



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

The attitude behavior-gap in the apparel market explained

A qualitative study examining the attitude behavior-gap concerning sustainability
in the apparel market.

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Abstract

Title: The attitude behavior-gap in the apparel market explained. A qualitative study examining the attitude behavior-gap concerning sustainability in the apparel market.

Keywords: *Sustainability, Attitude, Consumer Behavior, Cynicism, Identity.*

Thesis purpose: The purpose of this research is to examine and understand the reasons behind the existing gap between consumers' attitudes and behaviors in the context of sustainable apparel consumption.

Methodology: This research is based on a qualitative methodology with a research philosophy applying to a relativist and social constructionist position. The study utilizes an abductive approach and the empirical data is collected through 12 semi-structured interviews providing valuable insights to answer the research question.

Theoretical perspective: This study is based on several different theoretical perspectives. The main focus is from a consumer culture perspective including influences from a sociological and psychological perspective with the aim to achieve nuanced results.

Empirical material: Through the collected data three themes constructing a barrier between attitude and behavior emerged. These are defeatism, self-preservation and hierarchy of priorities.

Conclusions: The findings of this research resulted in the suggested theoretical model *Triad of Misalignment*. The model illustrates three identified themes that explains the discrepancy between consumers' attitudes and behaviors regarding sustainability in the apparel market. First, consumers display *defeatism* based on the perception that they have no power to influence the environmental impact of the apparel industry. Second, consumers prioritize other factors such as identity expression and social belonging through fashion above sustainability when it comes to fashion consumption. Finally, consumers engage in different self-preservation strategies to justify their misaligned actions.

Practical implications: Industries, managers and non-governmental institutions would benefit from, to a greater extent, understand the link between consumer attitudes and behaviors. Through understanding the barriers that create inconsistency between them it becomes possible to overcome them. Sustainability is crucial and a job that everybody needs to engage in to make a difference, something that consumers demand from higher institutions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 BACKGROUND	1
1.1.1 <i>Sustainable consumption and the apparel industry</i>	1
1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND PURPOSE	3
1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW	4
1.3.1 <i>Consumer decision making-theory</i>	4
1.3.2 <i>The attitude behavior-gap</i>	5
1.3.3 <i>Identified gap</i>	7
1.4 OUTLINE OF THESIS.....	7
2. METHOD.....	9
2.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY	9
2.1.1 <i>Ontological Reflection</i>	9
2.1.2 <i>Epistemological Reflection</i>	9
2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	10
2.2.1 <i>Research Approach</i>	10
2.2.2 <i>Qualitative Methodology</i>	11
2.2.3 <i>Sampling Strategy and Target Group</i>	11
2.3 DATA COLLECTION.....	12
2.3.1 <i>Semi-structured Interviews</i>	13
2.3.2 <i>Transcription and Practical Implementation</i>	14
2.3.3 <i>Secondary data</i>	15
2.4 DATA ANALYSIS	16
2.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	17
2.6 LIMITATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY	18
2.7 RESEARCH ETHICS	19
3. THEORY	20
3.1 RATIONALE BEHIND THE CHOSEN THEORIES.....	20
3.2 CONSUMER CYNICISM	21
3.3 IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	23
3.4 COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY	25
3.5 INTERNAL/EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL OF REINFORCEMENT.....	26

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS & ANALYSIS.....	27
4.1 DEFEATISM.....	27
4.1.1 <i>Inferiority complex</i>	27
4.1.2 <i>Distrust towards the market</i>	29
4.2 HIERARCHY OF PRIORITIES	32
4.2.1 <i>Social belonging and symbolic apparel consumption</i>	32
4.2.2 <i>Social and environmental influence</i>	35
4.2.3 <i>Style and identity over sustainable consumption</i>	37
4.3 SELF-PRESERVATION.....	39
4.3.1 <i>Blame and compensation</i>	40
4.3.2 <i>Justification and whitewashing</i>	41
5. DISCUSSION & THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION.....	45
5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION.....	45
5.2.1 <i>External Influences</i>	47
5.2.2 <i>Internal Conflict</i>	50
6. CONCLUSION	52
6.1 CONCLUSION	52
6.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS	54
6.3 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH.....	55
REFERENCES	57
APPENDIX	62

1. Introduction

This section presents the background to the purpose of this research. It illustrates the key factors that describe the relationship between consumers' attitudes and behaviors and further provides an overview to the problematization underlying the study. The background aims to provide an explanation of the context followed by the research problem and research question arguing for why a study of the chosen subject is needed. Lastly, the introduction chapter presents the outline and structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Imagine yourself gathering your friends for a dinner party on a Friday night. You are thinking about what to wear and start scanning the market for the perfect outfit. There are some favorite brands that you usually turn to, but your recently gained knowledge about the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry has made you rethink your consumption habits. Friday is getting closer, and since you are not sure where to look for more sustainable fashion, you visit your regular store and find a really nice dress for only 299 SEK, perfect! You feel very satisfied with your purchase and look forward to wearing the dress at the party. The day after the party you are going to wash your dress and read the washing label, the text “100% Polyester” and “Made in Bangladesh” reminds you of what you have learned about the fast fashion industry and its environmental impact. Suddenly, you feel anxious about buying the dress, you are not even sure if you will ever wear it again. Despite your attitude that you wanted to be more aware in your consumption choices, you fell for the opposite. You decide that next time, you will make a better choice and hang the dress in the back of your wardrobe, not wanting to be reminded of the guilt you feel for acting against your own values. ***Why did you go against your initial intention?***

1.1.1 Sustainable consumption and the apparel industry

Sustainability is an ever-present topic in society today, and people become increasingly aware of the importance of making more sustainable choices (Jacobs, Petersen, Hörisch & Battenfeld, 2018). The term sustainability can be defined as an environmental factor, as well as economic or social, depending on the context it is studied in. The most commonly used definition was coined by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987, defining sustainability as: “*the development that meets the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” (Kotob, 2011). Environmental sustainability is narrower and refers to “[...] *ensures future generations have the natural resources available to live an equal, if not better, way of life as current generations.*” (Evans, 2020).

In line with the increased awareness regarding sustainability, sustainable apparel consumption has emerged recently and the demand for environmentally friendly produced apparel has increased accordingly. The understanding for sustainable products has shown to be ambiguous and consumers often misunderstand the concept, resulting in low engagement in consumers' sustainable apparel consumption (Chang & Watchravesringkan, 2018). Previous research defines sustainable apparel as products made from recycled materials or natural fibers which have been grown organically. Further, *sustainable apparel* has come to be referred to as products with a low environmental impact and which can be used for a longer time period (Kim & Damhorst, 1998).

Environmentally concerned consumers are sustainably minded and aim to contribute by making sustainable choices and engage in environmentally friendly purchasing behaviors (Kim & Damhorst, 1998). Environmental concern refers to consumers' awareness of the environmental impact that their consumption implies, the general environmental degradation caused by humans and indicates a willingness to contribute to minimizing it. Further, this evolves into environmental knowledge describing to what extent consumers are informed about environmental issues (Sharma, 2020). Previous research has revealed that knowledge is an important factor that has a significant impact on consumer behavior (Taufique, Vocino and Polonsky, 2017). Moreover, researchers argue that consumers' increased awareness and knowledge of environmental issues enhance positive attitudes towards sustainable apparel (Sharma, 2020).

Ajzen and Fishbein (2000) argues that attitudes emerge from consumers' accessible beliefs or evaluations about an attitude object. Individual beliefs control the attitudes of the consumer, and changes in the beliefs can hence result in a changed attitude. Collecting information and knowledge about an object helps create a specific attitude towards it, and as consumers' beliefs change over time, new attitudes are formed (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000).

Previous studies indicate that lack of knowledge about the production process for sustainable apparel prevents consumers from seeing the benefits of consuming environmentally friendly apparel. Correspondingly, it is on the other hand stated that knowledge about environmental issues influences consumers' environmental attitudes (Sharma, 2020). Consumers' gained knowledge about the environmental footprint of their consumption has resulted in increased positive attitudes towards a change of consumption patterns and an increased willingness to engage in more aware consumption habits (Dhir, Sadiq, Talwar, Sakashita & Kaur, 2021). Generally, younger consumers are known to have more positive attitudes towards sustainability in the apparel market (Chang & Watchravesringkan, 2018). However, consumers do not always behave in line with these positive attitudes (Dhir et al. 2021).

Consumers' increased interest in the environment and sustainable products has conversely not led to a significant increase in demand for sustainable apparel (Jacobs et al. 2018). In fact, previous studies present that 30% of consumers intend to purchase more sustainable products, but only 3% fulfill the intention and purchase more sustainable apparel (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

The discrepancy between consumers' intentions and actions is in consumer behavior studies commonly referred to as the attitude-behavior gap. The gap between attitude and behavior has been described to consist of various barriers, three of them being *inconvenience*, lack of *trust* and lack of accessible, trustworthy *information* (Hirsch & Terlau, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). These barriers create a conflict in the apparel market between fast fashion and sustainable apparel, hindering consumers' sustainable actions.

1.2 Research Problem and Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to examine and understand the reasons behind the existing gap between consumers' attitudes and behaviors in the context of sustainable apparel consumption. This is best captured through gaining a deeper understanding of how attitudes form and how external and internal factors influence consumers' purchasing behaviors in relation to sustainability in the apparel industry. The research is conducted from a consumer perspective with main emphasis on theoretical perspectives from the field of consumer behavior. To collect deep, reliable consumer insights the research is based on a qualitative research approach that nuances and deepens the understanding of the subject.

The apparel industry is one of the single industries that stands responsible for the largest environmental pollution in the world. Every year the fashion industry produces over 92 million tons of waste and uses over 79 trillion litres of water for its production. Despite its enormous impact on the environment and the increasing reporting of these facts the fashion industry continues to grow, much due to the rise of fast fashion. Fast fashion consists of large brand chains that rely on cheap manufacturing, fast production, frequent purchases and short product life cycles to provide consumers with modern, up to date and low priced apparel (Niinimäki, Peters, Dahlbo, Perry, Rissanen & Gwilt, 2020).

Parallel to the growing fast fashion industry, consumers become increasingly aware of the environmental challenges the world stands before and become more educated about the considerable part that consumption plays in this (Sharma, 2020). These two contradictions interplay on the same market. On a macro level, even though consumer attitudes towards sustainable consumption alternatives constantly grow more positive, the fast fashion industry continues to grow at a steady pace. On a micro level, the attitude behavior-gap within consumers continues to be an inexplicable mystery (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Consumers' attitudes and behaviors are complex and depend on multiple different external and internal factors. Similarly, consumers' behaviors are a product of uncountable aspects including knowledge, cultural and social aspects. These complexities in the emergence of attitudes and behavior have motivated researchers from various fields to study the attitude behavior-gap in different contexts for several years.

However, within consumer behavior there is a clear majority of quantitative, positivist studies where the phenomenon is confirmed but lack the deeper analysis that qualitative studies can provide by answering the questions of *how* and *why* consumers think, feel and behave a certain way. Further, the topic of sustainability is fast moving and changing leading to that researchers have to be responsive to change. Younger consumers are generally more aware of environmental issues and the sustainability aspects of consumption, providing reason to assume that this generation may act differently than previous studies of earlier generations indicate.

Research question: Why are consumers' purchasing behaviors not reflecting their attitudes concerning consumption of sustainable apparel?

1.3 Literature Review

Researchers have been interested in the discrepancy between attitudes and behaviors for several years and within multiple fields of research. Psychology has been leading the path, but research on the subject in the context of consumer behavior has increased recently and the narrower area of sustainability in the apparel market has been raised in the last couple of years. This topic is more relevant in society today than ever due to the increased awareness of the consumption's environmental impact among consumers. This stream of research is up to this date dominated by positivist, quantitative research, leaving the qualitative question *why* this discrepancy exists in the apparel market unanswered.

Caruana, Carrington and Chatzidakis (2016) summarized existing research on the attitude behavior-gap and divided it into two camps. The first array is dominated by methodological flaws such as an overreliance on quantitative survey research where there is an overlying risk of that consumers provide the socially desired answers to appear as "*good citizens*" (Taufique, Vocino and Polonsky, 2017; Jacobs, Petersen, Hörisch & Battenfeld, 2018; Dhir et al., 2021). The second cluster of research is more interpretive, cross-disciplinary and argues that the attitude behavior-gap is a construction from decision making-theory where it is commonly assumed that consumer behavior is conducted in a vacuum from social contexts (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). This line of research has hence focused more on examining how the attitude behavior-gap is influenced by social and cultural factors, something that this research aims to add to (Caruana, Carrington & Chatzidakis, 2016).

1.3.1 Consumer decision making-theory

In 1960, psychologist Daniel Katz (1960) developed *the functional theory of attitudes* that explains attitudes facilitation of social behavior. According to Katz (1960), the motives underlying consumers' attitudes have to be identified to predict changes in consumer attitudes. The theory presents four different attitude functions based on the notion that different consumers have different attitudes towards certain attitude subjects (Katz, 1960). Another outstanding psychological theory, the reasoned action approach, today known as the theory of planned behavior, was first developed by Fischbein and Ajzen (1967, 1972, 1975).

Prior research had focused on the influence of how global dispositions, such as for example self-esteem, influenced different kinds of behaviors, why Fischbein and Ajzen questioned this methodology and suggested to direct the attention towards the specific behavior of interest to examine the determinants of it. The model pointed out a set of causal factors that could be used to explain and predict the majority of people's social behaviors. At the center of the model is *intention*, which is assumed to be the direct antecedent to *behavior* (Ajzen & Albarracín, 2007).

The theory of planned behavior is to this day widely used in several different streams of research and has been frequently applied in consumer behavior research, in context of the attitude behavior-gap and constitute a foundation for several theories touching on the same subject. Howard and Sheth (1969) developed the theory of buyer behavior in the late 1960's. The theory has since then evolved to become the primary consumer decision-model in the studying of consumer behavior and builds on the logic that consumers' purchasing behaviors are influenced by different inputs from external stimuli which forms the output, referring to the consumers' response. In between the inputs and outputs, closely related to foremost the outputs, there are the exogenous variables consisting of a number of different external variables that have a significant influence on buyers' purchasing decisions (Howard & Sheth, 1969).

1.3.2 The attitude behavior-gap

The discrepancy between attitude and behavior was examined by Guagnano, Stern & Dietz (1995) in connection to recycling through a sociological approach. The research found an inconsistency between attitude and behavior that laid the foundation for the attitude-behavior-context (ABC) model. The theory proposes that behaviors are a function of the inter-related outcome of attitudes and external conditions. (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz 1995) Further studies show that consumers that are strongly influenced by contextual factors may develop a positive attitude towards certain consumption and, as a result, engage in it with the aim to gain certain benefits (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Chang & Watchravesringkan, 2018).

The knowledge-attitude-behavior (KAB) model developed by Kallgren and Wood (1985) also maps out the relation between attitude and behavior, more specifically how attitudes form and how they influence behavior. The KAB-model proposes that consumers' attitudes are constructed from prior knowledge about the target subject. Taufique, Vocino and Polonsky (2017) argues that consumers' knowledge about the environment influences their decision-making and hence consumers' attitude towards the environment is a strong predictor of environmental behavior (Taufique, Vocino and Polonsky, 2017).

Dhir, Sadiq, Talwar, Sakashita & Kaur (2021) examined the relationship between environmental knowledge, attitude and pro-environmental consumption in the theoretical context of the KAB and ABC models. The study explicated the attitude-behavior gap by examining the drivers of green apparel buying behavior and the association of labelling desire and labelling satisfaction with this type of buying behavior. The findings concluded that green trust, environmental attitude and labelling satisfaction are positively associated with green apparel buying behavior. This follows from the finding that green trust, environmental concern, and environmental attitude partially mediate these associations. Moreover, age and gender moderated the association between environmental knowledge and environmental concern (Dhir et al., 2021).

Research on sustainable consumption has increased significantly in the last decade. Connell and Kozar (2014) provide an overview of the accumulated knowledge on sustainable clothing consumption and discuss the relation of consumers' engagement, attitudes, knowledge and consumption behavior. The authors state that environmental knowledge is an important predictor of sustainable consumption, but that knowledge has shown to not always translate into behavior. The conclusion indicates that researchers have different views on the relationship between attitudes, knowledge and behavior in connection to sustainable clothing consumption, but limited knowledge and lack of information in combination with social constructs could be vital barriers that restrict sustainable clothing consumption. Hence, the authors conclusively suggest further research on this discrepancy and the perceived barriers (Connell & Kozar, 2014).

McNeill and Moore (2015) provide an example of the above mentioned different views of the relationship between attitudes, knowledge and behavior among consumers in the fashion market. The authors address the conflict between fast fashion and sustainable fashion within consumers' desires and studies fashion consumers' attitudes towards sustainable products, buying ethical clothing and the subsequent behaviors. The authors categorize fashion consumers into three groups; *self consumers*, concerned with hedonistic needs, *social consumers*, concerned with social image and *sacrifice consumers* who strive to reduce their impact on the world. These groups have different attitudes toward fast fashion and sustainable consumption which indicate a varying importance of the barriers between them (McNeill & Moore 2015).

Adding to this, Jacobs, Petersen, Hörisch and Battenfeld (2018) support the notion of *self consumers*, that hedonic and egoistic values hinder consumers from purchasing sustainable apparel. Further, Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) found that the most important factor for consumers to reject sustainable apparel is price followed by limited information, communication and the credibility of these messages. Moreover, consumers expressed experienced inconvenience in finding ethical apparel complicating the process of changing their purchasing behavior (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

In connection to above mentioned *sacrifice consumers* (McNeill & Moore, 2015), Perry & Chung (2016) examined the attitude towards eco-apparel among established environmentally conscious consumers, focusing on the attitude-behavior gap and the benefit-behavior connections within eco-apparel. The findings resulted in the identification of two attitude-behavior gaps: one between environmental attitude and eco-apparel purchasing behavior and one between eco-apparel attitude and eco-apparel purchasing behavior.

Additionally, two benefit-behavior connections: *product* benefits and *emotional* benefits were found. The study revealed that the standards for consuming eco-apparel are the same as for purchasing regular clothes. Conclusively, attitude-behavior gaps exist even among aware consumers (Perry & Chung, 2016).

1.3.3 Identified gap

Conducted research within consumer behavior, the attitude behavior-gap and consumption of sustainable apparel is, as mentioned, dominated by positivistic, quantitative studies where the complexity of the consumer's mind is not covered in a fully satisfactory way (Taufique, Vocino and Polonsky, 2017; Jacobs, Petersen, Hörisch & Battenfeld, 2018; Dhir et al., 2021). Further, the theoretical frameworks used to analyze behavior has been limited to psychological, positivistic models that are designed to examine the attitude behavior-gap in different contexts (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Additionally, the theories that are treated above have developed into becoming a standard for research within this area (Katz, 1960; Howard & Sheth, 1967; Fischbein & Ajzen, 1967). The qualitative studies conducted in the area have further focused mainly on either consumers who are very into fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015) or the focus has been narrow on eco-apparel (Perry & Chung, 2016), making the prerequisites very specific and hence limits the transferability.

This leaves a gap in the existing literature on the attitude behavior-gap in the context of sustainable apparel consumption. We aim to fill this gap by contrasting previous research by using different theoretical perspectives from, in this context, unexplored areas to gain new insights. Additionally, we want to through thorough qualitative research, where the complexity of consumers' minds is considered, dig deeper into the question of *why* consumers do not behave in line with their attitude in the considered context.

1.4 Outline of Thesis

The outline of this study starts with an introductory part introducing the background to the chosen topic of the thesis. The background is followed by the research problem and purpose, research question and lastly an overview of the existing literature on the topic. The second part consists of a methodology chapter providing an overview and motivation of the methodological choices that have been made to conduct this research. The section covers the research philosophy, research design, method for data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, limitations and reflexivity, and lastly research ethics.

The third part covers the theoretical frameworks for the thesis. This part introduces the reader to existing theories and perspectives within the field of consumer behavior which later will constitute the foundation for the analysis of the collected data. The fourth chapter of the thesis presents the empirical findings followed by the analysis. This chapter is foremost based on the theoretical frameworks presented in the previous part of the thesis and the collected data. The discussion is presented in chapter five and includes a theoretical contribution followed by a discussion of the results. Lastly, we will conclude the key findings in a concluding part, presenting the conclusions in relation to the purpose and research question of this study followed by recommendations for practical implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Method

This section includes the methodological choices for this research. The chapter motivates why the chosen method was selected and what purpose it brings to the thesis. First, the research philosophy is presented followed by research design, sampling strategy and target group. This follows by data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations and reflexivity and lastly research ethics.

2.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy presents the ontological and epistemological reflection of this research. It is crucial to have knowledge about research philosophy to be able to identify different positions based on the purpose of the research.

2.1.1 Ontological Reflection

Ontology is a research philosophy raising questions about philosophical assumptions concerning the nature of reality including the researchers' view on it (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). There are four ontological positions within natural science: realism, relativism, internal realism and nominalism. Relativism, the chosen position for this research, is a philosophical position arguing that theories and assumptions can be true only in a limited sense. It is further argued that scientific laws are created by individuals and that people perceive things differently depending on different perspectives to perceive a phenomenon from (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018).

Within the social sciences, philosophers are mainly interested in individuals' behaviors and less in inanimate objects (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). We chose to base this research on the ontological position of relativism, since this study applies well to social science. This was mainly chosen since social science is concerned with people's behavior and hence the position is suitable for studying consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, the relativist stance assumes that scientific laws are designed by people since individuals hold various views and the facts depend on the observer. Our research aims to examine consumers' attitudes and behaviors in a sustainability context where there are no definite right or wrong answers. Instead, the focus is to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which makes the relativist position suitable for this thesis (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018).

2.1.2 Epistemological Reflection

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how we explore the physical and social world in different ways (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). It defines how people know the things they know through theories of knowledge. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2018) present two contrasting views within epistemology: positivism and social constructionism.

This research takes a social constructionist perspective since we consider it as better suited for this research examining consumers' experiences and different views on reality. The key idea of social constructionism refers to that reality is socially constructed and emphasizes how people give the world meaning through sharing experiences. To explain consumer behavior, we focus on the understanding of people's different experiences rather than emphasizing only external factors and fundamental laws. We agree with the social constructionist approach and its statements that people's actions and behaviors are designed by individuals' constructions of various situations, instead of direct responses to external stimuli. Further, the chosen approach is appropriate when conducting a qualitative study since the method is based on gathering data through open-ended questions and emerging approaches. Moreover, the sampling strategy within the chosen constructionist approach is known to consist of smaller numbers of cases selected for specific reasons and which this research will apply. To base the thesis on a social constructionist perspective gives us the possibility to bring forward the respondents' personal values and beliefs to examine the attitude and behavior towards apparel consumption in a sustainability context.

2.2 Research Design

Research design is a crucial part of a study describing the process behind the collected empirical data. It includes the choices that have been made treating the purpose of the research, what will be examined and how. Moreover, the chapter presents from where the empirical data has been gathered. The aim is to provide the answers we seek to answer the research question of the study. This subchapter presents the research approach, qualitative method, sampling strategy and target group.

2.2.1 Research Approach

This thesis takes an abductive research approach. An abductive research approach is a combination of an inductive and deductive approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). This approach provides flexibility and involves both empirical and theoretical material. The approach interplays between empirical data and theory, making it favorable when exploring new insights and examining consumer attitudes and behaviors (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

The aim of an abductive study is to understand and describe people's social life in terms of actors' motives and accounts belonging to the social life. In order to conduct this type of research we need to discover everyday meanings and motives of these actors. An abductive approach further takes peoples' construction of their social life into account and hence researchers need to understand how social actors create this social reality (Ong, 2012).

2.2.2 Qualitative Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research approach. As stated by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), qualitative research aims to understand the context of a phenomenon. In a qualitative study the ambition is to reach a deep understanding of a phenomenon that includes individuals' behaviors, attitudes, feelings, and perceptions through the collection of non-numerical data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

A qualitative methodology enables the possibility to capture complexities in a consumption context. We chose to reject a quantitative approach since we aim to reach a deep understanding of individuals' attitudes and behaviors, which we assumed is best answered by basing the study on qualitative semi-structured interviews. This facilitates the capture of underlying factors influencing consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability in the apparel market. A quantitative approach would have resulted in different outcomes since the methodology differs from the qualitative and observes a bigger emphasis on examining a larger group rather than deeply understanding consumers on a micro-level. Further, with semi-structured interviews the respondent gets a chance to speak more freely and hence provides insight into consumers' beliefs and values, increasing the chance of answering the research question of this thesis.

Lastly, this research stands from a consumer perspective and examines how consumers' attitudes influence their purchasing behavior concerning sustainability in the apparel market through gathering qualitative data that examines how consumers think, feel and how their attitude as well as behavior is influenced by different variables.

2.2.3 Sampling Strategy and Target Group

Consumers overall value sustainability and transparency more and more. However, the increase is especially significant among the younger audience, which is why we choose to focus on the younger group of generation Y (Rossi & Rivetti, 2020). Generation Y includes people born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). Generation Y are also called Millennials, and constitute 22 percent of the population with a high spending power of 30 percent of retail sales. Moreover, surveys have proved that 35 percent of the Millennials put a big emphasis on finding clothes considered to be sustainable or friendly towards the environment (Salfino, 2020). This research will target the lower range of generation Millennials to narrow down the chosen sample. The millennials are generally early adopters, meaning that they are open to change and likely to accept new innovations (Billing, 2019). Moreover, this generation has not only positive attitudes towards new inventions and sustainability, but they have also shown to be a segment valuing this topic higher than other generations (Rossi & Rivetti, 2020), which is the main reason to base our research on this target group. Choosing this sample for our study increases the possibility to gain rich empirical material since they are considered to be comfortable within the sustainable apparel context with an open-minded approach.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) emphasize the importance of defining a sampling strategy when creating a sample frame for research. Our selection of respondents is based on the requirements mentioned above to make sure that they meet the criteria. This is equal to a non-probability sampling, named purposive sampling strategy, meaning that we select participants who meet the criteria for our research. Therefore, participants not reaching the eligibility criteria have been rejected. Given that we already had an idea regarding the respondents and the purpose of the research, we considered a purposive sample strategy to be best suited for our study. Further, we chose to reject a probability sampling strategy and aimed for a controlled sampling process rather than a random sample where everyone has an equal chance of being selected (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Based on the above, we aimed for a selection of participants with differences in gender, age and occupation to open up for different and nuanced answers. To support the chosen direction regarding previously mentioned criteria we wanted to emphasize age since it can influence consumers' openness to technology and sustainability. We know that a younger audience is more tolerant towards new innovations and sustainable consumption, why age is included in the selection criteria for the participants (Rossi & Rivetti, 2020). Respondents can be influenced by external factors, as for example their prior knowledge, why occupation is also emphasized. Furthermore, aligned with a purposive sampling strategy, we chose younger participants and selected people we knew personally to some extent and which had a relatively open mind towards sustainability.

2.3 Data collection

The data collection section presents how the empirical data has been gathered. Both primary and secondary data have been used to collect material for the conduct of this study. This section includes information about semi-structured interviews, practical implementations and secondary data.

The primary data for this research consists of qualitative interviews. The aim is to gain full comprehension of consumers' overall attitudes and why their purchasing behaviors are not in line with their attitudes towards sustainable clothing consumption. A combination between primary data and secondary data is used to provide a nuanced analysis. The primary data collection is collected through semi-structured interviews providing the research with extensive, elaborative consumer insights in line with the qualitative methodology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

To complement the above-mentioned primary data, the research also includes secondary data. This data consists of document studies in the form of books, theories and previous research on the subject. The data provided our study with scientific data (secondary data) in combination with personal insights (primary data), increasing the authenticity of the research study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

2.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The purpose of the interviews is to examine how different variables influence consumers' overall attitude towards sustainability in the apparel market and how this further reflects their purchasing behavior. In the light of this, semi-structured interviews stand for the main part of the primary data to get insight and deep understanding in line with the above-mentioned purpose. Qualitative interviews are well suited when research aims to reach an in-depth understanding of respondents' worldview and to gain new insights about consumers' attitudes and behaviors. The interviews provide valuable understanding about the participants' experiences, beliefs and emotions surrounding the examined context.

The semi-structured interview technique is advantageous for this research since there is a clear purpose of the questions and, in contrast to a strictly structured interview technique, the main focus of interest lies in *why* and *how*, which is best favored through asking open-ended questions. The semi-structure allows the respondent to resonate freely and the interviewer can adapt the structure of the interview along with the discussion. This opens up for a deeper understanding of the respondents' view in line with the purpose of qualitative research.

To avoid bias is crucial when conducting interviews and can to some extent be achieved through using open questions since there is no right or wrong answer. Further, it is of importance that the questions do not steer the answers in a specific direction depending on the beliefs of the researchers which would be a risk of using an open structure. Connected to the above-mentioned, probes is another technique used when the researcher wants to improve the respondents' answers. This is used when researchers want to explore responses to specific alternatives. Probing can be advantageous when the respondents' answers need some clarification and to avoid bias and is hence enhanced when needed during the conduction of the interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Furthermore, we used a laddering up-and-down technique in our qualitative semi-structured interviews. Laddering up is achieved by asking *why* questions and gives the researcher a better understanding of the respondents' values (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The technique is common when conducting qualitative research since it provides nuance to the respondents' answers. It is important to emphasize common sense and sensitivity when using laddering up since the interview can fail if the researcher does not have enough knowledge. Laddering down aims for answers that illustrate examples and previous events of the respondents providing extended understanding of an individual's view on a specific construct. Combined, these techniques end up in a laddering up-and-down, meaning that the researcher jumps from ladder up to learn about the individual's values to then ladder down to explore the details that surround these preferences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The aim is to ask questions *why* consumers have a certain attitude towards sustainability in the apparel market, *how* this is explained, and *how* it further influences their purchasing behavior. When conducting the interviews, we used the laddering up technique and asked *why*-questions when we wanted clarification and elaboration on a given answer.

We furthermore followed up these ladder up questions with specific ladder down questions where the respondents got the opportunity to illustrate specific events and examples they had previously encountered (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We also tried to be attentive to *how* the respondents were answering. *How* they are expressing their statements is of importance since this can have an impact on the outcome.

Lastly, it is important that researchers throughout the interviews earn trust and use appropriate language and attitude throughout all interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). If a respondent experiences a lack of trust toward the interviewer, the risk arises that the person being interviewed provides answers they think are expected by them rather than the truth. We applied the above mentioned to our interviews and tried to make each participant trust us and the work we are doing to increase the possibility of capturing true, unbiased and in-depth answers from the respondents. Moreover, we met each participant with an appropriate attitude and language and further acted in a professional manner (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Above mentioned interview techniques as laddering up-and-down, probing and open questions are highly beneficial and provide our research with in-depth insights and ensures avoiding bias.

2.3.2 Transcription and Practical Implementation

To capture valuable information, the interviews were recorded so that we could listen to the recordings afterwards as well as to have the material easily accessible during the process. It is beneficial to record the interviews to be able to be present to a larger extent during the interviews and hence identify facial expressions, body language and other behaviors important for the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We decided to transcribe the interviews on a detailed level so that we could use exact quotations when conducting the analysis. On the other hand, there are disadvantages with recording to the research as well. A risk that arises with recording interviews and providing the participants with the knowledge that they will be recorded is that the respondents can feel restricted in what they say and hence result in dishonest answers. We avoided dishonest answers by informing each participant in advance that they will be recorded during the interview but that we will use pseudonyms when referring to their statements (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The interviews were conducted via zoom in respect to the ongoing pandemic. People may feel stressed by meeting physically since the Swedish recommendation is to avoid new contacts. We chose zoom-meetings with video since we still wanted the benefits and the feeling of a face-to-face interview. This provided us with the possibility to identify facial expressions and body language which can be important for the analysis. Moreover, to eliminate misunderstandings and allow the respondents to feel comfortable to speak freely, we decided to conduct the interviews in Swedish and translated them into English in retrospect. Further, we put a big emphasis on capturing all relevant statements and concepts the respondents gave on a micro level, so that the translation turned out as trustworthy as possible. The data collection resulted in a total of 105 pages of transcribed material.

The table below presents the 12 chosen respondents for this thesis.

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Duration	Date
Emma	Female	25	<i>Molecular biology PhD Student</i>	48 min	22/4 -2021
Eric	Male	27	<i>Electrician</i>	47 min	21/4 - 2021
Lovisa	Female	25	<i>E-commerce coordinator</i>	40 min	23/4 - 2021
Annie	Female	26	<i>Teacher student</i>	45 min	21/4 - 2021
William	Male	34	<i>General Practitioner</i>	42 min	1/5 - 2021
Julia	Female	28	<i>Brand manager</i>	49 min	27/4 - 2021
Erika	Female	30	<i>Teacher student</i>	61 min	29/4 - 2021
Anna	Female	25	<i>Accountant</i>	53 min	19/4 - 2021
Sophie	Female	24	<i>Molecular biology Master Student</i>	45 min	23/4 - 2021
Sara	Female	29	<i>Nurse</i>	42 min	24/4 - 2021
Adam	Male	24	<i>Chef</i>	41 min	26/4 - 2021
Nicole	Female	25	<i>Medicine student</i>	45 min	21/4 - 2021

2.3.3 Secondary data

The usage of secondary data means reanalysing previously collected data in earlier studies addressing other purposes (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Integrating secondary data in this research provides us with insights from already collected data from previous studies that lead us to exploring new insights and patterns within the chosen subject (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

In this research, the main secondary data consist of researchers' previous studies within the field of consumer attitude, behavior and sustainability in the apparel market. The validity, credibility and reliability of the chosen data is considered high since we use well known, peer reviewed databases when searching for secondary sources and use only sources with a higher number of citations in other studies.

2.4 Data Analysis

This chapter presents how we analyzed the collected data and how patterns and themes were identified through the process of collecting empirical material. After conducting the interviews, we transcribed and translated the collected material to get an overview of what had been said before sorting it into identified themes.

We chose to have an abductive approach when analyzing the gathered empirical material since we wanted to capture new and creative insights. The abductive analysis approach emphasizes to continuously work with theory during the research process and aim for creating unexplored theoretical insights. Further, an iterative interplay between existing theories and empirical data provides our research with novel insights (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

In combination with the abductive approach, we chose to include the concept of hermeneutics, which describes a certain way of interpreting and understanding. Hermeneutics is based on how people interpret things, and researchers further state the close connection between interpretation and understanding when conducting a study. There is a strong emphasis on the parts and the whole of something. The key concept of this is that you can not understand the divided parts if you can not see the whole of something, and you can not understand the whole if you can not see the parts alone. This is named the hermeneutic circle (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). Hermeneutics were used to facilitate the interpretations and understandings of this research. We worked extensively with the circle and interpreted the idea in our study. We aimed to increase the understanding of consumers' attitudes and the influence of this in their purchasing behavior. The reasons behind the attitudes can be seen as the different parts through a hermeneutic perspective, whilst the whole is referred to as a contribution to understanding the overall behavior of consumers purchasing patterns in the apparel market.

Before analyzing the gathered material researchers have to organize the collected data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). When entering the section of analysis, data reduction is the first step analyzing the empirical material. It includes the process of selecting, coding and categorizing the empirical material. The different ways of presenting data are called data display and include quotes, graphs, or charts which illustrate patterns which facilitates the understanding of the presented data. Data displays can help the researcher make conclusions based on the patterns in the reduced data set (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Sekaran and Bougie (2016) discussed the concepts of coding and categorization in the process of data reduction. Coding refers to an analytic process where the researcher reduces, rearranges and integrates collected data to design theory. When sorting the gathered material, we marked and commented statements we considered to be of greater interest, recurring or in other ways important for the context of this research. To code the collected data facilitated the process of drawing conclusions in the analysis. Further, we categorized the coded parts into different themes that were later used as a framework for the theoretical analysis. After coding and categorizing the empirical data, we identified valuable recurring patterns and themes that were representative for this research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Through framing we found various ways of understanding the gathered data. The concept of framing refers to “frame” the data in different ways that will later shape the analysis and the overall understanding of the empirical material. All of the conducted interviews were transcribed to get an overview of the different themes and discourses the respondents expressed when discussing the attitude behavior-gap in regard to sustainable apparel consumption. The interviews can be analyzed through a micro-frame perspective resulting in more detailed findings, or a wider frame meaning a more panoramic view. The analysis of this research focuses on a narrower micro-frame perspective to capture consumers' beliefs and values that reflects their attitudes and behaviors (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

2.5 Trustworthiness

In order to structure and conduct trustworthy qualitative research it is important to contemplate credibility and transferability throughout the whole research process. Guba and Lincoln (1982) introduced the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in relation to quality and trustworthiness in a qualitative study. Credibility determines how credible the research is and how researchers study the reality. This further enhances researchers' awareness that individuals perceive reality in different ways since there is more than only one sole reality and that this needs to be taken into account. When conducting the interviews, we aimed to capture the reality of each participant to increase the credibility of the study. Semi-structured interviews fit the purpose of answering the qualitative question of *why* consumers' behaviors do not mirror their attitudes when it comes to sustainable apparel consumption. The purpose of this is to gain insight and deep understanding of the underlying constructs that influence people's consumption processes. Further, semi-structured interviews open up for reflection without leading the respondents in any direction increasing the possibility of capturing individuals' different realities. Our sample of respondents had different experiences, backgrounds and ages which gave us broader perspectives and increased the credibility of our presented findings.

Transferability refers to the extent of which the findings can be applicable in other contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). We used a purposive sampling strategy for this research, meaning that we did not choose respondents randomly. The target group of this study is the younger part of generation Y consumers with different knowledge and gender, leading to findings that are generalizable over this age group but not to a wider population. However, since generation Y is a group of individuals that generally are more adaptive and aware of environmental issues than, for example, older generations it could be argued that this harm the transferability of the findings in a wider context. The presented theoretical models of this study can be transferred to other contexts than examining consumers attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability, meaning that the transferability increases.

Dependability treats consistency in the findings of a research based on data collection or analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In other words, dependability depends on whether the results of a study would remain the same, or potentially turn out different if the study was repeated. It is important to have in consideration the impact of random factors that affect the results in a research and consequently characterize a second research differently. This research involves the gathering of qualitative data based on consumer attitudes and hence the results may change over time due to flexibility and adaptivity.

Confirmability is a concept presented by Guba and Lincoln (1982) and is, in other words, the same as objectivity. When conducting qualitative research, it is crucial to be objective and not let subjectivity influence the findings. We had this in mind throughout the whole research process to avoid bias. The interview questions were structured in an objective way, leaving space for the respondent to be transparent in their answers. As researchers we kept the questions closely to the interview script so that the objectivity remained high.

2.6 Limitations and reflexivity

The research was limited to a short time frame and narrow scope in terms of a limited number of pages. In respect to these limitations the study includes a limited number of interview respondents, restricting the generalizability of the study. The focus group of this study is young Swedish consumers from generation Y. Consequently, a bigger, more differentiated sample at a different time could generate findings different from ours. In regard to this being a qualitative study, we wanted to bring forward that a quantitative study could give rise to other results due to focus on a broader scope which generates more generalizable, however narrower, research findings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018).

Another limitation of this research was the complexity of separation between attitude and behavior. The focus of this study was to examine consumer attitudes and the barriers hindering them from acting in line with these attitudes. However, it can be problematic to ask consumers about behavior due to the risk of them giving the answers they think we want or the answers they perceive that their ideal self would have. On the other hand, this research builds from transparency that we already know that consumers do not follow their attitudes, leading to more truthful responses. Furthermore, the interviews were constructed to make the consumers feel comfortable with reasoning about their thoughts and feelings, and since they were aware of the premises and the purpose of the interview, they knew that there are no right or wrong answers and that they would not be judged.

Reflexivity emphasizes awareness and openness from the researcher while conducting empirical, qualitative research. To be reflexive is vital to minimize the risk that the researcher's underlying assumptions influence the results and hence harm the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of a study (Haynes, 2012). Reflexivity has been contemplated through the whole process of this research, expectations and assumptions were left aside and we kept an open mind to be able to see every detail and all connections.

Further, we enhanced critical thinking and reasoning to attain a nuanced analysis and a deeper understanding of the examined phenomenon. We remained neutral and objective throughout the writing process and constantly reflected, criticized and reasoned to reach the best possible conclusions and outcome of the research without influencing it with our previous experiences or assumptions (Haynes, 2012).

2.7 Research Ethics

When conducting a research, it is essential to identify and enhance ethical principles. Common ethical issues are how to treat the participants of the study including how we protect their interest. A main ethical principle is to avoid harm for the participants. Harm could be factors such as stress and anxiety which we took into account when including participants in our study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The ongoing pandemic causes stress and anxiety of meeting people physically for some individuals. We had respect for this ethical issue and came up with a digital solution, conducting the interviews through zoom. This generated rich interviews very similar to physical ones while simultaneously having respect for the prevailing restrictions and peoples will to avoid physical contacts. Regarding the confidentiality of the participants provided information we followed ethical codes to ensure a maintained confidentiality throughout the research. To achieve this, we made sure to inform the respondents about how the information from their interviews would be handled and also ensured that the statements they provided us with would be used only for a research purpose (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We put a big emphasis on ensuring that the participants felt safe and had the possibility to ask us questions to avoid misunderstandings and insecurities throughout the process.

We started by introducing briefly what the study was going to cover and the purpose of the interviews. It was essential to do this in an organized way since we had to avoid revealing too much in detail to avoid bias among the respondents. Since we audio-recorded the interviews to enable fair transcriptions, we had to confirm that the participants consented to being recorded. Moreover, we informed them that the recorded material would be treated with confidentiality, and that only we, the researchers of the paper, and potentially our supervisor would listen to the recordings. Further, we aimed to increase the possibility of receiving honest and rich answers by informing the participants about the high level of anonymity. This contributes to making the respondents feel safe to express themselves since their real names would not be exposed, but instead replaced by pseudonyms. Additionally, we offered all respondents to look through what their participation resulted in. Lastly, we made sure to have an open and friendly approach towards the participants and made sure they felt comfortable to let us know if something did not feel right, respecting their personal will and value. Finally, these precautions resulted in that we got all the participants' consent for this research paper.

3. Theory

This chapter presents the chosen theories and models which later constitutes the theoretical framework and a foundation for the analysis of the gathered data. The literature explained in this section constructs the theoretical contribution to the understanding of consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability in the apparel market.

3.1 Rationale behind the chosen theories

This research is based on theories that act as foundations for analyzing the empirical material and to further answer the purpose and research question of this study. We chose to emphasize a consumer culture perspective and combine this with elements from a sociological and psychological perspective to gain a rich understanding from various perspectives. The choice to combine theories from several different fields within the social sciences provides the research with valuable nuance and depth enabling for new interesting findings within the studied context.

We have chosen to base the main part of our research on four specific theories emerging from the field of consumer behavior, sociology and psychology to capture a comprehensive understanding of the attitude behavior-gap. The first concept presents different types of consumer cynicism, explaining how consumers tend to act against their own moral enlightenment. Bertilsson (2015), Sloterdijk (1987) and Odu and Pechpeyrou (2010) add on the psychological concept of cynicism, presenting different perceptions and understandings of the subject which will help us capture the gap in consumers' attitudes and behaviors.

The second chosen concept is focused on identity construction and how consumers create an identity and social belonging through their consumption. This concept is useful to understand how consumers create their identity through their belongings, how they identify themselves and others, but also which symbolic value they assign their possessions. Belk, (1988), introduced the concept of possessions as an extended self, and Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1998) presented habitus and different types of capital. This provides us an extensive understanding of consumers' identity construction, which is beneficial when answering our research question.

The third theory is the cognitive dissonance theory that first emerged within psychology. Cognitive dissonance is useful to understand how individuals aim to reach harmony and minimize inconsistencies between their attitude and behavior. Festinger (1967) developed the theory, complementing this, we bring in insights from Aronsson (1969) and Cooper (1999) to capture the subject in a wider extent.

The last theory we considered to be useful in answering the research question is locus of control, developed and mainly described by Rotter (1966). The motivator for choosing this theory was that it facilitates the understanding of consumers' beliefs regarding their perception of the control they have of their actions and the outcomes of them, or if they perceive events beyond their personal control to have a bigger impact on the outcomes.

To sum up, we consider each of the chosen theories to be beneficial in the study of the attitude behavior-gap in a sustainable apparel context. Each of the theories provides valuable insights, and foremost, the combination of them helps us to capture different perspectives and essential findings for our analysis.

3.2 Consumer cynicism

Cynicism was in ancient Greece defined as “the government of self” but has in modern society developed into aiming at a more negative definition describing the attitude that comes from the belief that people are only interested in themselves. This suspicion leads to distrust towards the underlying motives of the messenger (Odou & Pechpeyrou, 2010). Cynicism is widely studied across different disciplines and contexts. In marketing studies, and mainly within the field of consumer culture theory, the main focus has been on consumer cynicism related to distrust in advertising and skepticism towards brands’ marketing (Chylinski & Chu, 2010). Consumer cynicism constructs a defensive psychological tool that consumers develop to protect themselves from brands’ constant attempts to persuade them to consume. In contrast to its milder form, skepticism, cynicism is not only aimed at the message but also towards the source of the message. In the case of consumer cynicism, the source often consists of a brand (Odou & Pechpeyrou, 2010).

Odou and Pechpeyrou (2010) constituted a conceptual deconstruction of consumer cynicism by comparing the contemporary meaning of cynicism with the original definition of cynicism and contrasted the psychological and the philosophical approach to cynicism from each other. This resulted in the distinction of four different models of consumption related to cynicism. Two of these models are relevant and hence used in this research, *defensive cynicism* and *offensive cynicism*. These two models refer to the suspicion towards marketing techniques, while the other two models, *subversive cynicism* and *ethical cynicism* construct reminiscences of cynicism from Ancient Greece and take a different perspective by questioning consumer ideology (Odou & Pechpeyrou, 2010).

Defensive consumer cynicism relates to the mental defense consumers develop towards marketing stimuli (Odou & Pechpeyrou, 2010). This distrust is a consequence of consumers’ fear of being misled by brands’ marketing based on the awareness of brands’ selfish intentions to profit. These general beliefs have emerged from repeated negative experiences from consumption and are known as marketplace metacognitions. Metacognitions help consumers stay observant of brands’ attempts to persuade them and consequently they become able to resist them. Defensive consumer cynicism leads to a loop where brands’ experience a need to camouflage their advertisement, which in turn leads to consumers becoming even more cynical towards their marketing. Additionally, this kind of cynicism leads to consumers treating all brands’ equally irrespective of if the actual brand has provided a reason to distrust or not (Odou & Pechpeyrou, 2010).

Offensive cynicism refers to when consumers engage in the game on the market by applying a strategy built on the same logic to look for their own interest and gain much to a minimized cost in their own consumption (Oudou & Pechpeyrou, 2010). Through taking advantage of brands' marketing efforts and offers including promotions, cashback systems and free trials they aim to profit as much as possible before they become fooled by brands' marketing. This enhances consumption opportunism and an opportunistic exploitation of the market where the premise is that everyone cares about their own interests and plays by the same rules instead of seeking protection from manipulation (Oudou & Pechpeyrou, 2010).

In complement to these cynical practises, Bertilsson (2015) examined modern cynicism among consumers in connection to fashion brands, stating that consumers perform what he names *modern cynicism* relating to the form cynicism where consumers consciously act against their own stated morals. Modern cynicism follows as a consequence of the pressure from conflicting moral demands that society and consumer culture put on individual consumers. This contrasts to the older views on cynicism where the function of it was to resist the market and may instead enhance and reproduce the contemporary consumer market ideology since consumers consciously act opposite from what they know and believe (Bertilsson, 2015).

Bertilsson (2015) highlights three different cynical discourses that consumers practice. The first displays *cynicism toward the market* where enlightened consumers show a disbelief of the morality in brands and branding. Second, there is a consumer *cynicism towards other consumers* questioning their morality. Lastly, consumers practice *cynicism towards the self* through a reflexive disbelief in their own moral enlightenment (Bertilsson, 2015). Conclusively, modern consumer cynicism derives from a disbelief in the morality of different subjects, including not only brands and the market ideology as is the case for defensive and offensive cynicism, but also other consumers and even the self.

Further, Bertilsson (2015) draws on Sloterdijk's (1987) work where it is argued that consumers ignore the consequences and continue to consume in the same manner with false consciousness and a cynical distance based on the idea that if they resist "*others would do it anyway, perhaps worse*" (Sloterdijk, 1987). Sloterdijk's (1987) view on consumer morality assumes that consumers have realized that their enlightenment and critique against the ideological system on the market does not change it, and hence they continue to act against their better knowledge.

These cynicism models are a suitable theoretical framework for this research since the data collection revealed recurring tendencies to cynicism. To identify, examine and hence develop a deeper understanding of these cynical attitudes and practices helps us understand how consumers construct cynical attitudes and behaviors and the consequences they lead to. This is relevant since different expressions of cynicism potentially contribute to the identified attitude behavior-gap related to sustainability in the apparel market.

3.3 Identity construction

Belk (1988) claims that in modern society consumption has become a crucial part of consumers' identity construction. Hence, to fully understand consumer behavior there is a need to have knowledge about the meanings that consumers link to their possessions. Belk (1988) developed the theory of individuals' extended self, which means the possessions an individual posits become a part of their identity. The concept of the extended self is a contribution to consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different products. An individual's extended self can include external material objects as well as persons, places and group possessions as family and friends. Individuals repeatedly use consumption objects to define family and other groups. People create a sense of belonging through the sharing of mutual consumption symbols, which is a way for individuals to define and express a group they belong to. Further, people in our surroundings are important as they reflect how we perceive ourselves (Belk, 1988).

Clothing serves as a "second skin" that reflects who we are and decides how other people may see us (Belk, 1988). Possessions as clothes are used as a tool to express ourselves and further as an attempt to achieve accomplishments, happiness and remind us of memories and previous experiences (Belk, 1988). An external object is a self-extension as long as the owner maintains an identity in the specific thing and retains a mark in it. Belk (1988) states three ways to incorporate possessions into the extended self, meaning that these objects are a part of the self. (1) Possessions we control for personal use, including clothes. (2) People form the object itself and illustrate the associations between mental creations and the individual, which includes the process of buying an object. (3) Knowing the object. Clothes are a way of expressing identity and belonging to certain groups (Belk, 1988).

Further, Belk (1988) argues that consumers who share clothes with each other can be seen as sharing identity since the individual has incorporated the self into the object. Individuals are not only using possessions to express who they are, also objects can reflect their owner. Objects have the authority to tell things about the possessor, and moreover act as evidence of seeing possessions as symbols of the self. Possessions differ in importance depending on how central they are to the self. Belk (1988) refers to this as multiple levels of the self. Possessions are visualized as layers around the core self, meaning that the constellation of layers differ depending on the individual, life cycle and culture that share symbolic meanings for various objects (Belk, 1988).

McNeill (2018) states that clothing acts as a self-representation and is used to form how other people perceive the individual, as well as how the individual perceives herself. Aligned with Belk's (1988) concept of identity construction, McNeill (2018) claims that individuals' belongings, such as clothes, can symbolize their definition of who they are and who they want to be. Clothing can further be used as a symbol to express a social belonging, to gain approval from a favorable group or to establish personal status.

McCracken and Roth (1989) argue that clothes have certain codes and constitute a way of communicating. The codes of clothing can express social information about their owner and send out messages about their identity and belonging. There are certain artifacts representing different things depending on the social group and individuals further have to consume these to be perceived as a member of that group (McCracken & Roth, 1989).

Symbolic meaning is the value assigned to a product to describe the importance of the possession and moreover to define the owner. Individuals assign a symbolic value to products they want to be associated with and communicate their identity and belonging through symbolism. Often symbolic values derive from their association with different social roles, meaning that symbols differ depending on context (Solomon & Assael, 1987).

A well known concept by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) is the key concept of habitus. He defines habitus as “*an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted; the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others*” (Pierre Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu means that people's behavior, thoughts and opinions are structurally contingent. Depending on the individual's surroundings, both social environment and the physical environment the individual has been exposed to, people form different attitudes which constitute their *habitus*. People have different experiences and various environments meaning that habitus is not constant, but instead continually changing. An individual's social environment is the one with the biggest influence on habitus, and hence hard to change. The environment a person is growing up in, is setting the foundation for their habitus. Bourdieu claims that some social environments have a bigger impact on habitus and that a change of scenery can influence individuals' approach to different things (Broady, 1991).

Beyond individuals' habitus, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) continued with developing a theory of capital and class distinction including three types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. The latter refers to membership and belonging in other groups. Social capital is closely linked to people's network and relationships often through recognition or symbolic exchanges. The network considered to be an individual's social capital could be friends, family or another similar group of people. Cultural capital is referred to as three forms. The first one is the *embodied* state: the influences from the individual's environment and the norms of the society. The second form of cultural capital is the *objectified* state: the materialistic resources an individual has access to. The possessions can be highly requested goods with a high sentimental value, meaning the economic value is insignificant in this context. Lastly the *institutionalized* state means educational qualification as diplomas and credentials (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is referred to as materialistic possessions “*immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights*” (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) has also included symbolic capital in his concept of different forms of capital. Symbolic capital can occur in all forms presented above, as long as it is represented or apprehended symbolically in different contexts (Bourdieu, 1986). Recognition is the key factor of symbolic capital, meaning symbols are given a value when recognition exists. Symbolic capital can express prestige, renown, reputation and authority (Bourdieu, 1998). Shared meanings, understandings and recognition by others is what gives something value and legitimation. It refers to the value people are giving a certain thing, which further generates power and status. According to Bourdieu, high social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital means the individual has higher status than a person having low engagement in all of the three different capitals (Bourdieu, 1986).

3.4 Cognitive dissonance theory

The theory of cognitive dissonance was developed by the social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1957 and is to this day a widely used theory across different contexts and has through recurring testing proven to remain strong and relevant. The theory builds on the conception that humans strive towards consistency within themselves. Attitudes, beliefs and opinions tend to be clustered together, coexisting in internal consistency. This consistency is called consonance. When there are exceptions from this, for example when someone continues to smoke knowing how bad it is for their health, they experience an uncomfortable inconsistency called *cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957).

The theory of cognitive dissonance builds on this psychology and describes the motivation that arises when people experience the unpleasant cognitive dissonance between their own different beliefs and behaviors, what is referred to as cognitions. The psychological tension of cognitive dissonance leads to the individual wanting to change one of the elements that are inconsistent, or add another, to minimize the perceived dissonance or restore consonance to achieve a feeling of harmony (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015). One example of this is when an individual is faced with a choice between several desirable opinions and after the choice is made have a tendency to justify it by pointing out benefits with the chosen alternative and highlight the negative aspects of the rejected alternatives.

It has further been discussed by researchers that cognitive inconsistencies have different significance depending on the context, where discrepancies within the self cause more cognitive dissonance than other inconsistencies (Aronsson, 1969). In other words, cognitive dissonance seems to be strong when an individual experiences a discrepancy between their own expectations of the self to be good and make rational decisions and their actual behavior that does not match. Some scholars claim that those with higher self-esteem are more resistant to the effects of cognitive dissonance since they more likely tend to focus on their other strengths. Aronsson (1969) tested if the theory of cognitive dissonance played a bigger role in cognitions regarding the self and concluded: “*at the very heart of dissonance theory, where it makes its clearest and neatest prediction, we are not dealing with just any two cognitions; rather we are usually dealing with the self-concept and cognitions about some behavior. If dissonance exists it is because the individual’s behavior is inconsistent with his self-concept*” (Aronsson, 1969).

Other research implies that cognitive dissonance occurs only when individuals perceive that their behavior leads to aversive consequences (Cooper & Worchel, 1970). In other words, if there is an inconsistency between the outcome of a specific behavior and the standard that it is compared to, people experience cognitive dissonance (Cooper, 1999). This concludes that in contexts where the comparing standard is personal the view of the self is critical, while in contexts where the standard is based on bigger, normative standards the self is less important (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015).

However, the theory of cognitive dissonance has been broadly used for many years and the theory has been confirmed by repeated studies making its impact distinct. This theory contributes with interesting perspectives to our research since it contrasts conventional knowledge that behavior is subsequent to attitudes by distinguishing conditions under which the opposite, attitudes follow from behavior, appear (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015).

3.5 Internal/external locus of control of reinforcement.

The theory of internal/external locus of control of reinforcement was first developed in 1966 by the psychologist Julian B. Rotter (1966) and is considered to be an important aspect of people's personality. Locus of control refers to an individual's perceptions of the underlying cause of events in their life. In short, the belief of whether they control their own destiny or if external forces do it for them. These forces may consist of fate, God or just powerful others such as the government. In this context, reinforcement bridges behavioral and cognitive psychology and refers to rewards and punishments (Rotter, 1966).

Rotter's (1966) view of this was that rewards and punishments widely direct individuals' behavior and hence characterize the beliefs that people hold about what controls their actions. As a consequence, these beliefs guide the attitudes and behaviors individuals adopt. This is a consistent approach within psychology and is commonly divided into internal and external locus of control. Philip Zimbardo (1985), a well-known psychologist described the range of internal and external locus of control as follows:

"A locus of control orientation is a belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or on events outside our personal control (external control orientation)." (Zimbardo, 1985, p. 275)

In other words, individuals that hold an orientation of external control believe that their behavior is decided by external forces such as society, fate or luck. On the other hand, people that are internally oriented in this sense believe that their behavior is guided based on their own internal decisions or efforts. Locus of control was by Forte (2005) named to be a factor that influences individuals' moral maturity in ethical decision making. People that are externally oriented tend to assume that ethical dilemmas, such as environmental impact, are beyond their area of control. On the contrary, individuals that are oriented to have an internal locus of control believe that their actions can make a difference, which is why they are more likely to make ethical decisions than those with an external locus of control (Singhapakdi and Vitell, 1991).

4. Empirical Findings & Analysis

This chapter will present the empirical findings of the gathered material which consisted of 12 semi structured interviews. We further analyzed the collected material with support of the presented theories in the theoretical chapter. Three themes emerged from the collected data: defeatism, hierarchy of priorities and self-preservation. These theoretical constructs inform us of why and how consumers do not behave according to their enlightenment attitudes and construct the three main barriers, also identified as the gap, between attitude and behavior concerning sustainability in the apparel market. Further, these themes have guided us through the process of analysing the gathered data and the identification of interesting patterns and enriching perspectives. Here, they further function as a framework for the structure of our analysis, aid the understanding of different phenomena and provide context for the following discussion of our findings.

4.1 Defeatism

The first theme we identified from the results of our data collection was that the respondents express a sense of defeatism when it comes to sustainability in the apparel market. By defeatism, we refer to the melancholic attitude and acceptance of being defeated. The respondents resign from trying to do anything about the matter as they already deem the battle lost. They motivate this melancholic attitude towards the situation by explaining that they do not believe that the small things they as individuals can make any difference. This contradicts what Giesler and Veresiu's (2014) research found concerning governmentality and that the market actively creates moral consumer subjects. The creation process fails since our respondents display that consumers are not convinced to become morally responsible when they do not perceive that it matters.

4.1.1 Inferiority complex

The general defeatism expressed by the respondents was recurrently motivated by reasoning that individuals are too small to make a difference in the big market context and hence it does not matter what single individuals do. Eric expressed an general feeling of defeatism, inferiority and hopelessness when asked what he does to be more sustainable:

“I do not do very much. I have a hard time seeing that what I do will make any difference on the whole.” - Eric, 27

The identified defeatism is expressed in different ways and contexts. In the example above, Eric senses that his behavior as an individual does not make a difference on the whole, and hence it does not matter if he will change his behavior or not. It was frequently recurring throughout the interviews that the respondents perceive that individual consumers are too small in the whole context of sustainability, explaining that there is no reason for them to change their own behavior because it does not make a difference anyway. Consumers feel betrayed by the market system that is built from mass production and mass consumption and instead they resign.

This is opposed to Giesler and Veresiu's (2014) argumentation suggesting that consumers may act sustainably responsible if they adopt such a consumer subjectivity. This was often expressed in connection to the perception that big companies do not do their part to contribute, and hence people wonder why it matters what individuals do. Sara's statement exemplifies this attitude:

"Sometimes it feels a little pointless to try to make an effort. For example, I try to not use plastic bags when I buy groceries, but at the same time almost everything in the store is already packed in plastic. I do not feel like it matters if I take a plastic bag or not when everything I put in it is covered in plastic anyway." - Sara, 29

This way of reasoning relates to Sloterdijk's (1987) view on cynicism and the belief that you as an individual could just as well continue to consume unsustainably because if you do not, someone else will and perhaps even worse. Correspondingly to modern cynicism, as Bertilsson (2015) describes it, this kind of scepticism is aimed at different subjects where individuals resonate that if no one else makes an effort, they do not have to either. This transfer of responsibility is partially displayed towards other consumers, indicating cynicism towards other consumers and questioning of their moral enlightenment in line with Bertilsson's (2015) view on modern cynicism towards others. Further, the respondents show a tendency to, once again, think that they as single individuals have too little power to have an impact that will make a real difference regarding a big issue like sustainability. Annie resonates in line with this modern cynicism towards other consumers relating to Bertilsson's (2015) argument about moral disbelief towards others, and about being alone in making a change:

"I think that it is hard to find the motivation when I do not see a change among others as well." - Annie, 26

Annie's statement displays both a cynicism towards other consumers and a sense that your own effort alone is worth little on the big whole. This further indicates that people are averse to feeling like they sacrifice something if they have the perception that others do not do the same sacrifice. According to Belk (1988) being part of a collective or a group is a big part of people's identity and the extended self. It seems fairer to make an effort collectively and not miss out on something when someone else can still have it and continue to consume without sacrificing anything. Adam provided a clear description of this perception:

"I also feel that the majority of people need to think sustainably if there is going to be a change. I can contribute, but it is not very motivating if you try to change yourself but see that others do not care at all." - Adam, 24

Adam put words on the feeling that if others do not care, you do not want to make a sacrifice either. People want to make a change collectively and not feel like they are the only ones taking responsibility to do better. This further relates to the question of who is responsible for making changes to minimize the environmental impact that consumption leads to.

This question is something that is brought up frequently throughout our interviews, and the respondents commonly put the responsibility to change sustainability within the apparel market on brands and legislators instead of consumers and their consumption habits. On the other side, brands and legislators try to make consumers responsible (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014) and hence nothing happens. The respondents generally motivate their reasoning through arguing that brands and industries have a much bigger impact than consumers. Eric problematizes the responsibility question by stating:

“I do not think the responsibility lies on the consumer. It is in the hands of big companies and legislators to develop a sustainable industry. There are industries that have the same amount of emissions as one whole country of consumers.” - Eric, 27

To, as this citation demonstrates, completely disregard consumers' responsibility within sustainability and put brands and legislators as solely responsible to make a change is a distinct example of *locus of control*. Individuals perceive that they have close to no power of the situation and consequently remove their own authority of the issue and hence minimize their perceived guilt. The transfer of responsibility is sprung from the perception that the individual is too small in the whole context to be able to make a difference. This transferring of responsibility demonstrates what is referred to as an external control orientation. This orientation describes individuals who perceive that they have no power over the outcome of certain events, in this case environmental impact. Hence, these individuals transfer the responsibility to control the outcome to external forces, such as brands and legislators in this context.

4.1.2 Distrust towards the market

In connection to the shift of responsibility and blame, the respondents recurrently throughout the interviews expressed a lack of trust towards brands' sustainability work. This distrust was expressed both towards the actual actions, but also towards brands in general. This is in line with Bertilsson's (2015) reasoning that consumers develop a cynicism towards brands based on the distrust towards their claims and actions. Many respondents further expressed scepticism towards the impact that the sustainability work and actions that brands engage in really result in, displaying defeatism through questioning the meaning of it. Sophie formulates her concern:

“I see that some brands promote that they use sustainable or recycled materials, but I feel like that represents 1% of everything they produce. Still, they let that take so much space in their communication, even though it does not really make a big difference. I am skeptical...” - Sophie, 24

Sophie's statement is directed at the impact of the brand's sustainability actions. However, in line with what Odou and Pechpeyrou (2010) argue regarding defensive cynicism towards brands, the respondents also transferred this cynicism towards the brands and their moral intentions.

This defensive cynicism and distrust towards brands' true intentions was further in some cases mentioned in a defeatist context. The respondents expressed a scepticism towards brands' morals, stating that brands only care about making profit and have no true sustainability intentions. Sara is one of the respondents that expressed a low trust in brands and scepticism towards their moral intentions:

“When I see that something is marketed as sustainable, I think they do it because they want to sell more, not because they actually care.” - Sara, 29

Similar statements were repeated by several of the respondents, displaying that consumers do not only distrust the impact of their actions, but transfer this distrust towards the messenger and question the brand's moral intentions confirming Bertilsson's (2015) findings. Additionally, the respondents' personal statements resulted in an existing distrust which seems to contaminate whole industries based on consumers previous experience from brands within it. Further, these claims enhance the defeatist belief that consumer's efforts to consume more sustainably does not matter, not even if they consume clothes that are labelled as sustainable. This is a consequence of the widespread cynicism towards brands which results in consumers stop trying, they declare themselves to be defeated. Further, when we followed up these claims of distrust by questioning what the brands could do to change consumers' sceptic perception, we received defeatist answers like:

“I do not know, really. There is too much that has to be changed. I think it would be very hard.” - Sophie, 24

Sophie's statement illustrates a cynicism and defeatism that was consistently revealed throughout our interviews. This defeatism has come to be aimed towards the whole market system, the respondents reason that the issue is too big and hence they give up. The interviews further revealed that consumers feel trapped in the market system, they feel exploited by marketing and enhance that they have no choice to stop consuming, even if they do not trust the industry. This could be related to Max Weber's description of the iron cage or Yiannis Gabriel's extension of Weber's concept using glass cages and glass palaces as metaphors for consumer's captivity on the market (Gabriel, 2005). To exemplify this, William stated that our whole society depends on consumption:

“Our whole society is built from, and depends on, consumption. And cost minimization usually comes before sustainability.” - William, 34

William highlights the issue that, in a competitive market, price and costs will always have great importance and consequently be prioritized before sustainability by both brands and consumers. He further claims cost and price to be intervening factors to consumers' distrust towards brands and a reason that consumers keep on consuming from brands they do not trust.

Correspondingly, Eric raises the issue that clothing prices have been pushed too low, resulting in that brands' exploit the whole production process:

“It is too cheap to consume today, and therefore we will continue to consume too much. People will always be egoistic and prioritize money. Even if people pretend like that is not the case, I think it always is in the end. I think it should be more expensive to consume, in that way brands could afford a more sustainable production and consumers would consume less.” - Eric, 27

Eric blames the market for the sustainability issues and displays a sense that consumers are victims of the market system, why brands have to take responsibility to change the structure of the whole industry. Through this, Eric provides a clear example of the iron or glass cage that visualizes that consumers are trapped in the market system (Gabriel, 2005). Moreover, this way of reasoning enhances the cynical, defeatist view and further transfers the responsibility to the industry in line with the external locus of control orientation as described by Rotter (1966). Sophie also touches upon consumers exposure when asked if shopping could be justified in any case:

“I do not think that we can blame everything on the individual. Brands market fast fashion, encourage consumption and sell clothes very cheaply. I have read that clothing prices have not adjusted to the inflation as other products have. Today you can buy clothes for almost no money. I do not think we can blame everyone in society either. For example, teenagers want to have nice clothes and have very little money, of course they will turn to fast fashion brands. I can not blame them and say that they are bad because of that.” - Sophie, 24

Sophie's reasoning enhances the complexity of the sustainability issue in the apparel market and the different shifts of responsibility and the blame game that is going on in the market between consumers and brands. Conclusively, through the lens of defensive and modern cynicism (Sloterdijk, 1987; Bertilsson, 2015), we identified a sense of defeatism based on the perception that the sustainability issue is too big for consumers to be able to make a difference. This has resulted in consumers feeling like they have no power to change the situation, in other words, many consumers have an external control orientation in the context of sustainability in the apparel market (Rotter, 1966). As a consequence, these consumers distance themselves from the responsibility to change into developing more sustainable consumption patterns and use it as an excuse to not consume according to their genuine attitude. At the same time, consumers blame brands and brands blame consumers, resulting in that no one changes.

4.2 Hierarchy of Priorities

The second identified theme considers consumers' priorities regarding consumption and sustainability in the apparel market. This theme was identified from the data collection's reflections of the things our participants valued higher in their consumption choices in the apparel market and how they made connections between sustainable consumption patterns and identity work. The theme captures how consumers prioritize and create a hierarchy concerning their priorities in consumption choices.

4.2.1 Social belonging and symbolic apparel consumption

Consumers' social belongings and symbolic apparel consumption saturated the findings of this research. A recurring pattern was that consumers prioritized their consumption based on what message the clothes they use mediates and how it is expressed in social belongings. Our respondents highlighted the importance of being approved by a favorable group or using clothes to symbolize a specific thing, often influencing their prioritization towards certain apparel.

Belk claims that consumers construct their identity through belongings. McNeill (2018) and McCracken and Roth (1989) further introduces concepts of symbolism and communicating one's value through the codes of clothing. This is confirmed by Sara's statement:

“Clothes to a great extent show who you are and say a lot about people. To be able to be comfortable in your clothes, and show who you are through it, it requires buying things to express it to your surroundings.” - Sara, 29

McCracken and Roth (1989) argue that clothes have the power to reveal the identity of the consumer and what message they want to mediate. Sara indicates that clothes can help individuals to communicate and hence the never-ending consumption cycle is important. Through her statement, Sara identifies the symbolism within consumption in the apparel market, further confirmed by McNeill's (2018) concept where clothes act as self-representations to show other people who you are. Moreover, clothes as objects of symbolism can reveal not only your identity but also your social belonging. There is a will to identify as part of a certain favorable group of people and clothes function as a tool to gain approval. The concept of expressing social belonging through clothes and symbols were repeatedly expressed by the majority of our participants in this research:

“You express yourself by dressing as a specific group of people. You express a form of social standing. For example, if you buy second hand clothes, the probability increases that you are a sustainable person caring about the environment.” - William, 34

Above William indicates that symbols can be used to reveal the social group the consumer would like to be identified with. Some clothes have associations with a certain behavior or a specific identity. William reveals that he has preconceptions about how some people behave or act based on their clothes and group belongings.

Adam agrees with this implying:

“A person who is “green” acts in a certain way and dresses in a certain way. In many cases, we have learned to recognize this. I believe that we can see if a person cares about the environment based on their clothes, and the individual probably wants to convey the same message to us and wants to be perceived in that way, hence they buy clothes associated with sustainability.” - Adam, 24

From our data collection, we identified that individuals perceive other people in certain ways depending on what they wear or which social group they identify with. These perceptions align with Belk’s theory describing that possessions become a part of the self. In this context, clothes act as an extension of people, reflecting who they are, where they belong, and what social standing they have in society. Moreover, objects as clothes can also help reveal a person's identity and values as was confirmed by William and Adam in the cited statements above. Belk (1988) further claims that possessions can tell much about an individual which William displays by stating that consumers who consume second hand probably are environmentally friendly consumers.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital and the objectified state is saturating the majority of the conducted interviews for this research. A person's dressing style and clothes conduct a form of materialistic resource or possession. Possessions can, according to Bourdieu (1986), have a high sentimental value to individuals, regardless of the actual economic value. This can further be translated into consumers choosing a certain style or certain clothes. The majority of our respondents mentioned that clothes are a way of expressing yourself, and to have certain clothes, as second hand clothes, defines a person. Most of the participants also mentioned that people who value the environment highly probably put a higher value into clothes that are friendly to the environment, such as second hand clothes. This can be confirmed by Julia:

“You can express a lot through just your clothes. For example, there is a certain group of people who care much more about our environment, act sustainable and buy second hand. For them, the clothes and their actions have a certain value. Then there is another group of people that do not care as much, which reflects their unsustainable actions.” - Julia, 28

Belk (1988), McCracken and Roth (1989), and McNeill (2018) use concepts of symbolism and symbolic possessions to explain consumer behavior in a consumption context. Bourdieu (1986) adds on the concept of symbolism with the concept of symbolic capital. He states that recognition is the key factor to symbolic possessions, creating shared values and understandings.

Erika provides an example of how symbolism interacts with clothes, consumption as well as McCracken and Roth's (1989) codes of clothing:

“Consumption relates to identity, for example through being interested in fashion and wearing specific clothes that represent a certain style or group. Then there are different dress codes in different professions which also affect the individual and you can identify someone by looking at what they are wearing.” - Erika, 30

This statement confirms both McCracken and Roth's (1989) concept determining that clothing has certain codes, as well as Bourdieu's (1986) symbolic capital. Clothes can sometimes reflect more than symbols, and more specifically express social standing and status. Erika further expresses a recognition factor where people have learned to identify others through their use of symbols and in this case objects as clothes. This can result in that a person is given more or less power and status based on the observer and their view on symbols. If mutual, shared meanings and understandings occur, the possibility of putting the observed individual in a higher status level arises subconsciously.

Moreover, Erika mentions that some professions or groups of people have different dress codes and that wearing certain clothes represents the population of that specific group or profession. This makes it easier for people to identify others through clothes and how individuals use clothes as symbols. Bourdieu (1998) argues that high symbolic capital generates *“prestige, renown, reputation and authority”*, which could be the case when Erika mentions “professions” as an explanation to people's view on symbols and consumption. An addition to these connections is Julia's agreement on giving a certain profession prestige and authority based on clothing:

“Then there are the so-called “costume gnomes” who are considered more snobbish and some, including myself, may associate them with being successful and not as sustainable.” - Julia, 28

It comes clear that Julia gives individuals wearing suits a specific quality, in this case, being “successful”. The suit could be a symbol that the person wearing it chose to express success, authority, and status just like Julia connected it to. She further mentioned that people may associate them with success, but not with sustainability. One explanation to this could be that sustainability is associated with other things than suits. This opened up for a broader perspective, entering the field of an individual's social and environmental influence and how this connects to social belonging and symbolism.

4.2.2 Social and environmental influence

The majority of the participants in our interviews mentioned that their views on sustainable apparel purchases have changed over time. Almost everyone stated that they act more sustainable today than before, due to their increased knowledge and awareness. Despite this, many of them do not perceive themselves as sustainable individuals. Bourdieu (1977) argues that, even if it is not done easily, habitus can change over time. The change of habitus is a long process since habitus is something that emerges within individuals from an early age. Sophie gave an example of how shifts in society affect consumers' consumption patterns and attitude towards status and symbols. This explains an emerging change in habitus, a gradual process over years of change in a dynamic age and stage of life that Sophie is in:

"[...] Now there are so many more hip places where you can buy second hand pieces. There are so many options and there are also many influencers who now promote it, so it has become much cooler. Before, second hand was more associated with poverty. Today, the perception has changed into something cooler and reflects that you are conscious and cool." - Sophie, 24

As Julia earlier mentioned about norms, society's norms could have changed to explain Sophie's statement above. All of the participants stated that society has changed and is now more open to a sustainable approach than ever before. Consumers nowadays are more informed and aware of the environmental impact their consumption has as confirmed by the participants. Sophie means that today a sustainable approach and second hand shopping is a cool thing reflecting the individual. Belk (1988) agrees that the life cycle influences people's possessions and the constellation of layers around the core self. Nicole gives an example of the connection between status and sustainable consumption:

"It also becomes a status thing. You do not want to buy something that is not sustainable because today sustainability has become a status symbol in many contexts." - Nicole, 25

Nicole further adds on her statement about status:

"It provides status to buy sustainable clothes in many groups and then you do it because it gives you status in that group, but also in terms of being considered a conscious and smart person. People who consume sustainably can in some contexts be considered as educated, aware and perhaps also as having a good economy as sustainable products usually are a little more expensive, and not everyone chooses sustainably over price." - Nicole, 25

Nicole argues that sustainable products give the consumer status in some groups which further confirms the previous statement that the norms of society could have changed. According to McCracken and Roth (1989) consumers must consume certain things to be approved by a group.

As Nicole states, to be approved in a group where the members care for the environment, the individual must act in a certain way. To buy sustainable products to a greater extent can in some groups signal that the individual is conscious but also wealthy, as Nicole expresses. Through the usage of recognized and accepted symbols, one can express group membership and identity. Further, society and norms play a big part in identity construction. What society accepts as normal and not constructs the foundation for consumers' perceptions in a sustainable apparel context.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the majority of the participants admitted some kind of influence that mirrored their consumption patterns. Many of the respondents also stated that their views on consumption and sustainability have changed over time, especially since they got older or moved away from home. They further stated that they had also changed some of their habits from their childhood according to their changed view or enlightenment such as the usage of plastic bags or recycling. However, the external influence from their environment, childhood, friends, and family were distinct. Here we also identified a parallel to Belk's concept (1986) of external influences regarding influence from other people in the consumer's surroundings.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory about cultural capital is further applicable in this context. We connect consumers' social influence and their consumption patterns with the help of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and the embodied state. Particularly one of our participants, Anna, emphasized that her sustainable consumption behavior has been influenced by her family since a young age, connecting to her habitus. She argued that she thinks more sustainably in certain exemplified situations and gave her parents credit for that. Further, adding to Anna's statement, the objectified state within the field of cultural capital is applicable, as well as the symbolic capital. Anna mentioned that parts of her sustainable thinking come from the fact that her family often bought sustainable products in her childhood. The sustainable products Anna buys today can hence also posit sentimental value to her, functioning as a motivator to why she continues to engage in these consumption patterns. Another interviewee, Julia, agrees on the fact that external influence is a big part of consumer behavior:

“I also believe in society's norms. I feel that there is an influence, perhaps even a pressure, in some groups and circles of friends to dress in a certain way or to have and express distinct opinions about sustainable clothing consumption.” - Julia, 28

Julia says that she believes in the norms of society and that the influence from groups in individuals' environments plays a big role and affects her actions. This statement is in line with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and the embodied state. Bourdieu (1986) argues that external influence contributes to the creation of cultural capital which Julia enhances.

Erika also agrees that external influence is important and play a big role, she emphasized the influence from society and her own social environment:

“It mainly depends on what society looks like and what is circulating around me, what my life looks like at the moment, and how the people in my environment behave. External influences from different directions have a big impact.” - Erika, 30

Further, Erika told us about the different stages in life, how it has changed and how the environment has influenced her in various ways:

“Through different periods or stages in life I have consumed different types of clothes depending on the lifestyle I had at the time.” - Erika, 30

The influence of habitus is distinct in this case. Bourdieu (1977) means that people form their habitus based on their social environment. Habitus is considered to be consistent, often emerging from the individual's childhood, but in some cases, habitus can change over a longer period of time. Even though Bourdieu (1977) states that a potential change of habitus is a slow process, Erika could have experienced a bigger change over a longer period of time. Habitus can potentially further affect people's approach to the environment and to their clothing consumption, meaning that they are influenced to consume more or less sustainably. This type of influence and change of consumption patterns over time, can result in consumers' changing their style and reasoning depending on their values at the time and which degree of influence they have been exposed to. This further demands an understanding of consumers' perceptions about style and identity and how this takes an expression in a sustainable consumption context.

4.2.3 Style and identity over sustainable consumption

We identified style as a major motivator to why consumers do not purchase sustainable apparel to the extent they claim they would like. Nicole exemplified her prioritizations regarding sustainability and apparel consumption:

“When I enter a store and I'm about to purchase clothes, I do not think of sustainability at all. I base my purchase decisions on what I think is nice and trendy.” - Nicole, 25

Nicole gave us a clear example of what she prioritizes when purchasing apparel. She reveals that sustainability is not of great importance for her, but the appearance of the clothes is what she prioritizes over making a sustainable purchase. This supports Belk's (1988) statement that possessions are part of the individual's extended self, meaning they put a value in their belongings depending on how important they perceive them to be to their actual or ideal self.

The majority of the respondents agree with Nicole, and state that style in combination with identity are of bigger importance than purchasing sustainable clothing. It is recurring in the interviews that the individuals want to reflect themselves in a controlled way through their consumption and choice of clothes. For them, this part is crucial, and the sustainable part often falls in the shadow of this process. McNeill (2018) supports the respondents' arguments through a statement of self-representation. Further, Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self could also explain consumers' view on identity and consumption using objects as an extension of themselves to define their identity. William exemplifies this through the statement:

"Today, society is built from buying what you think looks good, [...] which means that in many cases sustainability is not prioritized." - William, 34

William emphasizes the importance of window dressing in different contexts. People's consumption is controlled by the look of something and to be approved, which may harm sustainability. The majority of the participants of this research agree with William's statement, increasing the credibility that this is something that is part of a collective structure in society. Anna confirms the importance of style and identity:

"[...] if the item you are searching for is not available sustainably, I believe that style and identity comes first." - Anna, 25

Anna's statement above proves what the others mentioned that sustainability is not prioritized even though all of the respondents stated that it is crucial for society and our planet. All of the 12 participants answered that sustainable thinking in an apparel context is crucial and that they try to do their best to contribute to something good. On the other hand, the same individuals stated that they sometimes act egoistic and choose a piece that looks nicer and gives them a certain image than choosing a sustainably produced piece. Anna further gives a clear example:

"[...] the reason I consume is for my own sake and my own interest. It is selfish, but if I were to consume for someone else's interest, I would rather just not consume at all then." - Anna, 25

We had respondents stating that they believe people overall, and themselves sometimes, consume to boost their self-esteem. As Anna above answered, she consumes for her own sake which Nicole also answered:

"Consumption is a way to feel good about myself. That you dress for your own sake. I don't feel good about myself when I wear something I don't think is nice. It boosts my self-esteem. For our mental health, I can defend shopping and say that it is good for us. Studies have shown that people who look "good" are treated better. This includes clothes." - Nicole, 25

The respondents further answered that their knowledge about sustainability in the apparel market has increased lately thanks to the changing norms in society that have made sustainability an accepted and favorable outcome in consumption contexts. Even though society is changing, consumers have revealed a passive behavior where they prioritize themselves and their self-representation over sustainability and their better knowledge, showing signs of modern cynicism. Almost all of the respondents revealed an overall positive attitude towards sustainability in the apparel market, but simultaneously many of them did not act according to their perceptions. Some of them motivated their discrepancy in attitude and behavior by answering that they value style and identity higher and further, because of this, revealed an indirect resistance to changing their behavior since they want to sacrifice as little as possible. This is shown in Erika's statement:

"I would have had to change my whole personality and my identity if I would start buying second hand for example, and I will not go that far. I think my personality and identity is more important to me than consuming sustainably, and I do not want to change that." - Erika, 30

To sum up the hierarchy of priorities part of the study, we can see clear examples of how consumers prioritize when making an apparel purchase. What becomes evident is that consumers value style and identity higher than sustainability in an apparel context. Another thing the respondents revealed was that social belonging and social influence are things that consumers value higher than sustainable apparel. The findings show that consumers struggle with sacrifices, meaning they do not want to give up their personal style, image, group membership, or ego.

4.3 Self-preservation

The interviews revealed that consumers use different strategies to preserve and defend themselves and their behavior. The perceived need for self-preservation springs from above-described defeatism, selfish prioritization and cognitive dissonance that consumers experience when they act opposed to their own moral and better knowledge. This self-preservation is implemented through various strategies that are used externally and internally through blame and compensation. By blaming others, consumers remove themselves from the responsibility to act more sustainably because they perceive that brands and legislators should take a bigger responsibility. At the same time, they point out that others, brands or consumers, are just as bad to justify their own misaligned behavior. Moreover, through compensational thinking they shift focus from what they do badly by highlighting what they do better. These self-preserving strategies are important to look good externally, but foremost internally to reduce the unpleasant cognitive dissonance they experience from acting against their own better knowledge and hence maintain their self-image as responsible and good individuals.

4.3.1 Blame and compensation

The transfer of responsibility and blaming of other parties described above is additionally used as an internal coping mechanism by individuals who experience an uncomfortable psychological tension, cognitive dissonance, when they perceive themselves to be cynical and not act according to their own beliefs (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015). When people experience this inconsistency, they want to either change one of the cognitions or compensate by adding another to reach internal consistency and hence a feeling of harmony (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015).

Aronsson (1968) pointed out that some of these perceived inconsistencies seem to be more significant than others. Inconsistencies where an individual's self-concept, their own expectations of themselves to be good and make rational decisions, and their actual behavior does not match the perceived cognitive dissonance is stronger. This is applicable to our interviewees as they question their own moral, in other words defensive cynicism towards the self. They all express their beliefs enhancing the importance of sustainability within consumption, but realize that they do not act accordingly when it comes to apparel consumption, resulting in the unpleasant feeling of cognitive dissonance and consequently a motivation to reduce the inconsistency as described by Cooper and Carlsmith (2015).

One way to minimize the inconsistency is to, as exemplified earlier, reject the responsibility by claiming that they would not make a difference anyway. It becomes a defense to disregard one's own power of the situation and blame something external, instead of facing the dissonance and contribute in the ways it is possible. This defeatism dominated our respondents' views on sustainability within the apparel market and was used in several contexts throughout the interviews. Sara describes her view on sustainability and responsibility when asked about what she does to consume more sustainably:

“I do not think it will make a very big difference what consumers do if there is no difference on a higher level. There has to be more demands put on whole industries and legislations.” - Sara, 29

Sara copes with the cognitive dissonance she experiences through justifying it by claiming that it would not affect anything if she should make different choices, this resonates with an external locus of control orientation in line with Rotter's (1966) reasoning and further confirms the seeking for internal harmony in line with Cooper and Carlsmith's (2015) argumentation. To justify decisions that people feel uncertain about in retrospect is a common strategy to reduce cognitive dissonance (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015).

On the contrary to this kind of defeatism, a few of the respondents explained that they do small things to contribute and reasoned that it is better if everyone does something than to not do anything at all. One of the more positivistic respondents Emma explained her view on this:

“Everyone consumes something almost every day of our lives. Even if we change the smallest things it will add up and make a big difference all together in the long run.” - Emma, 25

This example can also be derived to cognitive dissonance through that Emma justifies her own not so sustainable decisions through stating that it is better to do something small than to not do anything at all. This strategy to reduce the perceived cognitive dissonance helps Emma to perceive herself and her view of her identity as a responsible individual and is in line with Aronsson’s (1969) finding that cognitive dissonance surrounding the self is perceived to be very strong. Additionally, the majority of our respondents, defeatist or not, followed up their statements where they conceded that they did not consume sustainably in some regard by adding a perspective of where they perceived themselves to be sustainable. They become pragmatic and resonate that bad behaviors can be compensated by other good behaviors in order to reduce the dissonance and preserve themselves. In other words, they could not directly state that they are “bad” without claiming that they are not *only* bad. This is clearly exemplified through several statements from the data collection, for instance Erika explained:

“Yes, I buy new clothes occasionally, and that is not very sustainable. But I choose to buy ecological food and I go by public transport even if I have a car. I recycle even though it is a bit more complicated because I know it is better.” - Erika, 30

This compensational reasoning is a recurring pattern that follows as a consequence of the cognitive dissonance that arises within the respondents and is an example of adding another cognition aiming to create consonance. These different strategies to minimize and reduce cognitive dissonance are all methods helping the individual to continue to consume opposed to their beliefs without feeling bad about themselves and preserve their self-view (Aronsson, (1969). Through avoiding the cognitive dissonance that occurs from consuming unsustainable fashion although it is not in line with their attitude, consumers lack real motivation to really change their consumption habits.

4.3.2 Justification and whitewashing

We finished all of our interviews by asking the respondents straight out if they consider that they behave in line with their attitude regarding sustainability within the apparel market. We received mixed answers on this question, but the most commonly recurring response was that the individuals expressed that they did not think so, followed by an explanation of why they did not consume according to their beliefs.

This reasoning is displayed by, inter alia, Lovisa:

“No, my behavior does not really match my beliefs. Much because of financial reasons, because I like fashion and I consume more than I should. I usually think fast fashion looks better and it is cheaper. But my opinion is still that I care, I think that others should consume as sustainable as they can, but I am not there at the moment. I have no problem with choosing sustainably when it comes to food, transport etc. but fashion is extra hard for me.” - Lovisa, 25

It is clear in Lovisa’s statement that she struggles internally with her prioritizations. She thinks that sustainability is important on the whole, and she wants to do better, but other attributes are more important to her and hence she experiences cognitive dissonance. This confirms Sloterdijk’s (1987) interpretation that the prioritization of other needs and attributes such as status make consumers act against better knowledge. She defends her cynical decisions, that she consumes against her own enlightenment, by stating that she does not have the financial resources for that right now, something that is also recurring throughout our interviews. Through claiming that you do not have enough money to consume sustainable fashion you disregard yourself from that responsibility and come closer to consonance, internal harmony.

In contrast, we also received some answers where the respondents considered themselves to follow their attitude. These explanations to a great extent comprised the reasoning that they at least did not pretend or claim that they consumed sustainable clothing, why they considered themselves to follow their attitude. Emma was one of the respondents that resonated like this:

“I think I follow my attitude. I think about it sometimes and I think that feels good if everyone does something small. I do not identify myself as a person who thinks so much about sustainability, and therefore I think I follow my attitude. But of course, I could be doing more, and maybe I will when I finish my studies and have more money. I do not know, I have no plans to change right now though.” - Emma, 25

Emma makes it clear here that she thinks she follows her own attitude, not because she is very sustainable, but because she *knows* that she is not. At least she is enlightened that she acts opposed to her own better knowledge, as emphasized by Bertilsson (2015). Further, she displays that she feels some kind of anxiety surrounding it anyway through stating that she could have done more, and that maybe she will in the future. As discussed earlier, this explanation, compensational and pragmatic reasoning is a strategy to defend herself from the cognitive dissonance she experiences through admitting that she consumes unsustainably in line with Festinger’s (1957) view. By claiming that she knows that she could do more, and that she will try to do so in the future, she accepts the inconsistency of acting against her own better knowledge on the condition that she will do better in the future. This is hence a clear example of modern cynicism where consumers consciously act against their own better knowledge (Bertilsson, 2015) and defend themselves from cognitive dissonance through compensational thinking (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015).

In these statements the respondents admit their cynicism and cognitive dissonance showing that they are, or become throughout the interview, aware of their inconsistent behavior in line with Bertilsson's (2015) view on modern cynicism. However, they feel a need to explain or defend their answer to not feel bad about themselves due to their inconsistent behavior (Aronsson, 1969) by explaining why they are not as bad as it may appear. This is a clear example of Sloterdijk's (1987) description of cynicism as the respondents admit that they consciously act against their enlightenment and better knowledge and use other, more important attributes as an explanation for this behavior.

This is also a form of defense and a way to try to reduce the perceived dissonance, by explaining that they are at least aware that they are doing something wrong and not hypocritical enough to pretend that they are better than they are confirming the findings of Cooper and Carlsmith (2015) and Bertilsson (2015). Through adding reasons to why they are not only bad, they reduce the dissonance that arises from the recognition that they are cynical and hence they come closer to internal consonance and harmony. To reduce the unpleasant cognitive dissonance makes it easier for the respondents to consciously proceed and consume opposed to their attitude, because they are enlightened about their own behavior (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015; Bertilsson, 2015).

Further, our respondents repeatedly highlighted that consumption has its' upsides as well. In addition to that it brings joy and that clothes are an important attribute people use to express themselves, some of our respondents mentioned that it is a responsibility to consume since our society depends on it. This view confirms the idea of the iron cage metaphor that Max Weber (Gabriel, 2005) used to describe that consumers are trapped by the market system, it is their responsibility to consume. Not only benefits in our modern society were raised, but also the fact that fashion consumption contributes to job opportunities in less fortunate countries. Erika discussed this:

"I do not want my clothes to contribute to the fact that workers get exploited and are forced to live and work under horrible conditions. But if my clothing consumption can contribute and make a family in a less fortunate country able to put food on the table every day, that is a good thing that we should not forget." - Erika, 30

Above mentioned and displayed reasoning is another example of compensational thinking reducing the cognitive dissonance of fashion consumption. To emphasize that it is important to continue to consume and also that consumption leads to positive changes in other parts of the world makes consumers feel better about themselves and their consumption habits as they are contributing to the better good, confirming Aronsson (1969) and Cooper and Carlsmith's (2015) arguments on cognitive dissonance.

Conclusively, consumers who consciously act contrary to their own beliefs often experience an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance. To reduce the inconsistency and feel aligned with their beliefs they use different strategies to feel internally balanced and, in that way, avoid changing their behavior, which is more of a struggle. This defense is to a great extent practiced because of the internal inconsistency and for the individuals' own sake to preserve their self-perception, in line with Aronsson's (1969) idea that cognitive dissonance surrounding the self is perceived worse than in other contexts. However, there is also an interest in portraying yourself in a good light externally, something that will be further discussed.

5. Discussion & Theoretical Contribution

This chapter highlights interesting findings from the analysis and connects these findings to previous research. We will discuss the relevant topics presented in this study and present how our findings and insights resulted in a new theoretical model visualizing the attitude behavior-gap in the context of sustainability in the apparel market.

5.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research aimed to examine the identified gap between consumers' attitudes and behaviors concerning sustainability in the apparel market. We identified a gap in the already conducted previous research of this area. The existing literature was dominated by quantitative, positivistic research that did not fully capture the complexity of consumers' minds and behaviors. Based on this, our research adds nuance and deeper understanding in the reasons behind why consumers' attitudes and behaviors are misaligned when it comes to sustainability within apparel consumption. The qualitative data collection from 12 semi structured interviews resulted in both confirmations and contradictions to previous research's findings. The data was analyzed through the lens of our chosen theoretical framework and resulted in the identification of three different themes that construct barriers between attitude and behavior. These themes conduct our contribution in the explanation of the reasons behind the misalignments that create the attitude behavior-gap surrounding sustainability in the apparel market. The three themes are *defeatism*, *hierarchy of priorities* and *self-preservation*.

The distinguishment of these three themes enables us to provide a theoretical model visualizing the findings of this research. The model is illustrated below in *Figure 1. Triad of Misalignment*. The three themes represent the mainly recurring patterns that the respondents expressed in our data collection, explaining the barriers between attitude and behavior. The first identified theme *defeatism* connects to consumer cynicism and external locus of control orientation and describes consumers' perception that they have no power to contribute to sustainability in the apparel market and that their actions are meaningless. Defeatism consequently results in that consumers continue to, in line with cynicism, act against better knowledge and often justify it through defeatistic reasoning and one or several of the identified *self-preservation* strategies. This perception is based on the fact that the issue of sustainability is abstract and too big for individual consumers to have an impact on. Consequently, consumers claim that the responsibility to change lies in the hands of brands and legislators and hence distance themselves from the responsibility burden and consequently blame other actors. On the other hand, the market tries to create responsible consumer subjects who should take the responsibility burden to consumers more sustainably. This blame game between actors on the market results in that nothing really happens because no one changes. Further, this defeatism and cynicism is manifested towards other consumers as well, motivated by the cynical reasoning that even if they do not consume unsustainably someone else will. This reasoning results in consumers resigning from the responsibility to change their consumption habits and declare themselves defeated by the market and stuck in its iron cage.

The second theme *hierarchy of priorities* brings up consumers' prioritization that hinders them from making sustainable clothing consumption choices, with the main focus on identity construction through clothing. This is closely connected to the *self-preservation* theme and constitutes one of the strategies that the respondents engaged in to defend and justify unsustainable consumption choices. The responding consumers express selfish needs that they prioritize above sustainability aspects and hence they choose to keep consuming fast fashion. These needs include to express individual identity through style and clothing as well as dressing to be part of, and accepted by, a group through following trends or consuming certain brands and products. Our model suggests that consumers use *self-preservation* to support their claims, stating that identity plays a bigger role than sustainability in an apparel context and consequently is prioritized higher.

The last theme *self-preservation* represents the different strategies that consumers use to defend themselves internally and externally. The need for defense springs from the realization of their own misalignment between internal beliefs and actual behavior and the unpleasant cognitive dissonance it evokes. To not perceive themselves, or be perceived by others, as hypocrites consumers apply different strategies to minimize the cognitive dissonance the inconsistency evokes. To reduce the dissonance, they add something else to balance it out and create consistency resulting in internal harmony. The strategies identified from our data was for example that the respondents, when they admitted that they did not act very sustainably in the apparel market, always followed up by adding that they purchased ecological food or recycled. They could not state that they were bad in one sense without explaining that they were not *only* bad. Additionally, this theme includes the transferring of responsibility connected to *defeatism* and that is used as a coping mechanism where consumers distance themselves from the responsibility to change and hence, they do not feel as bad about themselves.

Conclusively, the three identified themes construct a barrier between consumers' attitudes and behaviors connected to sustainability in the apparel market. Our model illustrates this process and demonstrates how *defeatism* leads to *self-preservation* and the close relationship between *self-preservation* and *hierarchy of priorities* and how they further influence each other.

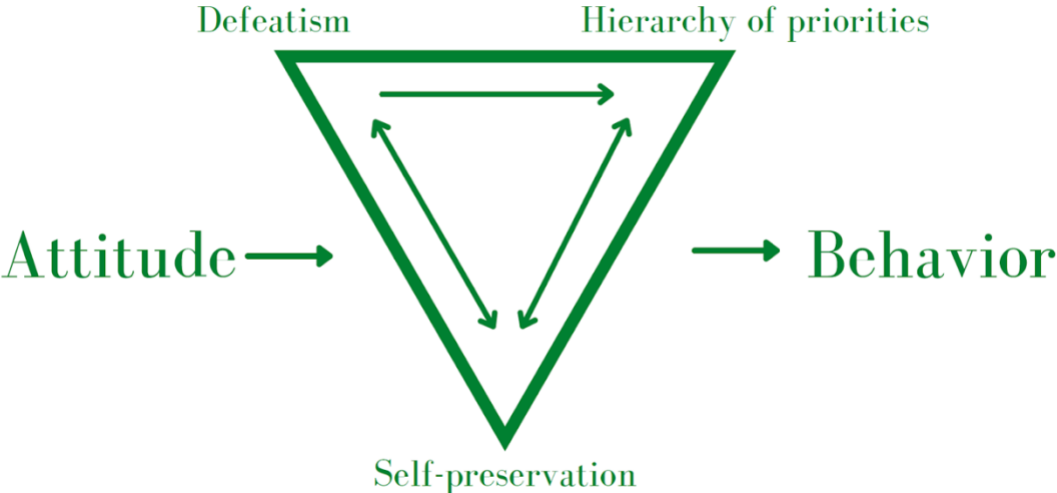


Figure 1. Triad of Misalignment

5.2 Discussion

By conducting a qualitative in-depth study examining the reasons behind the inconsistencies between consumers' attitudes and behaviors, we have advanced and added to previous research on the attitude behavior-gap that, to a majority, was quantitatively oriented. We have conducted deeper qualitative research examining consumers' view on the studied area. Further, a theoretical framework consisting of theories from several different research fields within the social sciences enabled us to see new things from different perspectives. Moreover, the qualitative studies previously conducted in this context have focused mainly on either consumers who are very into fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015) or the focus has been narrow on eco-apparel (Perry & Chung, 2016), making our study unique by bringing a broader scope of consumers. This different approach resulted in unique findings that can be generalized and applied to understand the attitude behavior-gap generally in several different consumption contexts.

The main findings consist of three, connected to each other, identified barriers that together construct the attitude behavior-gap and have been summarised in our model *Triad of Misalignment*. These barriers provide an explanation to why consumers, despite increased knowledge and positive attitudes towards sustainability, do not act accordingly. Moreover, the analysis revealed findings both confirming and contradicting previous research within the area.

New findings that this research has generated, include the fact that consumers are less averse to changing their habits than previous research has stated (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Moreover, the results contradict previous research by revealing that consumers do not perceive inconvenience of sustainable alternatives to be a barrier restricting them from making more sustainable consumption choices. Additionally, we see an emerging shift in the status of sustainable apparel, such as second hand, that will potentially change the future of this market and consequently reduce the perceived price barrier that previous research has found to restrict consumers from purchasing sustainable apparel options (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). The following chapter will further discuss in detail how our findings and suggested model contribute to previous research of the attitude behavior-gap.

5.2.1 External Influences

The collected empirical material for this research resulted in findings that confirm previous research, but also findings that contradict it. The result confirms that consumers' attitudes are influenced by both internal and external factors that reflect their behavior. One commonly recurring finding connected to internal and external influence was that consumers perceive symbols to be an important factor influencing their consumption choices. The collected data revealed that consumers often use clothes as symbols to express themselves and their belonging to certain social groups in society. This applies to their identification of others as well, as it is stated that clothing symbolises and reflects a person's identity.

The collected empirical material in this study consequently supports Cova's (1997) argument that the links that a consumed good implies are more important than the actual product itself, and Belk's (1988) explanation of possessions as an important part of the extended self. These links are especially important in societal contexts, where consumers are able to express different things depending on the value they provide the link of the specific object.

Further, the findings revealed that consumers depend much on society and societal norms and, to varying degrees, feel controlled by society in their consumption behavior and what is acceptable and not. This confirms Wiederhold and Martinez's (2018) argument that consumer behavior emerges from different social contexts. Moreover, this is applicable to Fischbein and Ajzen's (1967, 1972, 1975) *theory of planned behavior* since the theory is based on the notion that consumers' intentions decide when consumers go through with a purchase.

Intentions are influenced by different factors, one of them being social norms. Further, this is influenced by social class and the restriction of sustainable apparel behavior in favor of becoming a member of a desired group. This aligns with Howard and Sheth's (1969) research about consumer buyer behavior, presenting different inputs from external stimuli such as symbolic and social inputs that influence and create the output, consumers' buying behavior. On the other hand, some contradictions raised from the empirical material where consumers stated that they indirectly, through the use of different symbols, consumed to be approved in society and by specific groups. In this case, the statement about consuming for their own sake becomes weaker. This confirms previous research about social consumers where the consumers feel controlled by external influences, such as the social environment, and want to achieve a favorable social image (McNeill & Moore 2015).

The empirical material revealed other findings that both agreed with and contradicted previous research such as Feldmann and Hamm's (2015), and Chang and Watchravesringkan's (2018) studies regarding consumers influence by contextual factors. Their arguments were based on the notion that consumers develop positive attitudes influenced by contextual factors, and that this results in consumers engaging in certain consumption behaviors. Our findings are somewhat misaligned, in half of the cases we found that consumers are influenced by contextual factors, but that the engagement level sustainable apparel consumption remains low. In other cases, we found that some individuals consume sustainable clothing to gain benefits such as being considered as conscious consumers and gain status. The latter aligns with Feldmann and Hamm's (2015), and Chang and Watchravesringkan's (2018) studies, while the first finding somewhat contradicts them.

Katz's (1960) *functional theory of attitudes* aligns with the statement above in the sense that the utilitarian function of consumer attitudes refers to that consumers form their consumption behavior in order to gain benefits from their purchase. Since it appears that consumers have an overall more positive attitude towards sustainable apparel nowadays, this could be explained by the increased knowledge about the subject. This further supports the *knowledge-attitude-behavior* (KAB) model developed by Kallgren and Wood (1985).

The authors behind the KAB model demonstrate that consumer attitudes derive from their knowledge, as is confirmed by all of the participants in this research. On the other hand, even though knowledge seems to be a crucial deciding factor of consumers' positive attitudes towards sustainable apparel, previous research has shown that increased knowledge does not always increase the probability to choose sustainable apparel (Connell & Kozar, 2014).

An interesting finding that emerged from this research was that the respondents occasionally expressed a perception that sustainable apparel consumption indicates high status since social consumers are concerned with their personal image (McNeill & Moore, 2015). An explanation to this could be that we are shifting towards a more conscious society where consumers have more knowledge about sustainable apparel and that being aware is considered to be high status. This means that some consumers experience a need to engage in sustainable consumption to be approved in groups where it is a social norm to consume sustainably.

Furthermore, to be up to date and aware of societal issues can be perceived as being educated and responsible. This belief connecting status and sustainable further consumption supports the '*theory of buyer behavior*' (Howard & Sheth, 1969) and explains how these external social constructions act as inputs when consumers are making sustainable purchases. Also in this context, '*the functional theory of attitudes*' (1960) could be applicable. An explanation could be that people, according to the utilitarian function within Katz's theory, consume sustainable products to increase their status and hence gain benefits from this. This results in findings of egoism and selfishness (Petersen, Hörisch and Battenfeld, 2018).

Moreover, our findings partially confirmed that increased knowledge does not always translate into more sustainable behavior. The majority of the participants described an increase in knowledge and awareness, but still they had made no significant change in their behavior and consumption patterns in the apparel market. However, several respondents mentioned that they had changed other old habits based on new sustainability knowledge, for example they had started to purchase ecological food, reduced their use of plastic and started recycling. Several of the habits mentioned were habits that they have had all their life from their childhood home, indicating that consumers are not as averse to changing habits as previous research has found (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

Despite the findings that consumers have not changed their behavior significantly regarding clothing consumption, the majority mentions that their attitude has changed, and a few have started consuming second hand clothing despite that they have had a negative attitude towards it before. Additionally, none of the respondents mentioned habits to be a reason for their inconsistent behavior connected to clothing consumption. The respondents generally expressed a will of changing their consumption habits towards more sustainable ones, indicating that similar changes may be to come within the apparel market as well.

One of the main findings of our research was that consumers tend to perceive themselves as too small to make a difference in the context of sustainability, leading to that they become defeatist and resign from trying to make a difference. In other words, they have an external locus of control orientation (Rotter, 1966). This finding resonates with Wiederhold and Martinez's (2018) findings stating that the incapacity to make a difference and the feeling that their actions are meaningless hinders consumers from changing their consumption patterns into more sustainable habits. It also enhances Dhir et al.'s (2021) conclusion that green trust, the confidence of their ability to contribute to preserving the environment, mediates consumers' green consumption choices. In other words, low green trust resembles low engagement in green consumption.

5.2.2 Internal Conflict

The gathered data contained examples of internal influences, including that the respondents stated that they consume for their own sake and their own egoistic needs. Findings revealed that consumers act selfishly in their clothing consumption and consequently often prioritize style and identity before sustainability, supporting the concept of self-consumers by indicating that egoistic and hedonistic values act as a barrier restricting sustainable apparel consumption (Jacobs, Petersen, Hörisch & Battenfeld, 2018). This connects to the individual's values and how they perceive themselves. In this case, consumers may want to express their values and social identity through clothes. This resulted in that some of the respondents value style above sustainability while others expressed the will to portray themselves as conscious and sustainably aware individuals, exemplifying Katz's (1960) *functional theory of attitudes* and more specific, the *value-expressive function* describing when a consumed good contributes to individuals' beliefs and self-image.

Some participants additionally revealed that consuming sustainable apparel boosts their self-esteem. They described that it makes them feel proud of themselves for making a sustainable purchasing decision and argue that it is good for their own wellbeing. This indicates that sustainable consumption can make individuals feel better about themselves and their self-image, supporting McNeill and Moore's (2015) concept of *self consumers*. The concept describes consumers who consume to fulfill individual hedonistic needs and reach happiness and satisfaction from certain purchases.

Moreover, almost all of the participants agreed that sustainable clothing is more expensive and defended their unsustainable consumption choices with excuses as not having the economy to be able to act in line with their sustainably positive attitudes. In the same, or connecting, sentences the respondents followed up by providing their definition of sustainable clothing which recurrently turned out to be second hand clothing and reduced consumption quantities. We identified this as a form of cynical self-preservation behavior, defending themselves from the fact that they could actually afford to engage in more sustainable purchasing behaviors but do not. Supporting Katz's (1960) *ego-defensive function*, our consumers justify the unsustainable actions they consciously perform by defending themselves and their behavior.

One of the most recurring reasons given throughout the interviews was the economic aspect, and the consumers argued price and restricted economy to be one of the reasons why they do not buy sustainable clothes. This aligns with Wiederhold and Martinez's (2018) previous research concluding that price is an important deciding factor making consumers reject sustainable apparel purchases. However, the respondents further discussed second hand to be a less expensive and more sustainable option, contradicting their own economic arguments and contrasting previous research stating price to be a restricting barrier (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). This indicates an emerging change on the market and that this argument may be something that lingers from previous impressions and will be reduced in the coming years.

Another finding from our study that contrasts previous research is the perceptions regarding the convenience of sustainable alternatives. Our respondents predominantly agreed that sustainable alternatives are easily accessible on the market, both within apparel and other product categories. The interviewees enhanced new second hand apps, alternatives of conscious choices made of recycled materials from the biggest fast fashion chains and more, stating that it is not hard to make better choices on the market today. This contradicts previous research, for example Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) and others, that have concluded inconvenience to be one of the main barriers keeping consumers from sustainable apparel consumption. This result indicates that the market has changed fundamentally in the last few years and that the apparel industry may be heading towards a shift where the importance of sustainability is in focus.

6. Conclusion

This final chapter of the research concludes our findings and presents the main results of this research. The conclusion is based on the gathered empirical material and the conducted analysis. The conclusion meets the purpose and answers the research question presented in the beginning of this thesis. Lastly, the conclusion is finalized by examples of practical implications, limitations and suggestions for further research.

6.1 Conclusion

The main purpose of this research has been to further examine and understand consumers' attitudes and purchasing behaviors with the aim to explain the attitude behavior-gap concerning sustainability within the apparel market. From the background of this, a qualitative research consisting of 12 in depth interviews with Swedish generation Y consumers was conducted and analyzed through the lens of a carefully selected, appropriate theoretical framework. The data collection generated interesting perspectives of consumers' attitudes and behaviors in the context of sustainable apparel consumption. The chosen theoretical framework includes relevant theories and models from various fields and hence provides various perspectives to achieve a rich and nuanced analysis and discussion.

With help from the chosen theoretical framework, the sorting of the gathered empirical material resulted in the identification of three distinct themes that conducted a structure for the analysis. These three themes catch the complexities of the research question and lead us closer to an explanation of the attitude behavior-gap in the context of sustainability in the apparel market. The analysis and discussion resulted in a theoretical contribution presented in the *Triad of Misalignment* model illustrating the three identified themes that together construct an illustration of the barriers that explain the gap between consumers' attitudes and behaviors in the context of sustainability in the apparel market. Consequently, the model enables us to answer the proposed research question: ***Why are consumers' purchasing behaviors not reflecting their attitudes concerning consumption of sustainable apparel?***

The answer is that the three identified themes *defeatism*, *hierarchy of priorities* and *self-preservation* construct barriers that hinder consumers from carrying out their positive attitudes and translate them into behavior. This process is further explicated and illustrated in our model. *Defeatism* explicates consumers' expressions of defensive and modern cynicism and an observed sense of powerlessness regarding their own ability to contribute through sustainable actions to reduce the environmental impact from the fashion industry. This *defeatism* leads to that consumers, in their *hierarchy of priorities*, instead prioritize other attributes when making purchasing decisions, one of the most important being style because it serves their identity projects and social group belongings. To highlight the importance of style and identity in clothing to justify behavior opposite to one's better knowledge is one of the different self-preservation strategies that consumers engage in to minimize cognitive dissonance that appears from acting against their attitudes.

The concluded findings provide an overview enabling a descriptive understanding of the barriers creating discrepancy between consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability in the apparel market. The findings indicate that consumers perceive themselves to be defeated on the market, transferring the responsibility to brands and legislators. The sustainability issue is perceived as too big and abstract, leading to that consumers undervalue their ability to have an influence and do not see the outcome that their changed behavior translates into. This results in that consumers do not prioritize sustainability over their own hedonistic needs, and identity seems to be a major reason why consumers do not translate their attitudes into their behavior.

Individuals prioritize style and use of clothes to express themselves and to become part of a group rather than sustainable apparel purchases. Further, consumers experience unpleasant cognitive dissonance realizing the discrepancy between their own attitudes and behavior, resulting in the use of different strategies to neutralize this feeling and hence defend themselves. This is often done through compensating an unsustainable action with a more sustainable one to boost their self-esteem, justification of prioritizing style and identity is an example of self-preservation strategy.

The findings that this research resulted in may further be generalized and transferred to other fields than the sustainable apparel field. The findings and suggested model can help other industries as well as governments and legislators to understand why consumers do not act in line with their attitude and better knowledge, and hence provide support and guidance towards overcoming these barriers. Moreover, non-governmental organizations and public policymakers can benefit from using the suggested model to strategically reorganize society and regulations in the aim towards less degradation of the environment.

Conclusively, consumers seem to be less open to sustainable consumption within the apparel industry than other product categories, much due to the importance of identity construction connected to clothing. However, consumers are less averse to change their habits than previous research has proposed, and we see a potential emerging shift in the apparel market as both consumers and brands become more open towards recycling and second hand. In this way, consumers and suppliers can meet halfway to change the apparel market, diminishing the defeatism aspect since consumers do not have to feel like they work against brands, but with them. Further, this reduces the feeling of cognitive dissonance, and if the change takes place on a macro level, trends will follow leading to that more sustainable apparel becomes trendy and hence fill the function of identity construction and group belonging.

In conclusion, the three presented barriers: *defeatism*, *hierarchy of priorities* and *self-preservation* explains the attitude behavior-gap in the apparel market, and further facilitates the understanding of consumers inconsistencies in attitude and behavior concerning sustainable apparel. Despite the identified barriers that hinders consumers from making sustainable apparel choices, we see increased possibilities for an emerging change towards a more sustainable market. Consumers are willing to overcome these barriers and act more in line with their attitudes, indicating that there are good opportunities for the sustainable apparel market to grow.

6.2 Practical Implications

The findings from this thesis can be useful for future implications for brands in the apparel market trying to approach consumers concerning sustainability. As the research adopted a consumer behavior perspective through a qualitative method, it provides insights in how consumers think, feel and behave within the context of sustainability within apparel. It may be essential for future managers to gain a greater understanding of the factors that influence consumers' sustainable attitudes and purchasing decisions before developing strategies of how to successfully approach consumers in this context. This research suggests that managers should broaden their views and focus on creating marketing campaigns with an emphasis on sustainable, yet up to date, trendy apparel enabling consumers to express themselves and at the same time know that they support a good cause. The majority of our participants highlighted the importance of clothes that enables them to express their identity and stated that they would choose style over sustainability. Additionally, consumers expressed a lack of trust towards brands' sustainability communication and requested more detailed information of what lies behind these claims and stated that this would likely increase their trust.

Moreover, consumers' defeatism and the following low prioritization of sustainability in favor of their own selfish needs seem to depend much on the fact that sustainability is abstract and that the results from the efforts consumers make are unclear. Based on this, we suggest that brands introduce a reward system where consumers are allowed to more clearly see the outcome of their actions. This could be implemented by brands within the fashion industry, other industries or from an independent actor that collects information from several industries and different actions that individuals make to contribute in the strive towards a better future for the planet. One example of a way to implement this would be through an app where individuals could collect all the sustainable choices they make and receive a visualised interpretation of the results that their actions generate. This is further something that could be enhanced by governments and legislators to motivate individuals to change their habits.

Related industries that could benefit from the findings of this research are, among others, the food industry. This industry could benefit from applying the *Triad of Misalignment* model in their market context to facilitate the understanding of the attitude behavior-gap and overcome the identified barriers. Food is a major part of people's lives, just as clothing is, and the consumption patterns consumers engage in are in many aspects very similar. Defeatism can result in that consumers do not engage in sustainable food consumption, and identity and preferences can end up in that consumers prioritize and choose specific products. For example, vegan, sustainably produced or exclusive food choices can be based on how the individual perceives themselves and how they want others to perceive them. Further, this likely leads to the same consequences and use of self-preservation strategies to justify and cope with the inconsistencies in attitude and behavior.

Another suggested industry that would benefit from our findings would be the entertainment industry, as well as the car industry. These are based on similar assumptions as for the food industry, where our model presents how the identified variables: defeatism, hierarchy of priorities and self-preservation explains the attitude behavior-gap. In other words, our model is applicable in several market contexts and can hence be used by brands and legislators to find ways to overcome the barriers that keep consumers from acting in line with their positive attitudes and better knowledge regarding sustainability.

Since we studied a subject that is applicable in a larger societal context, we want to highlight the importance of understanding consumers' underlying values, beliefs and how they connect to their behaviors. We assume that this lies within the interest of, among others, non-governmental organizations and public policymakers. Consumers' environmental impact, as a consequence of their inconsistency between attitude and behavior, is a global problem affecting the entire world's population. To solve this, it requires that both consumers and industries take responsibility to minimize the environmental footprint. In order to achieve this, external actors need to understand and further examine consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable apparel and how the positive attitudes can be turned into sustainable behaviors.

Our research can provide knowledge to these actors, revealing what consumers feel and value the most concerning sustainability in an apparel context. The findings can generate insights to consumers' perception of feeling defeated and powerless in the context of sustainability, the value consumers provide style and identity and lastly, consumers strategies of justifying and compensating their behavior. Further, the respondents of our study display a demand for more legal restrictions on apparel brands concerning sustainability and claim that this would increase their motivation to change their own actions as well. What future actors can do with our findings is to apply them in practice and focus on developing strategies for creating both responsible consumers and brands with minimal influence of the identified barriers.

6.3 Limitations and Further Research

Since this research focused only on Swedish consumers in generation Y using a qualitative approach including semi-structured interviews, another sample and methodology would most likely have resulted in other findings. A quantitative approach captures a broader group and generates findings that potentially would have led to other conclusions than ours. It is important to emphasize that other generations than the one chosen for this study could have generated other findings as well. We can draw the conclusion that consumers often do not act in line with their behavior even though they have a will to. Identified barriers hinder the attitude from translating into behavior, but we can not state surely that our findings are applicable in contexts where the focus is another generation or methodology. Since consumers with different backgrounds, experiences and ages have different preferences and values, we can assume that our findings are applicable for a younger generation but may not be the case for an older generation or individuals with other experiences or backgrounds than the ones chosen for this research.

This results in the assumption that future research, covering a bigger population with various values, preferences, ages and backgrounds, needs to be conducted for a broader generalization.

The study displays that there is a need for more extensive knowledge concerning consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability in the apparel market. Since this study was limited to only interview data, future research would benefit from adding to it by studying consumers actual behavior in a more practical context. This research revealed findings indicating that consumers feel defeated in the market, using self-preservation strategies to defend themselves and justify their inconsistent behavior. Further, the importance of expressing one's identity and belonging through apparel consumption was clearly highlighted. Future research would benefit from applying the structure of this thesis and conduct a more extensive research focusing on the three identified themes within the suggested *Triad of Misalignment* model. Another perspective for future research would be to study other age groups than generation Y to get a broader perspective in consumer insights and examine differences and similarities between different generations.

As we have focused on why consumer attitudes do not translate into actual behaviors concerning sustainable apparel purchases, we conclude that there is still need for further research. The research should primarily concern consumers' underlying values and beliefs to later be able to approach them on the market. Since our findings indicated that consumers' attitudes are not consistent with their actions, we would like to see further research on how future managers could involve our findings concerning identity, defeatism and consumers' self-preservation regarding sustainability in the apparel market to develop more consistency between attitudes and behaviors.

Our data collection revealed that the respondent group of Swedish generation Y consumers' attitudes towards sustainable fashion, and foremost second hand, has transformed with time. Several of the respondents witnessed that they from a young age had had the impression that second hand clothing was something that you consumed if you had a bad economy, simply because it was less expensive. However, the interviewees now described that this perception has changed in the last couple of years and that they believe the status of second hand clothing is on its way up. The respondents refer to this as a consequence of a combination of the actuality of sustainability in society generally and the rise of different sites or apps that distribute the selling and buying of pre-owned clothing. Further, we would like to add a reconnaissance that we have made during the last months writing this thesis. We see that big fashion e-commerce retailers including NA-KD and Zalando have embraced this rising trend and started to distribute second hand apparel on their websites. We believe that this trend means that second hand apparel will increase in status within the near future, something that would be interesting to read further research about and what consequences this will have on the fast fashion market.

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Appendix

Interview guide

The interview is based on your perception of sustainable consumption. We appreciate that you try to elaborate and discuss your answers as extensively as possible to help us gain rich insights into consumers' minds.

- Can you please give an example of three words that you associate with sustainability.
Why did you choose these three words?
Have these words always been the same to you?
(Depending on the answer) Why do you think they have/do not have changed?
- What are your thoughts about sustainable consumption in general?
Why do you think like this?
- Do you think it is important to try to consume sustainably?
Why do you think so?
- What do you do personally to try to consume sustainably? What is your primary reason for this?
Why is this important to you?
What different products do you usually try to consume sustainably? Which products do you not consume sustainably?
Why is X prioritized and why is Y not?
- Please tell me about your perception and experiences of sustainable consumption?
Will you please give an example of a situation where you chose to consume something sustainably. Describe the process...
How did this purchase make you feel?
- When did you buy clothes last? Describe the process...
Was the purchase planned or spontaneous?
What store or brand did you buy from? Why did you choose this?
Which attributes were important for your decision, why?
In your opinion; was this a sustainable purchase? Motivate!
- Please define what sustainable clothing consumption is to you
Have you always had this view or has it changed over time?
How has it changed and why?

Do you think there is a way to defend shopping, (meaning consumption for the enjoyment and not basic needs)?

- Have you ever purchased sustainable apparel of some kind? This includes recycled materials, fair trade certified pieces, second hand...

If yes:

Which attributes are most important to you when purchasing sustainable apparel?

Why are these important to you?

Does this differ from when you buy “regular” apparel?

- Do you perceive that your social environment influences you in a sustainability aspect?

Do you experience any social pressure regarding your clothing consumption? Please elaborate!

Do you think that this affects your consumption habits? In what way? Discuss.

- What is your perception of brands’ sustainability efforts?

Why do you think your perception is like this?

If negative perception:

What do you think could change your perception into a more positive attitude towards brands’ sustainability efforts?

If low trust:

What do you think brands can do to increase your trust towards their sustainability efforts?

What do you think you could do yourself to increase your trust?

- How important is information and knowledge to you when you are going to buy a new piece of clothing?

Depending on the answer: Why is this important/not important to you?

What would happen if you did not receive any information at all about the clothes?

What would happen if you got more information?

- What role do you think consumption has for individuals? Elaborate and discuss!

Do you think that you can express who you are through clothing consumption?

Describe!

Can you give an example of a moment, habit or special product that you have consumed that you think defines you as a person, elaborate.

- Before we finish, do you think that you behave according to your own attitude regarding sustainability within the apparel market? Why or why not? Motivate and

explain.

- Finally, do you want to add anything?