sustainable concepts are employed. This is in the form of reduced or non-chemical use in cultivation, care in use of forest base materials to reduce environmental impact and sometimes non-genetically modified plants and reduced workers contamination (Claudio, 2007). The social aspect takes the form of not exploiting worker, fair wages to workers and incorporating practices that impact workers positively, like avoidance of force labour and child labour (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). On the material perspective for instance, materials like viscose are entirely eliminated and no longer in use by one retailer, due to negative impacts on the forest. While the other uses viscose by employing the help of organizations that ensure reduced impact of forest in fashion product. These are materials that are manufactured through the use of certain plant species within forest boundaries and are managed with third-party organisations and certified control sources (e.g. Tencel). They are engaged by the retailer to ensure reduced harm by having control over what and how these materials are produced. For example, making it recyclable, producing from tree replacement system (Sustainability Reports, 2016) and also employing ethical labour in production (e.g. Tecel.com, April 2018). Whereas there are some good certifications with these sustainable products however, some certifications and organisations may be said to rather create the opportunity for greenwashing due to the way the materials are blended (e.g. BCI, OCS). In conclusion all these materials and sustainable concepts employed are presented in-store by the fast fashion retailer in the form of sustainability tags and labels on products and in-store and online promotions.

Retailers representations of sustainability in-store takes two folds the perspective that dwell on the idea of sustainability as retailers responsibility, where the consumer is made somewhat passive by the retailer. The other that makes sustainability as an individual choice and decision (e.g. Connolly & Prother, 2008). Here, sustainable products are categorised in ways that segments the sustainable product in the retail space. Also, that most of the sustainable products are within the base product category whereas most of the trendy items are in the usual categories. The fast fashion retailers give equal attention to both sustainable products and unsustainable products. The material product agency is only one of many elements involved in practices. In both retailers, four key concepts are observed in retailers-consumers meaning making. Firstly, to make sense of retailers sustainability concepts, knowledge is required by consumers as carriers to 'succeed' at the performance of their consumption practice. that is, making meanings of sustainable tags and labels in the in-store environment. Secondly, finding sustainable products in-store is a highly tactile activity in-store and the only way to know if a product is sustainable is to reach for the tags and labels to study it. Thirdly, communication on sustainable labels are embedded in words that do not easily resonate or appeal to the ordinary consumers due to the unclear communication and



use of technical terms. There is a sense of mistrust and uncertainty about the provided information which connotes a sense of suspiciousness about the retailers. Fourthly, online practices do not situate value directly to the consumer, here members of online community themselves try to solve their sustainable questions without interference from the retailer, whereas retailers also tend to deprive the consumer of direct benefit when talking about sustainability online.

The direct benefit deprivation may be influenced by positioning of sustainability as retailers responsibility, so then the online posting request “help” from consumers and not directly offering value to the consumer. One typical example is the posting for reusable bags online by Crystal Retail as discussed above. This way they try to avoid sustainability conversations by being silent on sustainability community discussion online. In this light, the scrutiny and critics of the conscious consumer is equally avoided to create more positive rhetoric and interpretations in relation to the sustainable products and postings in the community space. It is perceived that fashion consumers are guided by heuristics in relation to sustainability (Ritch, 2014), in this regard consumers who are not already conscious with sustainability may not relate or make meanings in a useful way with sustainability marketing in-store. As one of the key findings is that consumers do not pay much attention to the sustainability signals in-store, it becomes like a part of the in-store furniture in a way that do not fully embody the sustainability signals.

In this thesis I have shown how the fast fashion companies are putting in efforts in becoming sustainable. Where sustainability marketing is viewed beyond the usual material dominated discourses. Rather are put into perspective as integrated in processes right from production, design process through to in-store and other online channels. And the situating of corporate social responsibilities as a seamless social strand of sustainable development in this thesis (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006). Though certain material combinations and lack of control due to complexities and knowledge on certain parts of the production chain might sabotage retailers sustainability work, sustainability in fast fashion extends beyond ethical, labour issues and environmental friendliness of material. Fast fashion retailers could take active roles in action where stages of retailers processes have to consider sustainability in various phases. Processes ranging from material type, material composition, design, style, care, fit, store display, type of labels and tags, communications on tags, positions of tags on the product and even be mindful of practices that are encouraged within the retail space both online and in-store. All these could be well embodied in retailers sustainability marketing, by identifying key nodes and smoothly evolving sustainability right from the production process to retail space in a less cumbersome way. Through the lens of practices theory,

sustainability signage as presented in-store, has the tendency to be ignored by consumers. This is due to the understanding that, the positioning and practices that are encouraged by the retailers may devoid the consumers of sensemaking in-store in relation to the sustainable materials. Sustainable performances and consumption practices in-store requires an overly tactile ways of doing, whiles tags and labels are inscribed in technical jargons and representations that may not resonate with the consumer. In this light sustainability as presented in terms of the retail space and marketing has the tendency to partially appeal to the conscious consumer, whiles the ordinary consumer's attention to sustainable concepts is not invoked in the retail spaces in terms of signals, services, and value. The findings of this thesis also partly support some earlier studies in this research field that have emphasized the importance of sustainability in supply chains, sustainable labels marketing, and sustainable services in retail store (e.g. Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006:2010; Lindersson, 2017; Fredriksson & Fuentes, 2014).

## **5.2 Discussions**

Fast fashion retailers create sustainability in the form of sustainable marketing and sustainable product availability for consumers. This means that they take charge of sustainability right from the production stage to retail space. In the production process their responsibilities are to ensure that material acquisitions and producing processes are done through the employment of sustainable concepts. They are also face with the challenge of not really having control over their entire production and acquisitions. Thereby having to employ the expertise of third party organisations and companies to ensure that various sustainability concepts are well integrated. This however does not mean that they are unaware of flaws and benefits in enacting sustainability in the production process. One of the key focus is on materials, where for instance BCI cotton which employs the concept of social and environmental sustainability concepts in its production are mixed with other cottons that are not produced with sustainable concepts. But still warrants the retailer to use sustainability labels on these products. Similarly, organic cotton certifications such as OCS blended certification allows retailers to blend a minimum of 5% of this cotton with other non-sustainable materials to warrant them to use the sustainability labels and tag. These two techniques and ways of organising sustainability has the potential to create greenwashing. Considering these two techniques employed, if retailers further incorporates other sustainable measures and concepts after the material production stage, then this may warrant a product a strong sustainable label and may warrant retailers opportunity to communicate better on the sustainable nature of products. As expressed by Warde (2005), things are not just communicators of symbolic meanings, in the same light practice as well cannot be reduced to just words, they must embody action in ways that will make them

meaningful. In this regard sustainable marketing of any product means enacting a specific version of sustainability, which in this case takes the environmental and social turn of sustainability (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016).

### **5.3 Managerial Implications**

The findings in this research has shown how fast fashion retailers market sustainability in variant phases of their business. However, the way the final marketing within retail space are marketed seem to leave consumers with doubt, confusion, and uncertainty, even though much efforts are put in by retailers in the production phase (e.g. Shen, 2014). This is largely due to the way sustainable services in the retail space are representations (Lea-Greenwood, 2010) to the end consumer. Additionally, some minor loopholes in the production stages that create a sense of fuzziness in explaining sustainable nature of some materials. The strategies employed by the fast fashion retailers to market sustainability seem to hold back from giving consumers the affordance to make sense of it. This way even though much is done, the transfer of knowledge to consumers are minimal. The innovative concepts and ways of doing fast fashion are not vividly presented in the same way in-terms of sustainability.

This study can largely benefits management of fashion retailers to offer good sustainable practices throughout their business processes and particularly being mindful of using sustainability labels in ways that may create mistrust. Instead by simplifying the technicalities of sustainable product description to encourage and appeal to consumers in ways that are meaningful to them. Secondly managers can incorporate other consumption practices that goes beyond the usual material acquisition as there seem to be a need for having the tendency to own the image of the product on the consumer without owning the product itself. This ties more into offering some sort of sustainability-oriented services in-store (e.g. Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016). Managers have to think about sustainability beyond products, by assembling a well-orchestrated retail space that effectively evolves retailers sustainable concepts in all stages. Due to the transferability of practices, this study even though was conducted in fast fashion the finding may apply to sustainability within different context. Such as sustainability in general retailing context.

### **5.4 Societal Relevance: The Broader Societal Benefits**

Though fast fashion and sustainability seems to be two contrasting concepts due to the notion that, ways of doing fast fashion does not align with sustainability. However, this thesis has given some insight that will aid to better understand sustainability marketing in the fast fashion context. Firstly, issue of sustainability in the general fashion industry has been very

troubling and has come under immense scrutiny. Fast fashion on the other hand is geared towards understanding the consumer wants and needs in a timely fashion (Hines & Bruce, 2007; Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). This way fast fashion retailers can be positioned as once that could identify consumers discernment with regards to sustainability. Considering that, the fast fashion space may not be the ideal place of the conscious consumer due to their levels of awareness (Bly et al., 2015). The unconscious consumer could be the main target audience of sustainability concern for a sustainable world. Thus, the relation between the society and the environment is a social issue (Redclift, 2015). The two methods employ by fast fashion retailers in terms of in-store sustainable services to the consumer may both have sustainable benefits to the society at large. The retailers are actively engaging sustainability right from production process through to retail space. This affords them unique positioning as global business entities with capabilities for global sustainability influences positively. As expressed by Urry (2011 p.9), solutions to sustainable problems cannot be developed within a single society.

The in-store concept, retailers give equal attention to sustainable products in ways that enhances sustainable performances, though there is still much work to be done in that regard. But bearing in mind sustainability as a process means that the retailers are taking initiatives in ways that aid sustainable consumption, either by allowing the consumer to have a choice or by making the sustainable product available in ways that do not give much of a choice to consumers. Both ways have their benefits and flaws however, to the greater societal benefit, fast fashion retailers are putting in efforts on both social and environmental sustainability concepts in ways that may gradually routinizing sustainable consumption practices (e.g. Crystal Retail). This is done in the form of sustainable materials that are produced with concerns for environmental and social sustainability and also through in-store organising of sustainable products and services. No matter what concepts retailers choose to use, there is a greater need to engage consumers sense making in sustainable consumption as well.

### **5.5 Limitations and Reflections on the Thesis**

The sustainability reports serve as a starting point to understand the fast fashion retailer in terms of sustainability in processes. The reports gave insights that would have otherwise been unachievable and costly within the timeframe of this thesis. Like tracing materiality of products and sustainable concept employed would have been impossible to achieve within the time frame. But combining the reports with other online resources made it possible to have a better understanding of managing sustainability right from the production process coupled with in-store observations to have a clear view of what actually takes place in terms

sustainability in fast fashion. Base on consumer types of the fast fashion retail, shadowing method was employed as a way to see what consumers actually do, rather than assuming that the consumers are conscious or unconscious. Considering also that the fast fashion retail space may not be the ideal place of the conscious consumer, interviews in this regard may not yield any meaningful results. Rather the consumers performances in the retail space gives a clear insight as to their consciousness on sustainability related issue. Shadowing method employed means that, the participants may not have to worried about being judged because they do what they usually do when they are in-store. Thus, the focus on “the actual doing” rather than just answering a researcher’s questions. The combination of websites and online community observation allowed for triangulation in ways that complement the various data sets that were collected. One of the key issues that arise out of the research is the ability to define what is “fast fashion” in relation to the kinds of store. It seems as though the fast fashion concept is widespread across the general fashion industry in a way that it is becoming difficult to single out fast fashion retailers. This is particularly evident in the initial stages of this research, it was quite difficult to analyse which retailers are fast fashion as the concept seem to be widespread across the fashion industry. Some retailers do not openly situate themselves as fast fashion, but they operate within the QR framework. Some weakness in the method employed include not taking a covert access observation in the smaller store, but this is a decision that was made to favour ethical concerns.

The shadowed participants employed could have had a combination of both younger and older demographics, thus the inclusion of teenagers. The sample size could have been bigger. It may also seem bias to have employed only women as participant because some retailers deal with children clothing as well. However, this decision to employ women as participants was also based on the observation made during the pilot study. It was observed that, the in-store space is highly gendered in favour of females. Similar observations were made with the online community discussions as well. In this regard it is deemed appropriate to employ the gender that was observed in the pilot study as participants.

## **5.6 Contributions and Future Studies**

This thesis adds to the body of knowledge and existing literature on sustainable marketing. This is done by contributing to the understanding of sustainable marketing practices in the field of retail marketing. It improves our understanding of the complex processes involved in organising sustainability that exist in the fast fashion retailing production process. And how it develops into the retail space, embodying consumer performances and consumption practices. It analysis the combination of organising sustainability in terms of material artefact,

meanings and skills employed in performing sustainability in fashion retail space. Departing from a practices-based approach and practice theory, the study gives insights on how retailers actions in the production chain are evolved into in-store and online for consumers sense making, performances and consumption practices. This is to contribute to the knowledge of existing literature on sustainability in retail marketing and expand the current knowledge on sustainable marketing through the lens of practice and consumption. By exploring retailers incorporations of sustainability in their business, from production processes and spatial organisation as embodying performances and consumption practices as marketing constructs. And also aid fast fashion retailers to market their sustainability in ways that allows for the sustainable processes in the production chain to progress into the retail space in ways that aligns with their overall sustainable practices.

### **5.6.1 Future Study**

As this thesis is within the framework of sustainable marketing and practices in the fast fashion environment, future studies of sustainable marketing in fast fashion can take a quantitative method approach. This could be used to find the connections in these two methods employed by the fast fashion retailers, by having high sample numbers. Since practice approach was used in this thesis the focus was on the actual doing and performance rather than value or direct purchasing behaviors. This thesis in this regard opens opportunities to actually examine these two ways of marketing sustainability in fast fashion, to have an understanding of how purchases and purchasing decisions are influenced in this regard. Based on the data collected some issues arise such as choices and affordances to have digital receipt as sustainable concepts this require further studies to understand how retails sustainability service could give consumers choices to make sustainable decisions on their own.

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IPE- Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs

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NRDC- Natural Resources Defense Council -<https://www.nrdc.org/>

OCS- Organic Content Standard-<http://www.ecocert.com/en/Organic-Content-standard>

OCC-Organic Cotton Certification- <http://aboutorganiccotton.org/organic-certification/>

SIWI -International Water Institute <http://www.siwi.org/>

Tencel - <https://www.tencel.com/>

WCED- <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wced>

WWF-World Wild Life Fund <http://www.wwf.se>

## 7.0 Appendix

### Appendix I

Fig: 6 Retailers report concepts and themes

<b>Fast fashion Sustainability (Trendsta Retail)</b>				
<b>Sustainable Product Assortments</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Skills Themes</b>	<b>Retailers Social and Env. Relevance</b>	<b>Sustainable Concepts and focus area</b>
Jeans	BCI- Cotton	Less fertilizer Less pesticides Less water No-child Labour Better wage	Less resources consumption Better life for farms because of Wage Chemical exposure Children get to be in school	Better labour practices Less water Use Less chemicals Less water bodies pollution
viscose made of wood	Viscose, wood	Collaborating with others substituting materials, substituting tools	Forest Preservation	Deforestation
Under garments and base layers	Organic Cotton	Non-chemical	Healthy product	Positive impact
Sweatshirts	BCI-cotton	Tools and techniques for reduction of chemical use		
Logistics	Combination of Rail, Air, sea and land	Choosing the mode with Lees emission	Reduce CO2 emission	Pollution reduction
Leather Products (Jackets)	Excesses from animal Food production	tools	Animal safety Endangered species protection	Balance in biodiversity
Recycle plan			Optimal material composition	

### Fast fashion Sustainability (Crystal Retail)

Sustainable Product Assortments	Material	Skills Themes	Retailers Social and Env. Relevance	Sustainable Concepts and focus area
Jeans or Denim Sweatshirts	BCI- Cotton  Dyed with indigo dye  Containing post-consumer recycled cotton	Less fertilizer Less pesticides Less water No-child Labour Better wage  Low impact wash and dying Less water uses in production process	Less resources consumption Better life for farms because of Wage Chemical exposure Children get to be in school Save water Less pollution of water bodies Less contaminating of workers  Water as scares commodity is not wasted as much	Better labour practices Less water Use Less chemicals Less water bodies pollution  Reduced resource use
Baby clothing garments and  Base layers  combination of products	Organic Cotton  Recycled Cotton polyester and polyamide	Non- chemical  Tool and techniques	Healthy product  Less resources use	Positive impact  Less impact
Animal Products  Donations	wool and leather  Donations to Cancer Projects	Partnerships tools and compliances  Tool and Partnerships	Transparency and not causing harm to animals  Trying to reverse harm to humans through Environmental pollution	Animal safety  Social responsibilities
Sustainability training  Garment Design and Life cycle  Man-made cellulosic fiber  Logistics	Some Staff at management level  Clothing Style Material combination  Viscos and Lyocell  89% sea freight	Tools and Skills  Sust. after sales care technic. Material combination for recycling, timeless styles  Lyocell (Birla Excel and Tencel) as a option better than Viscos  Tool and partnership with clean shipping org.	Skills to be pass on to instore  Reduced resource use for care Close loop projection Longevity  Less resource uses through tools and techniques  Lower emission Right transport choice	Awareness and knowledge, better consumption practices

## Appendix II

**Fig: 7 Shadowed participants**

Shadowing Participants			
Name	Gender	Education	Profession
Maggi (a mother)	Female	Bachelor level	Human resource person
Doris (a mother)	Female	Masters level	Marine Sector
Alice	Female	Masters level	Service Sector

### Shadowing Participation Request Text

Hello,

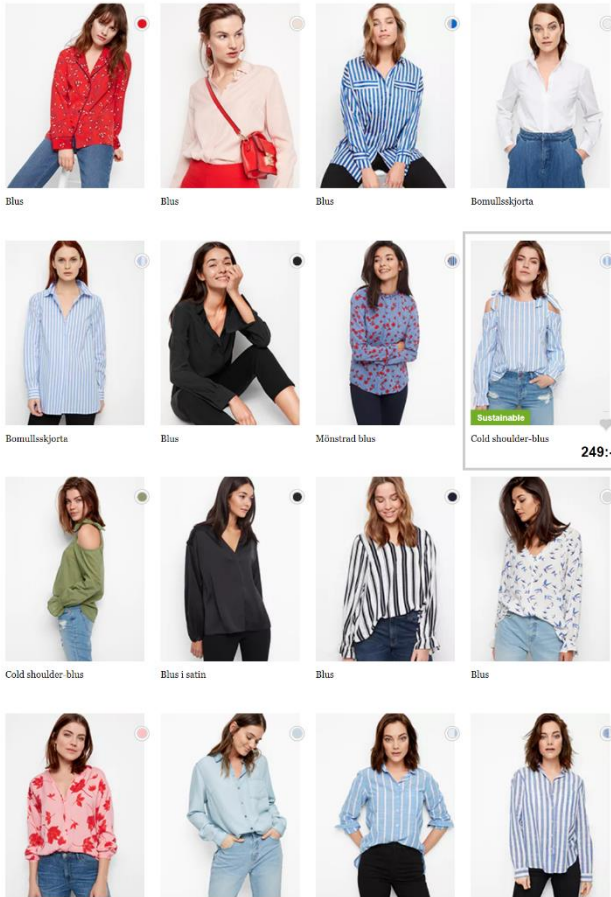
As a final year student of Lund university, I am currently writing my final year master's thesis about sustainable fast fashion; the aim is to understand how fast fashion retailers market their sustainability and how consumers perform sustainable consumption in-store. I would like to know if you do shop in Crystal retail and or Trendsta retail, if you do then I am interested in understanding how you go about your shopping in these stores. I would like to follow you around whiles you shop and observe what you usually do while in the shop. I may ask questions occasionally relating to what you are doing in the store or something in the store setting. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you can decide not to participate at any time with no questions asked. Your participation is anonymous and what you will discuss and during the period is only used for the purposes of the master's thesis. Kindly contact me if you will like to take part in the study or need any further clarifications.

Thank you in advance.

Cynthia Salkovic

### Appendix III

Fig: 8 Screenshot illustrating Crystal Retail website sustainable product display



Blus

Blus

Blus

Bomullsskjorta

Bomullsskjorta

Blus

Mönstrad blus

Cold shoulder-blus

249:-

Cold shoulder blus

Blus i satin

Blus

Blus

General Website display



An illustration of how it looks when clicked on



BETTER COTTON INITIATIVE  
Tack för att du stöttar hållbar  
bomullsodling.

How the sustainable information is displayed



**Fig: 9 Trendsta Retail website display of sustainable products**

COLLECTIONS > SUSTAINABLE COLLECTION

### SUSTAINABLE COLLECTION

197 PRODUCTS

Sort by ▼

Colour ▼

