Individual Consumer Identity Formation in a Politicised World

A qualitative study on how individual consumer identities are formed through everyday political consumerism

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Abstract

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Thesis Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of how consumers build their individual identities through everyday political acts of consumption.

Methodology & Empirical Data: This study is conducted based on a social constructionist worldview with a qualitative research design, adopting an inductive approach. The literature review and 19 semi-structured interviews jointly create the basis for discussion on the research question under study.

Theoretical Perspective: This thesis draws upon the three literature streams of consumer identity, political consumerism and identity construction through everyday political consumerism. Based on these bodies of literature, relevant key concepts are identified to provide a theoretical basis for the conducted empirical research and its qualitative analysis.

Main Findings & Contributions: Three inseparable modes are identified, namely motivations, inner conflicts and identity negotiations, jointly showing the different ways of identity construction through everyday political consumerism as part of a complex and intertwined process.

Practical Implications: This study illuminates the so far only scarcely addressed invisible and subtle forms of political consumption practised on a daily basis in connection to micro-level individual identities, providing implications for both scholars in consumer research and practitioners in marketing.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

"Climate change is real; it is happening right now. It is the most urgent threat facing our entire species, and we need to work collectively together and stop procrastinating."

- Leonardo DiCaprio (Academy Awards, 2016, as cited by Hoffman in TIME)

As this quote by Leonardo DiCaprio demonstrates, the climate crisis by now holds center position as one of the most pressing global concerns of this millenium (IPCC, 2022). With omnipresence in media outlets and political debates, "sustainable" and "green" have become important buzzwords (Verdegem & Fuchs, 2013). As a consequence, activist groups such as "Fridays For Future" and "Extinction Rebellion" are on the forefront of political activism, representing a movement of young consumers that are dissatisfied with the current political agenda (Wahlström et al., 2019). Political consumerist movements often stem from governments failing to take sufficient action for environmental, social and economic concerns, leading to proactive responses from citizens mirrored in both private and public areas of consumers' lives (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). That being said, consumption and lifestyle elements have become more political, which is reflected in a constant increase of consumer resistance on a global level (Micheletti & Isenhour, 2010). In light of a polarised society, as addressed in Ulver (2021), specifically with Millennials' and Gen Z's heightened awareness on social and environmental issues and their engagement in activism, some scholars (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020; Prendergast, Hayward, Aoyagi, Burningham, Hasan, Jackson, Jha, Kuroki, Loukianov, Mattar, Schudel, Venn, Yoshida, 2021; Tyson, Kennedy & Funk., 2021) have suggested that a growing number of consumers have become more demanding than ever before.

Particular uproar to environmental sustainability has grown on the fashion industry's harmful effects on the environment as it has a reputation of being one of the environmentally dirtiest industries in the world with destructive extents of chemical and natural resource usage, post-consumer waste and inefficient supply chains (Connell, 2019). At the hand of the growing number of marketing campaigns using sustainability narratives via greenwashing claims, one can observe a growing public discourse on sustainability within fashion resulting in an increasing number of conscious consumers invested in a mission for climate justice, as suggested in Portway (2019). Consequently, this leads to a general upheaval of environmental activist voices (Micheletti and Isenhour, 2010), as well as the exponential market growth of ethical clothing (Mintel, 2009). The latter is reflected in growing consumer demand, with 72 percent of consumers preferring to purchase sustainable fashion in 2018 compared to 57 percent in 2013, as discovered in a worldwide survey conducted among 2000 respondents on their attitudes towards apparel and second-hand products (Smith, 2019).

The essence of one's engagement in consumption can vastly be dependent on the individual consumer identity, as argued by Larsen & Patterson (2018). Moreover, how dominant scholars of consumer identity (Levy, 1959; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994; Larsen & Patterson, 2018) bring forward, people consume to contribute to the formation of their identities, and possessions are seen as an important part of an individual's self-concept. "Contemporary individuals perpetually pursue, create, enhance, transform and maintain their identities through the continuous making of choices, many of which are consumption choices" (Larsen & Patterson, 2018, p. 202). Then, at its very core, the consumption of products is majorly dictated by the basic human need to express oneself, which is particularly apparent in the case of fashion that is constantly on display (Berger & Heath, 2007).

1.2 Problematization

The critical relationship of consumption and identity construction is reflected in major works of consumer and marketing research (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988; Richins, 1994) which manifest the quest of identity and self-expression as the ultimate goal reflected in the very act of consumption. In recent times, there has been a growing discussion in consumer research on the phenomenon of political consumerism and its implications for the act of consumption and lifestyle choices (Holt, 2002; Micheletti &

Isenhour, 2010; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Research within political consumerism recognizes the mobilising force of discursive political actions on collective identities (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). The latter is also illustrated in Kozinets and Handelman (2004), determining a connection between activist discourses and consumer activist identities to a common social welfare. Yet, as argued by Stolle and Micheletti (2013), political consumerist motives stem not only from the urge to contribute to a common good, but are significantly rooted in individual, personal choice and concerns regarding the self. Several authors in consumer culture have studied everyday political consumption (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard & Kristensen, 2011; Cronin, McCarthy & Collins, 2014; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017), exploring various ways of mundane and day-to-day consumer resistant practices.

However, only a handful of consumer research scholars (Ozanne & Murray, 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1955; Holt, 2002; Cherrier, 2009; Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011) have studied individual consumer identities in the realms of political acts of consumption. These studies have found that, consumer resistance, integral in political consumerism, demonstrates an emancipation of consumers from the market's control via a growing scepticism towards advertising and marketing, consequently opening up new spaces for consumers to autonomously navigate their identities, as opposed to their prior dictation via the market (Ozanne and Murray, 1995; Holt, 2002). Further, Holt (2002) proposes that consumers' resistance in consumption practices establishes a new era of consumer culture that engenders consumer identities to be liberated, however only within emancipatory limits of the inevitable participation in consumer culture imposed by the market. In the same vein, Cherrier (2009) even goes so far as to recognize the central rather than peripheral role of identity formation through anti-consumption practices in consumer resistance. Moreover, most of the works in consumer resistance and identity (Touraine, 1981; Buechler 2000; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Cherrier and Murray, 2017; Chatzidakis, Maclaran, Varman, 2021) find agreement in that consumers are further strengthened in their collective identities, as they are involved in political consumption, longing for connectedness and group affiliation. Thus, previous research on identity formation in relation to political consumerist engagements has so far explored rather macro-collective resistance, where the individual perspective remains largely unaddressed. It remains unclear why past research on these micro-level issues exists to a very scarce extent. Thus, this research aims to dive deeper into understanding how

individual consumers build their identities when engaged in political acts through sustainable consumption, through the meanings they attach to their participation and its underlying personal drivers. Additionally, this thesis' focus lies on the more mundane and subtle forms of political consumerism, that is everyday political consumerism, which remains rather overshadowed in the larger picture of more overt activist actions, as argued by Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard and Kristensen (2011) as well as by Heath, Cluley and O'Malley (2017).

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of how consumers build their individual identities through everyday political acts of consumption. Hence, the research question of this thesis is defined as follows:

> *How do consumers construct their individual identities through everyday political consumerist actions?*

This is done by looking at the specific empirical context of the fashion industry with a focus on young consumers in Sweden belonging to Millennials and Gen Z. As previously discussed, the contextual focus of the fashion industry was chosen based on it being increasingly targeted for its entailed contributions to global socio-political issues such as social injustices and the climate crisis (Micheletti & Isenhour, 2010; Connell, 2019; Portway, 2019). Then, given that the process of identity development was found to be especially critical in adolescence and early adult years (Larsen & Patterson, 2018 in Kravets et al., 2018), the urgency for further research in the area of political consumerism rises for a better comprehension of the nuances involved in identity formation and political consumerism among the youth, specifically in the case of ethical clothing consumption (Jägel, Keeling, Reppel & Gruber, 2012). As for the specific locational focus of this study, Sweden was chosen since it was ranked worldwide as one of the top three countries by the UN Sustainable Development Report in 2021 for sustainable consumption (Sachs, Kroll, Lafortune, Fuller, Woelm & 2021). Moreover, the locational choice was based on proximity, convenience, and empiric feasibility, with both of the thesis authors currently enrolled in a Swedish university and living in Sweden.

This study aims to generally contribute to the interdisciplinary field of research that is Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and in particular to consumer research, specifically to the research streams of identity construction, political consumerism and the crossover stream of research in identity construction through everyday political consumerism. Regarding the research stream of consumer identity, this study aims to provide further knowledge in the interrelation of consumer identities and consumption practices. Concerning the stream of political consumerism, this study aims to contribute by providing a nuanced perspective on everyday political consumerist actions with the individual as the focal point, that so far was rather scarcely addressed. To the combined research stream of identity construction through everyday political consumerism, this study also aims to shed light on the interrelationship of consumers' individual political actions and their underlying identity constructs. As asserted by Kozinets and Handelman (1998), practices of consumer resistance, such as consumer boycotts should be understood as a sort of "expression of individual uniqueness" (p. 476). This individual and subjective perspective of political consumerist actions have not largely been addressed by consumer research, as asserted by Kozinets and Handelman (1998). Hence, understanding consumers' inner "lifeworld" (Kvale, 1983, p. 174), that is, their thought processes, perceptions, feelings and motivations on everyday political consumerist actions and how they are tied to their identities remains to be particularly critical in answering the research question.

1.4 Delimitations

There are a number of delimitations to be considered when addressing the research question posed for this study. First of all, this study's chosen research method is qualitative, with the purpose of understanding the complexity of how consumers' identities are intertwined with their engagement in political consumerism. However, it is not discussed how the participants' respective cultural backgrounds interplay with their overall engagement in socio-political consumption and activism. Although the research participants hold a variety of different nationalities, all of them are currently living in Sweden, where the study took place. Hence, it is not the aim of this study to demonstrate the differences of experiences with political consumerism in different countries. Furthermore, the focus of the empirical context in this thesis lies exclusively on the two generations of Gen Z and Millenials, consequently any implications drawn from this study do not apply beyond these age groups. Moreover, during the empirical data collection process, 19 study participants were interviewed along a guide of 20-26 questions to gather different perspectives on how consumer identities are reflected and built through everyday political consumerist actions. Hereby the focus of this study lies on capturing the participants' individual lifeworlds through engaging in everyday political consumerism.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

Overall, this study is divided into five main chapters. In the introductory chapter, a general overview of the study's background, problem, purpose as well as the study's delimitations are defined, to allow the reader to better understand the phenomenon to be discussed and to outline the relevance of this study. Secondly, the literature review will be presented with relevant concepts building the theoretical foundation for this research. In the subsequent third chapter, the methodological choices of this study will be outlined and justified including the research philosophy, research and sampling strategies, and a description of the data collection process with the purpose to guide the reader throughout the procedures of this study. Following this, the ethical considerations as well as the following research quality criteria will be presented with a subsequent elaboration on the chosen method of data analysis. Then, the methodological limitations to this research will also be discussed. In the fourth chapter, the empirical findings from the collected material will be thoroughly analysed and discussed in light of theories and concepts from previous research. The final chapter will return to address the research aim of this thesis, as well as to conclude on the main findings to answer the initially posed research question. Subsequently, main research implications, as well as limitations to this research will be outlined with suggestions for future research.

It is also important to mention here that throughout the whole study, when referring to people engaged in consumption, the terms "the consumer" and "the individual" will be used interchangeably, as will the terms "the self" and "identity"; and "sense of self" and "self-view" be used synonymously. Then, the terms "political activism" and "political consumerism" will also be treated similarly. Moreover, when referring to consumers' political convictions throughout the whole thesis, their firmly held beliefs and opinions on socio-political issues will be considered.

2. Literature Review

In order to answer the posed research question, the three literature streams "consumer identity", "political consumerism" and "identity-construction through political consumerism" are reviewed in this chapter for a greater understanding of how everyday political consumer choices contribute to the formation of consumer individual identity. The "consumer identity" literature stream provides insight into how individuals construct their identities through possessions and group memberships, as well as through consumption in general to accommodate their self-expression. Then, the "political consumerism" body of literature helps to explain the interrelation of individuals' consumption choices and self-expression through consumption with their political activism, where the concept of sustainability plays a driving force. It is essential to review these two literature streams for a broader understanding of consumer identity construction and political activism as separate phenomena, in order to lay the foundation for better comprehension and conceptualization of the next literature stream reviewed within this thesis, which is "identity-construction through political consumerism." The latter is at the crossover of the separate "consumer identity" and "political consumerism" literature streams, shedding light onto how the two are interlinked, thus providing the ground knowledge necessary for answering the research question posed for this thesis where everyday consumer resistance as a concept that is part of political activism. Ultimately, the analysis of the empirical data gathered is guided by the scope of the literature discussed in this chapter, the findings of which result in theoretical contributions to the aforementioned bodies of literature.

2.1 Consumer Identity

Consumer identity has been studied within the fields of both marketing and psychology for decades, having close interrelations between the two academic research arenas with oftentimes one borrowing from the other. By virtue of this, there is now a large body of

literature on consumer identity which can generally be divided into three separate streams of research that looks at consumer identity from different angles (Sassonko, 2020). The first stream of research includes works (Richins, 1994; Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge & Scabini, 2006) that conceptualise and introduce models on identity construction, while the second stream (Levy, 1959; Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Berger & Heath, 2007; Gao, Wheeler & Shiv, 2009; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011; Larsen & Patterson, 2018) specifically examines consumption and identity, and the third stream includes relatively recent work (Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Wheeler et al., 2005) focused on studying the effects of identity on consumption and decision making in different contexts.

Throughout this thesis, only the aforementioned first and second streams of research within literature on consumer identity will be presented and reviewed, as the purpose of this thesis is to bring about a deeper understanding of identity construction through consumption specifically. Additionally, it is important to define the main terminology used in this thesis, which oftentimes can have various meanings in separate academic works, in order to ensure clear interpretation and understanding of the intended meanings behind. Thus, it is essential to state that in this thesis the term "identity" is referred to as the group of identities that comprise a person's "self-concept", representing a person's individual qualities in general (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni & Warlop, 2012). Then, the term "consumption" is employed as the acquisition, purchase and use of products, services and experiences with no purchase decision involved necessarily (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005; Kleine et al., 2009).

2.1.1 Identity Construction

As described by Vignoles et al. (2006), "Identity Construction" is a complex process effected by various psychological motives, which are "self-esteem", "continuity", "distinctiveness", "belonging", "efficacy" and "meaning", that results in the formation of an individual's different identities assimilated into their self-concept either by "choice or endowment" (Reed et al., 2012, p. 312). One of the main ways of identity construction is through material possessions, which are considered to have a central role in an individual's self-concept (Levy, 1959; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994; Larsen & Patterson, 2018). "To understand what people are and what they might become, one must understand what goes

on between people and things" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, ch.1, p. 2). In his influential paper titled "Possessions and the Extended Self", Belk (1988) argues that possessions represent the "extended self" of an individual. Belk (1988) defines the extended self consisting of "self plus" possessions including objects, money, gifts, body-parts, internal processes, ideas, experiences, pets, places and even people. When attempting to prove the importance of material possessions as part of the self-concept, Belk (1988) talks about the grief and mourn one goes through and the feeling of "loss or lessening of the self" (p.142) when losing possessions comparable to the death of a loved one.

Possessions can be acquired not only by intentional purchasing, but also through gifts and heritage, which can be seen as a forceful imposition of the giver's extended self on to the recipient who can only choose whether or not to accept it (Sartre, 1943). In order for possessions to be incorporated into an identity and thus the self-concept, importance and value, including memories and associations, should be attributed to the possessions by the individual (Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine III, Allen, 1995). "Consumers value a wide variety of possessions, including relationships, memories, and beliefs, and they value belongings not only for their functionality but also for their symbolic representation of the past, present, and future" (Hill, 1991, p. 308). The more intense the attachment to a possession is, the stronger it becomes part of the individual's identity and self-concept (Kleine et al., 1995). In fact, the most valued possessions or "loved objects" are considered to be integral to an individual's identity and can have a substantial impact on their life (Ahuvia, 2005). As Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) found when exploring the meaning and histories of favourite objects in the American and Nigerian cultures, "favourite objects provide individualised cues for self expression" (p. 542).

Then, there has been found a link between an individual's possessions and personal values. In a variety of her works, Richins (Fournier & Richins 1991; Richins & Dawson 1992; Richins 1994) views the possession of materialistic items as a system of personal values that are deep rooted and long lasting convictions about what is important in life. Moreover, according to the self-determination theory by Ryan & Deci (2000), there are two types of motivations that can drive a person to be engaged in a certain activity, which can also be consumption and acquiring possessions. Ryan & Deci (2000) name the first motivation type as intrinsic, which they explain as the "natural inclination toward assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration" (p.70), being driven by interest, eagerness to discover, amusement and

irresistible urge while related to activities that represent challenge or novelty. The second motivation is called extrinsic, which is defined as the kind of motivation that drives a certain activity to "attain some separable outcome" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan & Deci (2000) explain extrinsic motivations as being driven by external factors such as peer pressure, rewards or reputation.

Meanwhile, identity construction is manifested not only through possessions but also through group membership, referred to as "social identities" (He et al., 2012). As the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in social psychology literature explains, consumers form their own identities in relation to social groups, creating a sense of collective belonging and ensuring the protection and support of the self-identity. Social identities are crucial in forming an individual's self-concept, which in turn has a substantial impact on how they see the world and behave in it (Cushman, 1990). Furthermore, just as in the case of identities formed through possessions, social identities can be the result of either choice or endowed factors such as gender, race and culture (He et al., 2012). Yet, social identities and personal identities together form the basis for individual self-expression, thus it oftentimes can be difficult to distinguish between the two (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Additionally, the fact that individuals can have both personal and social identities composed of different identities formed through possessions and group membership makes room for interpersonal conflicts and psychological tensions (Ahuvia, 2005; Reed et al., 2012; Suzuki & Satoshi, 2012). Yet, people strive to prevent and resolve identity conflicts in order to stay consistent with their identity narrative (Ahuvia, 2005; Amiot, de La Sablonnière, Terry, Smith, 2007; Reed et al., 2012; Suzuki & Satoshi, 2012). One of the main ways to do so is by deserting an identity in different ways, such as getting rid of possessions or ending group membership (Kleine et al., 1995). Then, individuals also manage their identity conflicts by balancing the presence of the different identities and activating only certain identities at certain times, as well as by synthesising solutions through merging the consumption activity and the specific conflicting areas of the identity (Reed et al., 2012; Ahuvia, 2005).

2.1.2 Identity and Consumption

The second stream of research within literature on consumer identity builds on the first stream of literature around identity construction and aims to discover its connection with consumption and the expression of the self through consumption. Identity and consumption are interrelated in a two-way process, where identity influences consumption and consumption influences identity formation (Thompson & Loveland, 2015). As Belk (1988, p. 141) writes, "We may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us." Similar to identity construction, self-expression through consumption is also driven by certain psychological motives, mainly the "distinctiveness" and "belonging" motives as described by Vignoles, Chryssochoou and Breakwell (2000). Vignoles et al. (2000) describes "distinctiveness" as consisting of three main types, which are "difference", "separateness" and "position." Difference refers to the inherent characteristics of the individual, such as physical appearance, opinions and skills that sets them apart and associates the individual to others, while separateness refers to the characteristics that separate the individual from others, setting mental and physical boundaries. Then, position refers to the individual's position in intragroup and intergroup contexts (Vignoles et al., 2000). Individuals use all these types of distinctiveness to express their identities (Vignoles et al., 2000), and as consumers seek to be distinct, the essence of consumption is to express distinct identities (Belk, 1988; Levy, 1959). This explains why individuals generally avoid mainstream consumption choices and practices, always seeking to be distinct as an individual (Tian, Bearden & Hunter, 2001).

The process of self-expression through consumption is only possible since people generally judge others' identities based on visible cues (Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011), thus individuals seek to consume for shaping certain cues that would express their desired identities (Schau, 2000). In order to do this, an individual must have a "self-view", described as the way the individual sees and perceives himself, based on which consumption choices can be made and cues can be manipulated (Gao, Wheeler & Shiv, 2009). Moreover, similar to expressing personal identities through consumption, individuals consume in certain ways to express their social identities and signal group membership or distinctiveness from specific groups (Berger & Heath, 2007; Berger & Ward, 2010), as described by the psychological "belonging" motive of self-expression through consumption (Vignoles et al., 2000).

When attempting to form both a social and personal identity, consumers also happen to identify themselves with specific brands, which Escalas et al. (2003) call a "self brand connection." That being said, the individual's choice of certain brands in consumption is a specific way for self-expression (David, Sandor & Eric, 2006). Consumers tend to form meaningful connections with certain brands (David et. al., 2006), consequently including those brands in their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman (2005). Furthermore, as the study by Richins (1994) asserts, consumption and personal values are directly interlinked, having personal values conveyed in possessions. Thus, whether or not the consumer chooses to engage in ethical consumption, largely depends on individual values and norms of the consumer (Diddi & Niehm, 2017, p. 16). And, as Niinimäki (2010) argues, personal values are very important individual factors for consumers choosing to shop eco-fashion (Niinimäki, 2010).

2.2 Political Consumerism

2.2.1 Characteristics of Political Consumerism

Recently, there has been growing interest in consumer research to understand the phenomenon of political activism and its implications for the act of consumption (Holt, 2002; Micheletti & Isenhour, 2010; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). The following review aims to both explain the current state of knowledge in political consumerism and to portray a holistic picture of different views on its implications for marketing research.

Major contributions to political consumerism are found in the work of Stolle and Micheletti (2013), introducing how political consumerist actions have shaped the postmodern market sphere. The authors define political consumerism as "consumers' use of the market as an arena for politics in order to change institutional or market practices found to be ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable" (p.39) and it is categorised as a form of "individualised political responsibility taking" (p.58). Complementary to this, Giesler and Veresiu (2014) state that consumers' inclination to make responsible consumption choices is entrenched in an increased consciousness of its consequences on the environment, consumers

health and on society at large. This goes in accordance with Stolle and Micheletti, who locate the underlying reason in consumers' heightened awareness of social injustice and their general discontent in governments failing to take necessary or even adequate measures (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Past research asserts that consumer movements engaged in political and anti-branding actions are a direct response to the harmful threat that poses contemporary consumer culture (Holt, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Individuals that partake in political consumerist movements are said to bond over shared grievances and are further driven by a common vision for change (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015). Theories on risk society (Beck, 1998) are providing early indications of an increased sensitivity amongst consumers for global and systemic issues of our time, such as the climate crisis, consequently leading to more consciously driven individuals exposed to existential fears. Ulver and Laurell (2020) argue that while consumer activists' purposes differ in radicalness with some movements intending to end the capitalistic economy once and for all, and others to make it more accountable or inclusive, the authors are convinced, as most consumer research, that consumer activists are lead by the common denominator of fighting for ubiquitous and liberal values of social and environmental rights. Unethically perceived actions of brands are a common cause for consumers' movements to rise and to take on the challenge of transforming consumption (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Thus, political consumerism at its essence often revolves around the common narrative of corporations as enemies, signified in the famous citation from Kalle Lasn (as cited in Holt, 2002, p. 70):

> *"The old political battles that have consumed humankind during most of the twentieth century—black versus white, Left versus Right, male versus female—will fade into the background. The only battle worth fighting and winning, the only one that can set us free, is The People versus The Corporate Cool Machine".[...] Now resistance to that brand is about to begin on an unprecedented scale. We will uncool its fashions and celebrities, its icons, signs and spectacles. We will jam its image factory until the day it comes to a sudden shattering halt. And then on the ruins of the old consumer culture, we will build a new one with a noncommercial heart and soul."*

This quote testifies the base of the anti-branding and political activist movement, that is a critical standpoint towards brands, particularly those wealthy in power, and the imperative of consumer resistance.

With increasingly divisive discussions about socio-political concerns such as gender inequality, human rights violations and environmental destruction, more brands are nowadays pressured to take political stances, whether in sincere or less sincere manners (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020). This trend finds its direct roots in the rise of political consumerism in the 1960-1970s (Micheletti & Isenhour, 2010) with citizens becoming "sub-politicians" (p. 34) for their growing engagement in individual and collective political responsibility taking (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Hence, it becomes apparent that political consumerism is characterised by a growing demand for social justice and equality via the politics of consumer choice, such as deliberately choosing to buy or not to buy a specific product (Thompson, 2011). In fact, contemporary purchase decisions have become a means of voting, with consumer's ability to selectively support products in accord with their innate values or to resist those that break with their personal beliefs (Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, 2006). Political consumerism entails the potential to change markets via openly delegitimizing unethical market practices, supporting market innovation and mobilising public discourses to engender shifts in politics (Weijo, Martin & Anould, 2018). Furthermore, Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) assert that the ongoing trend of environmentally concerned consumers is an important task to be reckoned with when it comes to the promotion and communication of products, where shallow promises are easily exposed, and consumers holding the expectation of companies to not only "talk green" but also "be green" (p.210).

2.2.2 Typologies of Political Consumerism

As defined by Micheletti and Isenhour (2010), political consumerism can take on different forms, that is 1) boycotts, 2) buycotts, 3) discursive actions and 4) lifestyle commitments, often referred to as unconventional modes of political actions as they incorporates consumer actions stemming from the mobilisation of consumers that aim to provoke societal change beyond conventional political arenas (Weijo, Martin & Arnould, 2018). As asserted by Boström, Micheletti and Oosterveer (2019), these four forms of political actions demonstrate that consumer inclinations towards practices within the market can be rather hostile or collaborative. In other words, consumers may engage in political consumerism by penalising, that is boycotting, or supporting, that is buycotting, specific products or brands (Baek, 2010; Neilson, 2010). Whether one chooses to boycott or buycott brands is always dependent on whether one finds a brands' behaviour or values to align with one's own values (Boström,

Micheletti & Oosterveer, 2019). More often than not are buycotts a direct response of consumers to a publicised greenwashing scandal, that is the revelation of a brand's insincere or hypocritical claims and promises in making a stance on controversial issues (Shetty, Venkataramaiah & Anand, 2019). Boycotts on the other hand result from a brand's successful advocacy for a socio-political issue, reflected in sincere efforts that align with an individual's values, which may strengthen one's support of the brand's cause as well as one's purchase intention (Shetty, Venkataramaiah & Anand, 2019). Interestingly, consumer research suggests that while buycotting is a rather altruistic effort with high levels of trust in a brand, boycotting practices are found to be more collectivistic in nature, as alienated consumers are inclined to rely on like-minded consumers and believe in being part of something bigger (Neilson, 2010).

While boycotting and buycotting represent rather traditional forms of political consumerist actions, discursive political consumerism on the other hand is a rather novel form of political responsibility taking that predominantly builds on consumer sovereignty through the act of a critical discourse about consumption and corporate social responsibility (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Unlike boycotts and buycotts, which in their essence are perceived as rather active and detrimental efforts, discursive actions are a rather subtle means of communicating critique on specific brands in creative and humorous ways (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). However, that does not make this form of activism less effective, in contrast, it involves a significant level of confrontation where transnational brands performing poorly with regards to social responsibility are often targeted (Boström, Micheletti & Oosterveer, 2019). Hence, the authors also argue that discursive actions hold the potential to provoke consumers being more reflective on their consumption choices and encouraging them to incorporate changes to their overall lifestyle.

The three above-mentioned forms of political consumerism are all part of the fourth form, that is lifestyle political consumerism, entailing more thorough changes reflected in an individual's overall lifestyle and consumption habits (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Lifestyle political consumerism is therefore the sum of actions revolving around boycotts, buycotts and discursive actions when these are pursued with a deeper degree of commitment that affects not only consumption patterns per se but considerably shapes an individuals' mentality of life (Boström, Micheletti & Oosterveer, 2019).

Specific examples from the past showcase that political consumerist actions are multifaceted, addressing a variety of market arenas such as the fashion industry. Early activist movements of boycotts and buycotts against poor working conditions and child labour, like the anti-sweatshop activism rooted in the early 1900s' and its "White Label Campaign" demonstrate that political consumerism is certainly not a new phenomenon (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). Rather, the rise of political consumerist actions was significantly stimulated by the exponential development of globalisation processes over the past decades (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). Therefore, one can witness contemporary political consumers to be increasingly more involved with the intricacies of nowadays' globalised processes of production and consumption (Boström, Micheletti & Oosterveer, 2019).

As found in an empiric study buy Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) analysing ecofeminist market activities, ecologically-conscious individuals are inclined to seek the best possible balance of their needs and their "ecological selves" (p.206) throughout day-to-day episodic life events. Moreover, one can distinguish between those environmentally conscious consumers who choose to buy differently, and those who choose a different way of life. Hence, it can be derived that political consumers' motivations go beyond actions of deliberate consumption or anti-consumption but much more are reflected in their ideological beliefs (Niinimäki, 2010). Similarly, Stolle and Micheletti (2013) assert that it has generally become less distinguishable whether individuals act for the sake of private or public welfare by taking on daily responsibilities in both private and public life. As a result, the authors argue that political consumerist actions are not solely arising from the standpoint of serving the common public good, but a rather significant part stems from personal choice and concerns regarding the self.

2.3 Identity Construction Through Everyday Political Consumerism

As previously mentioned, especially in a culture that is ruled by consumption and dictated by the sum of corporations' marketing activities, there is an innate predisposition for consumer resistance to emerge (Holt, 2002; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). This resistance becomes

particularly pressing in light of global socio-political issues resulting in movements of consumers to be in a constant pursuit of justice. Research on consumer resistance, as part of political consumerism, refers to consumer resistance as 'any attempt to undermine, escape consumer culture or unbind themselves from the dark sides of marketing' (as cited in Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017, p.2). As brought forward by Firat and Venkatesh (1995), postmodern consumer resistance is characterised by individuals' pursuit of a "noncommittal fragmented lifestyle" (cited in Holt, 2002, p. 72) with consumption predominantly serving the construction of the self.

Several scholars in consumer culture research have studied everyday consumer resistance in relation to collective (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Cronin, McCarthy & Collins, 2014) and individual identities (Cherrier, 2009; Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard & Kristensen, 2011) or both (Penaloza & Price, 1993; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). It is the case with everyday consumer resistance to remain rather invisible in the larger picture of loud activist acts such as demonstrations, strikes or publicly called for boycotts (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). As opposed to these rather extreme forms of resistance, everyday resistant acts are characterised as rather subtle, hidden and politically unarticulated (Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard & Kristensen, 2011; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). However, the fact that everyday consumer resistant acts go mostly unrecognised by others (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004), does not make them less significant, rather on the contrary, these individual consumption practices prove to be critical in an individuals' everyday experience (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017) and thus, in their identity formation process.

Most research on political consumerism (Kozinets, 2002; Chatzidakis, Maclaran & Varman, 2021) constitutes that consumer activism revitalises solidarity amongst consumers, where collective identities of consumer movements are constructed within a certain geographic nexus. In Kozinets's and Handelman's (2004) study on consumer movements, activists are ascribed a collective identity that shares a concern for the greater social good, most often that not including a positive self-portrayal. However, the authors also draw a line between activist consumers and non-activist consumers, arguing for a certain dualism with the "enlightened" and "aware" consumer standing in opposition to the "unenlightened" and "unaware" consumer (p.p. 701-702). Nevertheless, this can be understood as a rather controversial perspective, as it is a relatively essentialist categorisation of consumers that seems to neglect

critical nuances and diversities among individuals and thereby reduces them to structuralist categories. On another note, Kozinets and Handelman (2004) recognize the focus shifting away from corporations to the construction of ideological opponents amongst activists and mainstream consumers. Hence, there is a risk of a division and marginalisation between consumer groups that Kozinets and Handelman (2004) are convinced share more commonalities than differences.

What concerns the individual level of political consumerism, the study on consumer resistance by Heath, Cluley and O'Malley (2017) found that it is often the case with resistant consumers to use their opposition towards marketing as an instrument for the formation of identity following the "I versus them" mentality, often delineating sustainable vs. unsustainable or ethical vs. unethical practices (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011). Hence, the latter is said to function as a "normative framework" (p.1759) for consumers to be supported and motivated by neglecting other usually more dominant decision factors such as price, quality, style and convenience (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011). Consequently, consumer resistance research asserts that individuals engaged in consumer resistance are inclined to constantly follow a set of universally agreed upon objective truths and principles in the pursuit of withstanding marketing and branding schemes (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011). Thus, the authors conclude that resistant consumers build their identity in opposition to unreflected consumers that wander rather blindly and unaware through product racks. With a constant level of scepticism and reflexivity towards marketing claims, those engaged in consumer resistance on the other hand, are said to acquire personal marketing avoidance tactics in order to escape its tempting nature, for example, through conducting further research on promotional campaigns and learning about a brand's background (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). The same authors additionally assert that it is through these tricks of avoidance that individuals form their identities around attributes such as witty, wise, reflective and resistant, which form the strong contrast to the mainstream. Subsequently, those consumers resisting the power of marketing are simultaneously using it as an opponent against which they identify themselves (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017).

Furthermore, Cherrier, Black and Lee (2011) found that consumers' resistance becomes part of situating one's identity in alignment with personal values and convictions revolving around sustainability, where deliberate non-consumption is associated with being a "good" person. However a full alignment of consumers' values and practices is most often than a contested

effort, as consumer resistance research (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011) found consumers' inclination to face identity conflicts as a consequence of their sustainable everyday consumption practices challenging the features of their self-concepts.

3. Research Design & Methodology

This chapter explains how research was conducted with the purpose of gathering relevant insights for the research question posed in this thesis. It additionally describes the chosen inductive approach within qualitative research, as well as the collection of empirical material via semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the data analysis process is described, and the ethics and quality of the conducted research is discussed, alongside with recognizing the limitations of it.

3.1 Research Philosophy

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson and Jasperson (2018), one can distinguish two opposing views of epistemology, that is the theory of what can be considered as acceptable knowledge, namely positivism and social constructionism. While positivism views reality as objective with a social world existing externally which can be measured only via objective methods, constructionism on the other hand regards reality as socially constructed with individuals giving meaning to it by the interaction with one another (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). The origin of this research is rooted in the researchers' presumption that political consumerism is a social construct which means that every participant of society will have a different experience and perception of what it means to engage in political consumerist acts based on one's past experiences and socialisation process. Moreover, as the term already implies, identity construction as such is not only majorly complex and elusive, but also constructed by people themselves. Therefore, this study takes on a social constructionist standpoint in line with the ontological relativism position. In this way an emphasis is placed on understanding how different experiences and lifeworlds of individuals engaged in everyday political consumerist actions are reflected in the process of personal identity construction. In order to capture this, it is necessary to gain a holistic understanding both how the consumers think and feel about sustainable consumption and political consumerist

practices and how they incorporate and reflect on these in their daily lives. Consequently, so as to answer the initially posed research question on how consumers construct their personal identities through everyday political consumerist actions regarding environmental sustainability, this study applies a constructionist approach in interpreting the various thoughts, meanings, feelings and associations behind such engagements.

3.2 Research Strategy

A research strategy in essence determines how research is conducted, through the research approaches of qualitative, quantitative and mixed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). While contextual and individual interpretations cannot be captured via quantitative research, qualitative research incorporates contextual understandings of peoples' intentions and motivations, that benefit from as many impressions and insights as possible (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Overall, small samples are applied in qualitative research for the purpose of exploring processes, meanings and drivers within different contexts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Literature on consumer identity construction through everyday political consumption until recently has been rather scarce but today poses an increasingly debated issue in marketing research. Especially since this study aims to enter inner thought processes and the "lifeworld" (Kvale, 1983, p. 174) of consumers, it requires an in-depth analysis other than quantitative research to truly capture one's world of experiences in a social setting that can shape one's activities. Thus, the research strategy applied for this thesis is qualitative research, which provides the opportunity to gain an overall understanding of how individuals' political consumption practices within sustainability are interlinked with their individual sense of self. Moreover, given the contextual positioning of this study within the generations of Millenials and Gen Z and the fashion industry, qualitative research allows a certain degree of flexibility neccessary to understand the thought processes and feelings of young consumers when it comes to clothing consumption.

The method of primary data collection applied in this study are qualitative interviews, as they prove to be a suitable empiric tool in the context of studying largely unexplored research phenomena such as identity construction through political consumerism (Kvale & Brinkmann,

2009). According to Charmaz (2014), qualitative interviews consist of a number of questions that aim to address a specific issue or topic in detail, allowing enough space for "mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation, elucidating subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints" (Tracy, 2013, p. 132 cited in Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Whereas unstructured qualitative interviews are realised without an interview catalogue, semi-structured interviews are based on a guide of prior defined open-ended questions, enabling the interviewees and interviewers to adapt the individual interview situation whenever necessary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Furthermore, the relatively casual atmosphere of semi-structured interviews allows the capturing of a great amount of information, as the interview guide purely functions as an orientation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thus, semi-structured interviews are chosen for this thesis, as they provide a suitable context for exploring consumers' self-perception and self-expression through everyday political consumption practices in an explorative way, grasping not only the interviewees' perceptions, feelings and opinions but also their underlying motives (King, 2004 cited in Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Further, the open interview guide of a semi-structured interview allow respondents to be more personal in their answers, while establishing a higher degree of confidentiality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.3 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique for the interviews was carefully reflected so as to guarantee an optimal match between the interview sample and the context of the study. Therefore, the interview participants were selected among Millenials and Gen Z, who live in Sweden at the point and who are engaged in sustainable consumption and political consumerist actions. The interviewees were seeked through postings in both open and closed groups on social media channels such as LinkedIn and Facebook, mostly targeting students living in Lund, Sweden. The latter was done with the purpose of ensuring the highest probability of matches with the selection criteria of belonging to Millenials and Gen Z living in Sweden, given that Lund is recognized as a student city. Moreover, the respondents were intentionally chosen from different age groups and country backgrounds, which comes especially natural in light of the

multinational character of the city of Lund as one of Sweden's major student hubs. The choice of searching for interview participants in social media groups for students living in Lund was also based on factors of convenience and proximity, with both of the researchers living and studying in Lund. After publishing the social media posts that seeked for interview participants, a variety of people agreed to partake in the interviews, eventually reaching a number of 19 willing participants. The interviewees were selected based on ad-hoc sampling, prioritising availability and ease of access (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.4 Data Collection Process

The primary data for this qualitative study was gathered via 19 semi-structured interviews (see Table 1 below). The interview participants were either current students, newly graduates or working professionals at the ages of 22-33, holding a variety of backgrounds in terms of nationality and ethnicity. The interviews were scheduled and conducted based on the indicated convenient dates and times of the interviewees during a three week period in April 2022. After confirmations of participation and agreements on the time of the interviews, interview invitations were sent by the researchers to the participants by email, including a meeting link to a digital meeting platform, such as Zoom and Google Meet. While this might have limited the collected data with some connection issues occuring and not being able to fully see and interpret the interviewees' physical gestures, it however broadened the scope of the study to include participants from a wider range of places in Sweden. On the days of the interviews, reminder emails were also sent to the participants an hour early before meeting. The interviews lasted up to 60 minutes with an average length of 40 minutes and were recorded with the initial articulated consent of the interviewees for ensuring a more accurate transcription and analysis process of the collected data, as well as for having recorded evidence of the data collection process.

Table 1: List of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	City of Residence in Sweden	Interview Duration
Barsha	Female	30	Bangladesh	Malmö	35 min
Asmara	Female	28	Indonesia	Lund	43 min
Sita	Female	28	India	Lund	39 min
Linda	Female	25	United States of America	Lund	45 min
David	Male	33	United States of America	Lund	30 min
Greta	Female	28	Italy	Norrköping	41 min
Emma	Female	24	Sweden	Lund	30 min
Sarika	Female	28	India	Malmö	37 min
Anamaria	Female	32	Romania	Malmö	55 min
Carmen	Female	26	Bolivia	Länna Gård	49 min
Delima	Female	25	Malaysia	Lund	48 min
Aurora	Female	26	Italy	Gothenburg	48 min
Olivia	Female	22	England	Lund	49 min
Anahit	Female	28	Armenia	Lund	45 min
Grethe	Female	26	Norway	Lund	33 min
Mentari	Female	27	Indonesia	Lund	25 min
Gabriel	Male	27	France	Lund	30 min
Andres	Male	31	Colombia	Malmö	47 min
Aadhya	Female	24	India	Gunnesbo	37 min

The researchers conducted all of the interviews in pairs, with one of the interviewers taking interview notes and the other presenting the questions to the participants, respectively. This was especially important for enhancing research validity and increasing confidence in the accuracy of interview observations, hence serving the purpose of investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Additionally, having two interviewers present during the interviews can be beneficial insofar as it may loosen up the atmosphere and engender a more fruitful discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2011). While being open to ask follow-up questions for further clarifications and explorations and adapt questions based on individual respondent scenarios, the researchers used a pre-designed interview guide as a starting point. The interview guide was comprised of 20 - 26 questions, structured into four parts: i) General Understanding of Sustainable and Political Consumption, ii) Personal Relationship of Clothing Consumption with the Self, iii) Sustainability Concerns with Clothing Consumption, and iv) Engagement with Political Consumerist Actions, v) Implications for the Self with Political Consumerism (see Appendix A). The first part of the interview guide with introductory general questions aimed to gain a general understanding on how the respondents individually understood and defined sustainability, sustainable consumption and political activism, as well as to understand to which extent they considered themselves as sustainable consumers or active in political consumerism. The second part of the interview guide had the purpose of diving deeper into the respondents' sustainable fashion buying habits, motivations, perceptions and feelings in relation with the self and its expression. The third part was designed to understand the respondents' awareness and consideration of the environment when consuming sustainable fashion, as well as the importance they attach to being a sustainable consumer based on their personal values. Then, the last two sections of the interview guide included detailed questions on the respondents' engagement and past experiences in political consumerist actions, along with their motivations, perceptions and feelings around it stemming from and influencing the self.

While the pre-designed interview guide was effective for collecting the required empirical data for answering the research question posed in this thesis, the interview process on itself helped the researchers refine and improve the guide as more interviews were conducted and more insight on the questions involved was collected. Even though the originally created five themes of the interview guide remained the same, researchers changed and added a few questions along the way. Most importantly, during the interviewing process researchers

continuously stayed aware and attentive of their influence on it, which Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) describes as researcher reflexivity, a critical factor for the data collection and analysis process. For staying reflexive during the interviews, it was important for researchers to refrain from agreeing or disagreeing to any answers given, be it in a verbal or body-language form. Yet, it is important to mention that researchers generally welcomed the interviewees' answers with occasional reactions such as head nodding and phrases like "uhum" or "I see", in order to set an affirmative environment, to make interviewees feel listened to and understood, thus comfortable enough to share all of their thought processes and feelings. However, these affirmative reactions might have been picked up as signs of agreement by the interviewees and thus possibly affected the course of their answers.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that the data collection process itself made the researchers revise the initial research question posed for this thesis. The latter was more focused on exploring consumer identity construction through political consumerism in general, thus the initial questions included in the interview guide were more focused on the meanings and experiences of the respondents' engagement in various types of political consumerism. Yet, as more interviews progressed, a recurring theme was noticed in terms of the respondents stating their rather silent activism in political consumerist actions that would entail day-to-day practices. Thus, the researchers recognized the need to shift most of the questions in the guide regarding political activism towards slightly differing formulations that would better explore the respondents' meanings, perceptions and experiences behind their everyday political consumerist actions.

3.5 Data Analysis

One can find different approaches to conducting qualitative analytical work, each method involving a different frame, hence, leading to different findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, p. 266). The analytical method that was chosen for this thesis is the inductive method, with initial identifications of specific codes and categories through the recognition of patterns in the data so as to arrive at general principles (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, p. 267). Overall, the data analysis of this thesis was guided mainly by the principles of qualitative analytical work by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), while proceeding systematically to ensure a complete

analysis and "minimise potential distortion from selective use of the data" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 496). However, before the data analysis process could start, it was necessary to organise the data collected from the 19 interviews to facilitate the overall process of analysis. The process of transcribing and taking notes during the interviews allowed the researchers to capture a detailed record of the respective interview situation and to further familiarise themselves with the collected qualitative data. In order to address the common problems of working with qualitative material, that is, the *problem of chaos*, the *problem of representation* and the *problem of authority* (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018), this thesis' analysis was structured into the three parts proposed by Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018): *sorting, reducing and arguing*.

In the first step of the data analysis, that is sorting, the collected empirical data was familiarised with through re-reading the interview transcripts and notes and highlighting important excerpts, followed by a thematic sorting that emerged from recurring similar statements (Rennstram & Wästerfors, 2018). Via the process of initial coding, certain interview quotes were allocated to a variety of groups, with the attempt to code as openly as possible so as to ensure to not miss any relevant information (Charmaz, 2002). Additionally, based on Spiggle's (1994) proposition of categorization, the process of grouping codes that are examples of or represent different phenomena, the coding process was accompanied by assigning names or labels to the identified chunks of data. As the sorting process engendered an enhanced order and overview, it therefore tackled the *problem of chaos* that often arises with large amounts of empirical data (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). Subsequently, in the second step of the analysis the researchers conducted a categorical reduction, in order to condense the collected empirical material, which according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) is an omnipresent endeavour in qualitative research as it addresses the *problem of representation*. Particularly important hereby is the prioritisation of certain categories over others in order to create a more manageable and relevant set of data without neglecting the overall bigger picture. For this purpose, comparisons between the identified codes and categories were made to explore differences and similarities and ensure their alignment in matrices (Spiggle, 1994). Finally, via the process of arguing, that is theorising on the collected material, the *problem of authority* is addressed. This is done via the researchers' effort in building theory via a continued sorting and reducing process. The focus hereby lies on commenting on the findings made in the previous steps and producing a meaning in more general terms (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Hence, in this step the determined groups of

categories were allocated to three main themes for the purpose of further abstraction of the data as well as situating the findings in previous research. Overall, the researchers created three main themes with a total of nine categories extended by the codes as presented in Appendix B. Important to mention here is the fact that throughout the process of sorting, reducing and arguing, the research question functioned as the locus that was continuously borne in mind.

3.6 Ethics and Quality of Research

Regardless of the chosen methods, it remains an important academic effort to stay critical and reflective with the handling of empirical data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Dominant research quality criteria are reliability, validity, transferability and generalisability, however these stem from positivist viewpoints which, according to some scholars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Steinke, 2004) are not adequate for interpretative studies. Therefore, as argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985), it requires different evaluation criteria, namely (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability.

The first concept of credibility refers to the validity and accuracy of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was intentionally increased within this study by conducting the interviews online, allowing a certain degree of personal distance for the respondents to feel confident in their responses and to speak truthfully (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Moreover, the semi-structured style of interviews allowed room for open answers, even those unrelated to the interview guide but still within the topic under study, hence providing the respondents with a certain agency to bring forward what they found important and relevant (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). As mentioned in section 3.4, the overall validity of research was additionally enhanced via investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978), with both researchers being involved in the process of conducting and analysing the empirical data. The second concept of transferability refers to which extent the findings are generalizable or applicable in other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Generally, it was not the aim of this thesis to produce generalisable findings given the qualitative nature of it. However, it was purposefully intended to reach respondents from different age groups and country backgrounds, which is especially probable in light of the multinational character of the city of Lund as the point of

origin. The third evaluation criterion, dependability, refers to whether the study would have different results if conducted by someone else in the future (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Since the interviews were conducted by both authors in a rotational manner, the follow-up questions might differ in nature, however the interview guide provided a constant base after all to ensure a ground for comparability. The fourth concept of confirmability is formulated when credibility, transferability, and dependability are achieved all together (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As Tobin & Begley (2004) explain it, confirmability refers to the extent of the study's interpretations and findings being derived from the data, thus requiring explanations and justifications on how conclusions have been reached. To help the readers of this thesis understand why and how certain interpretations and conclusions have been made, clear reasoning for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices have been presented throughout the entire study, as recommended by Koch (1994).

With the purpose of protecting the interests of the research participants and the integrity of the research community, the empirical research conducted for this thesis was designed to adhere to ethical codes and practices, in accordance with the ten key principles in research ethics outlined by Easterby-Smith et al. (2018). Those principles are: 1) ensuring no harm comes to participants; 2) respecting the dignity of research participants; 3) ensuring a fully informed consent of research participants; 4) protecting the privacy of research participants; 5) ensuring the confidentiality of research participants; 6) protecting the anonymity of individuals or organisations; 7) avoiding deception about the nature or aims of the research; 8) declaration of affiliations, funding sources and conflicts of interest; 9) honesty and transparency in communicating about the research; 10) avoidance of any misleading or false reporting of research findings (Easterby-Smith et al, 2018).

To follow the first five ethical principles by Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) that are concerned with protecting the interests of the research participants, first of all, each interviewee was made sure to understand the research purpose, expected results and their role in the research process, as well their rights of confidentiality and voluntary withdrawal from the research at any time. The anonymity of the interview respondents was also established based on the sixth principal by Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), therefore referring to them with pseudonyms instead of their real names in the analysis that will follow. Furthermore, accuracy and lack of bias in the research process were ensured by the researchers in different ways in order to protect the integrity of the research community, based on the last four principles outlined by

Easterby-Smith et al. (2018). Firstly, researchers ensured a transparent and honest way of communicating the nature and purpose of the study to the research participants, that is starting from the point of inviting them to participate up until the end of the respective interivew, according to the ninth principle for ethical research by Easterby-Smith et al. (2018). Then, the interviews were recorded to enable the interviewers to take detailed notes on the most relevant aspects afterwards and ensure that nothing important is missed. Most importantly, during the interviews the researchers listened to the respondents sharing their answers without projecting their own opinions and feelings into the situation, yet strived to help them to explore their own beliefs if needed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Finally, the highest possible degree of accuracy and impartiality in the research results were pursued by avoiding any misleading or false reporting of the research findings, via the process of critical reflections on potential influences on the research situation. Moreover, the interviewers made sure to stay perceptive to the responses given thus changing and adapting questions based on need for further clarifications and explorations.

3.7 Limitations

While there are many advantages of qualitative research approaches justifying the chosen research strategy for this thesis, there are also disadvantages that should not be overlooked. The first disadvantage of qualitative research is the issue of generalizability to the whole population, with the research methods having small sample sizes (Thomson, 2011). Yet, the aim of this thesis was to find a sample that "properly represents the population even if the precision is lower due to a small sample" (Easterby-Smith et al, 2018, p.p. 80). The second disadvantage that comes with qualitative research is the fact that the methods can merely be reproduced as a consequence of the researchers' subjective lens of interpretation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Third, qualitative research approaches are mainly designed to exclude contextual details, focusing more on meanings and experiences (Silverman, 2010). Given the aim of this thesis to understand identity formation through everyday political consumption, as well as the short timeframe assigned to the work, analysing contextual backgrounds would be rather redundant and impossible in terms of study aim, size and allocated time.

Then, qualitative interviews allow researchers to be sensitive towards any non-verbal clues, such as hand movements and facial expressions, and thus change and adapt questions based on need for further clarifications and explorations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). While the latter can be considered as an advantage, these further verbal clues can also possibly create room for misinformation (Sims, 1993). In order to minimise the possible creation of such misinformation during the interviews, from time to time, interviewers summarised the responses given by the respondents in the manner of seeking clarification, in order to avoid assumptions and validate the understandings made by the interviewers. Furthermore, specifically semi-structured interviews with more open questions raise the issue of requiring higher degree of confidentiality because of the personal nature of the respondents' answers to the questions posed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). For this, as mentioned before, the interviewers ensured the anonymity of the interview participants. Moreover, the choice of the sampling strategy for this thesis also comes with certain limitations. While the ad-hoc sampling strategy was mainly chosen based on the need for data collection in very short timeframes and with minimal to zero costs (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018), its limits on the analytical possibilities in the study (Emmel, 2013) are recognized by the researchers. In order to overcome those limits, the researchers paid maximum attention to effectively conceptualising, mobilising and refining theory during the research process for making better and more contextualised connections with the gathered empirical data to be used for data analysis and research findings.

4. Analysis

4.1 Empirical Findings

In this chapter, the collected empirical findings from the interviews are presented and analysed. For a clear overview, these findings will be organised into three main themes covering the interviewees subjective opinions, feelings and experiences on the bespoken topic. The identified themes were determined as 1) Consumers' Motivations for Everyday Political Consumerism; 2) Consumers' Inner Conflicts of Engaging in Everyday Political Consumerism; and 3) Consumers' Negotiation of their Identities. As the research question of this thesis concerns how consumers construct their personal identities through everyday political consumerist actions, the identified three themes together demonstrate the complex and interlinked process of how consumers construct their identities. The first theme addresses consumers' motivations in connection to their personal values that drive them to engage in everyday political consumerist actions. The second theme explores different personal conflicts arising from consumers' participation in everyday political actions. The last theme concerns consumers' ways of negotiating their identities through various coping mechanisms applied on their personal conflicts. Together, the three identified themes show the three different ways of consumer identity construction through everyday political consumerism as part of a complex and intertwined process.

4.1.1 Consumers' Motivations for Everyday Political Consumerism

The first theme identified addresses the interviewees' personal drivers, that is underlying motivations of engaging in sustainable consumption within everyday political consumerism, as well as consumers' motivations regarding individual and collective responsibility taking. Together, these motivations play a significant role in the formation of consumer identities involved in political activism, which is reflected in the ways of consumers' self-identification.

While the first category addresses consumers' motivations for sustainable consumption and political consumer activism, the second subsection is a connector of the previous category, exploring the interviewees' overall motivation for their personal responsibilisation as a consumer. Then, the third category encompasses the self-imposed identities of the consumers based on their personal drivers for sustainable consumption and political consumerism and motivations for general responsibilization.

Personal Drivers for Sustainable Consumption and Political Consumption

A recurring opinion among the interviewees is that consumption and lifestyle practices per se have become politicised, that is every consumption practice holds a political implication. Hence, the respondents feel an urge to implement more sustainable consumption habits:

> *"I recognize that the values I hold for myself and that I try to live my life by, **have now become politicised** and they themselves are a political decision."* - Linda

> *"For a very long time I didn't consider myself being political because I just associated it with having a political colour, but I think **everything that we do nowadays is politicised**."* - Anamaria

Overall, in the words of Barsha presented below, it can be stated that everyone is political, whether deliberately or not, whether it is by making the decision to speak up or to stay silent. Thus, based on her point of view every consumption choice will inevitably have a political relevance, regardless of one's underlying motivation:

> *"Everyone is political, whether they want it or not, so it's just being very active and vocal about it or not very active and very silent about it. **Being political is expressing your opinion even when you are silent.** You are kind of expressing your silent positiveness to a person who is being vocal about it. If you don't say no to something, you're basically saying yes. That's my opinion."* - Barsha

Consequently, it becomes apparent that respondents feel that not only their personal consumption choices hold a meaning that goes beyond individual efforts, but also has a significant impact on the larger society. Overall, the shared motivation of most respondents to consume more sustainably is rooted in their conviction to protect the environment, which goes

in line with a human rights driven sentiment. The following statement by Grethe exemplifies this notion of personal engagement embedded in climate and social justice values:

> *"So this notion of **social justice within environmental limits are really fundamental values** that I hold. And that obviously then is also reflected in how I purchase. It then comes down to trying to make the most conscious decision and trying to think about how your purchase decisions and actions affect other people and also the environment."* - Grethe

In terms of the respondents' motivations towards engaging in political consumerism, the vast majority of respondents state that their urge to challenge the status quo, that is, to create a more sustainable world in opposition to capitalism and overconsumption, lies in the motive to create an alternative mainstream. This conviction is further reflected in the following statement by Grethe:

> *"I try to **resist the capitalist ideology of accumulation and mass consumption** through my own little habits. I am the rebel in my family and I don't think I've been doing anything particularly crazy. I'm just going against what would be seen as like the mainstream. That's where I find myself. I'm somewhere on the side that we are trying to make the new mainstream, that **it should be mainstream to care**."* - Grethe

Interestingly, Grethe quite accurately encapsulates the essence of consumer resistance in her answer. As asserted by previous consumer resistance research (Kozinets & Handelmann, 2004; Ulver & Laurell, 2020), capitalism is the primary adversary to consumer resistance. Here, Grethe describes the underlying driver for her engagement in political consumerist actions, rooted in her conviction to position mass consumption and the capitalist ideology as the enemy. With her self-imposed label as the "rebel", it becomes apparent that Grethe's self-view is shaped through her opposition towards the mainstream and the unsustainable, leading to the assumption that the way she perceives herself is reflected through her daily efforts of resistance and creating a new mainstream. On this note, a similar viewpoint is provided by Anamaria, who emphasises that engaging in political consumerist actions is not only beneficial for the sake of being sustainable, but beyond that, provides a powerful stage of starting a conversation that can foster change from within.

*"I think more than just doing something and joining or being sustainable yourself, **the power in all these actions is the conversations that they start** on a personal level. It feels powerful. "* - Anamaria

Moreover, another perspective that spurs the interviewees' motivation to be more active is their sense of guilt when seeing other people and friends engage in political actions. As Andres describes, he often experiences periods of self-doubt about whether the actions he engages in actually prove to be effective or whether he needs to do more.

*"It also makes me feel like I'm doing something. But it also makes me question myself. Am I doing enough? Even though I'm doing something it is hard to see the change, **it's hard to see the red thread, the line that goes from this protest to the change.** So it's sort of radicalised a little bit, making me think on whether I should be engaging in more disruptive action."* - Andres

Similarly, Linda shares that she feels a sense of encouragement to be more engaged when witnessing the activism in her circle of friends. While she acknowledges that there is a certain peer pressure, she also recognizes that most of her urge to participate in political actions comes from being inspired by others and using that inspiration to push herself into more action.

*"I have a number of friends who engage with or have engaged with the Extinction Rebellion as a specific example. Then **I question myself on why I haven't been more engaged.** I don't know if the ones that I engage in are to feel like I fit in. I think it's that in **having friends who do more, they provide me with more agency.** They give me a sense of being an agent and having control in decisions. When making decisions it can be very easy to get wrapped up in the fact that you don't, and so therefore there's no point to. So to not engage in that pessimism, they give me a sense of hope for the future."* - Linda

Another interesting perspective is delivered by Olivia, who opinionates that in light of global socio-political issues, everyone is exposed to a feeling of accountability for their actions. While she beliefs that her values and lifestyle can never be fully in alignment, it still lies in her sole discretion how much she can try to navigate it in the best way that works for her to feel somewhat at peace with herself. Further, she believes that engaging in political action is a

way for her to gain more of a sense of self and a sense of her social world and natural surroundings. Ultimately, she states that once she has acknowledged the interplay of her daily consumption habits and its effect on global societal issues, she also learns more about herself and how much she is willing to change to feel more at ease with her own self and conscience:

> *"I've been doing political action because I think you have more of **a sense of your relationship to other people** and your relationship to the love you have to global systems and cycles. Because like often you're quite **confronted with your own culpability, for things going on in the world,** like climate change, or modern slavery, or like things like that. You have to confront the fact that **the way that you live and your lifestyle is dependent on those things** and you are contributing. I think that gives you a different relationship to your sense of self. Again, it brings you to the fact that **your values and the way you live can never be fully in alignment.** But finding your sense of self is like finding the crossover between where you are comfortable with that, like **how much you can change about your lifestyle to align as much as you can with your beliefs** in a way that you can live on a day-to-day basis and that could be okay with yourself. And I think maybe that differs from person to person. But I think that's how it kind of shapes your sense of self."* - Olivia

Regarding the interviewees' personal ways of engaging in everyday consumer resistance, it is found that all interviewees show to be politically active in a variety of ways. It is important to understand these, as they shed light on where consumers come from, i.e. their source of motivation. The most common type of everyday consumer resistance among the interview participants is the engagement in discourses to promote sustainability and educate one's social circles. Hence, simple acts such as having conversations with friends and family are recurrently mentioned:

> *"I think I'm very critical of my friends that like to shop just for the fun of it. I always encourage them to shop second-hand, and to think twice before they buy from fast fashion stores and brands. So more in terms of my personal connections and social circles. **I encourage people to be more sustainable** in the choices that they make, but it's not something that I would say is like my identifying value in my relations with other people."* - Delima

*"I think I'm the kind of person who likes to speak up for social issues. I like to do **bring up things and share with other people** just so they know what happened out there"* - Asmara

A contrasting viewpoint to this is delivered by David, who argues that he personally believes that one can achieve more effective change with actions rather than words, which consequently lead him to take a more proactive approach of resisting consumption via direct action, following the "doer-mentality":

*"I'm a fan of the maxim **"actions speak louder than words"**. So I don't necessarily talk about the subject in day to day conversations with people, but **I take action via my spending habits and in other direct actions**. So my actions demonstrate to people what my convictions are."* - David

Furthermore, other interviewees like Greta state that they prefer to act on their own rather than engaging in official consumerist actions:

*"I kind of **boycott in my mind**, but **I don't officially participate in that**. And I might have been to some climate strikes years ago, but I don't participate. I really believe that we need people like these that are actually showing that we need to do something. But I think I'm more of a person that prefers to act on that myself. So **I try to make a difference by acting myself** and being more sustainable instead of telling others that we shouldn't do that. But I also think we need these people."* - Greta

Overall, the hesitancy to engage in more extreme actions might be more than just a personal preference itself but as mentioned by Emma below, can be an underlying fear of not doing enough to fit in with the more radical crowd of sustainable activists:

*"I don't think necessarily everyone always has to be loud and active. I also know that as a person I'm flawed and maybe every once in a while, I'm a hypocrite and may buy something from H&M, so then it feels a little bit scary, because if you're with people who are very strongly activists, I feel like they're almost going to, like, call you out or shame you for not being the perfect activist, or at least that's sort of how I've always felt. And so then **it's easier for me to sort of just do it more quietly**."* - Emma

Motivations for Responsibilisation

As seen in the last quotes of the previous category, the respondents hold differing views on the allocation and amount of consumer responsibility, that is whether one chooses to engage in more individual or collective action, or in more quiet or radical action. While some believe in their individual power to make change, others are convinced that it is difficult to mobilise change through individual actions. A vast majority of respondents state that they feel a certain responsibility and obligation to act sustainably, as reflected in Giesler and Veresiu (2014), which is rooted in their privileges as a part of the more affluent consumer group from a global perspective and their entailed purchase power, as well as their literacy and knowledge on the issue of sustainability. In sum, these factors are what makes the respondents believe in the personal need to fulfil an "ethical imperative" and "a personal accountability" to be a sustainable consumer, however one would define that.

> *"At this point of my life, I want to consume more sustainably because I feel like I have acquired an incredible amount of information about the ecological crisis that the world is undergoing. So at this point, I feel like **it's an ethical imperative to consume sustainably**. Also with the belief that I particularly think that individual action alone is not enough for collective sustainability, whatever that is."* - Andres

> *"In order to work off this nihilism that I as an individual has no matter whatsoever, **I need to believe in my purchasing power** and need to put actions behind my values. And so that means that I make the decisions that I can within my control that align with who I am or who I want to be as well."* - Linda

> *"When you have a certain level of knowledge about the topic, then you kind of have to be able to look yourself in the mirror and be like I'm okay with who I am. I kind of have to live them up to a certain extent. So I think that is the motivation for me, **it's a personal accountability**."* - Olivia

> *"I see that when I purchase something, **it's essentially me voting with my money**."* - Emma

On the same note, Emma and Carmen bring forward that although small actions are important, they feel a general dissentiment with responsibility being pushed onto the individual consumer, when the problem is a systemic one and actual power lies in the hands

of big institutions and companies. The latter issue is said to be proliferated by neoliberal governmentality and capitalism (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014).

> *"We should all be striving toward some sort of sustainability. And that doesn't always need to be the biggest form, but just in small ways. I think it's important, this bigger picture thinking of how we, as people live our lives on this planet. But what I don't like about it is that there's so much attention paid to the consumer about our individual habits. Of course, the issue is with us and our overconsumption and overpopulation. But of course, **the issue is also with bigger companies who aren't making the changes that they need to make**."* - Emma

> *"I mean, individual actions are important, but if the structure doesn't change, the individual is not responsible for everything. Our **individual actions cannot change the whole structure**"* - Carmen

Complementary to this, Grethe asserts that although demonstrations on the streets are important, she holds the conviction that it is now time to engage in actions that provoke a change on a larger scale which she pursues through her activist role of disseminating knowledge and coordinating activist groups online. Hence, her preference to predominantly engage in less visible acts of civil disobedience are not due to her disbelief in its effectiveness, but rooted in positioning herself in the broader picture that makes the most sense to herself.

> *"For me the best year for civil disobedience was 2018, and since then I became a bit more aware that **we actually need much more systemic change**. Of course, direct action is very important for bringing light to the issue and there are some organisations that have done a really fantastic job in bringing these issues into mainstream debate, but we need more than that. So that's why most of my activism now takes place online through **arranging demonstrations** and giving support to others and doing more of the sort of **knowledge dissemination** and building up the momentum. So **coordinating and organising different groups across continents** and across different movements is where I try to come in so that we get more diverse foundations from where we can build this civil disobedience in wherever place that we can help each other."* - Grethe

In sum, these excerpts highlight the common objective to live up to a certain individual responsibilisation, recognizing that individual action is a critical part, but not the solution to a collective problem. Hence, it can be concluded that the respondents are reflective of their role in the overall effort to combat socio-political injustices, while recognizing the limits of their personal capabilities.

Motivational Self-Identification

Overall, when describing what sustainability and sustainable consumption means to them personally, all interview respondents recognize that being aware and conscious is key, and those who think of themselves as sustainable consumers, even if not perfect, also perceive themselves as conscious and aware consumers.

> *"I would say I am **kind of a sustainable consumer**. I'm trying so hard to be more sustainable day by day, especially **trying to be more conscious** when I buy and use things, which is **the most important factor**, I think."* - Asmara

> *"I think **I am aware of what I'm doing**, which is already **a step towards being a sustainable consumer**, because a lot of people don't even care or consider this issue."* - Aurora

While almost all of the interview participants identify themselves as conscious and aware consumers, there are also respondents who attach particular labels to their identity beyond being an "aware consumer" and "conscious consumer". Those claimed identity labels, such as "climate activist", "environmentalist", "social activist", "rebel" and "minimalist", are reflections of their owners' political convictions and aspirations around sustainability and sustainable consumption in general, as well as in the clothing industry. Yet, it is also apparent that most interview respondents are comfortable to attach labels to their identities because of their deep-rooted political convictions that stem from such factors of life as education, occupation and lifestyle. Thus, individual backgrounds of the respondents play a crucial role in explaining their identity labels.

> *"**I would consider myself an environmentalist**, and a lot of that goes back to the fact that in **my job in archeology**, I'm out in nature for a long time. I spend a lot of time in*

national parks and around and in nature. So I'm very conscious of how my job and how my consuming habits affect the natural landscape. Items that I buy require natural resources. And I'm **keenly aware of how natural resources are harvested** *being out in the forests. So I've seen mine. I've seen forest logging. I've also been part of projects where we have to do forest management, and that's like cutting down really dry material so that it cuts down on forest fires. So I'm keenly aware that* **every time I buy a product, it's a natural resource tax***.”* - David

“I would say **I am a climate activist** *and* **I work in sustainability science***. So this notion of social justice within environmental limits are really* **fundamental values** *that I hold and that I try to bring in my work. And that obviously then is also reflected in how I purchase and use my clothes.”* - Grethe

Whereas, some interview respondents do not necessarily want to attach labels to their identities. When asked about how their political beliefs are reflected in their sustainable consumption choices, one interviewee who is actively involved in everyday political consumerist resistance shares about her actions being the bare minimum one should do:

“All that I do feels like **the right thing to do***, even though* **I don't see myself as a climate activist.”** - Delima

Interestingly, one interviewee who is very active in educating others about sustainability and advocating sustainable lifestyles, and who even has an Instagram account dedicated to that purpose, describes herself as someone actively trying to do better and what is right while being a non-extreme sustainable activist. She identifies herself as part of a general sustainable crowd that cares, based on how others perceive her.

*“**People kind of label me** as the one that cares about these issues or the one that is always doing these things. And **this makes me feel like I am one of those because I get called like that.** The new friends or new people that I meet usually perceive me as **the person who cares**. And I perceive myself based on this because I think t**hey reinforce the idea that I am this person**, because they keep repeating it.”* - Aurora

In summary, it can be derived that the interviewed consumers see their individual identities intertwined with their motivational drivers of engaging in political consumerist actions, in the sense that their motivations build the foundation for consumers to identify with a certain "label" that concerns sustainable consumption. The consumer self-identification itself also serves as a motivation for consumers' further engagement in political consumerism activism, with their motivations and self-identification mutually stimulating each other.

4.1.2 Consumers' Inner Conflicts of Engaging in Everyday Political Consumerism

The second theme identified revolves around consumers' inner conflicts that arise from their engagement in political consumerist actions regarding sustainable consumption practices, comprising personal contradictions that emerge between their daily pursuit of certain sustainability standards and the limits of the market. The identified categories are consumers' "Constant Struggles to Do Better"; "Pressures to Adhere to Normative Social Structures"; and "Personal and Marketplace Limits" which jointly explore personal conflicts that consumers are exposed to in their motivation to engage in everyday political consumerist actions.

Constant Struggles to Do Better

When attempting to understand how sustainability is defined and understood by the respondents, the data shows that they see it as a complex and nuanced phenomenon that is always context dependent. Hence, sustainability, as Andres argues, is a rather subjective concept that can have different meanings to different people, depending on one's mentality and perspective on the issue.

> *"Sustainability is a very complicated concept, it's a much more complicated goal. And it really depends, sustainability where? for whom? how? why? All those things are nuances of what it is. I've definitely come to realise how important that is and I've come to understand that sustainability has to include a lot of things." -* Andres

Consequently, due to the subjectivity of one's understanding of sustainability, most of the respondents hesitate to claim themselves as a fully sustainable consumer, since to them it is a matter of who they are compared to or a matter of the criteria according to which they are bound to judge. So, it is generally relative to them.

> *"I can say that **I'm more sustainable than most**. But there is **room for improvement**, definitely."* - Anamaria

> *"My perspective is very Latin American, mainly because I am from Uruguay. So, **in comparison with Arabian people, I'm super sustainable**. But, I mean, **it depends which are the criteria** we are talking about. In general, yes, I'm pretty sustainable in my consumption, but **not radically sustainable.**"* - Carmen

> *"**I think I am a sustainable consumer** because I try to stay away from these brands that I know are not good, also because I avoid buying things that I know that are not really needed for me. So in that sense, I think I'm really sustainable. But I also have a lot of sustainable friends. So we are kind of all influencing each other, right? And most of them are also vegan or vegetarian. So I think maybe **I'm not as sustainable as them** sometimes, but you know, **it's about finding the balance.**"* - Greta

> *"Yes and no. **It's constantly a battle** and **there's always trade-offs**, so I think it depends on what scale you're looking at and how you decide to define what you're indexing against. I think the biggest one for that, or like one that causes me a lot of back and forth is that organics are always going to be packaged in more plastic because that way they don't rub off on non-organics and then if they get tested on the flip side, one of the things I try is to not consume as much plastic. So which one is better? **Am I more sustainable if I consume organic or more sustainable when I consume less plastic?"*** - Linda

Furthermore, a commonality among the respondents' perception is that they feel like they are not enough of a sustainable consumer, yet they constantly try to be more sustainable. The reluctance of identifying as a sustainable consumer is therefore noticeable in the interviewees' recognition of their imperfections when it comes to sustainable consumption practices.

*"Well, **you can always be better** in anything you do, so I wouldn't say I am an absolutely sustainable consumer, but **I try to be** as far as I can be."* - Barsha

*"Not 100 percent, maybe 40 percent. I always try to make changes wherever possible. What I'm saying is **I am trying to change on a daily basis**, but I am like a sustainable consumer till up to 40 percent."* - Sita

*"Well I definitely think **I'm not enough of a sustainable consumer**. I am definitely not the most sustainable consumer there is."* - Andres

*"Sometimes I feel that **I'm not doing enough about my convictions.** So for example, my job is mostly about cars and developing software for cars. I always feel like it's not exactly what I want to do because I don't think cars are the solution for the future, maybe in some ways, but even the electric car is not what I see for our future, because you still need to produce electricity. So, yeah, sometimes I might not do enough but I would say that **I try my best.**"* - Gabriel

*"Being involved in political consumerism actions makes me feel like **I'm doing something.** But it also makes me question myself. **Am I doing enough?** Even though I'm doing something it is **hard to see the change**, it's hard to see the red thread, the line that goes from this protest to the change. So it's sort of radicalised a little bit, making me think on whether I should be engaging in more disruptive action."* - Andres

*"I feel like **I'm not doing enough**. You go to political actions and meet people and they always seem to be doing more. Like people are dedicating all of their lives to these things and changing the world in a very tangible way. And **that can be kind of intimidating** if you haven't done that, I think. That's like **a level of inadequacy** that you can feel."* - Olivia

It is noteworthy that in light of the last quote, Olivia accepts this sense of inadequacy in relation to her not doing enough that comes from participation in political actions. She also recognises the good side of the latter, as it can be understood as an encouraging challenge to take on:

*"But I think having that challenge is also a good thing I think, **one of the benefits of being involved in political activism is that kind of conflict that it presents within you**, and navigating that conflict within yourself is something good that comes out of it."* - Olivia

The above quotes show that there are certain internal conflicts that a consumer can go through when trying to be sustainable. As exemplified in the quotes below by Emma, Aurora and Anahit, while some of those conflicts can be based on the individual level, others can come from external factors, such as from certain constraints in the market concerning availability, transparency, quality or pricing. More on these individual and external conflicts will be discussed in the following categories.

*"I would say that **I try to be sustainable**. Obviously, as a student, it is a challenge, because usually, you end up paying higher prices for things that are made sustainably. It's also difficult as companies aren't always transparent with sort of how things are made and what they're made of and just their whole production line. And so even though companies can claim to be sustainable, **it's up to you** to actually go in and do the research to find out if that's actually true or if it's just greenwashing.* - Emma

*"**I do things that I'm not proud of and I would prefer to avoid**. But it's more because of the money issue. Sometimes it's difficult to buy second-hand if you have specific sizing, or if you need specific clothes for running or hiking for example, in which case sometimes it's better to have them new. This is because usually **certain things from second-hand are not good enough** because they are used. So yeah, it depends, **when I can I try to buy second-hand."** - Aurora

*"I would say I am a sustainable consumer not in all fields because **it's sometimes impossible."** - Anahit

In contrast to the common theme of respondents trying their best and wanting to be more sustainable on a daily basis, there is also a respondent who doesn't necessarily want to be

defined as a sustainable consumer since she lets herself to have unsustainable practices even though being aware of it.

> *"I don't consider myself particularly committed to sustainability in my everyday life. **I respect the value of sustainability and eco-friendliness**, and I do want to do more, especially in terms of the choices that I make, yet at the same time **I don't limit myself to only the most sustainable choices**."* - Delima

Pressures to Adhere to Normative Social Structures

Overall, most interviewees talk about their struggles to conform with societal expectations regarding certain dress codes or fashion trends. As Linda and Olivia describe, they often find themselves trying to fulfil the need to fit in to the newest trends imposed by society and brand advertisements. Interestingly, both are very aware of the extent to which they are influenced in their purchase decisions, and Olivia even goes so far as to recognize that she often feels persuaded into wanting or desiring a specific clothing item, and how critical it is for her to resist imposed temptations of overconsumption.

> *"I've gone through too many identity crises to identify with my clothes at the time. I think my clothes are reflecting where I feel I'm at in life. Some of the values that I think of course are more just like me **projecting external societal expectations**."* - Linda

> *"I think what I find difficult about buying new clothes is the feeling of inadequacy that I have about all of the other clothes that I own and feeling like they aren't good enough. Or also just being surrounded by new things. It sort of **switches your brain to a different part which is like advertising**, the stuff that you're told every day about like, "You should consume, you should buy new things, you won't have a good summer unless you buy this really lovely dress." That part of your brain is like, switch back on. You have to kind of work to shut it down again, and turn it off and remind yourself that what you're doing and **how you're dressing is great. It's just that these shops want you to think that it's not**."* - Olivia

While the representation of oneself through one's clothing style alone may be associated with a lot of social pressures, expressing oneself through clothes becomes even more complicated

for consumers in pursuit of sustainable lifestyles. This becomes evident via the following statement by Greta , who finds herself struggling with living up to the image of a sustainable consumer.

> *"Sometimes I actually get clothes from friends or we exchange them. Maybe I'd get H&M, which is a company I will never go and buy clothes from. But then I can wear them because I know that I didn't give them any money. I didn't spend anything on that so I don't feel that I contributed to a company that I don't approve of. It's actually a bit contradictory. Sometimes I feel a bit ashamed if people can see the H&M label. **It's more like a war with myself.** So it's a bit of finding a balance between really sticking with your values in this sense, but also, then these clothes are just going to the trash if I don't wear them. So it's also not sustainable in that sense. So I'd say it's kind of really **conflicting feelings** that I have."* - Greta

Especially the fear of being judged by others for wearing fast-fashion clothes is a very common concern shared by many other respondents. However, it is not just the fear of judgement by the external world, but also inner conflicting feelings about wearing fast-fashion, even if from second-hand sources, that Greta describes as a battle with her own self. Similarly, a number of other interviewees like Aurora explain that they feel the pressure to constantly live up to the ambition towards being a sustainable consumer by making the right choices for the fear of being judged.

> *"I like to show that I try to care, but also because I think in the moment in which **you get labelled as somebody that is engaged in sustainability, you have to keep up the role.** Otherwise, I feel too vulnerable, like my friends say, Oh, you were too careful about the trash and now you buy H&M. So I like to specify when I do something good but more because **I'm afraid from being judged**. I should not care but I think it's very difficult to not care."* - Aurora

However the fear of being judged is not just what regards the level of trendiness and one's commitment to sustainability, but also the overall fear of making oneself more vulnerable to others when deciding to become vocal. As Emma describes, especially with online activism, she feels exposed to the entailed risk of criticism from others and therefore is hesitant to speak up about socio-political issues on social media platforms:

*"There is definitely a pressure there, especially if you're going to make it present on social media, because **you just open yourself up to so much criticism**. It's not something I feel I need to do and be so vocal about, especially when it will probably open me up to some more criticism that maybe I'm not really ready to hear yet about the way I live."* - Emma

Another external pressure emerging from some of the interviewees' answers is in relation to having to accept gifts from their family and friends. Interestingly, they show hesitancy to accept the gift giver's extended identity when accepting and using the gifted possessions with total control, while insisting on no affiliation of their identity with the gifted possessions in use.

*"**I still get lots of clothing as gifts**. It's a thing in my family, to gift clothes. Then **it's more wasteful not to use it**, even if I don't love it and all it stands for. So I guess with the things that I've purchased for myself, it's fully aligned, but with all the things in my wardrobe there is still some misalignment."* **-** Grethe

*"I bought a pair of jeans in H&M, like in 2018? ...**They were a gift**. I mean I went and picked them. Someone wanted to give me something new. **So it's like I had to accept it**. And funnily enough, they're my newest jeans and they're the most broken pants that I have, the quality was sh*t. Right now I'm wearing pants that I've had since I was like 19 years old, and they're perfect."* **-** Andres

This can be seen as contrary to the viewpoint of Codere (1950) and Dillon (1968) cited in Belk (1988) that explains gifts as coming with "a partial imposition of the giver's identity" (p. 150) and the receiver having to "acknowledge the giver's mastery when accepting the gift" (p. 150) which can result in some loss of self. While the interviewees state to accept the gifts that come with the gift givers' partially imposed identity, they don't necessarily take it as part of their identity and experience no loss of self, while trying to stay true to their values and beliefs.

Personal and Marketplace Limits

Throughout the interview process, it becomes apparent that the respondents are all fighting their personal battles concerning navigating their purchases in accordance with their values of sustainability. These stem from restraints both on the personal and the marketplace level that dictate the extent to which consumers have control over the sustainability of their purchase decisions. Most often than not, the interviewees report feelings of remorse to emerge within their conscience whenever they are obliged to make purchases contradictory to their values.

> *"I felt bad and I still loved what I got, like a new belt. It was a belt made out of cork, it was new and it was in this super big tourist shop that I came into. So I was living through many conflicts. One of those issues is **self-loathing for liking what I liked**, but at the same time, telling myself, well, if I like it, why can't I get it. It's just a belt at the same time. It's a very iterative process, and it's **like a discussion with myself constantly**, with those things."* - Andres

Most of the interviewees' personal dilemmas and conflicts are rooted in market constraints and the limited scale of second-hand fashion. Especially the fact that second-hand clothing, although being a more sustainable alternative, is still built up and runs on the shoulders of a system that continues to be dominated by fast fashion overconsumption, is what makes the interviewees doubt their justification of buying more when it is second-hand. The quotes below by Emma, Anamaria and Linda demonstrate these personal struggles:

> *"I find most of it challenging because I am a person who quite enjoys fashion and I like to have clothes to sort of express myself and make my day to day style. So when I see clothes, I get excited and I'm like, Oh, this will look really nice for like this occasion or something like that. But then, of course, I also have the **conflicting side** where sometimes **it's hard to find the clothes** that I would like to buy, and **that reflect my style from sustainable companies**."* - Emma

> *"**I feel guilty** with every guilty pleasure. Every time that I buy something that's expensive and new and it does not support and stand for what I want, **I struggle with it**. [...] Even if I'm buying from second-hand markets, it's still a lot of brands that are fast fashion. You're still wearing Zara and H&M because you find them and you buy them and think, oh, it's so gratifying that I didn't buy it from the shop itself, but you*

still wear it and it still breaks or changes after you wash or whatever it's still not a quality product." - Anamaria

*"I think because that has led me to feel less guilty if it's second-hand. So then I don't mind buying more. So **it's me greenwashing my own decisions for myself**."* - Linda

Moreover, many other respondents like Aurora mention that their lack of capital represents a primary obstacle in the overall ambition to make more sustainable purchase decisions of clothes. Hence, many interviewees state they are prone to be more price sensitive towards clothing, stimulating their temptation to opt for fast fashion. However, some interviewees like Greta mention that, despite their lack of economic capital, they still hold a willingness to pay more for products that are of higher quality and durability, or from sustainable sources and fabrics.

*"I will try to buy something that is not too bad for the environment or for the people. Although **there is a problem of money because I'm a student** as of now, so I don't have too much money, so I kind of have to make it a choice. I try to do what is best for me, but also for the planet, **it's a kind of meeting point**."* - Aurora

*"If I buy second-hand, maybe something fancy, then **I am happy to pay a bit more for it when I see that it lasts longer**. So in general, I'm really focusing on buying less that can last longer."* - Greta

Interestingly, a number of interviewees reflect the notion that sustainable consumption overall feels like a liability and overall restriction, which can only be lived up to a certain extent, that is within one's personal limits:

*"I gave up in a lot of things. This is my part. I'm trying to do this and **I still have to enjoy my life as a human being.** If everybody gave up something, then we can start to make a difference"* - Aurora

*"Sustainable consumption for me means consuming less, it really comes back to the balance of a want or a need and how I define **what I need for myself versus the want that seems like a need that is more outward facing**. So it's actually really just trying to ascribe a utility to what I consume and whether that is worth the monetary value,*

*but then again it's not just monetary value that you put into something but **it takes up time and space in your life as well**." - Linda*

In fact, it becomes obvious that hedonistic and utilitarian approaches to the interviewees' consumption mentalities are often converging in the sense that one is often faced with the choice of making a purchase to serve one's desires and self-fulfilment versus not making a purchase or only making a purchase only out of necessity for the sake of a more sustainable purchase intention.

4.1.3 Consumers' Negotiation of Their Identities

The third theme identified from the gathered empirical data sheds light on how respondents perceive themselves when it comes to everyday political consumption, how they express their identity through sustainable consumption practices, how their engagement in every political actions makes them feel. In sum, while navigating through these things, consumers negotiate their identities in the pursuit of finding a balance between their self-concept with inherent personal values and their everyday actions. Consequently, this theme of the empirical data analysis dives deeper into understanding how being involved in political consumption can contribute to the identity construction of the consumer through consumers' negotiation of their identities.

Self-Expression Through Sustainable Fashion Consumption

In support of Berger and Heath's (2007) view on fashion being a means of showcasing one's identity, the gathered data shows that many interviewees see sustainable fashion consumption as a way to showcase their inner world, the personality they hold and the underlying values of the self, to an extent where sustainable fashion becomes an "icon" of the self.

> *"I really enjoy shopping for clothes as **this creative expression**. For me, clothing is one of the ways I express myself, my creativity. So, shopping for clothes, for me is maybe less often that I am wanting a particular thing or I need it, but it's more that I'm **looking for something that speaks to myself and I feel like represents who I am**. And because there is so much variety in second-hand stores, and there's no branding and*

*advertising telling you what's fashionable right now and what you need to wear, it becomes **a decision you have to make for yourself**. So, I think your values and the way you relate to fashion kind of connect."* - Olivia

*"I think that it is very important to me to be able to identify myself and my values with the clothes that I wear because at the end of the day **I still do express myself through clothes**. And also the brands that I associate with need to be able to have **similar belief systems** as me. So that's quite important to me overall. I think it's **feeling like I'm part of the purpose** that makes it more important to me and with respect to the clothes in itself, but I feel like it's very important to feel comfortable in what you wear and **feel like yourself**. "* - Sarika

As Sarika's quote suggests, consumers tend to form meaningful connections with the brands they choose to wear based on their inner values, creating that "self brand connection" as Escalas et al. (2003) calls it. Such value-aligned brand connections further show consumers' inherent willingness to express oneself through clothing.

*"I think that with the clothes that I'm wearing, I like to **feel like myself** and to dress in a way that I **feel true to who I am on the inside** through the different colours that I like and the cuts and the shapes of the clothes and so on. So that I pay a bit less attention to brands. **I prefer not to have huge logos**, especially if it's something that is not something that you really want to portray that you really agree with this brand's values."* - Grethe

Furthermore, the interview responses suggest that sustainable clothing consumption can be a way to show resistance towards the market and fashion trends accepted by society in general. It also can serve for more free expression of certain identity-traits, such as gender, which, in terms of expression, can be considered under societal pressures of rules and expectations in the world we live in. Thus, sustainable clothing consumption can also be perceived as a way to regain control of self-expression through clothing that is limited within the fast fashion context, while also showing resistance towards the mainstream and making a political statement based on general dislike of the shopping experience and overconsumption.

*"I think my sustainable fashion consumption choices contribute to my self-expression because **I am making choices that affect the way I dress, thus affecting how people view me.** I wouldn't want to be viewed as just fitting in in a way. So, I think sustainable fashion choices hopefully make it visually obvious to other people that I'm probably **not interested in fast fashion or trends and cycles** like that. I think maybe for me, it sends **wider signals of not wanting to conform to society**. Finding sustainable fashion has been a way for me to find clothing that makes me feel like I can **express my personality and my gender without having to conform to what I'm being told, how I'm being told to present that.**"* - Olivia

In contrast to most of the respondents' view, a few interviewees show indifference towards sustainable consumption as a means of self-expression. When asked about the importance of identifying their self and their values with the clothes that one wears, it is shared:

*"Not very important. I don't feel like I attach it to my identity very much, even at all. Yeah not at all actually. I definitely think that **there should not be any shame with clothes.** To me sustainability is quite a political concept and **it can mean anything to anyone**. So I haven't really tied it up to my identity because I think one day sustainability is something and another day I think sustainability is another thing. I also come from a privileged corner of society. So I feel like if I were to tie my identity to my clothing, I might enter into **shaming other people for having new clothes** without really understanding the fact that having new clothes can be a way of expressing economic mobility or something that makes someone else proud or happy. So that's why I would be a little bit **reluctant to tie it to my identity** or the part of my identity that is quite political."* - Andres

As Andres shares his viewpoint, sustainability itself is rather elusive and multilayered, which suggests that everyone holds a different understanding to how sustainability can be reflected within their fashion choices, hence their identities. Consequently, he is convinced that there should be no shame with wearing new clothes, as it can merely be tied to one's economic capital.

Overall, it is noteworthy to mention, that to most of the respondents', clothing style serves as a way to signal a certain image of the self to others, serving as visual cues for self expression,

both consciously and unconsciously, as described by Belk (1988), Berger and Heath (2007) and Chernev, Hamilton and Gal (2011).

> *"I definitely like other people to perceive me as **someone approachable and informal**, and that to a certain degree breaks some mainstream stereotypes about how one should look. But at the same time, I like to look appropriate, so I will definitely in certain occasions dress a little better, a little more formal. But as I've become a little bit older, **I don't care so much about it.** So I tend to drift more towards informality these days regardless of the situation I am in. But that's definitely an image I would like to project if I'm thinking strictly about my clothes and my surface."* - Andres

Anamaria even shares her view on the societal tendency to always categorise people based on what they wear and how they appear socially. In support of her view, Andres also reflects on the human tendency to attach meanings to everything, thus the individual choice of clothing always having to signal a certain meaning to others. The latter itself becomes the ground for consumers to negotiate the choice of signals through sustainable fashion consumption for portraying a desired image of the self in the eyes of others.

> *"I definitely think that my clothing style, if somebody would analyse it, would probably have a meaning. Maybe if people would really look into how I dress, which is very casual, they would think maybe she's from this type of income or maybe doing this kind of job. **I think socially you're always put into some kind of a category** based on how you dress or how you present yourself. But **I don't think I'm doing anything necessarily consciously to express anything**."* - Anamaria

> *"I think that we **humans have too many cultural attachments to everything**, and we send messages with everything and one of those is our way of dressing. We have to be dressed in a certain way, in certain places, at certain times. Coming to university with a T-shirt and an old-looking sweatshirt, instead of a suit and a tie or a polo shirt, it definitely sends a message. It can be something as simple as formality and informality, but it can be something as simple as trying to be underestimated or overestimated or trying to be respected or not, or trying to look hot or not. Now that I'm thinking about it, **where does it stop?**"* - Andres

While consumption choices are imposed by the identity, identity is also imposed by consumption choices (Belk, 1988, p. 141), thus how self-expression through clothing consumption choices contribute to the sense of self must not be overlooked. When reflecting on this process, all of the interview respondents express positive associations and feelings in regards to satisfying the self by creating harmony with the inner world and the outside clothing decisions.

> *"My clothing consumption habits definitely **validate me** in a way. They represent **which values are important** for me, which are sustainability and spirituality. I myself am spiritual, so I really believe that everything on this planet has a spirit. So I really want to try and **treat everything the way I want to be treated**."* - Mentari

> *"I'm concerned about the environment and social justice in my daily life and in my work. So it feels good to, you know, **live those values through clothing,** which is also something that **people can see.** So yeah, maybe it's like a nice kind of visualisation of how in an ideal world in my head would be like."* - Grethe

> *"I think my purchasing habits and sustainable consumption **reinforce my stances** on issues. To a degree, the fact that it can be done, it's that I do it and that it is quite affordable in all honesty, reinforces that it's a good choice to make. It is, I think, **the right choice to make** for me, for my lifestyle."* - David

In light of these interview excerpts it becomes apparent that the interviewed consumers negotiate their identities in the sense that they strive for their habits of fashion consumption and their self-expression to coincide with their ambition to pursue a sustainable lifestyle. Therefore, it can be argued that the interviewees construct their identities through their consumption of sustainable fashion, while there is identity negotiation involved in the process.

Consumers' Feelings Towards Political Activism

A commonality among the respondents' perception is that sustainable consumption based on their political beliefs brings them a sense of empowerment and emancipation from the market.

This stems from being able to live out their beliefs, and as a result reinforce, reaffirm and validate their selves with all of its convictions. The respondents also express feeling in control over their purchases and seeing their influence on others as empowering. These feelings are shared both by respondents who take only individual politically resistant actions in their everyday lives and respondents who are more publicly active in their political consumerist actions taking part in boycotts or climate strikes.

> *"I feel good with my actions as **I'm fulfilling my own principles**, like my own expectations of myself, upholding at least some measure of sustainability values in that sense."* - Nadine

> *"I feel good that I take part in political actions when I do. The fact that I'm surrounded by people with the same convictions, I think reinforces my own convictions. If there are other people who are in the same struggle and there are other people who do take action, that positively **feeds back into my own convictions."*** - David

In the same regard, Greta further shares about the importance of boycotting "Nestlé" products to remain true to herself to an extent where she would lose a part of her identity without engaging in the boycott.

> *"I think that definitely, **my boycotting made me the person I am**. Obviously, people change. People change their minds. And it can happen that maybe I would change my mind about them if I see that they're actually putting some effort. But I still don't believe their efforts are enough. But I think if I lose my boycotting Nestle and having these values without a reason, **I will not be the person that I am anymore** and **it will be a bit confusing for me**. I will be like I don't know who I am."* - Greta

Interestingly, when asked about their reflections on taking political consumerist actions, one of the interviewees mentions having an empowering feeling of creating a new mainstream, where other alternatives are possible. Thus, it is a feeling of empowerment for taking action that creates the possibility to go against the prevalent mainstream.

*"My participation in political consumerist actions makes me feel like **I am trying to continue to make change**. I think it makes me feel a bit empowered and I know that when I was not participating, I was feeling really depressed because it looked like there was no alternative. But **now I'm participating in creating an alternative, a new mainstream**. And it is very empowering."* - Grethe

Furthermore, there are two respondents who share opposite reflections on their political consumerist actions in regards to providing satisfaction to the self. While one recognizes and accepts the hedonic nature of the good feeling that comes after such actions, the other rejects it, putting more emphasis on rational choice making while still recognizing the good feeling about the self that comes afterwards.

*"I think **these political actions make me feel better**. But that's super hedonist and looking for satisfaction. It's not really much about that for me. I am doing what has to be done and what is rational."* - Carmen

*"On a personal level I recognise that everything that you do, be it charity, activism or whatever, is a selfish thing in the way that it really produces instant gratification. So I do know **I'm doing it for my own good first and foremost**, because I want to feel better that I did something correct, but at the same time I think on a bigger level I do believe that if everybody would have more trust that their own voice and actions can change something, **I would want people to be more selfish in that way.**"* - Anamaria

The gathered data also shows some respondents' sense of community, belonging and care gained from participation in political consumerist actions, which again proves empowering to them.

*"There's this quote that makes more sense to me now, like i**t's not nature that needs us, it's us who needs nature.** So if we nurture it, it nurtures us. This is my ground basis. So this makes me feel better that I'm trying to talk to people about these things, to educate them. It feels empowering. **It feels more like a communal feeling**, and you are sharing knowledge trying to make everybody's life better and not just yours, so it's a more communal feeling."* - Sarika

> *"There is that sense of empowerment, and there is also **a broader sense of caring** that you're creating an arena where it's possible to care for someone beyond yourself."* - Grethe

After emphasising the empowering feelings of involvement in political consumerist actions, the vast majority of the interview respondents also mention rewarding feelings of joy, happiness, relaxation, hope, self-development and self-gratification for doing something both for the self and the environment. As Andres mentions in the below quote, the engagement in political consumerist actions can be rewarding in many layers, yet it is mostly dependent on the individual to pick up the rewards specific to and in need of the self.

> *"Being engaged in these activities, I have some fun. **It feels very fun and I feel happy** sometimes. It's also **a good way of letting go of certain emotions** that I sort of repress. So I think that it comes back to me, so that it is also really useful in a way of **dealing with my own anxieties and relaxing myself and taking care of myself** to a certain extent. I think it's in many, many, many layers. I also learn a lot about other people's experiences, about other people's opinions, and there is a lot of like **personal growth and development.**"* - Andres

> *"Especially when we are with different movements in one Zoom call and you're sharing your knowhow of what you can do, what has worked the best for us, how should we generate the most care around specific topics, then you are **learning from each other.** It feels really like, I wouldn't necessarily say that it gives hope, but there's **something close to hope**, I don't know how to word it."* - Grethe

> *"When promoting and educating people about cleaning up after them wherever they are, I feel very good as I'm **doing something personally for me, as well as for the environment.** I'm a very tidy person and I personally don't enjoy when my surrounding is dirty."* - Anahit

> *"Participating in political consumerist movements **feels rewarding to me.** It feels like I'm **doing something that matters.**"* - David

The sense of pride is another common mention by the interview respondents when asked about how they think their political consumerism has contributed to the way they perceive themselves. Mainly, a proud feeling is reasoned from being able to showcase that second-hand clothing can also be fashionable while getting affirmation on it from others, as well as from being able to resist fast-fashion purchases and to recognize how far they have come in terms of consuming sustainably.

> *"It makes me feel many things, but mostly it **makes me feel proud of myself**, because in a way, you're sort of **exposing yourself** to some degree at least."* - Andres

> *"Sometimes I feel that it would be nice not to be alone in boycotting Nestlé because I think I am the only person that does that here in Sweden. But **I feel kind of proud** that I do that because I really am **putting effort into pursuing what I think is right for me."*** - Greta

> *"I do think that I have beautiful things in my closet. It would be super hypocritical for me to say that I don't care how people perceive me in any way, but **I feel very proud and very happy** when people compliment me on a piece of clothing that I found accidentally and was so cheap and it's an effect piece. You know you can be all black and black and black and then you have like a scarf that is wow. And then people are seeing that, and that was your bargain that you found and has a history and you relate to it. I'm super proud about it. And everybody else says oh my God, your blazer looks so nice and you're like, yeah, I spent 50 SEK on it, you know, and then everybody is like, oh really, from where? I think **it's a good conversation to have** nowadays, especially with people that are not as like minded as me because they never would imagine that you can actually have beautiful long life clothes from second-hand."* - Anamaria

The above quote by Anamaria also showcases her proudness to start a conversation with others because of her engagement in second-hand consumption, which to her is an important aspect of living sustainably and making a change.

> *"Then after this goes on, **I feel very powerful** to be able to have this conversation with people. And it feels like it **opens their eyes**, and **I think that's the power of it**."* - Anamaria

Then, Barsha also shares that it brings her satisfaction to know what she is doing and for which reasons she is engaging.

> *"Well, I wouldn't say fulfilled, but **I'm satisfied** with my political consumerist actions, that **I know what I'm doing and why I'm doing it all**." -* Barsha

As opposed to the positive and rewarding feelings of empowerment, belonging and pride, many respondents also share certain feelings of discomfort when reflecting on their involvement in political consumerist actions, whether it is via their participation in boycotts and climate strikes or simply trying to be sustainable on an everyday basis. The mentioned feelings of discomfort mainly include self-judgement and self-doubt. Interestingly, Linda questions her identity when comparing herself to her friends' involvement in political consumerist actions, yet she also attempts to recognize the positive outcome of that self-doubt in finding more agency and inspiration that is stimulated by her friends' actions, eventually providing her with a sense of hope.

> *"I have a number of friends who engage with or have engaged with the Extinction Rebellion as a specific example. Then **I question myself** on why I haven't been more engaged. I don't know that the ones that I engage in are to feel like I fit in. I think it's that in having friends who do more, **they provide me with more agency.** They give me a sense more of being an agent and having control in making decisions. It can be very easy to get wrapped up in the fact that you don't have control over your own decisions, and so then therefore there's no point to try. And so to not engage in that pessimism, they give me **a sense of hope for the future.**" -* Linda

Being angry, sad or scared during or from public political consumerist events are also feelings shared by a few respondents.

> *"When thinking about taking political actions to the streets or when joining an already organised initiative as a supporter, **I'm terrified**. This is because I just feel that **so many times things have gone so bad and have backfired the people that really tried to do a good thing**, so every time that I think about this public engagement, activism as in the pure form where you go to the street and you shout, then you show and you exercise your right to protest, **I just feel like panicking.**" -* Anamaria

*"**I feel scared** depending on what it is we're doing, and sometimes **I feel angry** and I get angry at the slightest things. I get very angry about how the Swedish authorities deal with mobilisation and demonstration in general, as if they knew better and like what you're doing is meaningless anyway, so why are you doing it. That attitude makes me super angry or that they give more importance to emergency exists in a building where there is no one than to the ecological crisis. So that makes me feel very angry too."* - Andres

Furthermore, another respondent shares about her negative feelings when being involved in boycotting "Uniqlo" based on beliefs that the company does not treat their workers properly. She elaborates on her negative feelings coming from the fact that she believes there should not have been a problem and she should not have had to boycott the company. Thus, she is questioning the act of boycotting itself, as it shows the inherent problem of the system where corporations do not show accountability for adhering to human rights and doing their part of responsibility for contributing to a sustainable future.

*"**I kind of feel bad** because I think treating their workers right is **something that the company should do in the very first place**. It's their responsibility to do it in the very first place, like treating the workers equally. So this boycotting is **not something that you have to feel the need of and be forced to do**."* - Asmara

In light of the previous findings, it becomes apparent that the different feelings that consumers are going through becomes a tool for justifying the way they choose to engage in political consumerist actions, both in terms of negative, positive or mixed feelings. Consequently, these feelings become an essential part of consumers' negotiation of one's actions with one's personal identity, that is, the form of participation in political activism with the personal beliefs and values that one holds.

The Pursuit of Finding a Balance

In line with the aforementioned conflicts of the interviewees imposed both by societal expectations and by themselves, a variety of respondents share their ways of coping with their conflicting feelings. Recurringly mentioned as a way to compensating one's unsustainable

purchases is the act of justifying one's decisions to oneself and to others for reasons of utility, price-sensitivity and convenience, or even through licensing oneself into believing that making more conscious decisions in one realm of life allows less sustainable choices in others.

> *"Buying sustainable clothes is also **a way for me to compensate** because I'm aware of the fact that most of my friends travel a lot by trains because they're from Germany and I feel guilty that I'm using the plane to go to Italy, so it can be a way to show them, you know, **I'm sustainable in that sense at least.** "* - Greta

> *"**I feel a bit ashamed** when I say that I buy from H&M because I'm always the one to say like, Oh, you should not support the business, they're not good. So **I always try to justify my action**. So I would say that I do care about it, but I'm not too good. I just do what is convenient for me at the end. I like to say like, Oh, I bought this, it was from the sustainable collection, even though we know that it's not always sustainable."* - Aurora

> *"There is definitely a bit of guilt present. It makes me a bit sad because I wish it would be possible to avoid it. I guess that's the point. Then **I justify to myself because I do my research beforehand** and like I would still go for avoiding plastic materials and so on. But in the end, you have to compromise on the social factors. So there is guilt present, that's for sure."* - Grethe

Moreover, a number of interviewees highlight the importance to find a balance with one's values and one's personal limits of wanting to adhere to them. Hence, they recognize that as an individual one can only do so much to work towards aligning one's consumption practices with one's values of sustainability, and that opting for more sustainable purchases is not always under one's control and is "part of the process". The quotes by Andres and Greta exemplify the notion of accepting one's personal limits of pursuing an all around sustainable lifestyle.

> *"I think that's part of the experience of trying to live more sustainably and **trying to become more of a sound person** in our consumption and in our daily lives is also living through and maybe reflecting upon the moments in which **there's the contradiction between what we believe and what we do**. So **it's all part of a process***

in the end, it's not like a light switch. Like now I'm a sustainable consumer, and now it's off. And now it's on." - Andres

*"I think it's kind of linked also with the fact that I have a lot of sustainable friends that are from my Master programme of Sustainable Development. We are kind of all influencing each other. [...] maybe I'm not as sustainable as them sometimes, but you know, **it's about finding the balance**."* - Greta

No matter the inner conflicts that consumers face when engaging in everyday political activism and the coping mechanisms they choose to deal with their conflicting feelings, the overall pursuit within consumer's negotiation of their identities is primarily to find a balance between their personal identities and their participation in political consumerism. Thus, seeking a balance is not considered as a negotiation on itself, but rather an anticipated result of all identity negotiations by consumers which contribute to consumers' identity construction through everyday political activism by achieving an overall harmony.

4.2 Discussion and Contributions

This chapter analyses and discusses the previously stated empirical findings. The latter will be further connected to the theory presented in the literature review chapter in order to give the findings more depth and to position this study within the academic conversation in this research field. By doing this, it will also be discussed how the empirical findings and previous research jointly enlighten an answer to the research question:

How do consumers construct their individual identities through everyday political consumerist actions?

Overall, a variety of main findings presented below are grouped into four main sections with the purpose of understanding consumers' identity construction in relation to their engagement with everyday political consumerism. The first section of the discussion provides contextual findings in terms of how consumers conceptualise sustainable consumption and political consumerism which builds the ground basis for better understanding the findings in the

sections that follow. The latter three will specifically present the different ways found for consumers to construct their identities through everyday political consumption, that is through consumers' motivations, inner conflicts and negotiation of their identities, while showcasing the complex and interlinked nature of the overall process.

4.2.1 General Conceptualisations of Sustainable Consumption and Political Consumerism

The first findings encompass the interviewees' conceptualisations of sustainable consumption and political consumerism which is especially important in order to understand where the interviewed consumers come from, that is how they personally make sense of these two concepts respectively and what role and importance they ascribe to each in their everyday lifestyles. Consequently, the interviewees' personal sense making of these two concepts are key to understanding how they construct their identities through everyday political activism with their own interpretations of the phenomena.

The Subjective and Relative Character of Sustainable Consumption

Having the difficulty to define sustainable consumption as a concept, it becomes apparent through the interviewees' understandings of sustainability and sustainable consumption that it is rather a concept with different meanings depending on the subjective eye of the beholder and the respective context. This viewpoint on the subjective character of sustainable consumption is reflected in the works of consumer research scholars (Heiskanen & Pantzar, 1997; Black & Cherrier, 2010), who assert that sustainable consumption is an elusive and ambiguous concept with no clear definition. Thus, sustainable consumption can be interpreted differently by different people, which as a fact finds agreement with this perspective on sustainability delivered by Heiskanen & Pantzar (1997) and Black & Cherrier (2010). Yet, this study also provides a further contribution to the theorising of previous scholars (Heiskanen & Pantzar; 1997; Black & Cherrier, 2010) in terms of bringing forward the consumers' relative understanding of sustainable consumption depending on contextual factors, thus having defined sustainable consumption as a relative concept in itself. This is further reflected in the extent to which some of the interviewed consumers identify

themselves as a "sustainable consumer", while the majority is rather reluctant due to the complexity and multifacetedness of the concept with an altered understanding depending on the context.

The Subconscious Character of Everyday Political Consumerism

Furthermore, the empirical data gathered within this study demonstrates that most consumers are actively but rather quietly engaged in political consumerism throughout their day-to-day practices such as personal boycotts and discursive action among friends and family, instead of choosing to be involved in loud activism such as demonstrations and climate strikes. Hence, everyday political consumerism shows to be a significant aspect of political consumerism, where more silent and mundane forms of activism are displayed. Additionally, it is found that a variety of respondents did not recognise simple day-to-day sustainable consumption choices reflecting their personal values or political beliefs. The latter can be interpreted in the way that everyday political consumerism is a rather subconscious endeavour that not everyone is equally aware of. These findings agree with marketing scholars of consumer research (Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard & Kristensen, 2011; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017) in their assertion that a significant part of consumers' resistance towards consumption is expressed through practices that remain largely hidden and invisible and less politically articulated.

4.2.2 Identity Construction through Motivations

The first mode of identity construction through everyday political activism is identified to be through various motivations that consumers have as driving forces for responsibilisation and engagement. These motivations play a significant role in consumers' engagement in everyday political consumerism through the way they shape consumers' self-identification further determining the type, level and extent of their engagement in political consumerism.

Political Consumers' Identity Construction: "I vs. Them"

Having explored the respondents' conceptualizations of sustainability and sustainable consumption, furthermore, a recurring theme emerging in the empirical findings is the interviewees' general opposition towards the unsustainable mainstream, mass consumption and the capitalist ideology. Particularly the way that the interviewees identify themselves via self-imposed "labels", as referred to by the interviewees, such as "environmentalist", "social activist", "climate activist" and "rebel", implies that their self-view is shaped against opposing camps of the unreflected mainstream and overconsuming market actors. This agrees with Heath, Cluley and O'Malley (2017) in their suggestion that conscious consumers "use their claimed resistance as a tool for identity construction" (p.12), hence identifying themselves against the opposition; as well as enforcing other works of major scholars in consumer culture and consumer resistance (Kozinets & Handelmann, 2004; Ulver & Laurell, 2020) that have employed global capitalism and consumerism as the primary adversaries of political consumer movements. This kind of othering against the mentioned adversaries employed by consumers can be understood as personal drivers to engage in political consumerist actions as it demonstrates how their daily political consumption practices are anchored in their self-identification. Thus, consumers are prone to act based on their self-imposed role and mission as a member of a certain social movement or philosophy, whether it is environmentalism, climate activism or minimalism, amongst others.

Consumers' Responsibilisation To Do Better

Moreover, it is found that the interviewees' underlying motivations to adopt sustainable consumption habits and to engage in political actions is rooted in a variety of aspects such as recognizing their privilege of being part of the more affluent consumer group, from a global perspective, with a certain purchase power and hence with a certain responsibility. Holding this privilege of "voting with your wallet" is what most interviewees describe as a critical aspect in contributing to a more sustainable and therefore socio-politically just world. Overall, the majority of interviewees opinionate that consumption habits have become politicised, especially in regards to sustainability, that is omnipresent on today's political agenda. In fact, it is observed that the respondents feel a constant urge to do more and be better, which most of them explain comes from feelings of remorse and personal culpability about contributing to

global issues such as climate change. This form of personal responsibilisation, as the interviewees state, is embedded in their literacy and knowledge on social and climate injustice and its interdependence with consumer culture. The latter is reportedly hard to ignore, which makes the interviewees both feel accountable for the impact of their consumption habits as well as compelled to constantly reflect on the ethical and ecological righteousness of their purchase decisions.

Interestingly, it is also found that consumer responsibilisation is additionally shaping consumers' sense of self in a way that consumers are increasingly confronted with their own culpability for their contribution to global socio-political issues like the climate crisis. As reported by the interviewees, they consequently feel inclined to confront the interdependency of their lifestyle choices and their surrounding world, which as they claim forms the relationship one has to one's sense of self. By accepting the fact that one's values and one's lifestyle and consumption choices can never be fully in alignment, the interviewees demonstrate a certain integrity.

It is further found that the queried consumers claim that the urge to act comes from within themselves, however, it should be argued whether their responsibilisation is rather a product arising from the governmentality of society. This finding enforces Giesler's & Veresiu's (2014) pioneering work in consumer research in their suggestion that consumers' responsibilisation is originated in an increased awareness of the contribution of consumption decisions on the environment and significantly shaped by "moralistic governance regimes" (p.840). Further, the interviewees' responsibilisation is mirrored in adopting the mission to "create an alternative mainstream" which is essentially reflected in Thompson and Coskuner-Balli's (2007) assertion that the market co-opts countercultural movements that are alternative and resistant towards the mainstream. The interviewees' inclination to identify themselves with a counter-culture against the existing capitalist system is also addressed in Ulver (2021), who asserts that the reason why consumers become increasingly engaged in activism is generally provoked by a politically polarising consumer culture, where consumer resistance can be referred to as a "market-sanctioned political manipulation" (p.16) assisted by the market. Consequently, the interviewees share a common misconception in believing that their everyday political activism is rooted in their self-concept, when it is in fact significantly shaped and steered by society at large.

4.2.3 Identity Construction through Consumers' Inner Conflicts

The second mode of identity construction through everyday political activism revolves around consumers' inner conflicts that they face when being engaged in political consumerist actions. These internal conflicts arise from their personal struggles of acting sustainably, according to their conceptualization of sustainability and extent of their responsibilization, in relation to the inherent market constraints that limit them in their desired actions. While navigating through these internal conflicts, consumers adopt different mechanisms to cope with the struggles they face, as a result shaping their identity accordingly, acknowledging the limits of their agency.

Pressures to Adhere to Normative Social Structures

While major works of consumer resistance towards marketing and consumption (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017) assert that consumers engage in loud or quiet forms of resistance in opposition to marketing, with the aim to undermine or escape consumer culture and the market system, they mostly overlook consumers' individual reasoning processes behind their decisions to engage in different forms of consumer resistance. As found via the interviews, this is particularly critical as it is connected to the way consumers perceive themselves and their role in making a change. In this regard, the findings show that consumers who choose to engage in more silent everyday political consumerism tend to avoid social pressures that come with being a more outspoken activist. This social pressure is mainly explained by having a certain societal image and expectation attached to the role of a relatively loud activist that one should keep up with publicly. While recognizing oneself as a sustainable consumer that is not perfect and always has room for improvement, it becomes a source of struggle and anxiety to be put under such light with loud activism and being seen and judged by others openly. Thus, as the interview responses show, the silent activist consumers tend to be more risk-avoidant and see themselves in making a change more quietly in safer spaces via engaging within inner social circles. Furthermore, contrary to this, it is found that those interviewees active in louder political activism hold the belief that effective change can only happen through direct action outside of one's comfort zone. Hence, based on the above findings, this research provides a novel theoretical contribution to the literature streams of everyday consumer resistance and political consumerism in

demonstrating that the consumers' "self-view", i.e. the way they see and perceive themselves (Gao, Wheeler & Shiv, 2009), becomes the underlying driver in choosing to engage in a certain form of consumer resistance over another. One's self-view plays such an important role in the way that it determines which signals to send through the engagement in political consumerist actions in order to project a desired image of the self to others in alignment with one's inner values and beliefs. The latter finding additionally goes along with the theorising of some consumer identity scholars (Belk, 1988; Schau, 2000; Berger & Heath, 2007; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011) who claim that people consume to express themselves via visible cues so as to portray a preferred image of the self to others, who tend to judge one's identity by one's possessions and consumption practices. Overall, it becomes apparent that consumers mutually stimulate each other into participating in more political consumption practices, as a result of peer pressure and social expectations. Hence, their conflicts comprise feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy about not doing enough or conforming to existing norms, which not only stimulates their responsibilisation but also feeds back into their identities by further shaping their self-view.

The Illusion of Consumers' Personal Choice

Another finding that arises from the conducted interviews implies that expressing one's self through consumer resistant practices helps consumers break free from the market to a certain degree, at least in one's agency over spending habits by choosing the best alternative for oneself. However, it can be argued that the interviewees' reported feelings that they hold agency and control over their consumption practices is rather illusionary, as the broader product offer is predicated and restricted by the market itself. Thus, the fact that the interviewed consumers feel obligated to adopt truly sustainable lifestyles becomes rather impossible within an inherently unsustainable market system. Consequently, this finding contributes to previous literature by enforcing Kozinets' (2002) assertion that escaping the market is the only way for consumers' true emancipation, which in reality is impossible. Hence, via consumer resistant practices such as personal boycotts or deliberate everyday non-consumption, the interviewed consumers reportedly feel liberated, however only to a certain extent. That is, they feel liberated within their personal limits such as lack of economic capital or hedonistic needs, and within market restrictions like the limited scale of sustainable options and alternatives to fast fashion. These market constraints and personal limits stimulate

consumers' misconception of not doing enough, as a result of which consumers are confronted with constant inner conflicts with the self. This lack of agency coupled with the respondents' belief that it is difficult to mobilise change through individual actions, implies that socio-political issues in fact are of systemic nature, which the individual cannot be blamed for, as most power lies in the hands of multinational corporations and public institutions. The latter finding adds to Giesler and Veresiu's (2014) argumentation that neoliberal governmentality and capitalism proliferate such systemic issues.

4.2.4 Identity Constructions through Negotiation

The identified third mode addresses consumers' inclination to negotiate their identities for the sake of navigating through a mixture of feelings arising from their engagement in everyday political actions and for the sake of finding a balance between their self-concept and their engagement in everyday political consumerist actions, which functions as a way to construct their identities.

Consumers' Feelings Towards Political Activism

The gathered data from the conducted research additionally shows how consumers' engagement in political activism can contribute to one's self-view through the feelings they have during their engagement, hence in turn playing a role in the complex and interlinked consumer identity construction process. This is one of the main contributions of this study to the literature stream of identity construction through everyday political consumerism (Holt, 2002; Black & Cherrier, 2010; Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard & Kristensen, 2011; Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011; Cronin, McCarthy & Collins, 2014; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017) where the interrelationship of everyday political consumerist actions and consumer identity is rather scarcely explored. Those feelings emerging from the interviews are senses of empowerment, and pride, as well as rewarding feelings. Through the sense of empowerment and pride the respondents reportedly feel validated and more in line with the values of their respective selves, thus feeling more true to their respective identities and validating their sense of self. These senses of empowerment and pride reach to an extent where the queried consumers feel that if they did not engage in everyday political actions, they would be having

a hard time understanding who they are and thus would lose a part of themselves. Interestingly, this finding is similar to what Belk (1988) proposes regarding the feeling of "loss or lessening of the self" (p.142) that is connected with the loss of possessions. Belk (1988) saw possessions as also including experiences, thus the lessening of the self due to non-engagement in political consumerism can be considered as an experience. This finds agreement with Belk's (1988) findings, as well as further contributes to it by understanding the connection of the self with possessions through the lens of consumers' experiences within everyday political resistance. Overall, through the experience of political activism, consumers negotiate their identities by seeking empowering and proud feelings for validating the self in contrast to the constant inner conflicts they have of not doing enough because of the personal and market constraints.

Furthermore, most importantly it is found that regardless of the motivations, internal conflicts and identity negotiations one goes through, consumers are in a constant pursuit of finding a balance of their inner values and beliefs with their lifestyle choices in order to be in harmony and to stay consistent with their selves on a day-to-day basis. Consumers construct identities that allow them to live in peace with themselves. This further demonstrates the complex and interconnected process of identity construction through everyday political consumerism, where motivations, internal conflicts and identity negotiations altogether play a crucial role in constructing individual consumer identities that would allow the achievement of balance with the self. This agrees with the finding in previous research on consumer identity (Ahuvia, 2005; Amiot et al, 2007; Reed et al., 2012; Suzuki & Satoshi, 2012) that people engage in certain consumption practices in order to stay consistent with their identity.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the aim of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the interrelationship between consumers' personal identities and their participation in everyday political consumerism, more specifically regarding sustainable consumption. The research uses a qualitative approach supported by 19 semi-structured interviews in order to gather consumers' thought-processes, feelings and experiences with everyday political consumerist actions for the motivation of sustainability. The study contributes to the literature streams of consumer identity, political consumerism, and consumer identity formation through political consumerism, and generally helps to broaden the knowledge on identity construction through political consumerist actions that has so far been only scarcely addressed by previous research.

5.1 Main Findings

This research results in several theoretical findings. Most importantly, a novel finding is made by contributing to the literature streams of everyday consumer resistance and political consumerism under the umbrella literature stream of consumer culture theory, shedding light on consumers' reasoning behind their decisions to engage in different ways of everyday political consumerist actions that critically contributes to the complex and highly interlinked process of consumer identity formation. This leads to the identifications of inseparable three modes that have been found through which everyday political consumers' identities are constructed, namely motivations, inner conflicts and identity negotiations. In terms of motivational drivers, the findings indicate that consumers engaged in political consumerism hold the inclination to identify themselves against the opposition, that is the "unsustainable mainstream" and the "capitalist ideology". This is an important motivational driver as consumers act according to what they value as part of their self-concept. Hence, it can be concluded that their identities are constructed against adversaries to their political convictions

and values. It is also discovered that consumers' engagement in everyday political actions is driven by consumer responsibilisation imposed by governmentality, which in turn creates a certain personal culpability about one's actions and contribution to global socio-political issues. Regarding identity construction through personal inner conflicts, it is found that consumers' political consumption practices are significantly dictated by adhering to normative social structures and peer pressure. As a result, consumers' self-view as well as their concern to keep up a desired image of themselves become the underlying drivers in choosing to engage in one way of political consumerism over another. Then, it is also found that consumer identities are constructed through everyday political consumerism by the coping mechanisms that consumers employ when facing internal conflicts in relation to dealing with personal and market limits. Moreover, in terms of identity construction through identity negotiation, the study's findings suggest how consumers' self-view and their identity is further shaped through feelings that arise from consumers' engagement in everyday political consumerist actions. These feelings are the senses of empowerment and pride, as well as rewarding feelings that contribute to the self by validating it and reaffirming the self's values and beliefs, to an extent where the non-engagement in everyday political consumerist actions results in the "loss or lessening of the self." Hence, consumers find themselves in a constant pursuit of seeking a balance between their values and beliefs with their everyday consumption habits, that finally enforces consumers' relationship with their self-view, thus further constructing their identities in alignment with their values.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study present valuable implications for practitioners in marketing and consumer research by providing a better understanding on the complex and interlinked process of how consumers form their identities through participating in everyday political consumerism. The identified three modes of consumer identity construction through everyday political consumerism, namely consumers' motivations, inner conflicts and identity negotiations, can assist marketing and consumer research scholars in further exploring consumers' reasoning processes behind their political consumerist acts and the complexity of those processes especially when in connection to consumers' personal identities. Moreover, marketers can use the suggested three modes of identity construction to craft more strategized

marketing campaigns and to appeal to consumers' politicised value perceptions, in order to build stronger value-aligned-brand connections with consumers. Additionally, as this study specifically explores consumer identity formations through everyday political consumerism within the context of Millenials and Gen Z residing in Sweden, the findings contribute with knowledge and insights for marketers to take into consideration in the process of interpreting young consumers' responses and general consumption preferences, that are especially critical to understand in the Swedish society that is characterised by a highly politicised consumer culture. Overall, this study potentially holds multi-disciplinary implications for other areas of research concerning consumer behaviour and psychology. Finally, this study illuminates the more invisible and mundane forms of political consumption practised on a daily basis in connection to individual identities, that consumer research so far has only scarcely addressed.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

One of the major limitations that this study holds, as with all qualitative studies, is the unavoidable subjectivity of the researchers analysing the gathered empirical data, which implies the possibility of different interpretations of the same data if analysed by other scholars (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Another limitation to consider regarding the empirical data collection process is that only a mono-method approach was employed, hence a "method triangulation" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p.p. 54-55) could not be reached. Hence, it is acknowledged that this research can be further enriched via a multi-method approach, for example, coupled with focus groups and/or a netnography study, to collect more nuanced views and experiences on the topic under study. Moreover, concerning the empirical context and sample selection of this study, it is important to mention that the interview respondents hold a variety of demographic characteristics, hence coming from different cultural backgrounds with various occupations, level and focus of education, as well as with different ages. However, as initially stated in the delimitations section, these cultural backgrounds are left largely unconsidered throughout the data analysis. This is because it is not the aim of this study to analyse contextual details but rather focus more on the inner lifeworlds of the respondents, which is usually the inherent focus of qualitative research (Silverman, 2010). Additionally, given the limited size and timeframe of this thesis study, analysing contextual backgrounds is considered as rather redundant and impossible to conduct.

Given that this study recognises the scarcity of literature on consumer identities within political consumerism, it is necessary to explore this gap further in other national and demographic contexts than Sweden and Millennials and Gen Z. This is especially critical in light of the topicality that this subject holds, including a growth in scepticism among young consumer groups towards brands that engage in socio-political issues. Hence, despite its limitations, this research can provide useful insights for both marketers and consumer researchers to navigate new consumer trends within political consumerism, specifically with regard to sustainable consumption practices. Furthermore, in light of the previous perspectives on identity construction and political consumerism, it becomes apparent that past consumer research majorly concerned itself with studying how political actions of consumption foster and shape consumer collectivism and solidarity. As mentioned previously, consumer research has partly neglected the role of the individual, where it remains largely unaddressed how personal identity projects are interlinked with the different forms of everyday political consumerist actions. Consequently, future research is necessary for a more nuanced understanding of individual identity construction through everyday political resistance to consumption, beyond the more overt political consumerist actions.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Guide

How old are you?

Where are you from?

What is your current occupation?

How long have you been living in Sweden?

Interview Themes

I) General Understanding of Sustainable and Political Consumption:

1. What does sustainability mean to you?
2. What does sustainable consumption mean to you?
3. Do you think you are a sustainable consumer? Why do you think you are? For which motivations?
4. Would you consider yourself as someone active in political concerns?
5. What are some of the sociopolitical issues you are interested in?
6. Have you considered/employed any of these in your consumption or everyday life?

II) Personal Relationship of Clothing Consumption with the Self

7. How often do you buy clothes? When? Why?
8. Where do you usually shop your clothes? Which brands?
9. How would you generally describe your relationship with purchasing clothes? What do you enjoy the most/least about it? How does it make you feel to buy new clothes? Could you describe your last clothing consumption?

10. How important is it to you to be able to identify yourself and your values with the clothes that you wear or the brands that you buy from? Why/ Why not? / When making consumption decisions, how important it is for these brands to have the same values as you do? Does it matter to you? Do you consciously think about it during your consumption? Why/not?

11. Do you think that your clothing style and buying habits represent who you are and what you stand for? / What makes you think so? / What do you think you clothing communicates (to others)?

12. Would you want to change something about it? If so, what and why?

13. To which extent do you believe you are currently reflecting what is important to you personally through the consumption/selection of clothes? / Where does sustainability rank, in order of importance, when you make consumtion decisions (for your clothes)?

14. How does the consumption of sustainable clothing contribute to your self-expression and the way you want to be perceived by others?

III) Sustainability Concerns with Clothing Consumption

15. Generally, which are the most important factors when you decide to buy clothes? / What are you the most conscious about when you select a clothing item? → Why is it important to you?

16. What efforts do you take to become more sustainable regarding the consumption of new clothes?

17. Do you pursue these efforts in a consistent manner?

18. Was there ever a case when you could not consume according to your values and beliefs of sustainability? Can you tell us about it?

IV) Engagement with Political Consumerist Actions

19. Do you think your everyday political convictions are influencing your purchase decision of clothes specifically?

20. Have you ever participated or thought of participating in boycotts,

climate strikes or other activist actions targeted towards a more
sustainable future?

21. What are your main motivations and reasons for participating in
political consumerist actions?

V) Implications for the Self with Political Consumerism

22. How does your participation in political actions make you feel and
think about yourself?

23. Do you think it contributes to the way you perceive yourself? How?

24. What do you feel in the process of being involved in these political
actions?

25. How do you think it affects the way others see you?

26. Have your behavior and way of thinking about sustainability has changed over time?

Appendix B - Coding Table

Themes	Categories	Codes
Consumers' Motivations for Everyday Political Consumerism	Personal Drivers for Sustainable Consumption and Political Consumption	Wanting to take care of the planet
		Human rights protection
		Sustainability as the umbrella to overall human welfare
		Not wanting to be a burden/threat for the planet
		Protecting the environment
		Sustainable consumption and lifestyles became politicized
		Everything you do has become politicized
		Personal values have become politicised
		Social justice driven
		Resisting the capitalist ideology of accumulation and mass consumption
		Wanting to create a new mainstream
		Not wanting to be blamed

Consumers' Motivations for Everyday Political Consumerism		Not wanting to be part of the problem
		An effective way to start a conversation
		Gaining motivation from like-minded people
		Not wanting to be quiet and wanting to take action
		Ease of engaging quietly
		Holding on to my personal image
		Gaining personal accountability
		Sense of encouragement by others
		Sense of Guilt from non-/less participation
		Living by "Actions speak louder than words"
		Building civil disobedience in wherever place we can help each other
		Online activism is more effective to mobilise change on a global scale
		Giving support to others via knowledge dissemination
	Motivations for Responsibilisation	Doing the rational thing
		Institutions alone are unable to produce the change we need

Consumers' Motivations for Everyday Political Consumerism		Individual action is important
		Personal ethical imperative to consumer sustainably
		Changes start from a single person
		Purchase power of the Individual
		Attention power of the individual
		What is good for me is good for the planet
		Acting on sustainability and to feel at peace with yourself
		Accounting for my personal culpability
		Voting with your wallet
		Making purchase decisions with care
		Equal contribution by everyone not just by few
		Solution lies in collective action
		Individual action is not enough for collective sustainability
		We need much more systemic change
	Motivational Self-Identification	Climate Activist
		Social Activist

		Environmentalist
		Sustainable Person/Part of a Sustainable Crowd
		Conscious Consumer
		Aware Consumer
		Minimalist
		Non-Extreme Sustainable Activist
		Non-conforming/rebellious
Consumers' Inner Conflicts of Engaging in Everyday Political Consumerism	Constant Struggles to Do Better	I'm not enough of a sustainable consumer
		There's room for improvement
		More sustainable than others
		Trying to be more sustainable
		Trying to be more conscious
		Recognizing that I cannot be perfect
		Sense of inadequacy and not being good enough
		Feeling guilty for buying anything new
		Feeling sensitive, upset and stressed because of being more

Consumers' Inner Conflicts of Engaging in Everyday Political Consumerism		aware
		Feeling like not doing enough
	Pressures to Adhere to Normative Social Structures	Expectations/inner struggle to fit in/ be trendy
		Struggling to meet certain dress codes/not agreeing with them
		Pressure of conforming to narratives/ dressing for occasions
		Afraid to be judged by others
		Fear of providing a platform for critique
		Feeling the pressure to keep up with a certain role and image
		Not needing validation from others
		Having to accept gifts
		Urged to justify "wrong" actions to others
		Social Pressure to stay consistent with a certain image of a sustainable consumer
		Wanting to be labelled as a good/favourable person
		Not wanting to choose a political side to avoid provoking others

Consumers' Inner Conflicts of Engaging in Everyday Political Consumerism	Personal and Marketplace Limits	Location dependent, restricted transportation choice
		Hard to find clothes from sustainable companies that reflect my style
		Self-loathing for liking what I liked in the store
		Greenwashing myself
		Desire of self-expression through clothes and limited choice in second-hand store
		Feeling sense of shame /at war/guilt with oneself about buying fast fashion
		Wearing fast fashion brands from second-hand stores
		Buying more clothes when they are second-hand
		Financial limitations causing price sensitivity towards fast fashion
		Market constraints causing to opt for fast fashion purchases
		Highly selective way of purchasing clothes causing unsustainable consumption
		Balancing one's desires and needs
		Navigating values on sustainability with specific personal

Consumers' Inner Conflicts of Engaging in Everyday Political Consumerism	Personal and Marketplace Limits	needs
		Still wanting to enjoy life as a human being
		Convenience vs. personal morals/values
		Taking up time and space in my life
		I wish I was more flexible
		Fear of being perceived as judgemental & cynical with extreme actions
		Wanting to be sustainable but feeling sceptical towards marketing claims
		Feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about truly sustainable consumption
		Wanting to be sustainable but lacking information
		Fast-fashion retail therapy for stress relief - treating the self
		Feeling heavy/resistant in the body when entering second-hand shops
		Falling for supposedly "sustainable fashion lines"
		Recycled products just as a band-aid to the problem

		Love-hate relationship with purchasing clothes
Consumers' Negotiation of Their Identities	Self-Expression Through Sustainable Fashion Consumption	Opposition towards fast-fashion, trends and cycles
		Not paying attention to logos/brands
		Indifference towards clothing as a means of self-expression
		There should be no shame with wearing clothes
		Becoming an icon of the self
		Visualization of the inner world
		Expressing the self and creativity
		Developing real sense of likings and values via second hand fashion
		Subconscious expression of the self / social class
		Making a political statement
		Reflecting myself via prioritizing efficiency and functionality
		Supporting brands aligning with one's moral values
		Clothes representing inner values
		Expressing my gender via second hand fashion

Consumers' Negotiation of Their Identities		Expressing my personality
		Challenging gender and fashion norms via second-hand clothes
		Differentiation from most people (= the mainstream)
		Wanting to be perceived as approachable and informal
		Providing a sense of meaning
		Feeling true to oneself
		Validating the self
	Consumers' Feelings Towards Political Activism	Feeling more control/agency over one's own purchase decisions
		Sense of reinforcement and validation
		Solidifying the self's certain convictions
		Creating an alternative mainstream
		Feeling more like the self
		Reaffirming, living out beliefs
		Seeing the influence of one's actions rubbing off on others
		Instant sense of personal gratification

Consumers' Negotiation of Their Identities	Consumers' Feelings Towards Political Activism	Feeling proud of the self
		Feeling fun and happy
		Having fun
		Gaining different viewpoints/finding fresh viewpoints
		Source of motivation (in general)
		Doing good for the environment
		Doing good for the self
		Learning from others/personal growth and development
		Calming personal anxieties/relaxing the self
		Feeling I am doing something
		Sense of belonging and community
		Being part of a "Sustainable crowd"
		Contributing to collective welfare via sharing knowledge with others
		Feeling part of the purpose
		Showcasing that second-hand clothes can be fashionable

Consumers' Negotiation of Their Identities	Consumers' Feelings Towards Political Activism	Leaving good impression with others via fashionable+sustainable clothes
		Refraining temptation to buy fast fashion
		Recognizing accomplishments gained and feeling proud
		Feeling angry
		Feeling scared
		Questioning the Self
		Judgment towards the self
		Not wanting to be the centre of attention
		Fear of Violence / Unsafety during climate strikes
		Lack of control during climate strikes
		General struggle to identity with extreme actions
		Preferring to take the observer role
	The Pursuit of Finding a Balance	Viewing personal contradictions as part of the process
		Paying for climate compensation when buying online
		Finding a balance

		Always trying to justify myself
		Compensating unsustainable practices
		Licensing into more consumption of clothes from sustainable sources