Make a Fashion Statement with Transparency

An experimental study on the antecedents of
consumers' perceptions of brand transparency

by

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Abstract

Keywords: Brand Transparency, Brand Effort, Message Sidedness, Sustainability Involvement, Apparel Industry

Thesis purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate the antecedents of brand transparency and test their impact on the customers' perception of transparency within the apparel industry. More specifically, the study has two objectives firstly, to identify the antecedents of consumers' perception of brand transparency, and secondly, to empirically test the identified antecedents and their impact on the perception of brand transparency.

Methodology: This study adopts a 2 (Brand effort: low vs. high) x 2 (Message sidedness: one-sided vs. two-sided) between subjects experimental design. The experiment was conducted as an online questionnaire with a scenario of a product page for a fictitious brand. The final sample consisted of 318 respondent, which was mainly analyzed through two-way ANCOVA and moderation analysis.

Results: Both high brand effort and two-sided messages were significant and supported as antecedents of consumers' perceptions of brand transparency. The results also suggest that brand effort and message sidedness work independently from each other. Although sustainability involvement was rejected as a moderator of the relationship between the identified antecedents and brand transparency.

Conclusion: Based on these results, high brand effort, and two-sided messages are proven as antecedents of consumers' perception of brand transparency, which work independently. First, brands should use high effort when disclosing information, which should be easy to find and understand. Second, brands should use both positive and negative information to be perceived as transparent instead of only providing positive information. Third, the consumers' sustainability involvement does not influence their elaboration likelihood of the transparency effort or information provided by the brand.

Originality: This study investigates the antecedents of brand transparency contributing to the literature, which is limited due to previous research foremost focused on the consequences of transparency and not the antecedents. Furthermore, this study is one of few to empirically investigate, not only brand transparency but the antecedents.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

"Fashion companies must come to terms with the fact that a more distrusting consumer expects full transparency across the value chain. Given the need to regain that trust, fashion players cannot afford not to examine long-standing practices across their businesses"
(McKinsey & Company, 2019, p.60)

Nowadays, brands not only need to be unique among all the noise and implement key communication strategies but also to express themselves in a legitimate way (Christensen, 2002). There has been a shift of power from business and marketers to consumers, mainly due to the rise of the Internet (Labrecque, Esche, Mathwick, Novak & Hofacker, 2013), where consumers demand access to more information (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Consequently, the marketplace displays a new model of consumer empowerment (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009), meaning that consumers have a greater capacity to "access, understand and share information" (Pires, Staton & Rita, 2006, p.937). As a result of this trend, from a consumer perspective, brands should provide and communicate information willingly about their operations and products to maintain a legitimate reputation (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011).

Therefore, the pressure on brands to increase transparency is growing (Press & Arnould, 2014). Parris, Dapko, Arnold and Arnold (2016) argue that another reason for the increasing pressure is the lack of openness. Thus, consumers' confidence and trust have decreased in businesses' operations and communication considering social, ethical, and environmental issues and impact (Foscht, Lin & Eisingerich, 2018; James & Montgomery, 2017; Parris et al. 2016). Simultaneously, consumers' skepticism of businesses practices is increasing (Parris et al. 2016). According to McKinsey & Company (2019) in 2017, trust in businesses fell in 40% of countries, while two out of five consumers stated that they do not know what brands to trust.

One of the industries that has faced this challenge is the apparel industry. As a result of its cyclical nature, the apparel industry is characterized by its tremendous use of environmental resources, complex production, and challenging business conditions (Dyer & Ha-Brookshire, 2008). Especially since the apparel industry is one of the most globalized of all industries, it is often unclear how this industry manages all of its production processes (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Hence, the apparel industry has suffered from consumers becoming increasingly skeptical towards brands and their actions. For instance, within the supply chain,

scandals with high media coverage have raised awareness about child labor and labor conditions (James & Montgomery, 2017).

As a result of these changes and more distrusting consumers, radical transparency is one of the trends that will shape the apparel industry in 2019, according to a report by McKinsey & Company (2019). Additionally, Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2017) state that as consumers' awareness regarding environmental and societal issues has increased, transparency has become an essential factor for consumers when choosing between apparel brands. Likewise, consumers' concern in their product choice and its environmental and social impact is growing (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Despite that, it seems that consumers are skeptical against apparel brands making sustainability claims (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2015) refer to sustainability claims as marketing communication of a brand's commitment to be a positive force or minimize the harm of their products and production in the environment and society.

Concerning the above mentioned, Lin, Lobo and Leckie (2017) argue in favor of implementing transparency in order to diminish consumers' skepticism and enhance their understanding of brands' practices and environmental efforts. Generally, transparency refers to *being see-through*, thus, letting the light pass through, allowing the objects behind being visible (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). In a business context, transparency concerns brands' efforts to make relevant information accessible to consumers regarding their practices (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2015; Brandão, Gadekar & Cardoso, 2018). More precisely, Parris et al. (2016, p.240) define transparency as the extent consumers perceive a brand to share information to provide "learning opportunities about itself."

Christensen (2002) claims that transparency has become a necessity in the market. For instance, the apparel industry has focused on communicating their practices concerning ethical and sustainable issues as a way to engage the consumer with their brand (James & Montgomery, 2017). At the same time, apparel brands have increased their efforts to include transparent business practices in their supply chain as consumers are more willing to acquire goods from brands that choose to communicate their practices (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). For instance, Patagonia, the frontrunner tackling environmental and social issues, shares the supply chain of their products, both positive and negative information (Patagonia, n.d.). Two other brands that received the highest rating on the fashion transparency index are Adidas and Reebook, which is based on their transparency in their practices and performance in the supply chain (Fashion Revolution, 2019). Another example is Everlane (2019), which practices radical transparency, integrating it in every part of their brand from the core values to the pricing to manufacturing.

Ultimately, by adopting transparency in communication strategies, Busser and Shulga (2019, p.1779) suggest that transparency can improve a brand's "credibility, reputation and reliability perceptions." Similarly, successful implementation of transparency could increase brand trust

among consumers (Brandão et al. 2018; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014a; Parris et al. 2016). However, the authors Parris et al. (2016) argue that only disclosing information is not enough to influence consumers' perceptions of transparency, for example, when simply providing information in the *fine print*.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Research on transparency has mainly focused on the consequences of transparency in multiple industries. For example, transparency has been found to have a significant effect on consumers trust (Brandão et al. 2018; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014a; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014b), brand attitudes (Brandão et al. 2018; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014a; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014b), brand authenticity (Busser & Shulga, 2019), and being perceived as a sustainable brand (Lee & Park, 2016). Furthermore, other authors looked into transparency within social issues, including consumers' perceptions of transparency efforts for a brand's labor conditions (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014b), fair pricing (Ferguson & Ellen, 2013), and transparency's role in the supply chain (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016). Previous studies have investigated consumers' perception of information transparency in social responsibility communication (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2017) and corporate sustainability reports (Fernandez-Feijoo, Romero & Ruiz, 2014). More recently, Lin et al. (2017) researched the role of green transparency and its effect on green perceived value, indirect self-brand connection, and brand loyalty.

At large, previous research has established that transparency can have beneficial outcomes for brands. However, past research has not focused on the antecedents of transparency (Hultman & Axelsson, 2007). Christensen (2002) argues that simply being transparent is not enough but that consumers need to have the perception of the brand as transparent. For this reason, transparency "is in the eyes of the beholder" (Christensen, 2002, p.166), which emphasizes the importance of achieving a perception of transparency in consumers (Taiminen, Luoma-aho & Tolvanen, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to advance the knowledge of how to shape a favorable perception of transparency in consumers. This can be referred to brand transparency, which Yoo and Jeong (2014, p.11) define as:

> consumers' perceived levels of a brand's strategic communication effort to make information available - whether positive or negative in nature - for the purpose of enhancing their understanding and making a brand accountable for marketing practices.

Parris et al. (2016) and Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) reviewed the transparency literature and proposed frameworks of transparency with its development and impacts. Nonetheless, these authors have solely based their proposed models on the literature, and their

studies lack empirical support. The authors acknowledged this, and Parris et al. (2016) concluded that there is currently a lack of quantitative investigation of the antecedents of transparency. Based on these arguments and previous studies on transparency, there is a need to further advance the understanding of the antecedents of brand transparency. This is essential, as consumers' perceptions of brand transparency can generate beneficial outcomes, including, decreased skepticism and enhanced trust of brands' practices.

1.3   Aim and Objectives

As stated above, brand transparency can have beneficial outcomes for brands. However, the knowledge of how to build a perception of brand transparency in consumers is lacking. For that reason, this thesis will investigate how to create brand transparency perceptions. The specific aim and objectives are described below.

The aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the antecedents of consumers' perception of brand transparency. This will be investigated in the context of the apparel industry due to its complex relationship with sustainability and high demand from consumers (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2017; Dyer & Ha-Brookshire, 2008). The study aims to advance the current knowledge in the literature of transparency; thus, how brands can enhance consumers' perception of transparency and leverage on the advantageous outcomes of transparency. Additionally, this study will provide marketing practitioners with more profound insights on how to successfully create a perception in consumers of transparency to create stronger brands. Hence, the question is, how can one build a perception of transparency, focusing on the sustainability claims regarding a brand's products and its production. More specifically, to achieve this aim, the specific objectives are firstly, to identify the antecedents of consumers' perception of brand transparency, and secondly, to empirically test the identified antecedents and their impact on the perception of brand transparency.

1.4   Research Purpose

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the antecedents of brand transparency and test their impact on the customers' perception of transparency within the apparel industry. The insights from this thesis are considered highly valuable and will contribute to the marketing literature of brand transparency. As well as help marketers to build a stronger brand trusted by its customers by contributing with new insights in a yet under-investigated field of brand transparency and its antecedents. Another vital aspect of this study is that it is particularly

relevant for the marketplace today and the sustainability challenges marketers currently face, especially in the apparel industry.

1.5   Delimitation

For the scope of this thesis, there will only be a focus on one industry. Thereby, when investigating the antecedents of consumers' perception of brand transparency, the focus will be on the apparel industry. This due to the reason that the apparel industry is criticized for its negative environmental impact and ethical standards and it has also been involved in multiple scandals (Dyer & Ha-Brookshire, 2008; James & Montgomery, 2017). Therefore, the apparel industry is considered relevant to study in the context of transparency as it can be advantageous for this industry.

1.6   Outline of the Thesis

To reach the aim and objectives, this thesis will start with a literature review of brand transparency, and it will introduce the theories that will be employed to support the proposed antecedents of brand transparency. At the end of the literature chapter, the developed hypotheses will be summarized and visualized in a theoretical framework. The next chapter will discuss the research design and methodology with a comprehensive description of the experiment conducted. Then, the results from the data collection will be presented. After that, the next chapter contains a discussion of the results. The last chapter will include concluding remarks, theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research within brand transparency.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Brand Transparency

The interest in transparency has increased during the late 20th century (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). As consumers' consciousness about sustainability issues is growing, this influences their choice of apparel brands. Hence, consumers are more concerned about the impact caused by apparel products on the environment and society (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2015). To tackle this, apparel brands communicate more about their sustainability efforts, for instance, through advertising, web sites, social media, or product labels (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2015). However, consumers tend to be skeptical of this type of communication (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Therefore, priority should be given to transparency in the communication as it can decrease skepticism and increase trust (Lin et al. 2017). Also, Parris et al. (2016) suggest to utilize and increase transparency when consumers are distrustful, when there exists an unfavorable industry reputation, when managing a negative public opinion, if selling undifferentiated products, or finally when striving for ethical excellence.

Transparency refers to a brand's efforts to provide clear and relevant information about their practices and products to consumers (Brandão et al. 2018), which signals openness (Parris et al. 2016). Tapscott and Ticoll (2003, p.22) add that transparency does not mean to share all information with consumers but the one "regarding matters that affect their interests." Kaptein (2008) points out that a transparent organization provides information in such a manner that all the involved stakeholders can gain an insight into the issues that are important for them. Lin et al. (2017) state transparency can act as a strategy for brands to increase consumers' awareness of a brand's initiatives and values, for example, sustainability or social efforts. Additionally, these authors claim transparency could further enhance consumers understanding of these efforts. Thus, leading to the growth of trust in the brand or organization among stakeholders (Parris et al. 2016).

However, building transparency, it is not enough to simply disclose information, is more related to openness and the quality of the information disclosed (Taiminen et al. 2015; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Authors like Blackshaw (2008) and Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) argue that to achieve transparency the information or efforts must be *easy to learn* and *easy to discover*. Moreover, for a brand to be perceived as transparent, information available to the consumer should be easy to find and understand. Likewise, McKay (2008) argues that in order for transparency to be perceived by consumers, the information should be adequately presented,

helpful and primarily concentrating on the information that consumers want to receive from brands. Furthermore, Parris et al. (2016) point out that companies ensure transparency by providing consumers with the opportunity for effortless learning.

Another essential aspect of transparency is that it is not only the organization's perception of transparency performance which is important, instead, it is the extent consumers perceive the brand as transparent (Taiminen et al. 2015). Christensen (2002) agree and claim that it is crucial for a brand to be perceived as transparent by consumers and not only act transparent. Therefore, consumers' perception of transparency is a critical point to consider when formulating efforts to be transparent. Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016, p.12) argue that transparency perception is "an evaluation of the quality of information provided by the organization," emphasizing information disclosure, clarity, and accuracy. Foscht et al. (2018, p.480) supported this belief and state that "transparency is a perception, as it rests on the receiver's perceived quality of the shared information." Other authors, Yoo and Jeong (2014) refer to brand transparency as consumers' perceptions of the brands' effort to share information. As a result, when a brand claims to be transparent, it enhances customer understanding and displays a brand responsible for its practices.

These perceptions are most likely formed during the interaction and communication with the brand (Parris et al. 2016). Kang and Hustvedt (2014a) and Parris et al. (2016) claim that brands can increase consumers' perception of transparency through their communication strategies. Nevertheless, the communication message has to be persuasive in terms of transparency to influence the consumers' perceptions of the brand (Dainton & Zelley, 2004).

Based on the literature review of brand transparency, the identified antecedents for this study were brand effort and message sidedness. An antecedent refers to a predecessor of a specific condition (i.e., brand transparency) (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Brand effort refers to how consumers should easily find and understand the information related to transparency. On the other hand, message sidedness is related to how the brand shares only positive or both positive and negative information about the product or brand. To create a more comprehensive overview of the transparency construct, a summary of the definitions discussed above, are presented together with their main characteristics in Table 2.1. When examining the definitions of transparency, three themes of characteristics were established. A first theme for the characteristics is that the information disclosed needs to be relevant for the receiver. The second theme is that it should be easy for consumers to access and understand this information. Thirdly and lastly, the information should regard both the pros and cons in the product information to create a holistic picture.

Table 2.1 Summary of The Transparency Construct

Author(s)	Definition	Characteristics	Type of study
Tapscott and Ticoll, 2003, p.22	"The accessibility of information to stakeholders of institutions, regarding matters that affect their interests."	Easy access Relevant information	Conceptual
Kaptein, 2008	A transparent organization provides information in such a manner that all the involved stakeholders can gain an insight into the issues that are important for them.	Relevant information Easy access Openness	Empirical
McKay, 2008	Information presented properly and helpfully and especially concentrating on the information that consumers want to receive from brands.	Accuracy Helpfully Relevant information	Conceptual
Yoo & Jeong, 2014, p.11	"Consumers' perceived levels of a brand's strategic communication effort to make information available - whether positive or negative in nature - for the purpose of enhancing their understanding and making a brand accountable for marketing practices."	Easy access Positive and negative information	Empirical
Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2015	Visible providing easily accessible, relevant, and comprehensive information about the brand's product and practices.	Visible Accessible Holistic	Empirical
Taiminen et al. 2015	It refers to disclose relevant information, as it relates to the *quality of openness* rather than sharing all information.	Relevant information The quality of openness	Empirical
Parris et al. 2016, p.240	"The extent to which a stakeholder perceives an organization provides learning opportunities about itself."	Relevant information Low-effort learning opportunities Pros and cons of the product Trust in the communication	Conceptual
Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016, p.12	"An evaluation of the quality of information provided by the organization," emphasizing information disclosure, clarity, and accuracy.	Easy to learn Easy to discover Clarity Accuracy	Conceptual
Lin et al. 2017	Brands efforts to provide clear and relevant information about their production process environmental impact.	Clarity Relevant information	Empirical

Brandão et al. 2018	Transparency refers to a brand's efforts to provide clear and relevant information about their practices and products to consumers.	Relevant information Clarity Trust in the communication	Empirical
Foscht et al. 2018	Providing critical information about a brands product/services which is easily accessible and understood by the receiver.	Voluntarily shared High-quality information Pros and cons of the product	Empirical

2.2   Attribution Theory

The attribution theory will be used to explain the antecedents of brand transparency in this study. The attribution theory refers to the idea that humans try to explain the cause of a specific event or action (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Kelley and Michaela (1980, p. 458) refer to the attribution theory as "the study of perceived causation, attribution referring to the perception or inference of cause." These authors explain the overall concept as behavior that can be attributed to certain causes and also different reactions to behavior. Likewise, their research on attribution determined that motivation, information, and prior beliefs are three types of antecedents for causal inferences (Kelley & Michela, 1980). At large, Crowley and Hoyer (1994) emphasize the essence of the attribution theory, which is how consumers ask 'why?' in regards to behavior.

Weiner (1985) further developed the attribution theory in an attempt to identify the type of causes that influence behavior and attitudes. Most importantly, he points out that ability and effort are the strongest perceptual casuals of performance and that these causes determine the perceiver's cognitive and affective reactions. According to Folkes (1988), cause-and-effect relationships dictate why consumers purchase certain products and services, causal inferences play a major role in buyer and seller interactions. Likewise, she states that the research on attribution attempts to understand the relationship between attitudes and behaviors. The attribution theory will further be used in this study to explain the antecedents of consumers' perception of brand transparency. More specifically, the relationship between brand effort and message sidedness for apparel brands' sustainability claims, which will be discussed below.

2.2.1 Attribution Theory and Brand Effort

The attribution theory is used as an explanatory framework to understand the persuasion process between a brand's effort to be perceived as transparent by its consumers. Moreover, the attribution theory can assist in explaining how consumers react to a brand's actions (Kelley &

Michela, 1980). This section will explain the variations in effort level from a brand and its effect on perceived transparency in its consumers.

In past studies, the authors Mohr and Bitner (1995, p.240) point out effort "as the amount of energy an observer believes an actor has invested in a behavior. It is an effort that is noticed and, perhaps, assign a meaning." Likewise, the perceived brand effort is the consumer's perception of the use of resources, for example, money, personnel, time, and attention (Kirmani, 1990). Moreover, as stated by Mohr and Bitner (1995), the effort is an important element to consumers, and it is often related to persistence since if the behavior is repeated during an extensive period, it is perceived to be effortful. Additionally, in a recent study, Söderlund and Sagfossen (2017) claim that effort from a brand is rewarded with higher positive evaluations of the brand from its consumers.

In a communication context, previous studies have identified a positive relationship between consumers' perceptions of the brand's effort and consumers' assessment of the product (Kirmani & Wright, 1989). Furthermore, Kirmani (1990) states that higher effort from a firm exhibits trust in the firm's quality of the products. Other authors like Modig, Dahlén and Colliander (2014) mention that effort from a brand is considered to have an impact on brand attitudes, brand interest, and WOM intentions regarding the brand. However, if consumers believe that a brand is trying to persuade them, high-effort from brands can also have a negative effect (Morales, 2005).

Mohr and Bitner (1995) argue that effort is a prominent construct in the attribution theory as effort is taken into consideration when consumers try to explain behavior to a specific cause. The authors also emphasize the importance of perceived effort in the process of causal attributions for behavior since this process attempts to establish an actor's motivations and normally effort is part of this process. With this in mind, this causal mechanism can affect how consumers perceive a brand's effort and form judgments of to what extent a brand is transparent. Moreover, according to Morales (2005), in her study on how consumers reward brands for extra effort, the attribution theory and effort suggests that its consumers reward brands if the effort is perceived as high. She further explains when consumers observe a brand, they consider the properties of causality and the author points out that, at large, people perceive that others must use their resources to the fullest based on moral responsibility.

Thus, concerning transparency, based on the mentioned above definition and research on effort, one factor that can have a positive reaction in consumers is if the brand's effort would be attributed to public-serving motives compared with self-serving motives (Forehand & Grier, 2003). In this case, information regarding environmental issues could be considered as public-serving motives from brands. Kirmani (1990) also states that higher effort from a brand may create trust in the brand's products. Hence, this could be linked with transparency as trust is both necessary and an outcome of transparency (Parris et al. 2016). Furthermore, the effort could be an indicator of trust which is needed for a consumer to trust a brand as transparent.

As described above, in the context of a brand's effort, this study tries to assess the effect on consumers' perceived brand transparency. The brand effort is a process factor as the brand exerts effort on communicating the brand's sustainability and environmental issues to the consumer. It is proposed, based on the attribution theory, a brand's degree of effort acts as an antecedent of consumers' perceived brand transparency. Building on these arguments, the following hypothesis is stated:

> **H1:** High (vs. low) brand effort on communicating sustainability will have a positive effect on consumers' perceived brand transparency.

2.2.2 Attribution Theory and Message Sidedness

Another antecedent of brand transparency was identified as message sidedness. On the one hand, as previously stated, trust is a consequence of transparency. On the other hand, trust is also a necessary factor for perceived transparency; thus, the consumers must trust the brands' transparency efforts and messages (Brandão et al. 2018; Parris et al. 2016). Nevertheless, Jahn and Brühl (2019) argue that by also including negative information about corporate social responsibility, consumers' trustworthiness in the brand increases. Furthermore, Crowley and Hoyer (1994) refer to two-sided messages as an essential type of persuasive communication. Two-sided messages mean to include both negative and positive aspects of a product or the brand in the communication (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994).

At large, the attribution theory has been a guiding force of the existing two-sided messages studies (Eisend, 2006). As the attribution theory explains, consumers' process in assigning cause to behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980). In relation to the transparency literature, authors highlight how transparency includes sharing both pros and cons about the brands' practices and products (Parris et al. 2016; Foscht et al. 2018; Yoo & Jeong, 2014), which in this thesis it concerns apparel brand's sustainability efforts. Therefore, an overlap can be assumed between messages sidedness and brand transparency (Yoo & Jeong, 2014).

The research on two-sided messages has foremost been within persuasion research, as well as in the advertising context (Rim & Song, 2017). In advertising research, two-sided messages have been mostly attributed to enhance the perceived credibility of the message source (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Eisend, 2006). Although, two-sided messages are rarer and instead of presenting products in a favorable one-sided light which is the standard for marketers, where only positive arguments of the product or brand are included (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Eisend, 2007).

Crowley and Hoyer (1994) claim two-sided messages as more effective in changing initial negative attitudes into positive ones than one-sided messages. Eisend (2006) states two-sided communication not only to have a positive effect on source credibility but also to enhance brand

attitude and purchase intentions. Importantly, the advantages of two-sided messages have been found to be stronger when the negative aspects are disclosed voluntarily. This was also supported by Jahn and Brühl (2019), where two-sided messages contribute to the honesty of the brand, however, if perceived as involuntarily shared, it could have an adverse effect on trust.

There is a trade-off between the improved credibility versus the amount of negative information disclosed (Eisend, 2010). Nonetheless, two-sided messages are still considered as persuasive for consumers. Although, Eisend (2006) claim that including important negative information and too much negative information lowers the message persuasiveness. Therefore, the degree of negative information in a two-sided message should be low to moderate to enhance the message percussiveness (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Eisend, 2006). Eisend (2006) states that the inclusion of negative statements should not exceed the rate of 50%. Thus, to achieve transparency, consumers may want to learn more about the brands' products and practices, including its weaknesses (Parris et a., 2016).

As noted, negative information can be damaging to the brand (Eisend, 2010) but still enhance the perception of transparency as it signals openness and honesty (Foscht et al. 2018). In line with the attribution theory, which observes that consumers tend to ask 'why?'. Thus, consumers seek a cause of why the brand is communicating two-sided messages and not only one-sided (Eisend, 2010). Two-sided messages could, therefore, be attributed as either the brand trying to sell products or to the characteristic of the information shared (Rim & Song, 2017). Accordingly, consumers may attribute two-sided messages to the brand as being honest by *telling the truth* rather than only the desire to present the product in a favorable light (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994). This implies the willingness to not only disclose favorable information about the brand, hence, presenting a more objective picture of the brand. Furthermore, this could be processed by consumers as the brand being transparent, establishing a perception of brand transparency in consumers. Therefore, based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

> **H2:** Two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages will have a positive effect on consumers' perception of brand transparency.

Message sidedness could also moderate the relationship between brand effort and consumers' perception of brand transparency. If there are high brand effort and two-sided messages regarding the product and its production, it could enhance the perception of brand transparency. As discussed previously, the attribution theory presumes consumers try to assign actions to causes (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Thus, a brand's high effort using two-sided messages could be attributed by consumers as sharing a holistic picture of the product and its production. Therefore, the following hypothesis is stated where two-sided messages act as a moderating variable:

H3: The positive effect of high (vs. low) brand effort on brand transparency will be amplified when two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages are included.

2.3 The Elaboration Likelihood Model

As previously stated, transparency perceptions are most likely formed during a brands communication (Parris et al. 2016). For communication, the persuasion in the messages is essential as it can alter the received mind (Teeny, Briñol & Petty, 2017). The persuasiveness is also essential for brands aiming to communicate transparency to establish a perception of brand transparency in consumers (Christensen, 2002; Taiminen et al. 2015). Petty and Cacioppo (1984) argue that there are two paths to persuasion and proposed the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). This model assumes that when a message is received, it begins to be processed by the receiver (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006). At large, the ELM refers to:

> the likelihood one engages in issues-relevant thinking with the aim of determining the merits of the arguments for a position rather then the total amount of thinking per se in which a person engages (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984, p.674).

Furthermore, this model proposes that people are "neither universally thoughtful in evaluating persuasive messages nor universally mindless" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, p. 668). Shrum, Liu and Nespoli (2012) argue that the ELM is a useful model when predicting marketing messages effectiveness, as it provides a clear theoretical framework that provides guidance and displays the process of how to maximize the effectiveness of the persuasion for messages.

The Central and Peripheral Routes

Under this framework, Petty and Cacioppo (1984) state that there are two routes, central or peripheral, to processing taken by people. Although, the path depends on the messages personal relevance for the receiver, which routes to persuasion if followed (Solomon et al. 2006). The central route involves processes that require high involvement, and the peripheral route involves low involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Hence, ELM predicts that if the message is found relevant, then it would take the central route where if strong arguments it will lead to strong positive change, whereas if the message is not relevant, the processing will take the peripheral route will and create weak and negative attitudes (Dainton & Zelley, 2014).

Given this, it is stated that a person's attitudes in the central route are formed after an extensive evaluation of the information presented (issue or product-relevant) (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). A person's attitudes and behaviors in the central route are mostly influenced by the quality of the arguments (Solomon et al. 2006). Likewise, due to the strong arguments in the central route, the attitude changes are enduring and will most likely predict behavior (Petty et al. 1983).

The contrast to the central route is the peripheral route which is followed when the receiver is not motivated to elaborate the message or arguments, thus, low involvement processing (Solomon et al. 2006). Moreover, Kotler and Keller (2016) claim the formation of attitudes requires less thought, and brand associations are more important in the formation. It is also stated that "peripheral cues such as expertise or attractiveness of the communicator have greater impact on persuasion" (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984, p.674). According to Solomon et al. (2006), peripheral cues refer to the information surrounding the actual message. Cues which are effective for low involvement is source attractiveness, length of the message, or the recipient's mood (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Shrum et al. 2012; Teeny et al. 2017).

2.3.1 Sustainability Involvement as a Moderating Variable

Message Sidedness

Even though two-sided messages may increase consumers' perception of brand transparency, consumers' ability and motivation to elaborate upon the message may be an influential factor. The ELM framework suggests the process of a persuasive message depends on the recipients' motivation and ability to process the specific message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Moreover, the ELM implies that message processing is moderated by the level of involvement of the recipient. The ELM predicts that the sidedness of the message is more persuasive for high involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Thus, how involved and knowledgeable the recipient is on the subject. If the recipient would have a higher degree of sustainability involvement, then the recipient is more motivated for cognitive processing which takes place in the central route (Hale et al. 1991; Wei, Chiang, Kou & Lee, 2017). Whereas a low sustainability involved recipient is not as likely to elaborate and then go through the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Wei et al. 2017).

The two-sided message may be considered as a type of counter-persuasion which the ELM classifies as strong arguments for the central route where they are more likely to form long-lasting changes in the mind of the receiver (Dainton & Zelley, 2004). Also, according to Rim and Song (2017), two-sided messages are considered more informative as they include both positive and negative information. In regards to ELM, more informative messages need more elaboration when processed (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Concerning brand transparency, it could be said that solid, factual information has the strongest effect on highly involved consumers (Bögel, 2015). Additionally, negative information may indicate the need for higher elaboration likelihood (Shrum et al. 2012). The ELM also predicts if the receiver has a higher interest considering the message subject then they are more likely to elaborate, and the sender should use strong arguments to be persuasive (Dainton & Zelley, 2004). However, this is not true if the recipients have low or no interest on the subject. Thus, two-sided messages should be more effective for consumers of high involvement, compared with low involved consumers (Eisend, 2013).

Furthermore, as noted by Eisend (2013, p.567), "under high involvement conditions, recipients are influenced by both the message content and its arguments and, thus, by the negativity or positivity of the message." Whereas for low involvement, ELM suggests the peripheral cues will be influential for the receiver (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). This implies negative information will be more effective during high involvement. Hence, two-sided messages are more persuasive for high involvement condition rather than low involvement. Besides, with higher elaboration processing, the formed attitudes should be stronger (Dainton & Zelley, 2004).

When evaluating sustainability messages, it is said that high-cause involvement from the consumers will most likely lead to processing these messages in the central route (Schmeltz, 2012). Therefore, it can be assumed that consumers with a higher degree of involvement in sustainability issues would elaborate apparel brands sustainability claims more and have a more significant impact on their perception of the brand (Browning, Gogo & Kimmel, 2018; Wei et al. 2017). For this study, it would imply the perceptions of brand transparency. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

> **H4a:** High involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between message sidedness and consumers' perception of brand transparency.

Brand Effort

Similar to the message sidedness, the brand effort can be processed differently by consumers. As mentioned above, the formation of attitudes is dependent on the consumer's levels of involvement and cognitive processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Browning et al. (2018) claim that the level of involvement is one of the most crucial factors of ELM. The same authors state that highly involved consumers that consider messages of personal interest and relevant are most likely to process these messages through the central route.

As brand effort is the amount of energy used by the brand assigned to a cause (Mohr & Bitner, 1995), which in this thesis concerns sustainability issues to be perceived as transparent. Importantly, as Modig et al. (2014) argue, the degree of brand effort perceived by consumers may influence the perceptions of the brand. Regarding sustainability messages, previous studies show that involvement is a crucial factor, where involvement has a direct effect on consumers motivation and capability to process these messages (Browning et al. 2018). Therefore, it can be predicted, based on the ELM, if the consumer is highly involved with the cause which the brand assigning much effort to the consumer would be more likely to elaborate upon the effort (Dainton & Zelley, 2004; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Consequently, the degree of sustainability involvement of the consumer would motivate or demotivate the perception of the effort put in by the brand. With these arguments in mind, the following hypothesis can, therefore, be formulated:

H4b: High involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between brand effort and consumers' perception of brand transparency.

2.4 Chapter Summary and Theoretical Framework

As previous research has mostly focused on the consequences of transparency, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the antecedents of brand transparency and test their impact on customers' perception of transparency within the apparel industry. Given this, antecedent refers to "something existing or happening before, especially as the cause or origin of something existing or happening later" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019, para. 1). Therefore, the formulated hypotheses relate to what is needed for consumers to have a perception of brand transparency. Noted by authors like Parris et al. (2016) is that brands need to disclose relevant information when acting transparently. Additionally, other authors suggest that perceptions of transparency are most likely shaped during communication interaction with the brand (Brandão et al. 2018; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014a; Parris et al. 2016). However, the conditions needed for communication to form favorable perceptions of brand transparency were discussed in this chapter.

Based on the literature review, two main antecedents were defined, which are the degree of brand effort and message sidedness. Thus, if there is a high brand effort, consumers will have a perception of brand transparency (H1), and if the brand communicates, in terms of sustainability, two-sided messages, it will have a stronger effect on perceived brand transparency than one-sided ones (H2). It is also predicted that two-sided messages could moderate the relationship between brand effort and consumers' perception of brand transparency (H3).

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that a possible moderating effect is the sustainability involvement of the consumers. As predicted by the ELM, consumers' processing would be higher and thus create a stronger perception of brand transparency for consumers highly involved with sustainability issues. Hence, moderating the relationship between message sidedness and brand transparency (H4a). Similarly, the relationship between brand effort and perceived brand transparency is also predicted to be moderated by sustainability involvement (H4b).

Based on the proposed antecedents of brand transparency and the moderating variables, the proposed theoretical framework is shown in Figure 2.1. The framework is done to visualize the relationships between the antecedents and consumers' perceived brand transparency. The theoretical framework will be tested through an experiment, which is described in the following chapter.
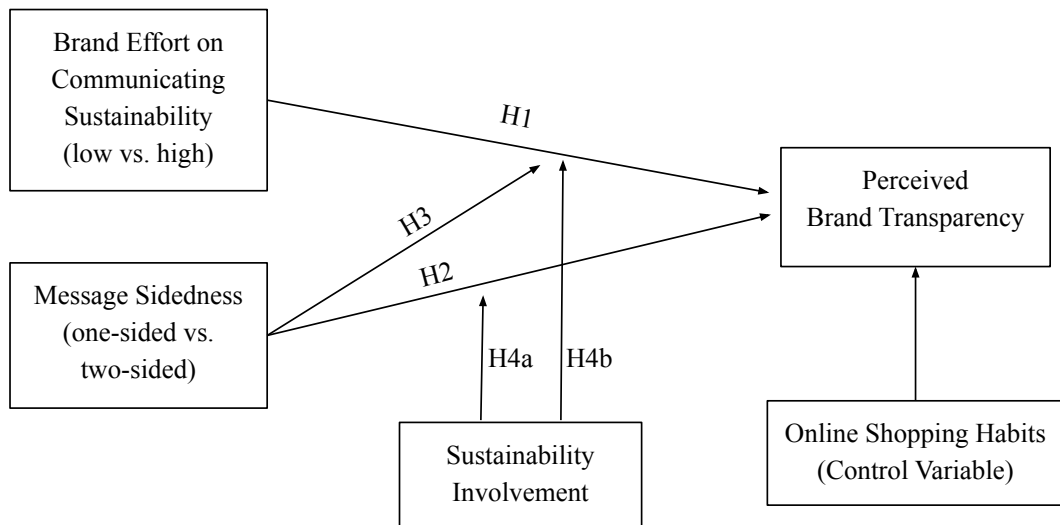
Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

The researcher's philosophical standpoint dictates the scope of the study and the appropriate research design (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Thus, as part of the methodology chapter, the philosophical standpoint will be explained in terms of ontology and epistemology. As for ontology, internal realism mostly relates to the authors of this study since this position emphasizes that there is a single reality, however, by it is only possible for researchers to access this reality by gathering indirect evidence (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015).

As for epistemology, it is evident by the purpose of this study, along with the constructed hypothesis that the approach is a positivist one. The main ideology behind positivism is that of an external reality, knowledge is based on facts and can be measured by quantitative methods (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). In this study, past findings and theories in the area of brand transparency were used along with existing theories (i.e., attribution theory and elaboration likelihood model) to elaborate the hypotheses and later empirically test them. These causal explanations and hypothesis were elaborated to try to observe and deduct the effect of brand effort and message sidedness on consumers' perception of brand transparency.

3.2 Research Approach

When conducting research, there can either be taken an inductive or deductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Inductive means to start from observations to theory, whereas deductive departs from existing theory, develop hypotheses based on observations in order to support or reject the hypothesis and then possibly revise the theory (Burns & Burns, 2008). According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the deductive approach is the one most commonly used. Furthermore, this study will adopt a deductive approach to the research, deduct the hypothesis from the existing literature, which will be operationalized and empirically tested (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). This research is set out to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between antecedents and their effect on consumers' perceptions of brand transparency. Thus,

formulate hypotheses of the antecedents and then empirically test their potential impact on the perceptions of brand transparency within the apparel industry.

Previous studies in transparency have been conducted both qualitatively or quantitatively. However, as this thesis will take a deductive approach, it suggests a quantitative research strategy, which implies the quantification of data in both collecting and analyzing (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Saunders et al. (2016) explain that a quantitative strategy tests casual relationships, where it usually allows the collection of numerical data from a larger sample, as well as, is considered as more objective. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) also discuss how quantitative data is used to make conclusions about the study's defined population. Furthermore, doing a study in a quantitative manner is necessary to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables in this study.

3.3   Research Design

Bryman and Bell (2015) claim the choice of research design will be reflected in the outcome and what is considered a priority in the research process. Malhotra (2010) refers to the research design as the blueprint in conducting research. Thus, the research design works as the framework for obtaining and analyzing data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, a well-defined research design is essential and will contribute to making the research more effective and efficient (Malhotra, 2010).

Malhotra (2010) broadly states that a research design can be either exploratory or conclusive. For qualitative data, an exploratory design is usually adapted, whereas, for quantitative data, a conclusive design is used. He also argues that a conclusive research design is generally more structured and formal than exploratory one as well as based on a larger sample. Another aspect of a conclusive design is that it is used to test specific hypothesis and relationships. Given this, a conclusive research design will be used for this study due to the more structured nature of the purpose of this thesis. Thus, to investigate the antecedents factors of brand transparency and test their impact on the customers' perception of transparency within the apparel industry.

According to Malhotra (2010), there are different types of conclusive research designs, descriptive or casual. The most adequate for this study's purpose is causal research, which investigates the cause-and-effect relationship. Furthermore, causal research is most often executed by an experiment which will be the choice in this study (Malhotra, 2010). Burns and Burns (2008) explain that in a true experiment, a cause of an independent variable is predicted and manipulated to determine if there are any effects on the dependent variable. Another essential aspect of a true experiment is the random assignment of the people or groups who receive the treatment or the control condition (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, the aim of the thesis is to conduct an experiment according to these principles. This study, therefore, adopts a

2 (Brand effort: low vs. high) x 2 (Message sidedness: one-sided vs. two-sided) between subjects experimental design, which is presented in Figure 3.1. There are three experimental groups and one control group which is Group 1 having low brand effort and one-sided messages.

In order to conduct the experiment, the respondents were randomly assigned to an experimental group at which point the respondents were exposed to an apparel shopping scenario with respective treatment. The manipulation of the independent variables was the effort a brand had put in to make the information easy and available. The other one was the message sidedness were the information was either only positive or both negative and positive about the product. The dependent variable was then measured, which in this case, it was the consumer's perceived brand transparency. The dependent variable was measured by a set of statements which will be discussed later in this chapter. Importantly, the randomization of the groups aimed for the groups to be heterogeneous and equivalent to each other.

Brand Effort

		Low	**High**
	One-sided	Group 1: Low brand effort, One-sided message	Group 3: High brand effort, One-sided message
Message Sidedness	**Two-sided**	Group 2: Low brand effort, Two-sided message	Group 4: High brand effort, Two-sided message

Figure 3.1 Experimental Groups

3.4   The Scenario

The experiment was executed in the form of an online shopping scenario displaying a white unisex basic T-shirt to avoid biases towards the product. The brand for the experiment was made up to not influence the respondents with any pre-existing brand attitudes. For the scenario, the muck up brand was named A-BRAND. The scenario was set up at the shopping page for the T-shirt where the consumer could read more about the product and add it to their basket. As explained in the previous section (see Figure 3.1), there were four scenarios with the manipulations of the independent variables (brand effort and message sidedness).

To achieve the manipulations needed for this study, the scenarios were created by the authors of this study. Although the scenarios were set out to be as realistic as possible to reflect the real situation, consumers are exposed to when shopping for apparel. Therefore, when creating the scenarios, inspiration was taken from the apparel brand Everlane (2019), which is typical for radical transparency as this concept is part of all aspects of the brand. As this study has a focus on the apparel industry and its sustainability efforts, the information presented in the scenario, therefore, focused on the product, and its impact on the environment within the production. Given that the production of the products is the primary source of the negative effect of the apparel industry (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). The four complete scenarios and the visuals are included in Appendix A.

3.5 Sampling

3.5.1 Target Population and Sample

Sampling is the process of selecting a representative portion of the population for the study and is crucial for quantitative research (Burns & Burns, 2008). Before selecting a sample, the first step is to define the population, which is the entire collection of observations of interest for the study (Malhotra, 2010; Saunders et al. 2016). The population of interest for this study is quite broad, but focusing on individuals who shop online. For consent reasons, only individuals over 18 years old are allowed to participate in the study, and therefore individuals under 18 years are not included in the population as they are not able to give their consent. Although, obtaining data from the entire population would be of too large size and not feasible. Therefore, the sample obtained will aim to be a representative proportion of the population (Burns & Burns, 2008). The sample technique and size will be discussed further below.

3.5.2 Sample Technique

Sampling techniques can either be probability or non-probability (Malhotra, 2010). Burns and Burns (2008) point out a probability sample as when all individuals in the population have a known probability of being selected in the sample. Whereas non-probability sample refers to when some individuals have a zero chance of being selected and others are more likely to be selected than others (Bryman & Bell, 2015). For this thesis, a non-probability technique will be used as it was found more feasible due to time and resource constraints.

The type of non-probability sampling will be convenience sampling because of its characteristics and advantages, namely, accessibility, easy to perform, and inexpensive (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Burns and Burns (2008) refer to convenience sampling as selecting respondents based on what is convenient and available in the researcher's surroundings.

However, the authors claim convenience sampling has its disadvantages and limits, including the risk of being biased, which have to be considered. This could limit the generalization of the results, one way to hinder this constraint is to increase the sample size to have higher reliability of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Another prevention for the sampling is to use control questions to ensure the respondent is included in the defined population before answering the remaining questions. This thesis will collect data online, specifically through social media platforms, which is relevant for the defined population of online shopping consumers (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015).

3.5.3 Sample Size

Bryman and Bell (2015) note that the sample size should be determined before collecting the needed data. Generally, a larger sample represents the population more accurately, thus, "increase its power and decrease estimation error" (Voorhis & Morgan, 2007, p. 46). Furthermore, Malhotra (2010) assert the aimed sample size is influenced by various factors, such as time and cost constraint, accuracy, and non-respondents. The sample size can be hard to determine when the population size is relatively unknown. According to Voorhis and Morgan (2007) rule of thumb for between-group designs is a minimum of 30 participants for each experimental group. However, for this study, the minimum for each group is instead 50 participants as the study is within social science. Thus, as this study has four groups, the total sample size should be at least $n = 200$. During the data collection, there were 330 responses collected with more than 50 in each group, which is over the minimum level decided for this study.

3.6 Data Collection Method

The data collection method for this study will be an often used method in business research, which is a survey (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A survey is a useful tool to obtain the respondent's perceptions. As the purpose of this study include measuring consumers' perceptions of brand transparency but also as a survey is an appropriate data collection for the experimental design of this study. Furthermore, the survey will take the form of a questionnaire where the manipulation of the independent variables will be together with a set of questions.

It was found appropriate to conduct the questionnaire in an online environment as the defined population to be present online (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015), and the experiment will be done in an online shopping experiment for a mockup apparel brand. Thus, the questionnaire will be created and answered with the help of an online survey program. Additionally, there are several advantages when conducting an online questionnaire. First, as stated by Burns and Burns

(2008), Internet-based questionnaires are cost and time efficient. Second, they are easier to carry out, and they help reach larger samples and populations. Third, there is no interviewer bias as the respondent fill out the questionnaire by themselves (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, online questionnaires have its limits, for example, if the respondent misunderstands a question and there would not be an interviewer or observer present to answer possible questions, which could affect the responses negatively (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, the questionnaire should be clear enough, so there is no room for misunderstandings.

Furthermore, as the questionnaire will be online, it will be self-administered for the respondents. As noted by Burns and Burns (2008) there are several factors to consider to collect accurate data from the correct population, for instance, the importance of having a well-designed questionnaire. The authors also argue that a well-designed questionnaire will increase the response rate and simplify the coding and analysis of the data. The development of questions for online surveys is different from the traditional survey. Bryman and Bell (2015) claim that it is essential to have a clear and not too long questionnaire so that the respondents understand the questions, and no misinterpretations are made. Therefore, Burns and Burns (2008) argue for the importance of having an introduction to the questionnaire explaining the purpose and how to complete the questionnaire. Additionally, the structure of the questionnaire needs to be logical, short, and simple.

When designing the questionnaire for this study, the factors above were considered. After providing clear instructions, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), the questionnaire should begin with control questions that will allow the researcher only to get respondents from the relevant population. The control questions will be based on the characteristics of the population needed and due to ethical reasons, thus, confirming if the respondent is over 18 years old, before continuing to answer the remaining questions. If the respondent was included in the sample, questions regarding control and the moderating variable were asked. The moderating variable concerned the respondents' degree of sustainability involvement in accordance with the ELM.

Then a picture of the respective manipulation of the online shopping scenario was presented from a muck up apparel brand together with a shorter text (Appendix A). In the scenario, the brand had either put high or low effort into its sustainability transparency and one-sided or two-sided information of its product. They were representing the scenarios in the 2 (Brand effort: low vs. high) x 2 (Message sidedness: one-sided vs. two-sided) experimental design. After the respondent had been exposed to the treatment, questions acting as a manipulation check was asked to ensure the respondent noticed the manipulation. This was followed by questions to measure the respondents perceived brand transparency based on the scenario. Lastly, demographic questions were asked to ensure the different experimental groups were balanced. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

3.6.1 Pretest

Before distributing the questionnaire and collecting the data a pretest was conducted. Burns and Burns (2008) point out the importance of pretesting the questionnaire before collecting the data. In order to change any confusing or problematic questions, wording, and the length of the questionnaire, which could negatively influence the quality criteria of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The manipulations for the experiment were also crucial to pretest to ensure they were notable and realistic (Burns & Burns, 2008). Pallant (2007) recommends to pretest the full procedure of the experiment both the manipulations and the dependent variable, which is intended to be measured.

Furthermore, this could be hard to identify only over the Internet. Therefore, the pretest was conducted in a more open manner through the questionnaire platform's pretest function and over the phone. Thus, pretesting involves presenting potential respondents from the defined population to examine and answer the questionnaire and afterward discussing if any problems appeared (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Firstly, a pretest was conducted through an online questionnaire platform, where possible respondents had to answer to the questionnaire but also write out their feedback and if some parts of the questionnaire were hard to understand or answer. Eight individuals, who belong to the target population, examined the questionnaire. The responses were also collected to examine the manipulation check and the other items. During the pretest, a problem was found with BT01 as it did not align with the scenario and therefore, was adjusted. Also, based on the pretest, changes were made in the phrasing of statements. After that, there was an additional pretest for the manipulation check with five individuals, where the manipulation check for the brand effort was found problematic. There was a problem with the wording in the manipulation check statement and the scenario, however, these issues were resolved before beginning to collect the main data for the study.

3.7 Variable Measurement and Scaling

It is vital in research to define and clarify the concepts used in the study and turning them into measurable variables, this process refers to the operationalization of the variables (Burns & Burns, 2008). Furthermore, without translating the more abstract concepts into specific and concrete, it will not be possible to measure these concepts and reach the aim of the study. In addition, describing the variables of the study carefully will also contribute to the external validity of the study (Burns & Burns, 2008). Bryman and Bell (2015) state that to provide a measure for a concept there need to be indicators (or items) which will represent the concept, for example, through questions in a questionnaire. The authors also state that there is a point to

use multiple-item measures as it can capture more than only a portion of the concept and make finer distinctions. Therefore, this study will use multiple-item for the concepts to capture a broader set of aspects of the concept, thus, asking the respondent multiple questionnaires regarding the concept which is intended to be measured (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The questionnaire only used closed questions as they are easy to convert or coded into the format needed for analysis in SPSS (Pallant, 2007). For the items intended to measure the dependent variable, manipulation check for the independent variables, moderating and control variables the Likert scale was applied, which is a commonly used method where the respondents are asked to strongly disagree or agree with a specific statement (Burns & Burns, 2008). The scale is considered to measure the intensity of how the respondents feel about the issue (Bryman & Bell, 2015). For this study, a 7-point Likert scale was used where 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=slightly disagree; 4=undecided/neutral; 5=slightly agree; 6=agree; 7=strongly agree (Likert, 1932). Although, Burns and Burns, (2008) point out a limitation with the Likert scale is that it is an ordinal scale, meaning the distance between the values cannot be compared. There was also a set of demographic questions (Appendix B) which were measured on a nominal scale (Burns & Burns, 2008).

3.7.1 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study that will be measured to detect if any changes occur in consumers' perception of brand transparency due to the independent variables, thus, the cause-and-effect relationship (Burns & Burns, 2008). This study refers to Yoo and Jeong (2014, p.11) definition of brand transparency which is:

> consumers' perceived levels of a brand's strategic communication effort to make information available - whether positive or negative in nature - for the purpose of enhancing their understanding and making a brand accountable for marketing practices.

As the purpose of this study concerns the antecedents of brand transparency, the items to measure the dependent variable were adapted from other authors' previous studies within transparency. Brand transparency will be measured by twelve items as it was decided to use multiple-items. Furthermore, these items were adapted from Hustvedt and Kang (2013), Lin et al. (2017), and Busser and Shulga (2019). However, the items were slightly modified to suit the context of an apparel brand and sustainability. The modified items are found in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Operationalization of The Dependent Variable

Items
Brand Transparency
I could easily find out about the supplier A-BRAND uses to make their product
I believe A-BRAND provides the information needed to understand the environmental impact of its product
I believe A-BRAND provides information about its environmental practices to customers in a clear way
I believe A-BRAND is honest in addressing sustainability issues in their product production
I believe A-BRAND openly shares information about its production process
I believe A-BRAND provides useful information about its product production

Note: All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.7.2 Independent Variables

Brand Effort

One of the independent variables for the study is brand effort. More specifically, referring to how much effort the brand has put into making it easy for their customers to find transparent information about their products and production focusing on the context of sustainability. The effort was operationalized in the experiment as the information was clear and easy to understand for the potential shopper. In the experiment where the brand effort was low, it was hard for the consumer to find information about their sustainability linked to the product and its production. These two conditions for low and high brand effort can be found in its complete form in Appendix A. After the respondent was exposed to the shopping scenario, there was a manipulation check for the brand effort to be sure the respondent had registered the manipulation. This single-item was adapted from Modig et al. (2014), although, the item was modified to fit the context of this study.

Table 3.2 Manipulation Check for Brand Effort

Item
Brand Effort
A-BRAND has devoted much effort in providing information about the product's manufacturing process

Note: The item were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Message Sidedness

The other independent variable is the message sidedness, referring to if a brand includes both negative and positive information about the product and its production (two-sided) or only providing positive information (one-sided) (Eisend, 2006). The manipulation of this variable, therefore, either only had positive information about the products and its production or also included the negative impact, in terms of sustainability, of the product and its production. The

scenarios of one-sided and two-sided messages can be found in their full form in Appendix A. Same as for the brand effort, there was a manipulation check (Table 3.3) for the message sidedness to ensure its effectiveness. This single-item was adapted and modified from Kao (2011).

Table 3.3 Manipulation Check for Message Sidedness

Item
Message Sidedness
A-BRAND includes both positive and negative information about the product's manufacturing process

Note: The item were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.7.3 Moderating Variable

A moderating variable was also identified for the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. This moderating variable is the consumers' sustainability involvement. Zaichkowsky (1985, p.342) has defined involvement as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests." In this study, sustainability involvement refers to the degree of consumers involvement with environmental and social issues and the effort to minimize the negative impact on these (Wei et al. 2017). Thus, the degree of needs, values, and interests in regards to sustainability. Where a consumer with low sustainability involvement may not even pay any attention to information regarding the sustainability from brands (Solomon et al. 2006). Whereas, a consumer with high sustainability involvement may be motivated to read all information on the subject and give it much attention. Hence, the consumer has a higher interest in processing the sustainability information from a brand (Solomon et al. 2006).

To measure the moderating variable, there was a multi-item scale, as discussed above. These items were adapted from D'Souza and Taghian (2005) and Goh and Balaji (2016) studies, although, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. There were also added one item which focuses on the industry for this study. In total there were four items which are shown in Table 3.4 below. Furthermore, these items were used to measure the subjective degree of sustainability involvement (low vs. high) for consumers (respondents) to test the formulated hypotheses of its moderating effect.

Table 3.4 Operationalization of The Moderating Variable

Items
Sustainability Involvement
I am concerned about the environment I am willing to make personal sacrifices to protect the environment I am emotionally involved in environmental protection issues I am knowledgeable about sustainability issues in the apparel industry

Note: All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.7.4 Control Variable

In addition to the dependent and independent variables, there was also control for another possible variable which could explain the result. This was done to increase internal validity by controlling the additional variables other than the manipulated ones (Burns & Burns, 2008). As noted by Pallant (2007) it is important to measure the covariants before the experimental manipulation is done in order to prevent these from being influenced by the manipulation.

Based on this, one control variable was identified which is the respondents' online shopping habits. Online shopping habits were chosen as it can be assumed that the frequency of shopping online could affect their familiarity and perceptions of shopping. Furthermore, this could affect how they interpret the scenario as a more frequent online shopper of apparel product would be more custom with the scenario compared with a non-frequent online shopper. Additionally, the ELM which was previously discussed, predicts the involvement to influence consumers processing (Dainton & Zelley, 2004); thus, online shopping habits could be influential. Therefore, this variable was measured by three items on a 7-point Likert scale shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Operationalization of The Control Variable

Items
Online Shopping Habits
I am familiar with online shopping I shop apparel online often I shop more online than in physical stores

Note: All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.8 Data Analysis Approach

The data analysis was conducted in two steps, preliminary analysis, and main analysis. In the main analysis, the formulated hypothesis was tested. However, first, the data was entered into SPSS and Jamovi, where it is important to code it properly (Bryman & Bell, 2015). During the coding phase, each of the responses received a unique number as well as all the items which also were labeled. This was considered an essential step to ease the data analysis later (Pallant, 2007).

3.8.1 Data Screening

After the responses were collected from the questionnaire, the data were screened for possible errors, outliers, missing values, or invalid responses due to not being over 18 year old, or not passing the manipulation check. The screening is an essential step before conducting any analysis of the data as it can influence the results (Burns & Burns, 2008; Pallant, 2007). The first step of the screening was to control if the respondents belonged to the target population as well as passing the manipulation check which also is connected with the internal validity of the study. There was a total of 330 responses from the questionnaire, of these eight were screened out because the respondents were not over 18 years old. Thus, they did not belong to the target population and therefore not responded to the whole questionnaire. The data set was then screened for missing values, outliers, or other errors. This was foremost done by using the frequencies and descriptive statistics tool in SPSS, as suggested by Burns and Burns (2008). There was identified five outliers which were removed from the data. After the screening, the total number of valid responses was 318.

3.8.2 Preliminary Analysis

In the preliminary analysis phase, the manipulation was checked by using an independent-samples t-test for each manipulated variable. As part of the descriptive phase of this study, a summary of the descriptive statistics will be presented (Pallant, 2007). These statistics will be useful to describe the characteristics of the sample size and to check that the variables used in this study do not violate any of the assumptions of statistical techniques used to answers the research questions (Pallant, 2007). Also, during this phase of the study, normality of the distribution will be assessed with the skewness and kurtosis values (Pallant, 2007). An essential step of this is to analyze the sample data with graphs. Furthermore, it is vital to check that each of the scales used for this study is valid and reliable with the sample. Firstly, an exploratory factor analysis will be used to evaluate the multi-item constructs, and secondly, the Cronbach's

Alpha coefficient will be used (Pallant, 2007). For the Cronbach's Alpha, 0.7 will be used as an acceptable limit (Burns & Burns, 2008).

3.8.3 Main Analysis

As this study is set out as a between-groups experimental design, a two-way between groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) is used. This is an extension of the ANOVA, but the ANCOVA also statistically controls for additional variables which may influence the dependent variable (Pallant, 2007). There will be used a two-way ANCOVA compared with one-way, as this study has two independent variables (brand effort and message sidedness) and one dependent variable (brand transparency).

Furthermore, two-way ANCOVA is suitable as this study do not only want to test the main effect of brand effort and message sidedness on consumers perception of brand transparency, but also controlling for other variables which in this study is online shopping habits. Thus, as explained by Pallant, (2007) controlling for alternative variables influencing the variation in the dependent variable. Plus, test message sidedness moderating effect on brand effort and brand transparency. Together with the ANCOVA, a contrast was used to examine where the differences are found (Pallant, 2007).

Before conducting a two-way ANCOVA there are a number of assumptions which need to be fulfilled. There are some general assumptions of all parametric techniques, these include (1) the level of measurement for the dependent variable should be interval or ratio, (2) random sampling, (3) independence of observation, (4) normal distribution, (5) homogeneity of variance (Burns & Burns, 2008; Pallant, 2007). Additionally, Pallant (2007) discusses five of assumptions which need to be fulfilled specifically for ANCOVA. First, the covariate variables should be measured prior to the experimental manipulation, to avoid the score being influenced by the manipulation. Second, the reliability of covariant. Third, no strong correlation among the covariates variables. Fourth, there needs to be a linear relationship between the dependent variable and each covariate. Fifth and last, homogeneity of regression slopes (Pallant, 2007).

After the ANCOVA there was conducted a moderation analysis to test the sustainability involvements impact on the relationship of the independent and dependent variable. To do this there was two separate moderation analysis for each independent variable (i.e., brand effort and message sidedness). This was done in the Medmod tool in the statistical program Jamovi.

3.9 Quality Criteria

Several authors within business research point out the importance of ensuring the quality of the research, which often refers to the replicability, validity, and reliability of the study (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Burns & Burns, 2008). The replication of the study concerns if the results can be replicated by other studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, a complete description of the procedure of the study and the questionnaire used is included to enable a higher degree of replicability. Validity refers to the accuracy of the measures in the study, thus, if the questions measure what is intended (Burns & Burns, 2008). According to Burns and Burns (2008, n.p.), reliability refers "to the consistency and stability of findings that enables findings to be replicated." Furthermore, this is why it is essential to ensure a high validity and reliability of the study. In the next paragraphs, there will be a further discussion of the validity and reliability of this study.

3.9.1 Validity

The validity considers whether questions measure the constructs that are intended to measure, which is crucial for experimental studies (Burns & Burns, 2008; Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). In experimental studies, there is often a distinction between internal and external validity, which need to be considered (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). The internal validity refers to the degree "which the conditions within the experiment are controlled so that any difference or relationship can be ascribed to the independent variable, and not other factors" (Burns & Burns, 2008, n.p.). Thus, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2015), if the study can make valid conclusions based on the causal relationship in the experiment and not any other alternative explanations for the variability in the dependent variable. The authors suggest using a control group and random assignment of the subjects will contribute to enhancing internal validity. A dimension of the internal validity is the construct validity, is regarded if a measure reflects the concept it is supposed to measure. In experimental designs, this also concerns if the manipulation worked (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, the manipulations were first pretested, and a manipulation check was also included in the questionnaire to ensure its functionality and to enable the study to draw conclusions based on the results.

The external validity instead refers to the degree the results can be transferable to the defined population, that is, the generalizability of the study (Burns & Burns, 2008). For external validity, it is essential, according to Burns and Burns (2008) to consider the representatively of the sample. Furthermore, the authors argue by collecting a comprehensive description of the respondent's characteristics and the methodology used for the experiment helps to assess whether or not the results are generalizable for this study. Bryman and Bell (2015) raise the question if the results of the experiment can be transferred to other settings. For this study of

brand transparency, the focus is on the apparel industry and sustainability, which is a relatively common setting for consumers in the real world. Thus, brands today have a larger focus on sustainability regardless of the industry. Additionally, the experiment is conducted online but in the setting of online shopping, making it more realistic for the respondent. These facts will also ensure higher ecological validity for the study, as the experiment reflects a realistic scenario (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.9.2 Reliability

The next aspect to consider is reliability, which concerns the stability and consistency of the measurements in the study (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). According to Bryman and Bell (2015), there are three key factors to consider when assessing measures' reliability. First, if the measurement would generate the same results over time, meaning if the results are repeatable. Second, the inter-observer consistency, which refers to the consistency of the observer's subjective judgment and decisions made in the study, especially when there is more than one observer (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As there were two researchers for this thesis, thereof, sensitive decisions which could influence the process were made together to ensure a higher degree of consistency.

Third and last, testing the internal consistency means to assess a set of questions which are supposed to measure a specific construct (Burns & Burns, 2008). One commonly used statistical tool to ensure the internal consistency is Cronbach's alpha, which is based on correlations (Bryman & Bell, 2015). When using Cronbach's alpha, the more items are intercorrelated the greater internal reliability and the other way around. Burns and Burns (2008) argue that Cronbach's alpha is useful for questionnaires as it indicates if different questions are measuring the same constructs. The values for Cronbach's alpha can be between 0 and 1, where 0.8 and above is considered as a highly acceptable level of internal reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, Burns and Burns (2008) claim a value of 0.7 as the acceptable limit. For this study, the acceptable limit will, therefore 0.7. Furthermore, if the Cronbach's alpha has an acceptable value, it indicates that the questions are well formulated and measures what is intended.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

In business research, as well as other research, it is crucial to consider the ethical aspects of the study as conducting research comes with certain responsibility (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). Even though Burns and Burns (2008) explain ethical issues as neither black or white, but many shades of grey, there are multiple ethical guidelines to consider. Therefore, possible ethical problems will carefully be reflected upon for this thesis.

One way to ensure a high ethical standard in the research is to follow some fundamental principles of ethics in research. These can be divided into the protection of the respondent in the research, by ensuring no harm, respecting their dignity, ensuring complete informed consent of the respondent, protecting their privacy, and remaining anonymous (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). Another consideration is the trade-off between disclosing the complete purpose of the research beforehand or not, as revealing the purpose can affect the respondents' response, but not disclosing brings up the issue of possible deception (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, safeguarding the anonymity for quantitative studies is often easier than qualitative ones since there is a use of numbers instead of words and larger samples (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, the data in quantitative studies still need to be treated correctly. In this study, respondents will be asked for consent beforehand as well as upholding the other ethical principles to ensure a high ethical standard.

Another critical area of research ethics according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) is protecting the research communities integrity. Where deception in the research needs to be eliminated, by being honest and transparent when reporting the study and its results (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Also, if there are any conflicts of interest these need to be declared, importantly, to uphold the standards in research, there should be no misleading or false reporting of the results in the research (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015). Moreover, these principles are essential to conducting high-quality research and should be followed. Otherwise, reporting misleading and wrongfully research could be shared to society (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and possibly negatively affect the research field of brand transparency.

4 Results

4.1 Overview of Sample

For this study, there was a total of 330 responses from the questionnaire. However, after the data screening the total number of valid responses was 318. The data screening is explained in more detail in the methodology chapter. As part of the main analysis, the experimental groups were analyzed. Overall, the four experimental groups had around the same number of participants, although, there were more participants in the fourth group.

For the sample, 71.1% were female and 28.9% male. For ages, 45.3% of the respondents belonged to the 25-34 age group, meanwhile 26.1% to the 18-24 age group. In respect to educational level, about 56.6% had obtained a bachelor degree while 26.1% graduated from a master level. When it comes to occupation, most were students (37.7%), employed (39.3%), or self-employed (19.5%). A total of 33 countries were represented by the respondents, with a majority from Ecuador (39%) and Sweden (33.6%). Based on the randomization of the assignment of the manipulation group to the respondent, the groups have a relatively similar distribution of the participants regarding demographic characteristics, which is essential for the quality of the experiment. The complete socio-demographic characteristics of the final sample are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Demographics for The Experimental Groups

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Total Sample
Sample Size	75	76	76	91	318
Gender (%)					
Female	73.3	71.1	69.7	70.3	71.1
Male	26.7	28.9	30.3	29.7	28.9
Age (%)					
18-24	30.7	21	25	27.5	26.1
25-34	36	50	38.2	54.9	45.3
35-44	17.3	14.5	14.5	9.9	13.8
45-54	9.3	5.3	10.5	5.5	7.5
55-64	6.7	9.2	11.8	2.2	7.5
65 and over	–	–	–	–	–
Education (%)					
< High school	–	1.3	–	–	0.3

High school	12	18.4	14.5	13.2	14.5
Bachelor	64	48.7	54	59.3	56.6
Master	22.7	30.3	26.3	25.3	26.1
Doctorate	1.3	–	2.6	2.2	1.6
Other	–	1.3	2.6	–	0.9
Occupation					
(%)	40	34.2	31.7	43.9	37.7
Student	34.7	43.4	38.2	40.7	39.3
Employed	20	18.4	27.6	13.2	19.5
Self-employed	2.7	2.6	1.3	–	1.6
Unemployed	1.3	–	–	2.2	0.9
Parental leave	1.3	1.3	1.3	–	0.9
Other					
Origin[a] (%)					
Ecuador	41.3	40.8	46.7	29.7	39
Germany	5.3	5.3	3.9	6.6	5.3
Sweden	32	36.8	32.9	32.9	33.6
United States	1.3	3.9	3.9	12.1	5.7
Other	20.1	13.2	12.6	18.7	16.4

Note: [a] The participants were from a total of 33 different countries.

4.2 Manipulation Check

The effectiveness of the manipulation check was assessed by an independent-samples t-test, which is used when comparing the mean of two different groups (Pallant, 2007). To check the manipulation effectiveness of message sidedness, the respondents were asked to indicate if the brand included both positive and negative information about the product's manufacturing process on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The independent-samples t-test demonstrates that one-sided messages ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.80$) were perceived as having less of both positive and negative information compared with the two-sided messages ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.57$) (t (299.322) = - 8.92, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the manipulation of message sidedness seemed to be successful among the respondents.

To check the manipulation efficiency of brand effort, the respondents were asked to indicate the level of effort which the brand provided information about the product's manufacturing process on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The independent-samples t-test shows that low brand effort ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.81$) was perceived as less effort than for high brand effort ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.26$) (t (264.264) = - 6.93, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the manipulation of brand effort was considered to be successful among the respondents.

4.3 Validity and Reliability of Multi-Item Constructs

4.3.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to evaluate the three multi-items. In order to determine if the items were loading with the component they were supposed to. The extraction method was maximum likelihood with varimax rotation. For EFA, certain assumptions were checked. (1) Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and (2) the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) were used to assess the factorability of the data (Pallant, 2007). The KMO value was 0.83 (i.e., considered good (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2019)) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), which makes both of these prerequisites satisfied. In reference to the variance, the three-component solution explained a total of 56.5% of the variance. Also, the scree plot displayed a cut-off point after the third component (see Appendix C).

The matrix (Table 4.2) shows that the three components have strong positive loadings. The EFA proves that all the items of the multi-item constructs are correlated with their respective construct, except one item (CV04_04) for sustainability involvement which did not load with its construct and was therefore deleted from further analysis. This could be because the item was specifically related to the apparel industry while the other items were more general about sustainability and thus did not load with the others.

Table 4.2 Rotated Component Matrix

	Factors			
Item	Brand Transparency	Sustainability Involvement	Online Shopping Habits	Communalities
BT01_03	**0.876**	-0.026	0.036	0.768
BT01_06	**0.853**	0.017	0.023	0.728
BT01_02	**0.839**	0.009	0.042	0.705
BT01_05	**0.836**	0.006	0.070	0.704
BT01_04	**0.805**	0.039	0.128	0.665
BT01_01	**0.634**	0.021	0.052	0.405
CV04_02	0.065	**0.854**	-0.072	0.738
CV04_01	0.013	**0.732**	-0.097	0.545
CV04_03	-0.060	**0.708**	-0.023	0.505
CV04_04[a]	0.027	0.285	0.162	0.108

CV03_02	0.039	0.008	**0.849**	0.723
CV03_03	0.042	-0.018	**0.703**	0.496
CV03_01	0.087	-0.006	**0.495**	0.272

Note: 'Maximum likelihood' extraction method was used in combination with a 'varimax' rotation, BT=Brand transparency, CV04=Sustainability involvement, CV03=Online shopping habits, [a] Item deleted.

4.3.2 Cronbach's Alpha

After evaluating the EFA, the internal consistency of the multi-items was assessed. This was done by conducting a reliability analysis with the Cronbach's alpha, where 0.7 was considered an acceptable level (Burns & Burns, 2008). The results are shown in Table 4.3. The value for brand transparency was 0.915 which is considered strong, according to Burns and Burns (2008). There was one item deleted for sustainability involvement based on the EFA, the Cronbach's alpha supported this as when deleting the item the α-value increased from 0.703 to 0.794. The online shopping habit construct value was slightly under 0.7; however, this value ($\alpha = 0.691$) was still accepted as it was close to the acceptable limit. After assessing the multi-items, both with EFA and internal consistency, the constructs were considered strong and could, therefore, be combined into one score to represent each construct. Table 4.3 shows the mean and standard deviation for the constructs; meanwhile, the box plots are found in Appendix D.

Table 4.3 Cronbach's Alpha for Multi-items

Construct	N of Items	α	Mean	SD
Brand transparency	6	0.915	4.67	1.44
Sustainability involvement	3	0.794	5.67	1.01
Online shopping habits	3	0.691[a]	5.14	1.24

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha, SD = standard deviation, [a] This value was still accepted as it is close to 0.7.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

4.4.1 Assumptions for ANCOVA

As part of conducting ANCOVA, a critical step is to check the assumptions for ANOVA and additional assumptions for ANCOVA. The following five assumptions for ANOVA were checked. (1) The level of measurement for the dependent variable was measured at an interval or ratio level. (2) Even though there was not a random sampling, a convenience sample was used. However, the sample size was large, and the groups were randomly assigned. (3) the observations were independent. (4) The assumption of normal distribution was violated;

however, by examining the histogram, a tendency for a bell curve can be seen. Plus, according to Pallant (2007), social science research seldom has a normal distribution, and ANOVA is robust and tolerant for this violation. Additionally, the author argues when the sample size is large, the violation should not create any major problem. (5) According to the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances table, the homogeneity of variance is violated since there is a significant value of $p < 0.001$. The same arguments as for the normal distribution are applied here.

After checking the assumptions for ANOVA, specific assumptions for ANCOVA were analyzed. (1) The covariate variable was measured prior to the experimental manipulation. (2) The reliability of the covariate was checked. Where online shopping habits has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.691, which is very close to the adequate level. (3) There was only one covariate, so there could not be any correlation among the covariates. (4) There is a linear relationship between the dependent variable and each covariate. As shown in Appendix E, the figures displayed that there is a linear relationship between all the relationships. (5) The homogeneity of regression slopes was also checked. The interaction between the variables was not significant and therefore, did not violate the assumption of homogeneity of regression slope. The diagrams and numbers for the assumptions tests can be seen in Appendix E.

4.4.2 Effect of Brand Effort and Message Sidedness on Brand Transparency

In the following section, the results of the 2 x 2 between subjects experiment will be explained and the hypotheses will be tested. To begin with, H1 stated high (vs. low) brand effort on communicating sustainability will have a positive effect on consumers' perceived brand transparency, whereas H2 stated two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages will have a positive effect on consumers' perception of brand transparency. A two-way ANCOVA was conducted to test the difference between high vs. low brand effort and one-sided vs. two-sided messages on consumers' perceived brand transparency controlling for online shopping habits. The ANCOVA was also used to test the moderating effect of message sidedness on the relationship between brand effort and brand transparency. The descriptive statistics for all the different experimental groups are shown in Table 4.4, and the results from the analysis are shown in Table 4.5. As discussed in the previous section, there were preliminary checks conducted to check the assumptions of ANCOVA.

Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics for ANCOVA

Brand effort	Message sidedness	Mean	SD	N
Low	One-sided	3.54	1.55	75
	Two-sided	4.50	1.23	76
	Total	4.02	1.47	151
High	One-sided	4.95	1.26	76
	Two-sided	5.50	0.94	91
	Total	5.25	1.13	167
Total	One-sided	4.25	1.58	151
	Two-sided	5.04	1.19	167
	Total	4.67	1.44	318

Table 4.5 ANCOVA for Brand Transparency

	F	Partial Eta^2	p
Brand effort	72.397	0.188	<0.001
Message sidedness	28.501	0.083	<0.001
Online shopping habits	3.459	0.011	0.064
Brand effort*Message sidedness	2.124	0.007	0.146

In support of H1, there was a significant main effect from the high brand effort on brand transparency, $F (1, 313) = 72.397$, $p < 0.001$. Likewise, the main effect of two-sided messages was also significant $F (1, 313) = 28.501$, $p < 0.001$, which supports H2. Although, the effect size for both the brand effort (Partial Eta^2 = 0.188), and message sidedness (Partial Eta^2 = 0.083) was considered small based on Cohen (1988) guidelines. All of the results mentioned before suggest that there is a difference between low vs. high brand effort as well as one-sided vs. two-sided messages on consumers' perception of brand transparency.

After the ANCOVA, a contrast of the main effects of the independent variables was done to compare the means between the levels of the independent variable to test where the difference lies (Table 4.6). The contrast revealed that for brand effort, the mean for high brand effort ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.13$) was higher than the mean for low brand effort ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.47$). This evidence supports H1 were high brand effort was significantly ($t (313) = 8.51$, $p < 0.001$) higher than low brand effort. Likewise for message sidedness, two-sided messages ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.19$) have a higher mean than one-sided messages ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.58$). This is supported by

the significant (t (313) = 5.34, p < 0.001) that two-sided messages have significantly higher brand transparency score than one-sided messages, which provides evidence for H2.

Table 4.6 Main Contrasts for Message Sidedness and Brand Effort

	Estimate	SE	t	p
Two-sided messages – One-sided messages	0.747	0.14	5.34	<0.001
High brand effort – Low brand effort	1.191	0.14	8.51	<0.001

The ANCOVA (Table 4.5) also tested the interaction effect between brand effort and message sidedness, which was not found significant F (1, 313) = 2.124, p = 0.146. Further suggesting that two-sided messages do not moderate the relationship between brand effort and brand transparency. This result did, therefore, not support H3 which states that a positive effect of high (vs. low) brand effort on brand transparency will be amplified when two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages are included. The covariate online shopping habits were not significant, F (1, 313) = 3.459, p = 0.064, suggesting that the level of online shopping habits did not affect the perception of brand transparency.

4.4.3 Moderating Effect of Sustainability Involvement

The moderating variable (i.e., sustainability involvement, M = 5.67, SD = 1.01) was tested with a moderation analysis to test its influence over the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. In Appendix F, a scatterplot for sustainability involvement and brand transparency data is shown. Sustainability involvement was first tested on the relationship of message sidedness with brand transparency, where it was not found significant with a p < 0.05. Although the p-value for the interaction between sustainability involvement and message sidedness (p = 0.057, SE = 0.15) was significant at p < 0.1, this hypothesis was still rejected. As a result, H4a was not supported, therefore rejecting that high involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between message sidedness and consumers' perception of brand transparency.

Table 4.7 The Moderation Estimates for Sustainability Involvement and Message Sidedness

	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper	Z	p
Message sidedness	0.790	0.15	0.488	1.092	5.130	<0.001
Sustainability involvement	0.018	0.08	-0.132	0.168	0.238	0.812
Message sidedness *Sustainability involvement	0.292	0.15	-0.009	0.591	1.906	0.057

Moreover, sustainability involvement was also tested on the relationship between brand effort and brand transparency (Table 4.8). Sustainability involvement was found not significant (p = 0.258, SE = 0.15) for brand effort. Thus, there was no support for H4b, stating that high involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between brand effort and consumers' perception of brand transparency. Based on the moderation analysis, sustainability involvement does not moderate the relationship between antecedents and brand transparency.

Table 4.8 The Moderation Estimates for Sustainability Involvement and Brand Effort

	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p
			Lower	Upper		
Brand effort	1.226	0.15	0.940	1.511	8.425	<0.001
Sustainability involvement	0.014	0.07	-0.127	0.156	0.197	0.844
Brand effort *Sustainability involvement	0.164	0.15	-0.120	0.447	1.131	0.258

4.5   Summary of Results

The results of the experiment were presented above. Based on these, three main findings were identified by the hypotheses testing. First, high brand effort on communicating sustainability has a positive effect on consumers' perceived transparency. Secondly, two-sided messages have a positive impact on consumers' perceived transparency. Thirdly, no empirical evidence from the experiment was found to support the hypotheses that sustainability involvement moderates the relationship with the independent variables and the dependent variable. Table 4.9 displays a summary of the hypotheses tests.

Table 4.9 Summary of The Hypotheses Results

	Hypothesis	**Result**
H1	High (vs. low) brand effort on communicating sustainability will have a positive effect on consumers' perceived brand transparency.	Supported
H2	Two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages will have a positive effect on consumers' perception of brand transparency.	Supported
H3	The positive effect of high (vs. low) brand effort on brand transparency will be amplified when two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages are included.	Rejected

| H4a | High involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between message sidedness and consumers' perception of brand transparency. | Rejected |
| H4b | High involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between brand effort and consumers' perception of brand transparency. | Rejected |

5 Discussion

Given the demand for greater openness of companies from consumers and the buzz of transparency (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016), it is crucial for brands to have a strategy to tackle this. This study aimed to develop the understanding of the antecedents of brand transparency (i.e., consumers' perception of brand transparency) by identifying and empirically testing these in an apparel industry context by focusing on sustainability claims. The two identified antecedents were brand effort and message sidedness. Additionally, it was suggested that consumers' sustainability involvement would moderate the relationship between the antecedents and brand transparency. This chapter is set out to discuss the results further presented in the previous chapter and what these could mean to the literature of brand transparency.

5.1 Effect of Brand Effort on Brand Transparency

Based on the chosen theoretical framework, this study formulated the hypothesis (H1) that high (vs. low) brand effort on communicating sustainability will have a positive effect on consumers' perceived brand transparency. The results of the experiment conducted supported this hypothesis. In the following section, the results will be analyzed by referring to the attribution theory and previous studies in the field of brand transparency.

First of all, the results concerning high brand effort showed to have a positive effect on brand transparency. In relation to the attribution theory, previous studies have found that effort is an important construct of the attribution theory as consumers often try to explain behavior to a specific cause (Mohr & Bitner, 1995). From this perspective, a possible reason for this result is that the information disclosed by the apparel brand made the customers aware of the effort put in by the brand, thus attributing the behavior or the actions taken by the brand to higher transparency. Consumers attached a meaning to the actions taken by the brand, and this resulted in the consumers rewarding the brand with higher positive evaluations. Furthermore, as mentioned by Kirmani (1990), a higher brand effort may create trust in a brand; thus creating a higher perception of brand transparency. This could be explained by the fact that trust is both an element and a consequence of brand transparency.

In line with what was previously stated by Forehand and Grier (2003), a factor that can positively impact the consumers' perception of a brand is if the brand's effort is related to public-serving motives. In this case, the information disclosed by the apparel brand was purely regarding the brand's practices in the supply chain. The results from the experiment showed that there was a significant difference in perceived brand transparency when there was low brand effort compared to high brand effort. A different result could have resulted if the respondents were presented with information that only benefited the brand (self-serving motives) instead of showing information that was related to the benevolence of the brand towards its suppliers and its workers.

Lastly, a third possible reason for higher perceived brand transparency is that the respondents in the experiment did not have previous brand attitudes towards the brand since the brand presented to them was a made-up brand (i.e., A-BRAND). Moreover, a different result might have appeared if the brand in the experiment was a known brand with which the respondents had pre-existing attitudes. In a real-life situation, it would be harder for a brand with pre-existing brand attitudes to convince its consumers of its brand transparency. Nonetheless, the effort is essential for consumers and if a brand shows to be persistent with a behavior, in this case showing information about its sustainability efforts, it will most likely be perceived as transparent (Mohr & Bitner, 1995). However, it is important to note that since the effect size was considered small (Cohen, 1988), brand effort should be used as a long-term strategy for brands since it would take some time for the consumers to perceive a brand as transparent. Thus, the high brand effort has to be consistent over time for the consumer to establish a perception of brand transparency.

5.2   Effect of Message Sidedness on Brand Transparency

In the brand transparency literature, authors such as Foscht et al. (2018) and Parris et al. (2016) discussed brand transparency as sharing both pros and cons in the product information. For that reason, this study suggested message sidedness as an antecedent of brand transparency. The following was stated, (H2) two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages will have a positive effect on consumers' perception of brand transparency. Hence, sharing both positive and negative information would enhance consumers' perceptions of brand transparency. The results from the experiment supported message sidedness as an antecedent of brand transparency, which will be elaborated upon more below.

Firstly, the results concerning message sidedness showed that by both sharing positive and negative information about the product, a brand can increase the perception of being transparent in consumers. Whereas, only sharing positive information about the product will not shape a strong perception of brand transparency. Furthermore, this suggests that two-sided messages

are more effective and persuasive in creating brand transparency compared with one-sided ones. The result is, therefore, in line with Crowley and Hoyer's (1994) research that states brands using two-sided messages are perceived as more honest by consumers, as they do not only present the product in a favorable light.

Secondly, since the effect size for message sidedness was small (Cohen, 1988), it could mean that brands should employ message sidedness as a long-term tactic to be perceived as transparent. Including two-sided messages will not immediately change the perception of a brand in consumers, but need to be consistent over time. Furthermore, Crowley and Hoyer (1994) and Eisend (2006) argue the amount of negative information should be low to moderate for the message to increase persuasiveness. Although, low to moderate amount of negative information in Eisend's (2006) research regarding two-sided messages increase source credibility and persuasiveness but do not specifically create a perception of brand transparency. On the other hand, including a high amount of negative information could enhance the perception of brand transparency more but have damaging implications for other dimensions of the brand, such as brand attitude or purchase intentions. Therefore, in line with Eisend (2010), the degree of negative versus positive information is vital to consider, as there may be a trade-off between strong brand transparency and other essential dimensions of the brand.

Thirdly, referring back to the attribution theory, the results from this study support that two-sided messages are attributed to transparency. In an effort to understand why a brand is communicating two-sided messages and not only positive information, consumers seek a cause (Eisend, 2010). As a result, this study agree with Crowley and Hoyer (1994) that consumers attribute two-sided messages to the brand as being honest by telling the truth rather than only the desire to present the product in a favorable light. Based on these arguments, it can be said that including two-sided messages can act as a useful strategy for brands to increase the perception of brand transparency.

Although, messages sidedness had a main effect on brand transparency, it did not moderate the main effect of brand effort that was discussed earlier. Thus, H3 which states that the positive effect of high (vs. low) brand effort on brand transparency will be amplified when two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages are included. As this hypothesis was not supported by the results of the experiment which means both brand effort and message sidedness work independently to create a perception of brand transparency in consumers. Thus, a brand displaying high effort would not enhance the perception of brand transparency by also using two-sided messages. However, both high brand effort and two-sided messages, as discussed above, have an independent positive impact on brand transparency.

The result concerning the interaction was unexpected, it was hypothesized that the two antecedents would have an interaction and create a significant stronger perception of brand transparency in consumers. The rejection of this notion could be explained by the fact that effort and sidedness are strong enough to increase brand transparency on their own. In regards to the

attribution theory, high brand effort and two-sided messages are attributed to brand transparency, nevertheless, this result suggests that it does not increase (nor decrease) the perception of brand transparency by combining the two antecedents.

5.3   Sustainability Involvement as a Moderator

In this study, aside from testing the brand effort and message sidedness, the sustainability involvement of consumers was also investigated. The sustainability involvement was tested based on the main concept of the elaboration likelihood moderation (ELM) suggesting that the persuasiveness of a message depends on the recipients' motivation and ability to process the specific message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Likewise, the consumers' involvement and knowledge about the message subject would determine their degree of elaboration. Based on these arguments, there were two hypotheses constructed to test the sustainability involvement, which will be discussed more in detail below.

First, the consumers' sustainability involvement was suggested to moderate message sidedness. Thus, (H4a) high involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between message sidedness and consumers' perception of brand transparency. The results from the moderation analysis contradicted this statement and rejected sustainability involvement as a moderator of the relationship of message sidedness and brand transparency. Secondly, H4b suggested, high involved (vs. low involved) consumers with sustainability will positively moderate the relationship between brand effort and consumers' perception of brand transparency. Similarly to H4a, this hypothesis was not supported and sustainability involvement was not found to influence the perception of brand transparency. These results suggest that it does not matter how involved the consumers are with sustainability to elaborate on the sustainability claims made by brands in their attempt to be perceived as a transparent brand. Thus, high brand effort and two-sided messages improve consumers' perception of brand transparency regardless if they are involved with the topic or not.

Surprisingly, the sustainability involvement as a moderating variable was rejected. However, in line with what was previously stated by Petty and Cacioppo's (1984) ELM, it takes stronger arguments for consumers who are involved with a topic to be persuaded to change opinions or attitudes. Similarly, Browning et al. (2018) and Wei et al. (2017) found consumers with high sustainability involvement to take the central route and be affected by stronger arguments. Overall, all respondents had a high degree of sustainability involvement. The same was found when examining the scatterplot (Appendix F) of sustainability involvement and brand transparency, as the subjects are mostly on a higher degree of sustainability involvement compared with low. The generally high level of sustainability involvement could be due to the growing concern for environmental and societal issues in consumers (Bhaduri & Ha-

Brookshire, 2017). As a result, brands need to use strong arguments when communicating transparency with consumers as their sustainability involvement is high. Therefore, even if this study rejected the notion that sustainability involvement will moderate the relationship between the antecedents and brand transparency, it is still important to consider consumers' growing sustainability involvement when developing a brand and its transparency strategy.

6   Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the antecedents of brand transparency and test their impact on the customers' perception of transparency within the apparel industry. This study acknowledges the report by McKinsey & Company (2019) that states that radical transparency is a trend which will shape the apparel industry in 2019. After reviewing the literature, two antecedents were identified, namely, brand effort and message sidedness. Together with the attribution theory, it was proposed how these antecedents could affect brand transparency. Additionally, by applying the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), sustainability involvement was identified as a possible moderating variable. Based on the results and the discussion above, three main findings were established.

The first main finding was that high brand effort was supported as an antecedent of consumers' perception of brand transparency. Secondly, two-sided messages were also accepted as an antecedent of brand transparency. More specifically, by disclosing both positive and negative information brands can create a strong perception of brand transparency. Although an interaction effect was not found between the two antecedents.

On the contrary, the third finding, sustainability involvement was expected to act as a moderator of the relationship between the antecedents and brand transparency, however, this was not supported by the results. Moreover, consumers' degree of involvement and knowledge about sustainability issues did not affect their elaboration likelihood in this study. Importantly, this notion also still agrees with previous research regarding the ELM, that highly involved consumers are persuaded by strong arguments (Browning et al. 2018; Wei et al. 2017). However, these results suggested that generally, there is a growing sustainability involvement among consumers (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2017). With these findings in mind, respective theoretical and managerial contributions will be elaborated upon below.

6.1   Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical field of brand transparency. First and foremost, this study provides new insights to the topic of brand transparency, especially by building upon existing literature on the antecedents of brand transparency. Past research mostly focused on the consequences of brand transparency (Brandão et al. 2018; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014a; Lin et al. 2017), however, previous literature concerning the antecedents is

mostly conceptual and limited. Also, new findings in relationship to the attribution theory and ELM, which were applied in this study, were identified.

Furthermore, the results of this study provided evidence that high brand effort and two-sided messages act as antecedents of brand transparency. Thus, consumers perceive brands using high effort when disclosing their transparent information as more brand transparent than brand utilizing low effort. This finding is in line with Morales (2005), that consumers reward brands for the extra effort. Building on the attribution theory, it suggests consumers attribute a high degree of brand effort to being a transparent brand. Thus, high effort works as an indicator that the brand tries to share relevant information about themselves with consumers and to educate them about their practices and products.

Another implication is that two-sided messages are more effective to build brand transparency rather than one-sided ones. Thus, including both positive and negative information has a positive effect compared to only using positive information. The theory of message sidedness (i.e., one-sided and two-sided) is essential for the literature stream of brand transparency. In regards to the attribution theory, consumers attribute two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages to brands being more transparent.

The final theoretical contribution is that this study lacks evidence to support that sustainability involvement would act as a moderating variable for the relationship between the antecedent and brand transparency. Thus, consumers' degree of sustainability involvement was not found significant and will not foster consumers' perception of brand transparency. The main reason for this may be the general growth of environmental and societal awareness among consumers today (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2017), which was also implied in the results of this study. Although, this implication is still supporting previous sustainability and ELM research, where consumers who are highly involved with a topic are persuaded by strong arguments (Browning et al. 2018; Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Wei et al. 2017).

The empirically tested antecedents of brand transparency are an addition to the literature and build on Parris et al. (2016) and Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) theoretical work on brand transparency. Thus, empirical evidence for the antecedents and the perceptions of brand transparency in consumers. However, these two antecedent work independently from each other.

6.2 Managerial Implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions, there are some managerial implications for brand and marketing managers to consider when working with brand transparency. First, as the marketplace is changing and consumers demand more openness and honesty from brands

(Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011), managers should consider how brand transparency could contribute to creating a stronger brand. This study agrees with Parris et al. (2016) that there should be greater transparency when consumers are distrustful and when working in a criticized industry. Accordingly, the apparel industry was taken as a point of departure in this thesis, since it is an example of an industry that has experienced multiple challenges (James & Montgomery, 2017) where more brand transparency can contribute. Therefore, the main recommendation is to strive for greater brand transparency, especially for industries which have a substantial negative environmental and social impact. Moreover, brands should aim for more openness and honesty. The insights from this study will enable marketers to build a stronger perception of brand transparency in consumers and leverage on the advantageous outcomes of transparency.

To achieve a perception of brand transparency, this study contributes with two main recommendations. Practitioners should consider their degree of brand effort and strive for a high effort to achieve greater transparency. With this in mind, consumers will perceive that the brand puts in much effort by disclosing relevant information. Importantly, high effort should be employed to make the information easy to find and to understand for the consumers, as this enhances their perception of brand transparency. It is also suggested to employ high brand effort as a long-term strategy as it will have greater impact over time.

Another recommendation is to utilize two-sided messages in a brand's transparency efforts, which should also be considered as a long-term tactic. This thesis concluded that in order to create a perception of brand transparency, a brand should share both positive and negative information about its product and production to provide the consumers with a holistic picture instead of a biased one (i.e., only positive information). Although, the degree of negative versus positive information is important to consider when using two-sided messages. This study did not investigate the amount of negative information per se, but authors like Eisend (2006) argue that the amount of negative information should be low to moderate in order not to have an adverse effect for the brand. For that reason, brands should balance the amount of negative versus positive product information. However, Eisend's (2006) research focuses on how two-sided messages affect purchase intention and persuasiveness but does not consider how it could build a stronger perception of transparency.

Even though the results from this study found high brand effort and two-sided messages to work independently to increase the perception brand transparency, it can also be said that when these two strategies are combined the perception of brand transparency does not decrease in consumers. Therefore, there was not found any negative side effect for marketers to combine the two strategies. This, as the antecedents, will still create a perception of brand transparency in consumers. Despite that, the high brand effort may be a more harmless strategy to use, compared with two-sided messages as it may be riskier due to the negative information disclosed.

It is relevant to mention that during the process of this thesis, the global fashion giant H&M launched a new sustainable initiative, namely a 'transparency layer' to their products both online and in stores (H&M, 2019). They launched this on April 23rd, 2019, where each product's supply chain is available, enabling consumers to make more informed decisions. This initiative demonstrates how important transparency has become for brands in the apparel industry. Accordingly, Isak Roth, Head of Sustainability at H&M, says:

> By being open and transparent about where our products are made we hope to set the bar for our industry and encourage customers to make more sustainable choices. With transparency comes responsibility, making transparency such an important factor to help create a more sustainable fashion industry (H&M, 2019).

In regards to the H&M's 'transparency layer,' it is highly similar to the scenario created for this study's experiment. Firstly, it can be considered to be using high brand effort as H&M easily displays information about the product and its production. They include information similar to the one presented in the scenario with A-BRAND. Namely, including H&M's production requisites, suppliers, factories with address and number of employees, materials, and sustainability goals. Although, H&M does not share information regarding audits and the environmental footprint of the product. Secondly, they do point out that cotton requires a high amount of water but not specifically how much for the particular product, nor carbon dioxide emissions. Moreover, they mostly include positive information (i.e., one-sided message) in the description. Regardless of this, H&M has shown high brand effort in order to position its brand as more transparent.

As previously discussed in this thesis, transparency is an important aspect for brands today. The launch of H&M's 'transparency layer' further demonstrates this and is in accordance to McKinsey & Company's (2019) report that claims radical transparency will shape the apparel industry in 2019. Furthermore, the results of this study are, therefore, of high relevance for managers today and how they can shape the perception of brand transparency in consumers by utilizing high brand effort and two-sided messages.

6.3   Limitations

The first limitation that this study faced was that the experiment that was carried out only focused on the apparel industry. This poses a limitation to the study in terms of generalizing the results to other industries. However, this was considered before starting the thesis as the authors thought that the apparel industry is deemed to be relevant to study in the context of transparency as it is one of the industries that faces the most challenges in the supply chain and environmental issues (James & Montgomery, 2017). Another limitation was that overall the individuals in the sample were between the age of 18-34 who were greatly concerned with sustainability, this

could mean that a sample with older individuals and lower or more diverse sustainability involvement could generate another result. At last, the brand (i.e., A-BRAND) used in the study was a made-up brand. This means that the subjects who participated in the experiment had no previous conceptions of the brand. This was done in order to avoid brand attitudes and prior experiences alter the results of the study.

6.4   Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are made for future research. Brand transparency is a complex topic, and there are still more aspects of it to investigate to enrich the knowledge about this field. First of all, a made-up brand was used to test the antecedents of brand transparency. Thereto, this opens up the opportunity to replicate this experiment with a real brand, or a low end versus a luxury brand to determine if pre-existing brand attitudes will affect the consumers' perceptions of brand transparency. For instance, H&M could be of interest to use as a mean of investigation with their new 'transparency layer', especially as they act in the criticized fast-fashion industry.

Similarly, future researchers are encouraged to investigate message sidedness in relation to brand transparency. Even though it was established that message sidedness acts as an antecedent of brand transparency, the question is how this translates into purchase intentions or other dimensions of the brand. Thus, it would be relevant to analyze the implications of disclosing both positive and negative information about a brand's environmental and sustainability efforts and how this would affect the consumers' purchase intentions and brand attitudes. Another area which could need further investigation is the degree of negative versus positive information for two-sided messages to work as an antecedent of brand transparency and how it affects other aspects of the brand, such as brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

Lastly, it is encouraged to research beyond the scope of this thesis to develop greater insights about the effect of the antecedents in brand transparency. It is recommended to replicate this study in different contexts and industries. Furthermore, in addition to the two identified antecedents future studies should open up for the discovery of additional antecedents of brand transparency.

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Appendix A: The Scenarios

Scenario 1: Low brand effort/one-sided messages

A-BRAND

THE ORIGINAL COTTON
WHITE TEE

Select size

| XS | S | M | L | XL |

ADD TO BAG

DETAILS
- Straight fit
- 100% organic cotton
- Rounded neck

DESCRIPTION
We believe a good T-shirt is all about a classic shape and amazing materials. We guarantee a perfect fit and feel, wash after wash.

We care about **Sustainable** production and only use certified organic cotton

Scenario 2: Low brand effort/two-sided messages

A-BRAND

THE ORIGINAL COTTON
WHITE TEE

Select size

| XS | S | M | L | XL |

ADD TO BAG

DETAILS
- Straight fit
- 100% organic cotton
- Rounded neck

DESCRIPTION
We believe a good T-shirt is all about a classic shape and amazing materials. We guarantee a perfect fit and feel, wash after wash.

We care about **Sustainable** production and only use certified organic cotton

This T-shirt required:
2.700 liters of water
7 kg of CO2

Scenario 3: High brand effort/one-sided messages

Scenario 4: High brand effort/two-sided messages

Appendix B: The Questionnaire

The questionnaire with scenario number four.

Welcome to our survey!

Thanks for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire.

We are two students currently writing our master thesis at Lund University School of Economics and Management and we need your help!

Some short information before the survey begins: the questionnaire takes about 3 minutes to complete. It is completely voluntary. You can terminate your participation at any time, but we appreciate if you take the time to respond to the entire questionnaire. All responses are completely anonymous and confidential.

Please read the instructions carefully before answer the questions.

Thank you,
Victoria and Lovisa

If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact us via mail (ma1178ro-s@student.lu.se or lo5372gu-s@student.lu.se).

Are you 18 or older?

◯ Yes
◯ No

Please answer the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Undecided	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am familiar with online shopping	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I shop apparel (clothing) online often	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I shop more online than in physical stores	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Undecided	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am concerned about the environment	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am willing to make personal sacrifices to protect the environment	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am emotionally involved in environmental protection issues	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am knowledgeable about sustainability issues in the apparel (clothing) industry	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

A-BRAND

A-BRAND sells apparel (clothing) for both women and men.

Imagine you are in the need for a new white T-shirt and are surfing the web and click on A-BRAND's T-shirt.

Please carefully read the text on A-BRAND's product page before continuing.

Based on the A-BRAND's scenario carefully read each statement and answer with your degree of agreement or disagreement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
A-BRAND has devoted much effort in providing information about its product manufacturing process	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A-BRAND includes both positive and negative information about the product's manufacturing process	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Here is a reminder of A-BRAND's web page, scroll down to answer the remaining questions.

A-BRAND

THE ORIGINAL COTTON WHITE TEE

Select size

| XS | S | M | L | XL |

ADD TO BAG

DETAILS
- Straight fit
- 100% organic cotton
- Rounded neck

DESCRIPTION
We believe a good T-shirt is all about a classic shape and amazing materials. We guarantee a perfect fit and feel, wash after wash.

Made in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Check out this supplier

Follow our environmental footprint here.

We care about **Sustainable** production and only use certified organic cotton

This T-shirt required:
2.700 liters of water
7 kg of CO2

Our requirements:
✓ Fair labor
✓ Eco-efficiency
✓ High-quality

Mihn City Knits
www.knits.com
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Factory Manager:
Chuong Jeong
chuong.jeong@knits.com

Supplier since 2010

Factory sustainability score: 91/100

Last audit:
13 Feb, 2019

A-BRAND

Based on the A-BRAND's scenario carefully read each statement and answer with your degree of agreement or disagreement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Undecided	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I could easily find out about the supplier A-BRAND uses to make their product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe A-BRAND provides the information needed to understand the environmental impact of its product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe A-BRAND provides information about its environmental practices to customers in a clear way	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe A-BRAND is honest in addressing sustainability issues in their product production	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe A-BRAND openly shares information about its production process	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe A-BRAND provides useful information about its product production	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

XV

What is your age?

◯ 18-24
◯ 25-34
◯ 35-44
◯ 45-54
◯ 55-64
◯ 65 and over

What gender do you belong to?

◯ Female
◯ Male
◯ Other

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

◯ Less than a high school diploma
◯ High school degree or equivalent
◯ Bachelor's degree
◯ Master's degree
◯ Doctorate
◯ Other

What is your current occupation?

◯ Student
◯ Employed
◯ Self-employed
◯ Unemployed
◯ Parental leave
◯ Other

What is your country of origin?

[Please choose] ⇕

***If you can't find your country in the list**
Please specify the country

_____
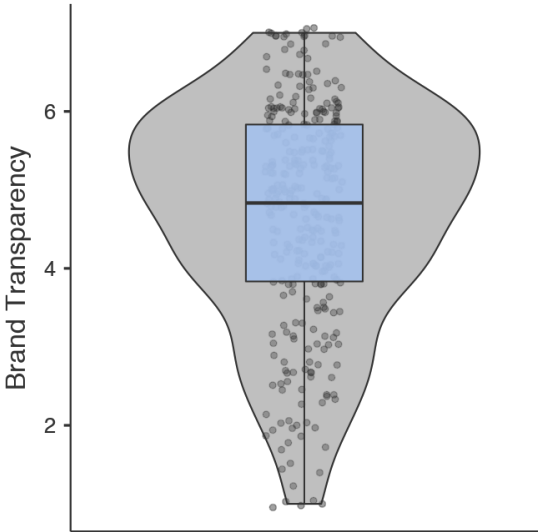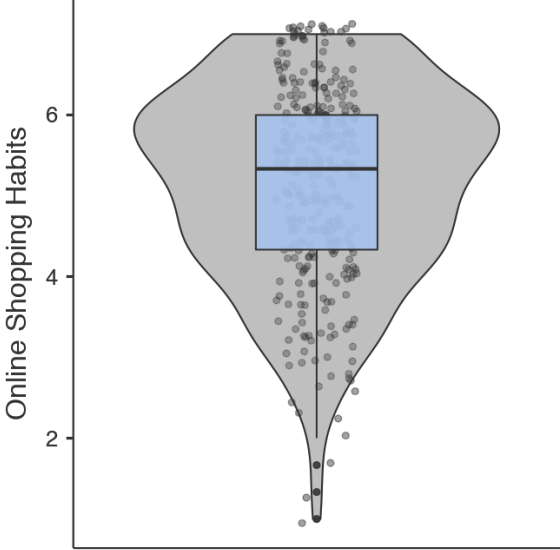
Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

We would like to thank you very much for helping us.

Your answers were transmitted, you may close the browser window or tab now.

Appendix C: Exploratory Factor Analysis – Scree Plot

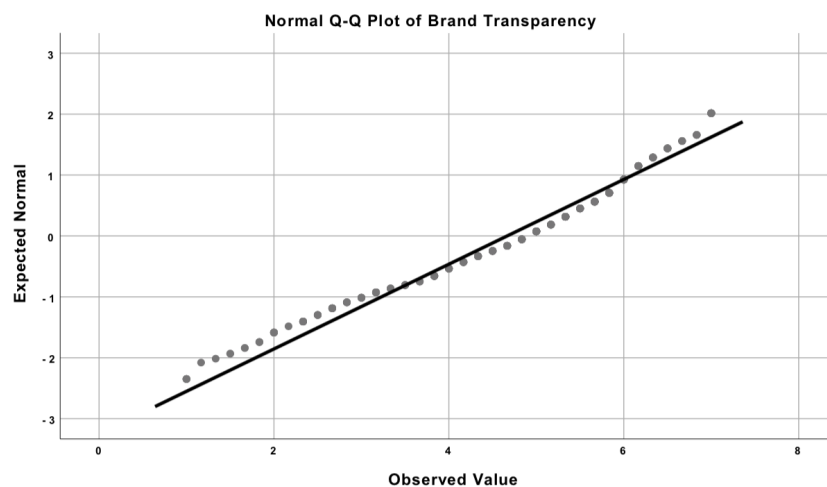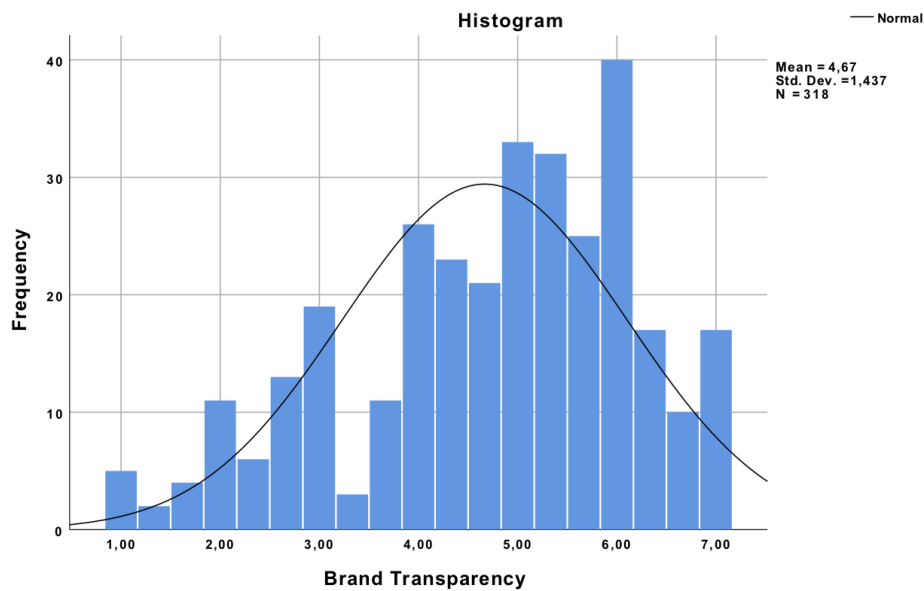Scree Plot
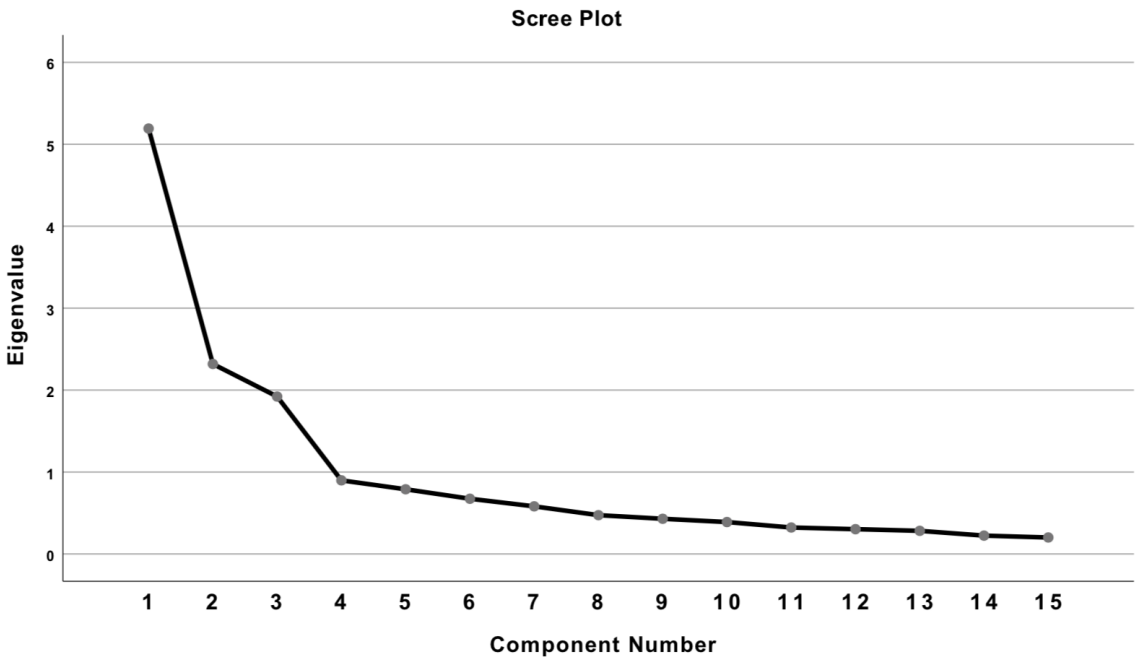
Appendix D: Box Plots for Constructs
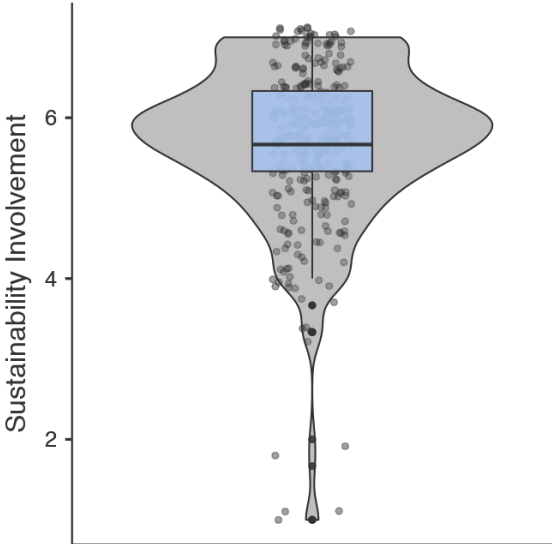
Appendix E: Assumptions for ANCOVA

ANOVA:

(4) Normal distribution

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Brand Transparency	0.093	318	<0.001	0.962	318	<0.001

ANCOVA:

(2) Reliability of covariates

The internal consistency (i.e. Cronbach's alpha).

Variable	α	N of items
Online shopping habits	0.691[a]	3

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha, [a] This value was still accepted as it is close to 0.7.

(4) Linear relationship between dependent variable and covariant
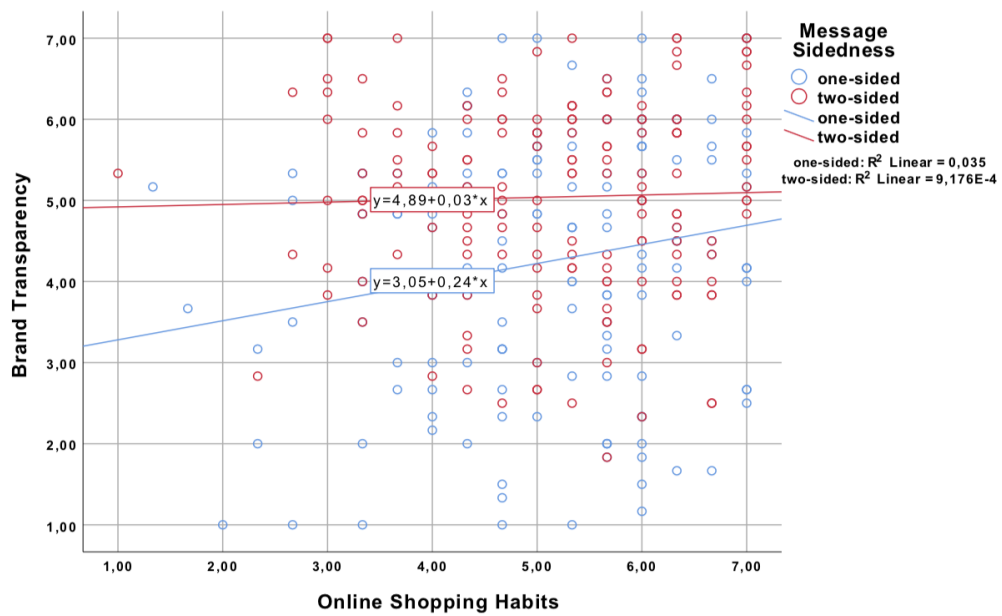
(5) Homogeneity of regression slopes

	df	Mean square	F	p
Brand Effort*Online shopping habits	1	0.035	0.023	0.879
Message sidedness*Online shopping habits	1	1.953	2.217	0.163

Appendix F: Scatterplot of Sustainability Involvement and Brand Transparency