



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

# The sisterhood saving the world through shopping

A qualitative study on how females navigate and assume responsibility as consumers of fashion

by

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# Abstract

**Title:** The sisterhood saving the world through shopping

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**Key words:** Fast fashion, Sustainability, Ethical consumption, Authenticity, Femvertising

**Thesis purpose:** The purpose of this study was to understand how young females navigate as consumers of fashion with reference to ethical concerns and further, to understand and analyse how these consumers experience a responsibility for sustainability matters in the context of fashion.

**Methodology** The study is qualitative and exploratory. The study adopts a social constructionist epistemology and the ontological standpoint is relativistic, with an inductive research approach.

**Theoretical perspective:** The assembled theoretical framework incorporates the concepts of corporate social responsibility, femvertising, authenticity in advertising. To understand the consumers we implement the theories of cognitive dissonance, three levels of fashion consumers, value-action gap and market construction paradigm.

**Empirical Data:** The data was collected through five semi-structured focus groups consisting of Swedish females belonging to Generation Z in an online setting.

**Conclusion:** Generation Z females in Sweden struggle when navigating as consumers of fashion because of the many barriers and external pressures, which in turn constitute the foundation for an assumed responsibility. Lack of authenticity and trustworthiness does not prohibit Generation Z from consuming fast fashion, despite the assumed responsibility. The study extends on the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing, by integrating a consumer perspective, and explores a gender perspective in fashion marketing with regards to ethical consumption.

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Filippa Kjellberg



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# 1. Introduction

*You are deeply invested in sustainability and believe that you are a forward-thinking woman with your values in the right place. You also enjoy fashion and dressing according to the latest trends. You consider yourself a ‘woke’ human being and often feel pressured to act accordingly with your beliefs since most of your female friends tend to speak about the importance of being an ethical consumer. However, when you buy a t-shirt at Monki on Friday and order from the latest spring collection at H&M the day after, a strong cognitive dissonance arises within. The pressure to purchase clothes as well as your constant eco-stress are two very conflicting values. Thankfully, both Monki and H&M’s advertisements are female-empowering, telling you that you contribute to empowering women around the world as well as that you made an environmentally conscious choice. Instantly, you feel better and your cognitive consistency is stronger.*

Claire Bonnet recently created an art project to highlight the hypocrisy displayed in a campaign from Monki (Êkhô studio, 2019), a fashion company part of the H&M group. The campaign called ‘Salute Sisterhood’ is set to empower young women and address sustainability issues (Monki, n.d.). For the art project, the artist used clothing produced for Monki that features feminist messages and printed quotes from the report Gender Based Violence in the H&M Garment Supply Chain (GLJ, 2018) on top of them. The report includes interviews with women who work in H&M’s factories in the Global South. This art project conceptualises how the feminist messages used in marketing convey a false picture of reality, namely a false sense of empowerment. For example, on the t-shirt with the text “empowher” from Monki, Claire Bonnet, has on top of the original text, printed the quote:

Working using the machine the whole day, for 12 hours, with only half-an-hour of break leaves my legs swollen. By evening it is very difficult to walk with that pain in my leg. I cannot even stand up for a while and take a walk, stretch my legs. I just have to complete my target (Êkhô studio, 2019; GLJ, 2018, p.65).

The artwork, therefore, showcases in a concrete way how the messages in the campaign from Monki feature double standards as well as inauthentic marketing initiatives (see appendix A

for an example from the campaign). As Hayat Rachi put it, “you cannot exploit women in one country to empower them in another” (Fashion Revolution, n.d, n.p).

Furthermore, young consumers are becoming more aware of their consumption and have higher demands on organisations to adapt to them (IBM corporation, 2017). Despite the trend among young consumers of consuming more ‘ethical’, the fast fashion industry has grown tremendously over the last decade (Horton, 2018). To clarify, an ethical consumer refers to a consumer who considers, among other attributes, social and environmental sustainability when making purchasing decisions (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consequently, even though ethical consumption is on the rise and being a ‘woke’ customer has become a buzzword among the younger generation, fast fashion clothing is still highly requested and the demands are still high.

## 1.1 Background

Implementing sustainability messages in advertising is a widely used marketing strategy and it has been a recurring area of study. Sustainability messages can be used by companies to communicate their CSR initiatives as well as position themselves in the consumer's mind as responsible. A newer and less studied area is the use of feminist and female-empowering advertising known as “femvertising” (Åkestam, Dahlen & Rosengren, 2017). The concept that empowering women through advertising can create a sense of contribution to social, economic and environmental sustainability has made it a widely used rhetoric strategy within CSR activities (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010). Femvertising and encouragement of being an ethical consumer are themes that are frequently encountered in the fast fashion industry (Sobande, 2019; Horton, 2018), which makes this a relevant and interesting industry to study. Henceforth, when we refer to sustainability and ethical consumption, we consider both social and environmental aspects of the term.

### 1.1.1 The fast fashion industry

Fast fashion brands aim to mass-produce clothing and meet current customer demand at its peak by reducing their lead time for production. Examples are brands such as the H&M Group, Shein and Zara, which use a strategy of constantly updating their product ranges depending on trends. The fast fashion industry has changed the retail landscape by erasing the idea of following the seasonal rhythms and instead constantly producing to meet customer



demands (Horton, 2018). Furthermore, Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) point out that fast fashion companies primarily attract young female customers. The industry is highly competitive and the brands constantly compete to be first in translating trends into products (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). This competitive environment puts suppliers in a compromised position where they have to adapt and be agile in order to meet the fast-changing demands from the market (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

The fashion industry accounts for between eight to ten per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 20% of industrial water pollution can be derived from textile treatment and dyeing, which makes it one of the most polluting industries in the world (UNECE, 2018; Niinimäki, Peters, Dahlbo, Perry, Rissanen & Gwilt, 2020). Moreover, even though cotton farming only uses three per cent of the world's arable land, it accounts for eleven percent of pesticides and 24% of insecticides (UNECE, 2018). Accordingly, this has negative environmental effects as well as health implications. The fashion industry is one of the most resource-intensive industries, due to the remarkable use of water in cotton production, and the industry accounts for 2.6 percent of the world's total water use (Esteve-Turrillas & de la Guardia, 2017; The True Cost, 2015). Global textile production per capita has increased from 5.9 kg to 13 kg per year between 1975-2018 which means that fashion companies have almost doubled their production compared to before the millennial shift (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Moreover, Niinimäki et. al (2020) points out that In Sweden, it is assumed that the average person consumes between 13 - 16 kg of clothing on a yearly basis. Other than the environmental concerns the fashion industry also has social implications for millions of people. The increased customer demands and growing need for production of textile material have resulted in factory workers to a larger extent being exposed to harmful substances and unsafe processes as well as dangerous and inhumane working conditions e.g. long working hours and low salaries (UNECE, 2018). Moreover, it is estimated that 85% of textile workers globally are women (The True Cost, 2015). Hence, even though the fashion industry promotes sustainability and female empowerment, the numbers point toward the opposite, making the industry a crucial target for development.

These contradictory claims result in a rather unexplored paradox introduced and primarily discussed by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020). The paradox acknowledges that fast fashion companies on one hand strive to through marketing and communication activities make women feel empowered when consuming clothes; on the other hand, these companies

exploit women by compromising their human rights and contribute to the pollution of the environment with their production processes in another part of the world (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). Hence, these companies capitalise on an image of being engaged in the feminist movement as well as taking responsibility for climate change (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020; Wei & Jung, 2022). Consequently, young women are portrayed as both protagonists and victims in the fast fashion industry, acting as both empowered main characters, while others are disempowered acting behind the scenes (Horton, 2018). This paradoxical notion constitutes the background for this study and will henceforth be referred to as the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing.

### 1.1.2 The paradox in practice

To showcase how fast fashion companies are engaging in female empowerment activities in combination with environmental sustainability, Monki, owned by the H&M Group, will once again be used as an example. In their campaign ‘Salute Sisterhood’ Monki printed messages such as “We Are Sisters” and “This body got rights” on clothes (Monki, n.d.). In addition Monki prints “Cool outfit, Thank you, It’s sustainable” on their garment tags as a part of their sustainability communication (Êkhô studio, 2019). Combining these messages encourage women to adopt values of feeling empowered and being sustainable. Additionally, one could argue that fast fashion companies are trying to steer customers towards ethical consumption. For example, H&M’s club point system rewards customers for making more sustainable choices. Bringing your own bag when shopping, recycling clothes in the stores, buying clothes from the conscious collection or choosing a climate-friendly delivery method, rewards customers with extra club points (H&M, online, n.d.). While this may seem forward-thinking, the club points are mostly useful for receiving bonus checks for future purchases, which in turn logically would drive more consumption.

### 1.1.2 Generation Z

The interval of birth years of Generation Z is disputed among researchers, but many scholars settle on people born from 1995 to 2012. Reisenwitz (2021) describes this generation as realistic and familiar with bureaucratic structures. They demand a feel-good environment, are less loyal to brands (Reisenwitz, 2021), and are more cautious, pragmatic and disruptive than the previous Generation Y (Scholtz, 2019). In general, Generation Z has a low level of commitment and sees themselves as having the right to take rather than to give (Scholtz,

2019). According to Patel's (2017) article published in Forbes, the generation was to account for 40% of all consumers by 2020 and they are concerned with positively impacting the world as well as companies actually making a change, and walking the talk. Additionally, Generation Z prefers subtle marketing messages that are communicated in a creative way compared to brands that advertise their products in a tenacious way (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Furthermore, they spend most of their money on clothing and shoes as well as influence their families' choices in consumption (IBM corporation, 2017). A study conducted on Generation Z in South Africa concluded that young consumers avoid market generated content and instead prefer authentic and genuine content, generated by other consumers (Pillay, 2021). Generation Z is more influenced by digital advertising and online reviews than previous generations and the most influential advertising is sponsored advertisements on social media and television advertising (PWC, 2020). Moreover, this generation values sustainable consumption to a large extent and according to PWC (2020), 45% would pay a higher price premium for sustainable products and 44% for ethically produced products.

## 1.2 Problematisation

The art project presented in the introduction clearly manifests the problem we intend to highlight in the study. Although the fast fashion industry targets women with empowering messages (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020), there is no guarantee that these are perceived in the intended way. Therefore, we argue that using these methods for profitable reasons can generate customers built upon false premises. According to the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing, the problem within the fast fashion industry is that empowering consumers in one part of the world ultimately results in exploiting people in another part of the world (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). Therefore, consumers in the Global North might still feel good about their purchases, while people in the Global South, as part of the supply chain, are being punished. One could state that the paradox enables companies to grow without taking actual responsibility for their actions and social and/or ecological footprint, a way to maintain an unethical business model.

The fast fashion industry primarily aims to target women, since they are considered the biggest consumer group (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013). Because female consumers have an eminent role in the industry (Horton, 2018), it can be rewarding to examine how they orient themselves as consumers of fashion more closely in relation to the paradox. Scholtz (2019)

states that young females as part of Generation Z are concerned with changing the world and are anticipated to have less brand loyalty than previous generations. Further, this generation is sceptical in nature and particularly concerned with companies walking the talk, making an actual societal impact and prefers advertising that they perceive as authentic (Scholtz, 2019). This can indicate that Generation Z might not be as easily convinced, which consequently makes them an interesting group to examine.

Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) conclude that fast fashion companies are transferring responsibility onto the individual customer. The authors mainly investigate how fast fashion companies are communicating in regards to feminist marketing and environmental sustainability. How consumers relate to this assumed responsibility and whether they manage it as part of their consumption is currently unexplored. Further knowledge would extend the theory presented by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) and provide a consumer perspective. Hence, we argue that further research is needed to fully understand how young female customers understand and navigate in the fashion industry.

Unsustainable consumption in a specific market is not one sided and is developed in dialectic interplay between consumers and corporations (Holt, 2012), which speaks for the importance in including a consumer perspective when studying the fast fashion market, as means to change and improve the industry. Furthermore, Generation Z will have increased purchasing power in the next few years making them a more crucial consumer group to research and understand (Wolf, 2020). A female consumer perspective is important because young women ultimately function as protagonists in the fashion industry (Horton, 2018), which makes them a key stakeholder with the power to influence the industry and its current issues. How young females react to and make sense of feminised sustainability marketing today will influence how companies will steer their marketing in the future.

### 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of how young females navigate as consumers of fashion with reference to ethical concerns. In particular, we aim to investigate whether the trend of ethical consumption comes with expectations and pressures to consume sustainably with regard to internal as well as external pressures. By analysing this we aim to contribute to the research concerning young female consumers' experienced

responsibility for the sustainability question (Chant, 2014) and especially in the fashion industry (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020; Horton, 2018; Southwell, 2014). In prolongation, by understanding how young female consumers navigate as consumers of fashion we seek to explain how the existence of the feminised sustainability marketing paradox is maintained, with the limitation of Swedish female consumers belonging to Generation Z. To fulfil our purpose we answer the following research questions:

### 1.3.1 Research questions

**Research Question 1:** How do Generation Z females navigate as consumers of fashion?

**Research Question 2:** How do Generation Z females experience ethical concerns and responsibility for sustainability when consuming fashion?

## 1.4 Intended Contribution

With this study we aim to contribute to the research fields of authentic femvertising (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022; Lima & Casais, 2021; Grau & Zotos, 2016), feminisation of responsibility (Chant, 2014), ethical consumption on the fashion market (Horton, 2018; McNeill & Moore, 2015, Southwell, 2014), unsustainable consumption (Holt, 2012) as well as extend the research concerning the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing from a consumer perspective (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). This will be done by studying how young Swedish female consumers, as part of the Global North, navigate in the fashion industry and if they experience a sense of responsibility in relation to their consumption. Moreover, the research contributes to awareness concerning how consumers' consumption behaviour could maintain the existence of the paradox, whereas it has previously been discussed as a structural industrial issue. We argue that there is a gap in existing research concerning the combination of feminist marketing and sustainability and further explore how the responsibility for the sustainability question has become feminised, specifically from a consumer perspective.

Lastly, the intended practical contributions concern the consumer insights the fast fashion companies can utilise when communicating sustainability messages aimed at Generation Z and what this generation is concerned with when consuming fashion.

## 2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter, the relevant literature and theories are summarised in a traditional way. Firstly, we discuss marketing strategies such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and femvertising. Second, we enter into the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing in the fast fashion industry and present what has been discussed in recent articles on the topic. Lastly, we discuss how research elucidates how the young female consumer, in the Global North, relates to the fast fashion industry in the light of the paradox and theories on unsustainable consumption, cognitive dissonance, the three levels of fashion consumers and the value-action gap.

### 2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The question of whether companies should implement a corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy has become a question of how rather than if and there is an immense pressure for companies to communicate these CSR initiatives in an authentic and transparent way (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). There are numerous definitions of CSR and the concept has been widely discussed in research over the past decades. Sarkar and Searcy (2016) conducted a qualitative study analysing 110 different definitions of CSR and based on this suggested the following definition:

*CSR implies that firms must foremost assume their core economic responsibility and voluntarily go beyond legal minimums so that they are ethical in all of their activities and that they take into account the impact of their actions on stakeholders in society, while simultaneously contributing to global sustainability. (p.1433)*

An important contribution of Sarkar and Searcy's (2016) study is the light given to the ethical component of CSR and that this particular component is becoming increasingly important for a successful CSR strategy. The ethical dimension includes companies being transparent, open, fair and accountable for their actions and gives attention to the notion that companies have to look past incentives that are merely economic to be successful and trusted (Sarkar & Searcy, 2016). Moreover, Sarkar and Searcy's (2016) research suggests that the sustainability dimension is crucial in CSR activities and this dimension should be built upon a combination of environmental, social and economic issues.

Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007) argue that CSR can be used by companies to achieve a competitive position in the market and points out that a CSR positioning allows customers to a larger extent to identify with the brand and humanises the company. Additionally, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007) propose that this in turn can result in more loyal customers that act as brand advocates. Moreover, loyal and engaged customers of CSR brands tend to be less sensitive to negative information making it easier to keep the customers (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). Hence, the authors suggest that CSR initiatives can generate meaningful long-term relationships with customers since consuming products or services from CSR brands can contribute to fulfilling customers' needs for enhancement of the self. Furthermore, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007) argue that customers' CSR beliefs are determined by two factors: CSR attributions, which refers to customers' ideas about the brand's motives for engaging in CSR activities and CSR awareness which concerns the degree to which the customers are aware of the CSR actions of a brand. However, if CSR and sustainability are not incorporated into the business model, there might be a risk of solely a short-time commitment that employees do not hold close to heart (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). For fast fashion companies, it might not always be clear whether and how sustainability is part of the business model, which evidently can make it difficult to maintain over time (Di Benedetto, 2017). Moreover, Abitbol and Sternadori (2019) conclude in their study that a company's CSR initiatives' impact can be enhanced if stronger brand loyalty is already established and if the consumer previously has developed a relationship with the brand.

### 2.1.1 Greenwashing

Along with the rise of CSR the concept of greenwashing has also been brought to the light. Greenwashing refers to when companies through different marketing and communication activities mislead consumers into perceiving the company to be more sustainable than it is in reality (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). The communicated environmental actions are often exaggerated by the company to present a more favourable image of the company (Szabo & Webster, 2021). Greenwashing can also be identified on a product level where companies promote a product or service claiming it is more sustainable than it is in reality (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Thus, if a company uses positive communication about their environmental performance while in reality having a bad environmental performance the company is engaging in greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Moreover, greenwashing can result in

ethical harm for companies and to avoid being accused of greenwashing companies tend to increase their transparency efforts which have shown to make consumers perceive a company's green communication as more authentic (Szabo & Webster, 2021). Delmas and Burbano (2011) present market external drivers as key for greenwashing and these include customer demand, investor demand and competitive pressure. Furthermore, consumers are still sceptical of companies using CSR in their cause related marketing, where the main goal is to sell products (Jeon & An, 2019), for self-benefitting reasons. For example, fast fashion brands need to carefully consider how they are directing and framing their CSR information. When the benefit is directed towards the self, there is a higher level of perceived hypocrisy (Jeon & An, 2019). Fast fashion brands are usually associated with non-sustainable practices and therefore consumers are more critical from the start (Wei & Jung, 2022).

## 2.2 Femvertising

Femvertising refers to the use of feminine empowerment messages in advertising to raise women's status with the intention of strengthening female identity in consumption (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017). Additionally, femvertising can be used as a strategy to enhance the brand, since femvertising according to Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen (2017) makes the brand less prone to advertising reluctance from women. Female empowering messages in advertising are messages that aim to evoke feelings of confidence, liberation and independence among women (Drake, 2017). Google's "Think Insights" describes female-empowering advertisements as spreading messages about body positivity, love and gender equality (Wojcicki, 2016 cited in Drake, 2017). Femvertising has risen as an anti-objectification movement in advertising, where the advertisements are supposed to give a stronger sense of authenticity (Grau & Zotos, 2016), and resembles CSR activities (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). However, researchers, as well as the general public, tend to be critical of the strategy used by many organisations, since it is an attempt to capitalise on feminism and empower women with no real intention of actual societal impact (Varghese & Kumar, 2020; Lima & Casais, 2021). Additionally, women are considered the biggest consumer group for the fast fashion companies (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013), and thus, marketing activities are first and foremost aimed to target women which could be a potential incentive for femvertising to be used as a marketing strategy for fast fashion companies.



According to Abitbol and Sternadori (2019) femvertised messages are often performed through narrative self-referencing, unlike CSR initiatives such as environmental sustainability. In other words, women featured in femvertisements are telling the consumers about what they have overcome and make them resonate with that message (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). Moreover, female consumers develop strong brand loyalty with brands that incorporate personalisation into the brand and females tend to like brands that they perceive as “individuals” (Rialti, Zollo, Pellegrini & Ciappei, 2017). In accordance with Rialti et al. (2017) women are also more prone than males to recommend brands they are loyal to. Therefore, femvertising might be more likely to be perceived as positive when incorporating self-referencing in comparison to other CSR activities.

Furthermore, authenticity is explained as a prerequisite for femvertising to be perceived in a positive manner since there is a tendency for hypocrisy (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022; Lima & Casais, 2021). Authenticity can be described as “the alignment of a brand's explicit purpose and values with its activist marketing messaging and prosocial corporate practice” (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020, p.445). If authenticity is difficult to detect, or actual inauthenticity is perceived, the advertisements might instead come across as “femwashing”. Femwashing is a concept with many similarities to greenwashing, and there are multiple terms used to describe this phenomenon, such as ‘faux activism, ‘commodity feminism’ and ‘fempower washing’ (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). In line with this, egoistic motives are said to have a negative impact on CSR authenticity and companies should strive to have either value-driven or stakeholder-driven CSR activities to be perceived as genuine, since these driving forces are seen as more altruistic (Jeon & An, 2019). Moreover, Nunes, Ordanini and Giambastiani (2021) emphasise how the context is crucial for if, or to what extent, the advertisement is perceived as authentic. When consumers’ are less involved in the brand, they put emphasis on *originality* as a determining factor for authenticity, namely “the extent to which a product or service stands out from mainstream offerings present in the market and does so without unnecessary embellishments” (Nunes, Ordanini & Giambastiani, 2021, p.3). However, when they are involved and somewhat co-create the brand, they instead want *legitimacy* as a determining factor, i.e. “the extent to which a product or service adheres to shared norms, standards, rules or traditions present in the market” (Nunes, Ordanini & Giambastiani, 2021, p.3). Important to note is that consumers who generally enjoy femvertising are less likely to question the authenticity of the advertisement (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019).

### 2.2.1 The six dimensions of authentic femvertising

Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot (2022) introduce a framework for assessing the authenticity of femvertising, consisting of six different dimensions; transparency, consistency, identification, diversity, challenging stereotypes and respect. Consumers' ideas of a brand's level of authenticity are not determined solely by the individual dimensions; instead consumers assess authenticity from a more holistic point of view based on the six different dimensions (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022). Hence, the authors point out that even though a brand is perceived as authentic in one or two dimensions it might be considered less authentic when judging based on all dimensions. If brands' femvertising activities are not perceived as authentic by consumers companies can be accused of femwashing instead (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022).

#### *Transparency*

Brands have to be transparent with their customers in order to be perceived as authentic (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022). Transparency entails using truthful and simple elements in advertising e.g. by brands implementing spontaneity and sincerity in their marketing activities. Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinots (2022) research showed that everyday scenes and not adjusting e.g. body shapes in advertising are crucial for consumers to recognise advertising as transparent.

#### *Consistency*

Being consistent as a brand refers to being consistent in communication, offerings and the identity of the brand. Brands that have been acknowledged for contributing to female empowerment in the past are oftentimes perceived as more credible compared to brands with a history of sexualising women since these are perceived as less credible and in the long run less authentic (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022). Moreover, the authors point out that pioneer brands in the femvertising movement have a higher probability of being perceived as authentic. Lastly, the femvertised messages have to resonate with the product or service the company is offering (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022).

#### *Identification*

The study conducted by Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot (2022) shows that when consumers are able to identify with and relate to the message communicated in femvertising it

is perceived as more authentic. Hence, when there is a connection between the self and the advertising the level of authenticity is higher.

### *Diversity*

Diversity refers to the inclusion of women of different sizes, ages, ethnicity and women with disabilities (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022). Important to note, and something that was found among the participants in Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot's (2022) study is that "Body diversity involves not only showing women who are slightly curvier than the standard but also showing the diversity within the curvy category [...]" (p.5). Diversity can be divided into three separate categories; physical diversity, diversity of identity and health-related diversity (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022).

### *Respect*

The fifth dimension of Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot's (2022) framework is respect, and consists of two aspects; respect from women toward themselves by evoking self-esteem and from brands toward women e.g. by the reduction of sexual messages in advertising. Moreover, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-acceptance can be successfully communicated through femvertising. However, there is a fine line between advertisements that project how women should become confident, which can be understood as inauthentic, while advertisements portraying a confident woman tend to be perceived as authentic (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022).

### *Challenging stereotypes*

Lastly, the authors point out the importance of femvertising to challenge stereotypes to be considered authentic. The stereotypes are divided into role stereotypes, physical stereotypes and stereotypes related to women's abilities and interests. Furthermore, when using the colour pink to talk about feminism or women brands are more likely to be perceived as inauthentic and this goes for advertisements portraying stereotypes about female personality traits and interests as well (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022). On the contrary, Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot's (2022) study showed that when brands show women in loud, messy, intellectual or athletic activities females recognise this as authentic. Their research also indicates that consumers still want to see what is considered more traditional roles in advertisements as well and therefore it is important to include more stereotypical roles

combined with stereotypical challenging elements. Hence, this dimension is concerned with including all genders and all roles (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022).

## 2.3 The paradox of feminist marketing and sustainability

The paradox of feminised sustainability marketing has been discussed in previous chapters and in this chapter we will provide a more thorough explanation of how Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) explain the paradox since it is crucial for the study. Companies claim that women can both gain empowerment and contribute to saving the world through consuming fashion (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). This kind of marketing does not only attempt to use female empowerment as a marketing strategy but also promotes individual environmental responsibility to females. The issue becomes prominent when examining the main victims of the fast fashion industry, who particularly are females in the Global South, producing textiles and clothing with poor working conditions (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). It is crucial to include gender into the context due to the fact that the majority of people working in textile factories producing these clothing are women (The True Cost, 2015). Hence, companies promote feminist and sustainability messages while having tremendous climate impact as well as compromising human and particular women's rights in the Global South with inhuman working conditions (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020; The True Cost, 2015). Sobande (2019) concludes in her study that femvertising and diversity marketing could be a way for fast fashion companies to manage the industry issues of sustainability and labour ethics that inevitably come with repercussions and resistance.

The paradox introduced by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) is discussed in other existing literature as well, but it is described with other terms such as the feminisation of consumption and feminisation of responsibility (Horton, 2018; Chant, 2014, Southwell, 2014). Horton (2018), for example, introduces a dichotomy between casting females as the needy subjects of contemporary consumerism as well as implicitly suggesting a gendered responsibility and how women also realise this picture, living up to the expectations. Furthermore, Chant (2014) introduces 'feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation', which entails that women have more responsibility for the wrongdoings associated with the fashion industry such as poverty and that they have less of a choice, where the agency of the consumer is corrupted by fast fashion (Horton, 2018). Even though the individual consumer has the intention to act ethically, they are not trusted to behave accordingly, because of this

corruption. In the fast fashion industry, young women are central as targets and protagonists as well as victims, which comes with constant moral negotiations for female consumers. Women tend to feel a larger liability for responsible consumption in fashion and experience that they have duties to fulfil (Horton, 2018). On the contrary, sustainability research in relation to fashion tends to discuss sustainability from the perspective of a gender-neutral consumer (Southwell, 2014). Because of the gender bias towards women in both fashion as well as sustainability, there is a tendency for organisations within the industry to put environmental responsibility on women consuming fashion and therefore this responsibility has become feminised (Horton, 2018; Southwell, 2014). Southwell (2014) describes how some researchers believe it is rooted in the connection women have to household chores since they are inevitably linked with ecologically conscious choices, such as recycling and consuming specific food and beverages. Sustainability and fashion are considered to be opposite poles while both consumption and responsibility for the environment are in the hands of women (Southwell, 2014). Furthermore, young women are believed to be vulnerable followers of fashion, solely steered by trends and therefore passive (Entwistle, 2014). Furthermore, Entwistle (2014) touches upon this subject as well and discusses how there is a need for a more comprehensive, global account of fashion where we do not only discuss it as either identity, meaning or consumption. Fashion needs to be discussed in a way where researchers combine the range from production to consumption in an entity, including the whole supply chain. Entwistle (2014) also discusses how fashion since early on has been discredited in research because of its strong association with femininity, where fashion has been seen as both immoral and departing from intellectuality.

## 2.4 The consumer in the fast fashion market

Understanding how consumers act in the fast fashion market is crucial for the study. According to the study conducted by Su and Chang (2017), one predictor of young consumers' loyalty toward fast fashion brands is perceived value. This perceived value is constructed by the following factors: reasonable price, trendy pieces, limited editions and availability which means that these factors can act as determinants for whether consumers will be loyal to a fast fashion brand or not.

Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) describe how the fashion supply chain was moved toward being more affected by fast-changing consumer demands than keeping prices low and that the

pressure to deliver on time results in compromising ethical concerns from the supplier side. This means that the retailers who can translate current trends in the shortest lead time are the most successful. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) study the fast fashion industry from an industry point of view and distinguish the consumer demands as the main source of an unsustainable supply chain. Thus, the study argues that “the drivers of fast fashion that create the impact [on the supply chain] are clearly coming from consumer demand” (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p.266).

Conflictingly, Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) affirm the notion that consumers in recent years have become increasingly attentive to ethical considerations when it comes to fashion consumption and the authors point out environmental concerns such as over production as indicators of this. To examine this Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) study brand avoidance which refers to active exclusion of a certain brand due to factors other than high price, unavailability or inaccessibility. Particularly, the study explores brand avoidance in a fast fashion context which “encompasses active forms of the attitudes and behaviors against fast fashion and its consumption” (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013, p.244). The study focuses on Korean women between the ages of 20 to 30. Based on a content analysis and the brand avoidance model introduced by Lee, Motion and Conroy (2009) eight negative beliefs concerning the fast fashion industry were detected; overly trendy styles, poor performance, lack of personal help, deindividuation, big store discomfort, irresponsibility, inauthenticity and foreignness. The results showed that poor performance and deindividuation, referring to not perceiving fast fashion clothing as unique, have positive significant effects on the behavioural intention to avoid fast fashion (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013). Inauthenticity also proved to have significant effects on behavioural intention, but in a negative way, meaning that according to Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) experienced inauthenticity does not make people avoid consuming fast fashion. Consequently, this means that inauthenticity is not a significant determiner for consumers to avoid fast fashion and in this study, inauthenticity refers to clothing being considered as copies of high-fashion or identical to original pieces (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013). When it came to irresponsibility the results did not indicate that this had any significant effects on behavioural intention which means that ethical and environmental concerns do not necessarily affect individual purchase behaviour (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013).

## 2.5 Unsustainable consumption

Holt (2012) explains the ethical value paradigm, in which he defines what in research is the most common causes of unsustainable consumption and therefore also a way to pursue sustainable consumption. The ethical value paradigm proposes that unsustainable consumption is partly caused by the choices of consumers, that in turn is caused by consumerism which is a set of values that suggest that lives are centred around consumption (Holt, 2012). Consumerism is said as being upheld by personal values such as materialism, possessive individualism and narcissism. According to Holt (2012), these values increase consumption and lead to unsustainable consumption. In order to pursue sustainable consumption, the values need to change through adapting values from outside the modern capitalist marketplace (Holt, 2012). Consequently, there is a need for an ethical transformation, where sustainable values are foundational in society and consumers are reflective on how their consumption affects the environment. However, Holt (2012) criticises the ethical value paradigm and introduces the market construction paradigm, as a subdisciplinary speciality within consumer culture theory (CCT), which can explain why the ethical value paradigm is flawed. According to the ethical value paradigm, consumers are tied to specific consumption behaviour (Holt, 2012). Nonetheless, individuals' sustainability actions vary fiercely across different product categories, which is demonstrated by the market construction paradigm where consumer culture is understood as "a skeletal metacultural logic - centred on channelling desires and identities through consumer choices and actions" (Holt, 2012, p. 240). One might be sustainable when it comes to cars but not regarding what food they buy for dinner. Holt (2012) argues that unsustainable consumption is not considered a behaviour that exists across different markets, it is more of a development of market ideologies. Each market is said to represent an independent variant of unsustainable consumption that depends on how the market has grown in regards to consumer practices and specific market institutions, in a dialectic interplay between consumers and companies. In order to change the level of unsustainable consumption, transformation processes need to aim at specific market ideologies, one at a time, rather than trying to achieve an overall shift in a consumer society (Holt, 2012).

## 2.6 Experienced cognitive dissonance

The Global North consumer of fast fashion has a complex role with issues often discussed in terms of possible or limited choice and agency (Horton, 2018). Women who are consuming fast fashion are facing the problem of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a theory developed by Festinger (1957) and concerns people wanting to maintain harmony in their behaviour and attitudes. When there is an inconsistency between what someone believes and what they actually do, they will ultimately try to eliminate the dissonance by changing either their attitude or behaviour, with the goal of reaching cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1975). According to the theory, grounded in psychology, most people will try to reduce this disharmony in order to ease their minds. Consuming cheap clothing is conflicting with being environmentally conscious, which is the main implication for cognitive dissonance in this context (Southwell, 2014). Female consumers find themselves in a no-win situation, where they are both expected to consume fashion and act sustainably and thereby constantly rationalising their choices through altering their attitudes and beliefs. This never-ending spiral can contribute to women looking for other values to adopt, in order to reduce their cognitive dissonance (Southwell, 2014). Moreover, a way for companies to change consumers' attitudes is to make use of female empowerment in advertising since they tend to evoke emotion, which is sought after, and thereby make women feel better about their purchases (Drake, 2017; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). Drake (2017) concludes that female respondents to a larger extent than non-female respondents have a more favourable attitude towards brands using female empowerment advertising and that this further resulted in higher purchasing intentions. The use of emotional messages in advertising has been shown to create emotional connections between the brand and the consumer and this correlates with higher purchase frequency as well as a higher level of engagement from customers (Drake, 2017).



## 2.7 Three levels of fashion consumers

Type of fashion consumer	Level of environmental and social concerns	Attitude/behaviour	Potential market for sustainable fashion
The 'Self' Consumer	Zero to low	Consistent	Low
The 'Social' Consumer	Low to medium	Inconsistent	High
The 'Sacrifice' Consumer	Medium to high	Consistent /inconsistent	Medium to high

(Based on the ideas presented by McNeill & More, 2015)

McNeill and Moore (2015) distinguish between three types of fashion consumers. First, the 'Self' consumer, who considers fashion as a part of expressing their self-identity, tends to not prioritise environmental and social issues. This group of consumers see sustainable fashion as neutral or even unfavourable and their behaviour is consistent with their attitudes. The 'Self' consumer is also difficult to influence, prioritising speed and price over anything else. Second, McNeill and Moore (2015) describe the 'Social' consumer as a consumer who is starting to consider sustainability issues. They often experience an inconsistency between their attitudes and their behaviour. This is primarily because they are facing barriers such as a lack of acceptance of sustainable fashion as well as high prices. Another factor is that this kind of consumer is highly aware of how they are perceived by their surroundings and is easily affected by opinion leaders. Therefore, these individuals are seen as the best potential consumer group to attract when marketing sustainable fashion. Lastly, McNeill and Moore (2015) discuss the 'Sacrifice' consumer who pays attention to environmental and sustainable issues and is evidently avoiding fast fashion brands in order to stay true to their attitudes. However, they are still facing some cognitive inconsistency regarding staying fashionable while also reducing consumption. The 'Sacrifice' consumer is a useful market to target for sustainable fashion, but nevertheless, they will always prioritise less consumption over more. Gaining the trust of this type of consumer should be a goal for marketers in sustainable fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

## 2.8 Value-action gap

The value-action gap describes the gap between the intention to engage in sustainable behaviour and actually performed behaviour. Blake (1999) studies this gap based on participants of the study's own experienced barriers for sustainable behaviours and aims to "develop a perspective theoretically grounded in a more dialectical understanding of the relations between individuals and social institutions" (p.265). The study takes its starting point in three barriers that are identified as possible obstacles for pro-environmental behaviours, and these are: individuality, responsibility and practicality. Furthermore, to overcome the value-action gap it is crucial to translate environmental concerns into pro-environmental behaviours (Blake, 1999). He also affirms the notion that people will respond to and interpret equivalent environmental information in different and varying ways which makes it hard for e.g. corporations and social institutions to determine how the communicated information will be received and understood.

The first barrier, individuality, concerns personal attitudes and cognitive structure and Blake (1999) points out that "these barriers are important for people whose environmental attitudes are peripheral within their wider attitudinal structure" (p.266). This means that other attitudes or values are of greater importance for the individual than environmental concerns which results in that other values exceed environmental concerns. Individuality also takes into account the fact that some people do not consider themselves as fitting into the ideal of the typical environmentally conscious person which results in reluctance towards performing pro-environmental behaviours (Blake, 1999). Responsibility is the second barrier and refers to "people's perceptions of institutions and responsibility" (p.266) meaning which external factors are influential on the individual's actions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975 cited in Blake, 1999). How individuals experience this barrier is determined by who they believe to be responsible for the environment. This means that if an individual believes that the society is responsible for the environment the barrier will be larger and the same goes if the individual has a lack of faith in the society's capacity (Blake, 1999). Albeit, according to Blake (1999) people do not believe that their individual actions will make any difference and therefore the incentives to engage in pro-environmental behaviours are not strong enough. The question of who is responsible for the environment thereby forms a barrier that counteracts pro-environmental behaviour.

The third, and last, barrier discussed by Blake (1999) is practicality. This barrier exists independently of the two other barriers meaning that even though an individual might possess an intention to act in a pro-environmental manner there could still be practical barriers that make it impossible to turn intentions into behaviours (Blake, 1999). He points out that these practical barriers can be lack of time, money, information or physical storage space as well as lack of encouragement and pro-environmental facilities e.g. recycling stations. Moreover, to overcome the value-action gap it is not enough to increase the amount of information concerning the environment but rather it is necessary to commit to actual change by redefining the roles and functions of public and private institutions (Munton, 1997 cited in Blake, 1999). This in turn will facilitate the process of individuals acting in a pro-environmental way and thereby turn intentions into actions

## 2.9 Chapter Summary

The literature was gathered with three objectives linked to the purpose. This study investigates how young female consumers navigate as consumers of fashion and to what extent they assume responsibility for ethical issues. Therefore, the theoretical background first introduces the essential concepts of CSR and femvertising. These concepts constitute a background for the paradox introduced by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020), which is elaborated on. Second, the paradox showcases a critical issue within the industry in regards to ethical concerns, that we intend to highlight and further investigate with a consumer perspective in mind. By accounting for critical issues in the market, we can understand how responsibility is distributed among stakeholders. Lastly, a theoretical consumer perspective is included, to understand the Generation Z female consumer as presented in academia. Therefore, we present the theories market construction paradigm, cognitive dissonance, the three levels of fashion consumers, as well as the value-action gap. These theories altogether help us define the research problem and act as a starting point for the discussion.

## 3. Methodology

In this chapter we account for our methodological choices, the advantages, as well as the limitations, are discussed to increase the trustworthiness and transparency of the study. The chapter starts by explaining the research design as well as research philosophy and then provides an in depth description of how the data was collected and later analysed. The limitations and qualities of the study is then discussed and the chapter is finalised with a reflection regarding the methodological choices.

### 3.1 Research design

The research design describes how the researchers will collect data as well as how they will analyse it in accordance with certain quality criteria. It describes how the researchers prioritise dimensions in the research process such as casual connections between variables, generalisation, and interpretation of behaviour in a specific social context (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). For this study, we adopted a qualitative approach where we aimed to examine how a social group constructs meaning and understands a specific phenomenon. As for the research strategy, qualitative research aims to make sense of what people think of the world and puts emphasis on words rather than numbers (Oates & Alevizou, 2018). The study takes on an exploratory approach, aiming to gain depth in a research topic that is fairly unexplored (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Validaze, 2021). Data was gathered through four focus groups with four to five participants in each group and one additional complementary focus group with previous participants to collect further data since it was essential in order to fulfil the purpose. Furthermore, the data collected in the focus groups constituted a solid foundation for the analysis and discussion, allowing us as researchers to gain knowledge about how young female consumers navigate as consumers of fashion and to what extent they experience responsibility for sustainability matters.

Determining whether a study is deductive or inductive is not a simple task since a study rarely is either but rather has elements of both induction and deduction (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, our study is more inductive in nature, primarily because the aim is to contribute to the extension of existing theory and the collected data acted as a guiding light when shaping the thesis rather than letting theory guide the data collection which is significant for a deductive approach (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Based on the data

collection the research question was formulated since the data provided us with insights into what our respondent group finds to be problematic and insufficient, which is also a sign of induction. Furthermore, the interview guide (see appendix B) was not based on theory and hence, theoretical frameworks and concepts did not direct or determine the discussions in the focus groups (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

## 3.2 Research Philosophy

Ontology is described by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) as the nature of reality and existence. The authors introduce four ontological positions that are situated on a continuum. Realism and internal realism placed on the left of the spectrum speaks for a single reality that is independent of the human mind and can be observed. On the contrary, relativism and nominalism take the stance that reality “depend on the perspectives from which we observe them” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021, p.72) and that reality is a human creation. In contrast, Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) discuss ontological perspectives as either objective or constructionist, where the objectivist perspective considers social phenomena as independent of social actors and constructionists believe that reality is created through human action and sensemaking. As for this study, we made use of a relativist ontological stance presented by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), where the truth is disclosed “through discussion and agreement between the main protagonists” (p.73), where we believe that facts are dependent on the viewpoint of the observer. Through the use of focus groups, we searched for truth in an interactive discussion between members of the protagonist group.

Epistemology as a philosophy concerns how to understand knowledge and how it is acquired. The epistemological stance is underpinned by the assumed ontological perspective (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), the researcher takes on either a positivist or interpretivist approach where positivists are more concerned with quantifiable data where they gain knowledge through measuring while interpretivists gain knowledge through interpreting and understanding human behaviour. However, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) discuss epistemological perspectives as either positivist or social constructionist. Positivism is described in accordance with Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) and social constructionism adopts a similar perspective to interpretivism. For this research, we put emphasis on process rather than outcomes in terms of investigation, which strongly speaks for the fact that we adopted more of a strong constructionist perspective, where we

gained knowledge from examining how a specific group of people made sense of the world through sharing experiences. Social constructionists often aim to increase understanding of a phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021), which aligns strongly with what we aspired to do with this research by combining empirical data in form of focus group discussions with previous research on the phenomenon.

### 3.3 Focus groups

Focus groups are essentially a method to explore a theme or topic in-depth, where multiple participants create a collective construction of meaning through interaction. This method provides the possibility of uncovering multiple views on a specific topic that may not be uncovered in the format of a question-followed-by-answer approach (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). When the focus groups were conducted, we aimed to ensure that all participants were contributing to the discussion in equal proportions. Important to note is that completely equal participation is not feasible when conducting focus groups, because it would limit the natural flow of a discussion (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Having as equal contribution as possible among the participants is of great importance in a focus group since having one or a few persons taking over the discussion can decrease the reliability of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Furthermore, what distinguishes focus groups from one-on-one interviews is the interaction between individuals. Group interaction is part of what can be studied when using focus groups as a method and having multiple participants can, according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), help the researchers to understand why people feel the way they do. Disagreement can untangle how a participant actually thinks and why they think it. By looking at how groups construct meaning, one can get insight into how social perspectives are formed (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

When conducting the focus groups the framework for focus group research presented by Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug (2001) was used as a guideline prior to, during and after the focus groups to assure that no important parts were left out. The framework consists of five different steps: defining the problem, establishing the groups and plan for the sessions, selecting the moderator and assistant moderator, conducting the focus groups and lastly analysing the information.

### 3.3.1 Why focus groups?

Unlike group interviews, focus groups are meant to explore one topic or phenomenon in depth through collective sensemaking and meaning construction. According to the theoretical stance of symbolic interactionism, presented in Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), social phenomena are created through interaction with others. Therefore, focus groups are more representative of everyday life in a naturalistic sense than individual interviews (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Focus groups are interactive in nature (Oates & Alevizou, 2018), which enables the researcher to study social dynamics within groups as part of the qualitative research that one can not do with solely qualitative one-to-one interviews. For example, one can research how participants both individually and together make sense of a certain occurrence or phenomenon and how people express this to other participants (Oates & Alevizou, 2018), respond to others (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) and possibly try to validate as well as legitimise their perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Because multiple focus groups were conducted, we could study different group dynamics that occurred in each of the sessions. For a rather unexplored area, exploratory focus groups are a fitting method, where the structure is limited (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Additionally, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) point out that focus groups are beneficial as an exploratory tool in qualitative research and especially in market research. Therefore, we decided on a semi-structured focus group structure in order to extend on existing theory (Oates & Alevizou, 2018), but still make it as openly structured as possible to capture the respondents' instant associations since the phenomenon is fairly unexplored. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) focus groups can, in contrast to traditional interviews, facilitate the respondents to be challenged by each other, both in terms of views and coherence in arguments. Through the participants challenging each other, the researcher can encounter more realistic data, since the respondents reconsider and revise their perspectives (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

### 3.3.2 Focus Groups on Zoom - opportunities and challenges

Conducting focus groups on the digital communications platform Zoom allowed us to reap the benefits of recording both video and sound while it also enabled us to have participants from all over Sweden without having to travel (Falter, Arenas, Maples, Smith, Lamb, Anderson, Uzzell, Jacobs, Cason, Griffis, Pozin & Wafa, 2022). Having a video recording of the focus groups made it possible to analyse the non-verbal communication as well and not

only the spoken words, which according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) is valuable when conducting a social constructionist study. Zoom as a tool made it possible for the participants to sit at home or another place where they are most comfortable which contributed to relaxed and open conversations. Additionally, we chose Zoom since our participants were familiar with the platform because it has been widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, Zoom has a number of features that were beneficial during the focus groups e.g. private chat function and raising hands.

However, it is important to note that there are some potential drawbacks of conducting focus groups this way. Having a reliable internet connection is one that is brought up by Falter et al. (2022) and therefore we clearly communicated to the participants that they should ensure that their internet connection was stable well ahead of the focus group. Furthermore, the focus groups we conducted were synchronous since the discussions took place on a virtual platform and the data was collected through real-time conversations (Falter et al. 2022). Lastly, we decided to do the focus groups in Swedish since this was the participants' native language, which allowed them to fully express their thoughts and ideas (Oates & Alevizou, 2018). Hence, by doing this we avoided the barrier that foreign language potentially could cause. Language itself was not a focus in this study and because of that, the translation of quotes was not an issue.

### 3.3.3 Role of moderator

The framework for focus group research presented by Carson et al. (2001) argues for the importance of having a clear structure when it comes to moderating the focus groups. Carson et al. (2001) suggest having one moderator and one assistant moderator. Thus, the roles of moderator and assistant moderator were split between us every other time. Based on the suggestion from Carson et al. (2001) we decided who should have the role of moderator and assistant moderator prior to the execution of each focus group. The moderator was responsible for asking the question and making sure that the discussion ran smoothly while the assistant moderator made sure that the technique was working since the focus groups were conducted digitally. Furthermore, Carson et al. (2001) make a distinction between low involvement and high involvement by the moderator. We settled on assuming a low involvement role when conducting the focus groups because we wanted a more loose structure facilitating the participants to speak freely as discussed in 3.3.1. The moderator is



supposed to balance between creating too much structure and not having enough structure since the former hinders the upcoming ideas from the participants and the latter can cause departing from the research issue and initial questions (Carson et al. 2001). At times, there was a need for more structure and at other times we noticed a need for less structure, and thus we adapted to the situation. Furthermore, when the aim of the research is linked with theory building incentives, it is important to avoid leading questions and encourage and guide respondents with little to no discussion involvement (Carson et al. 2001).

In terms of time, each focus group lasted for around one hour and we offered different time slots to make the process as convenient as possible for the participants. We started the discussion by asking some introductory questions to break the ice, with the main aim to make the participants feel comfortable with us as researchers as well as with each other. Such questions can encourage sharing and active participation (Oates & Alevizou, 2018).

### 3.4 Sampling

When selecting the participants for our study we incorporated both purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The purposive sampling was done to make sure that the participants fulfilled certain criteria and the snowball sampling functioned as a complement to the purposive sampling. Participants chosen through snowball sampling were based on recommendations from the purposively chosen participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability strategic sampling method where the participants are chosen because of their ability to aid the researcher to fulfil the purpose of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). When choosing participants we strived for representation to ensure that the sample was as representative of the population as possible. However, as Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) point out, due to purposive sampling being a non-probability sampling method it is not possible to make generalisations regarding the population in large. Representativeness in this case refers to the sample being representative of the population relevant for the study where inferences can be drawn from that specific group (Oates & Alvizou, 2018).

Additionally, a sequential approach was used which means that more participants were continuously added to the sample to provide further insights and development to the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, we added more participants throughout the research

process to make sure that we reached data saturation (Silverman, 2014). This can be compared to snowball sampling where the researcher finds new participants through the initial participants (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, snowball sampling was used as a complement to the purposive sampling method, where our initial respondents were asked to recruit people they considered suitable for the study after they had taken part of the focus group session. The drawbacks of snowball sampling are the risk of lack of representation since it is based on personal connections (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Due to the fact that the snowball sampling only accounts for a small part of the entire sample, we reduced the risk of lack of representation since we aimed for representation among the participants selected in the purposive sampling. However, it is worth pointing out that the participants chosen through snowball sampling still had to meet the same criteria as the purposefully chosen participants.

The criteria that constituted the starting point for the sampling were that the participants should identify as female, reside in Sweden, belong to Generation Z and have a social media presence where they encounter fashion advertising on a daily basis. Women, and specifically young women are central to the phenomenon since they tend to feel a stronger responsibility for sustainable consumption as well as being the protagonists in the fast fashion industry (Horton, 2018; Chant, 2014; Southwell, 2014). As for Generation Z, we limited the sample to people born between 1995 and 2003 in order to ensure that all participants were considered legal adults. This was partly because of ethical reasons but also because minors might at times be hindered from shopping online which consequently could limit the empirical data we can gain from them because of a lack of experience as consumers. If the people taking part in the focus groups are the same age and come from similar backgrounds, they will be more likely to become intimate and share personal information (Wibeck, 2002), which seemed to be proven during the focus group sessions. By fulfilling these criteria we argue that our participants were able to contribute insightful perspectives and interesting ideas regarding the topic for the study.

Table 2. Focus Group Participants

Nr	Pseudonym	Birth year	Occupation	Level of education (ongoing)	Date	Duration
1	Iris	1996	Student	Master's degree	11/04/2022	57 min
	Molly	1998	Student	Bachelor's degree		
	My	1998	Student	Bachelor's degree		
	Stina	2000	Student	Bachelor's degree		
	Alice	1995	Student	Bachelor's degree		
2	Lilly	2000	Student	Bachelor's degree	19/04/2022	52 min
	Ella	1998	Working	Bachelor's degree		
	Nora	1997	Working	Bachelor's degree		
	Shirin	2000	Student	Bachelor's degree		
3	Sara	1997	Working	Bachelor's degree	20/04/2022	48 min
	Ingrid	1998	Student	Bachelor's degree		
	Astrid	1997	Student	Master's degree		
	Olivia	1996	Working	Bachelor's degree		
4	Ebba	2000	Working	High school graduate	25/04/2022	54 min
	Reema	2000	Student	Bachelor's degree		
	Mariam	2000	Working	High school graduate		
	Ida	1997	Working	Bachelor's degree		
	Ilse	1999	Working	Bachelor's degree		
5	Alice	1995	Student	Bachelor's degree	28/04/2022	15 min
	Ella	1998	Working	Bachelor's degree		

Source: own illustration

## 3.5 Analysis of data

Analysing the data is the last step in Carson et al.'s (2001) framework. When analysing large amounts of data it is crucial to structure and thematise the material. To do this in the most efficient and correct way possible we made use of the steps presented by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), which are sorting, reducing and arguing and these functioned as guiding principles throughout the analysis process.

### 3.5.1 Sorting

In order to avoid the chaos that comes with qualitative data, there is a need to sort the material thoroughly (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Because the focus groups were semi-structured, the data was unstructured from the start. Sorting the material is a way to spend time with the data in order to get to know it and create an overview and also a way to discover what raw material is material relevant for the study (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). When sorting the material the researcher creates order and evaluates what data is valuable and avoids clichés in

sorting. Furthermore, it facilitates the analysing process in the way that it arranges the empirical data after categories and themes which can be used as a structure for the analysis, where the sorting becomes a skeleton for writing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

For the sorting process, we made use of thematic sorting where the categories were based on certain keywords or expressions that were recurring in the data (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). In addition to this, how interaction manifested itself during the focus groups and how the participants challenged one another also constituted a basis for the sorting and categorising (Oates & Alevizou, 2018). During the categorising, we tried to avoid categorisations that had already been done in previous research and instead favour original knowledge to contribute to current theories. We as researchers also tried to recategorise the material multiple times to avoid what would be our initial favourite approaches.

### 3.5.2 Reducing

The second step in the process of analysing the data is reducing, which is completed in order to scale down the large amounts of data to be able to pinpoint what is actually important for the study. Reducing also makes it possible for the researcher to get a better overview of the material (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Moreover, this process gives an answer to the problem of representation since it is in fact impossible to reproduce everything that has been documented throughout the research process. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) point out that the process of reducing resembles a dialogue between the material and the researcher since the researcher should be able to comment on the material while simultaneously being controlled and disciplined by it. Hence, the researcher can not only choose the material that pleases him or her, and due to this the process of reducing can be rather sensitive and brutal (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) present two primary strategies for reducing; categorial reducing and illustrative reducing. In this study, we made use of illustrative reduction which means that the reduction of data aims to illustrate a phenomenon as clearly as possible which resonates with the purpose of this study. Furthermore, when implementing illustrative reduction the researcher also identifies a number of subcategories that helps the researcher account for and make sense of the phenomena (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

### 3.5.3 Arguing

The third step in the analysis process is arguing and this involves theorising the material that has been sorted and reduced. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) affirm the importance of not belittling the findings of the study and to rather argue for why the findings deserve attention. The tendency to belittle one's findings concerns the problem of authority and by being able to argue for the importance of your findings this problem can be eliminated (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). To make sure we were successful in arguing for our findings we constantly tried to back our empirical findings up with, or put in contrast to, existing theories (see chapter 5). Moreover, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) put emphasis on the range of meanings the word theorising can have and that it does not necessarily mean to confirm something but it can rather be proposing a new perspective or presenting an approach or concept from a different point of view. Hence, this step is where our research contribution was determined.

Theorising is a way to argue since the creation of theory should convince the reader about the importance and value of the empirical findings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Because we had been working with the material continuously when reducing and sorting theorising it became easier since some ideas and themes had been taken out to make sure that we were able to clearly define our contribution as well as fulfilling the purpose of the study.

## 3.6 Limitations

Similar to other methods there are some limitations to focus groups and it is crucial to be aware of these to restrict them as much as possible to increase the quality of the study. One limitation brought up by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) is the fact that the researcher might not be able to control the development of the discussion and it can be hard for the moderator to determine when to intervene in the discussion. However, since our focus groups were set out to be of semi-structured character we were open-minded to the discovery of new themes and topics. Hence, this was less of a limitation for this study since we wanted the participants to be able to express their opinions and let the discussion evolve. Another limitation that is brought up in the context of focus groups is the risk of group effects, which refers to the situation when the group agrees on a particular idea and then becomes uncritical toward this idea and develops an unreasonable connection with it (Janis 1982 cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Nonetheless, this phenomenon has not been thoroughly studied in focus groups

contexts which makes it hard to determine to which extent these group effects might impact the data collection (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). But being aware of this phenomenon during the focus group discussions allowed us as researchers to ask critical questions when the participants were showing tendencies to be uncritical towards an idea presented during the discussion.

The large amounts of data that can be collected through focus groups are clearly beneficial, but it can cause problems when analysing the data. To facilitate this process we adopted the framework for analysing data presented by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), discussed in 3.5, which functioned as a guiding light when sorting and reducing the data and identifying the themes for our study. Lastly, it is important to address the issue of participant discomfort in a focus group. When discussing subjects that may be uncomfortable or taboo, participants can be afraid of sharing their ideas or experiences which can affect the result of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, we do not consider discussing fashion consumption to be something that causes discomfort among young females and in addition to this all participants showed an interest and willingness to participate in the study because they all voluntarily signed up.

### 3.7 Quality of Research

To determine the quality of the study we, as suggested by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) based on Guba and Lincoln (1994 cited in Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019), analysed the trustworthiness of the study based on four different criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria also manifest the ideas of the existence of multiple truths rather than just one single truth, which makes them adapted to qualitative research. Hence, instead of using reliability and validity, that is more suited for quantitative studies, the concept of trustworthiness constituted the starting point for the analysis of the quality of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Moreover using reflexivity as a determiner of the studies quality and level of transparency is frequently brought up by qualitative researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Olmos-Vega, Reneé, Stalmeijer, Icon & Kahlked, 2022) albeit, this was used as a fifth criterion.

Credibility refers to the importance of conducting research in accordance with good practice and ensuring that the collected data from respondents is accurately presented in the study

(Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Therefore, to make the study as credible as possible it is important that the researcher has an understanding of the phenomenon or social world that is being studied. Interpreting the data in a representative way is known as respondent validation and this process is used to ensure that there is coherence between the findings and the information shared by the respondents in the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). To ensure the credibility of this study we constantly strived for transparency by documenting the different parts of the data collection to make sure nothing was lost in translation. Moreover, being two researchers allowed us to both participate in analysing the collected data to ensure that our respondents' ideas and perspectives were correctly displayed in the analysis. Lastly, having both video and sound recordings of the focus groups allowed us to watch and listen to them multiple times to ensure that our interpretation was as credible as possible.

Transferability concerns the possibility of using the findings of the study in a different context (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Geertz (1973 cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) describes transferability as finding a thick description, where deep parts of a certain culture are accounted for in the research. In regards to this, the study contributes to a given concept in need of expansion. However, the findings of this study can be used in similar fashion marketing contexts as well. Worth mentioning is that the sample for the study is fairly small and it is difficult to argue that the sample is representative enough to use the findings in another context, but the results of the study can provide incentives for further research.

Moreover, dependability aims to affirm the study's trustworthiness and is similar to reliability in quantitative research. The concept is concerned with keeping all records and documentation of the entire research process and further making this documentation accessible (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Early on in the research process, we made up a system for keeping track of all documentation to ensure dependability. Doing so also facilitated the process of external parts assessing the quality of the study.

The fourth criterion, confirmability is concerned with objectivity and while it is recognised that complete objectivity is nearly impossible it is crucial for researchers to strive for minimal influences of personal values and beliefs when interpreting the data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, to achieve a high confirmability level it was essential to disregard personal values to make sure that the results of the study were as accurate as possible. Throughout the research process, we avoided cherry-picking when writing about theories as well as when

choosing what empirical data was going to be incorporated. The data was coded into categories, which then developed into themes (see 4.0), which made cherry-picking less of an issue.

Lastly, reflexivity will be considered as a measurement of the quality of the study. Olmos-Vega et al. (2022) defines reflexivity as “[...] a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes” (p.1). This definition acknowledges the importance of the researcher being self-conscious about their potential biases and possible preconceptions that can affect the analysis process. Moreover, reflexivity also concerns the researchers' relationship to the respondents and how this might affect their responses to the questions asked during, in our case, focus groups (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To secure reflexivity we decided to implement what Olmos-Vega et al. (2022) refers to as “reflexive writing” which concerns activities like journaling and field notes to document the research process. Being able to look back at this documentation facilitated the analysis process since we were able to return to the field notes when something in the transcribed material was ambiguous (Olmos-Vega et al. 2022).

### 3.7.1 Methodological reflections

When conducting the focus groups, the respondents were informed that the discussion was recorded in order for us as researchers to be able to transcribe the material and all agreed to the terms. We made use of an informed consent form (see appendix C), with research ethics in mind that our respondents had to sign before the focus group took place. The respondents were informed about being kept anonymous, that they were given made-up names and that the recordings were deleted after the transcription was done.

The participants of the focus groups were divided so the majority did not know each other previously. This was done because we wanted to avoid previous dynamics between respondents to impact the result of the study. However, because of this, we experienced that the respondents were at times more comfortable talking directly to us than talking to each other, which could potentially affect the gathered empirical data. One problem that can occur when respondents are part of an already established group is that they easily fall into a given role (Wibeck, 2002). Simultaneously, when researchers are looking into why and how people



express opinions on a matter, it could be beneficial if the group already is familiar with the rest. Therefore, for future focus groups it could be a potential opportunity to have people that already know each other. Conducting focus groups is a difficult task because of the severe planning that has to take place in order to gather multiple people at the same time for an interview. Gathering five focus groups is therefore a strength in this thesis, and was primarily made possible because we decided to conduct the focus groups via the digital communication tool Zoom. For the last focus group session, an additional theme was included. The respondents were shown pictures from the Monki campaign (see appendix D), at the end of the focus group session and got to react to it as well as discuss it together. The reason why we chose to show the participants a campaign was because we discovered it was difficult to discuss femvertising without disclosing the entire theory behind it. Many interesting aspects came with this segment which led us to conduct a further focus group session with some of the previous respondents from the first three focus groups.

## 4. Analysis of empirical findings

In this chapter, the relevant empirical data is presented and analysed in the themes identified when sorting the material. The empirical data is structured into five main themes with some of the categories supplemented by subcategories. First, we discuss the theme barriers for sustainable consumption, then we analyse responsibility in the context of fashion consumption followed by a discussion of perceptions of fast fashion companies, shame and lastly the impact of *the self* when it comes to fashion consumption is discussed.

### 4.1 Barriers for sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption was a recurring theme during the focus groups. However, it was often discussed in terms of the barriers experienced when trying to consume sustainably or when consuming clothing in general. The respondents often discussed price, lack of time, insufficient knowledge and information as barriers when consuming fashion or even thinking about their consumption. Most of the participants agreed that they would prefer to choose more sustainable alternatives or consume less clothing. However, it was clear that most of the respondents at the same time did not try to confront the barriers and instead behaved in accordance with them. It is crucial to understand these barriers to be able to reason how young female consumers navigate as consumers of fashion and analysing these barriers also made it possible to detect whether or not there was a gap between intentions and actions. By outlining these barriers we can better understand what difficulties young female consumers experience as consumers of fashion.

#### 4.1.1 Price tag

The most recurring barrier, discussed more heavily than any other, was the barrier of price. When asked to discuss the three most important factors when consuming clothing or not, price was mentioned by almost all of the respondents immediately, prior to any other factors. Most of the participants express how they would like to prioritise differently, but most of the time other factors, in addition to price, such as quality, style and comfort, were considered prior to consuming ethically.

Ella

[...] I have to be honest and say that I don't consciously think about it [labour conditions] each time unfortunately. I wish I was better and thought a step ahead, but for now price comes first and then quality or material.

What Ella states here clearly represents the importance of the price of clothing and that it is considered more important than sustainability concerns. On the one hand, this points toward Ella possessing conflicting values and that she wishes to prioritise sustainability when consuming but in reality she prioritises price. On the other hand, it is worth considering that claiming that she wishes to prioritise sustainability matters when consuming could be a result of societal pressure during the focus group, meaning that this is what the society wants her to say and to avoid shame or judgement Ella expresses that she aspires to be a more conscious consumer.

Many of the respondents expressed concern about their own economy in terms of what they can afford or not. The underlying reasons were mostly linked with them being students or early in their careers, with a limited income. Although, many expressed that they would consume more if they had an unlimited amount of money, which in many ways is contradictory to being sustainable. Some expressed that they wished that they would take the environment into greater consideration, but it was just not possible to consume sustainable clothes at the pace they wished for with their current income. One respondent, Reema, expresses how she would have liked to think that an endless amount of money would contribute to her consuming more sustainable clothing, but she also realises that she probably would not, no matter her financial status. This goes to show that Reema does not consider money as a pressing issue for consuming sustainably, but rather her current habits.

Reema

I would like to believe that if I had an endless amount of money I would choose more sustainably, but I also know myself and I don't know how much money I would spend on it or whether I would buy the same things as today but slightly more expensive.

Price even seemed to exceed sustainability as a factor providing them with a sense of pride. Buying something inexpensive when you could have bought an expensive piece of clothing is described as respectable, saving money being the main credible factor. One of the respondents describes how price comes first in terms of being respected and credible and then there is also

the bonus that comes with the sustainability factor. This, once again, clearly distinguishes how most of the participants value price high, where saving money is described as a good feeling.

Molly

In my friend group right now it feels like you get *cred* [slang expression for recognition] when you find something expensive online and then instead find it on Tradera [platform for second hand shopping] and purchase it a bit cheaper. You become a bit proud over the fact that you found it cheap because you are a student and don't have money, and at the same time do something good.

The reasoning of sustainability being a bonus when consuming seems to be a recurring thought. My resonates that "[...] of course I don't want to make too much of an impact on the environment. [...] but it is more of a bonus than an actual reason". By this My illustrates how financial concerns come first, and if sustainability were to be considered a result from deciding not to purchase, it would act as a bonus rather than an incentive not to purchase.

On the contrary, the respondents who showed a greater environmental concern and tended to avoid fast fashion brands as part of their routines also discussed price as a great determining factor, and it was even mentioned before other things they experienced as concerning, such as sustainability and capitalism. This shows that the level of sustainability intentions does not decide whether the respondents seemed to care about price as an essential aspect. Even when sustainability acts a determining factor for consuming or not to consume, price is still present and affects the participants' thoughts and actions.

Ingrid

[...] I only buy clothes second hand, so I don't think about it [buying clothes] that much. Because it is second hand it is often cheaper and then I can buy more. I also don't feel as bad about it regarding the environment and capitalism and all those things that exist in our world.

Along with Ingrid, Nora discusses how sustainability is a deciding factor for her when consuming and that it can act as the main incentive for not purchasing a clothing item. However, price is discussed as an even more important barrier whereas she describes it as

having stopped her more often than sustainability concerns from purchasing clothing. There is an ongoing balancing act between price and sustainability factors, where price ultimately takes the prize.

Nora

I would also say that money is a big factor, but I also want to try to be aware and many times I have stopped myself and said “no, I really don’t need this”, but it is not at all as often as when I see the price tag on something and neglect it for that reason.

Hence, we argue that price seems to be the most important barrier for sustainable consumption of clothing and even for clothing in general. That price acts as a common barrier among the participants does not strike as surprising, however, it is an interesting notion how price can act as both an empowering credible factor as well as a major hindrance for young female consumers to act how they would like to act. Price being evident also showcases how the industry-wide issue of sustainable options being higher priced maintains an unethical consumption pattern.

#### 4.1.2 Lack of time

When discussing whether the respondents consume sustainably, time was an important barrier. The participants often discussed that most fast fashion companies have convenient online shops that are user friendly, which is one of the reasons they tend to prefer fast fashion companies when purchasing clothes.

Sara

[...] I think that all fast fashion companies profit from having easy to use online stores, it makes them easily accessible, which unfortunately makes you rather want to purchase your clothes there because it takes less time and is more convenient.

Sara discusses time as an evident factor for not purchasing second hand clothing. Among a few of the respondents, there is a thorough understanding that second hand shopping is more time consuming, which is one of the main reasons why they tend to purchase fast fashion instead, especially online. Lilly argues that “I’ve tried second hand and sometimes you find things, but I think that it takes a lot of time and costs as much, which makes me turn to

internet shopping instead". The participants who experience time as a barrier do mention that they use online shopping as a tool to solve the problem of having too little time.

Furthermore, Sara discusses how laziness is part of the time barrier.

I guess I agree that the attitude is not aligning with my behaviour. My attitude is that I would like to purchase more second hand clothing and my behaviour is that I am too lazy and don't spend enough time and energy on finding second hand clothing that I like.

With reference to the notion that the participants experience that sustainable consumption demands more time, this barrier contributes to the creation of a gap between intentions and actions. What strikes as interesting is that even though a majority of the respondents possess an intention to shop more sustainable, and for them that means second hand, they are still not willing to spend the time necessary to do so which could mean that the incentives or the experienced rewards for consuming sustainable is not strong enough. Hence, the reward for spending time on researching more sustainable clothing alternatives is not big enough to keep people from consuming the less time-dependent option of fast fashion. Moreover, this results in an opportunity cost between consuming sustainable and consuming time efficiently and in the case of this study the majority of participants found saving time when consuming more important than consuming sustainable. Thus, the fact that the respondents experienced sustainable consumption as more time consuming, and time not being something they were prepared to offer, ultimately results in a barrier.

#### 4.1.3 Knowledge and information

Another barrier that was discussed, although not as frequently as the others, is the barrier of knowledge and available information. It is also evident that a few of the respondents are simply not aware of labour conditions and environmental sustainability concerns, which can be due to lack of own investigation or as a consequence of it being difficult to find information. Although the participants disclose an interest for sustainability they have not spent time to learn whether the brands they purchase from engage in such activities. There is also the sense of denial, where the participants describe it as them repressing facts because it is easier to not be informed. This shows a clear sign of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), where the participants actively are trying to reduce dissonance by not searching for

information. By not being aware of the possible issues with their shopping habits, they maintain a cognitive consistency.

Reema

I would like to consider myself as someone who looks a lot more at sustainability and conditions and all things like that, but if I'm being completely honest it's not something I look into for each company I purchase from. I have no idea, I don't know how they are doing, the ones who make the clothes.

Reema describes how she thinks of herself as having an intention to search for information about sustainability, but also realises that in practice she probably will not realise this intention. She is aware of the issues of labour conditions as well as environmental sustainability concerns, but does not look into the companies she is currently purchasing clothes from. Shirin, however, discusses how it is something she might actively try to avoid because of the seriousness that comes with it.

Shirin

I think it's difficult to find [information], at least for me. Maybe you try to repress that it is really serious how it is with the labour conditions. [...] If you look at the website, they would never directly admit the shortcomings.

At the same time, some of the respondents show great awareness of the fast fashion industry and tend to avoid companies that they know do not actively engage in sustainability matters. Although they are aware of the shortcomings in the industry, they as well do not spend much time searching for information or find it difficult to find information to support their values. Lilly, for example says that "it is really difficult to find information on how things are in the factories, it's basically impossible. So if you want to take responsibility as a consumer, it kind of doesn't work anyways, it's very very difficult". She thereby demonstrates that the difficulty with finding information heavily limits her ability to take responsibility when consuming clothing because she can simply not find information that she considers truthful.

Alice

[...] I think I have a lot more decision anxiety than others when it comes to purchasing clothes. But also because of the industry and that you know that it is not always sustainable. It's just so difficult to know what happens where it is produced.

Iris resonates in a similar way: "I don't look into what country it [the garment] is produced in, but more like if you know something about the brand. I don't look into it deeply but more if I think it is sustainable, or better". Lilly, Alice and Iris demonstrate that they are usually not aware of details such as where the garment is produced, but are instead more reliant on the reputation of the industry, and sometimes the reputation of specific brands. Therefore, they do not consider communication from specific brands but rather a general industry wide impression.

Another finding was that most of the participants often spoke about second hand shopping as the sole sustainable alternative to fast fashion. Many participants discussed why it is difficult to shop second hand and what barriers they are facing when doing that, however, very few discussed other sustainable alternatives for consumption. This might be because of the knowledge and information barrier, meaning that the participants find it difficult to search for information regarding all brands, and not only fast fashion brands. Therefore, they might avoid being reliant on the fact that any clothing brand, that is not second hand, is sustainable. Shirin exemplifies how there seems to be two options and how she has to pick one over the other: "[...] I don't buy much second hand. I study and when I don't study everything else takes so much time so I only purchase [fast fashion] clothing online".

With the price, time and knowledge barrier in mind, we wonder whether the intention to consume sustainably comes from within or if it simply is an external pressure the respondents feel the need to live up to. If it were to be an internal objective to act sustainably, perhaps the majority of respondents would act on it to a greater extent and not refer to the established barriers. On the contrary, if it first and foremost is an external pressure from both the industry and society as a whole, it might not be an incentive enough to act on, whereas the responsibility is not fully internalised for the respondents. The respondents generally made sure to mention their awareness in terms of sustainability, but were somewhat reluctant when discussing what actions they take to act on experienced responsibility. Because of the chosen method of focus groups, we were made aware that many of the participants typically spoke about their ethical consumption as a response to others claiming to act sustainably, in what



could be described as a chain reaction. This indicates that there in fact is an external pressure, where the respondents were deeply affected by each other's answers. The potential experienced responsibility will be explored more in depth in 4.2.

## 4.2 Carrying the weight of the world and the bag

Throughout the focus groups it became apparent that the participating young females experience a big responsibility for sustainability and values being an ethical consumer, and some also felt like it was on them to bring up the topic with friends and family. Furthermore, some participants expressed that women tend to speak up about sustainability questions in different social media forums.

Mariam

[...] Girls do take more responsibility for sustainability, the environment and human rights or really everything in my opinion, with that said I think women feel more pressure and responsibility just because there are more women speaking up about these questions and having opinions on it.

The way Mariam expresses herself showcases that she indeed perceives women to have a greater responsibility for sustainability concerns and that this feeling can result in a sense of pressure to act accordingly. Something that strikes as interesting is that she experiences that women tend to speak more about sustainability which in turn can accelerate this sense of responsibility. Meaning that seeing people, in this case women, speaking up about sustainability on e.g. social media can result in a pressure to do the same.

Ida discloses how she experiences that her female friend groups discuss sustainability more than other friend groups: “Yes I think women experience more responsibility for sustainability and I believe we talk more about it with our friends compared to what men do. I don’t think that conversation is as common among men”. Moreover, Ida points out “I think women are built differently and have a more empathic mindset that makes them care more [about sustainability]”. Ida discusses that the sense of responsibility can be derived from both the fact that women in nature might be more empathic, and therefore feel a greater sense of responsibility, and that women tend to talk more about sustainability with their female friends. Perhaps, this instinctive sense of responsibility that women possess can explain why

women talk more about sustainability which in turn can stimulate the feelings of responsibility. The notion that women have more empathy, and because of this possess a higher level of responsibility, is something that was recurring during the focus groups.

When conducting the focus groups we made a conscious choice of not mentioning the word sustainability to avoid priming the participants' answers and discussions. However, interestingly enough in every focus group the question of sustainability was brought up within the first five minutes both in terms of environmental concerns and working conditions in factories producing clothing for fast fashion companies. That the topic was mentioned so quickly in each of the sessions showcases how the participants strongly experience that they are 'carrying the weight of the world' and especially when consuming clothing. The first question asked during the focus group was regarding the thought process behind consuming fashion and Alice reasoned the following way "[...] I try to be quite restrictive with how I choose to buy clothes and not at least because of the environmental aspect of it". Other participants also expressed a feeling of responsibility for the environment but that they experience different barriers towards turning their values into actions.

My

[...] Of course I care about the environment and take it into account. I would have loved to buy some timeless pieces that are produced under better conditions but I feel like I don't have the economy for it. It feels wrong to spend that much money on one piece of clothing right now.

What My discusses is how it is already a given fact that she reflects on sustainability but is hindered by her financial situation, which is one reason not to buy pieces that are produced under better conditions. This claim indicates a strong sense of responsibility, but nonetheless, not strong enough to change actions. However, some participants have managed to turn this sense of responsibility into actual behaviour.

Ingrid

[...] I only purchase second hand clothing except for underwear or activewear, other than that I only purchase second hand clothing, so that [sustainability] is my main concern when I shop. Also, since it is second hand it is most often cheaper and that

means I can buy more and my consciousness is not as bad when it comes to the environment and capitalism.

The fact that Ingrid brings up her consciousness as one of the driving incentives for ethical consumption speaks in favour of a great sense of individual responsibility. Further, she seems to question capitalism as an ideology, which could explain why she assumes a strong individual responsibility. The idea that capitalism is something fundamentally unhealthy does not align with companies acting for the greater good, which could be why Ingrid advocates for an individual responsibility instead of relying on the industry to act responsible. But even Ingrid who almost exclusively consumes second hand feels like she might not be doing enough which indicates that she experiences a high level responsibility on an individual level. “I tell myself, due to the fact that I shop second hand, that my climate footprint is not that big but maybe it’s not really that easy but that’s what I tell myself at least”.

In addition to responsibility, the participants also stated that they feel more pressure to dress a certain way compared to their male peers, which becomes somewhat ambiguous with the sense of responsibility. This means that women tend to feel a pressure to act in a sustainable way when consuming clothes while also following trends and purchasing new clothes to meet the expectations of society. When asked if they believe there are external pressures for increased consumption Molly answered “Definitely, I believe that is what drives my consumption”. Sara agrees with this, but adds the dimension of society and influencers pressuring her into having to own a range of different clothing items to fit different occasions.

I feel like society and particularly influencers want you to buy so many different pieces and a large amount of clothes so that you have a lot to choose from for different occasions. So I guess that is a form of pressure [...]

It might not only be a question of gender either, it can also be a matter of which generation you belong to. The participants also discussed how they experience other generations not being as aware of sustainable consumption as they themselves are. One of the reasons explained by one of the participants points toward social media as a platform, where the participant experiences most of the sustainability advertisements to come from. Young females as part of Generation Z have grown up with social media as a constant, whereas the older generation are not as involved in the social media sphere. Stina speculated how this

could be a reason for why it is more difficult to change the habits of generations older than themselves.

[...] compared to my parents' generation, I don't think they have the same awareness. Or it might be rather mixed, but my mom is not as involved in social media as I am. We grew up with social media and have been exposed to information that you should be sustainable. They lived long before this and it might be more difficult to change their habits into consuming sustainably than it is for us.

What Stina states here argues for the fact that social media could be a source that accelerates the responsibility young females experience for sustainability matters. This could be a partial explanation for why the younger generation feel a greater sense of responsibility compared to the older generations. Hence, the younger generation is to a large extent exposed to sustainability communication on social media both from companies and influencers which can increase the experienced responsibility. Additionally, Iris points out that "for me it feels like it's more women that values that [sustainability] and that all messages concerning sustainability are targeted towards women" which is a further indication that the fashion industry tries to convey this sense of responsibility to females.

Consequently, the participants discuss how both social and environmental sustainability has been on the agenda throughout their lives and that it is something they constantly face, for example on social media. Thinking and acting sustainably is described as colloquial and everyday language for most of the respondents, making it a natural part of their surroundings. Even though many of the participants claim to not be informed or knowledgeable about sustainability, it does not seem to be difficult to have an ongoing discussion about it throughout the focus group sessions. However, even though many are aware and knowledgeable about sustainability, combining the topic with the fashion industry and certain companies might be a limitation for some of the respondents.

## 4.3 Nobody remembers a coward... or a fast fashion company?

One of the findings was that the participants found it difficult to determine whether they had seen specific sustainability initiatives from various companies. When discussing advertisements they either were fond of or disliked, most of the respondents had a hard time remembering specific ones. For example Sara discussed how she found it difficult to think of a specific commercial she had seen.

No, I don't think I see a lot of old media if you would call it that, like newspaper advertising or tv commercials. It is only clothing commercials through social media in that case, and you are so used to that so you just scroll past the advertisements. So I don't know if there is something that I like or speaks to me.

The participants mostly discussed sustainability advertisements in general, where they all showed a great scepticism towards such commercials and campaigns. The answers pointed towards an awareness that many companies tend to discuss sustainability, however, it all seemed to blend together in a homogeneous stream of messages. When discussing the Monki campaign, 'Salute Sisterhood', the respondents were sceptical about whether it would make a difference or not for society to print meaningful quotes on clothes. They questioned whether the initiatives were genuine and what the underlying reasons were for posing a campaign based on values the respondents would assume as important to them. Many of the participants assumed that Monki was using important values such as feminism and sustainability for capitalistic motives, which for some even caused anger.

Ida

I get angry, because they are driving consumption by alluding to things that you find important, but they are not making the situation better. Just because I buy a shirt from Monki that says that my body has rights it won't change anything, it feels wrong for me.

Furthermore, the participants did not feel empowered by watching the advertisements or by hearing about the campaign and the thoughts behind it. Other participants focused more on

the actual print when discussing the clothes and did not seem to consider the thought behind them as much. They for example discussed how it would feel ridiculous walking around with such prints on their clothes and Alice discussed how “they [Monki] are exploiting the opportunity of a contemporary phenomenon”. Along with Ida, Alice too believes that “they are alluding to something that is current and that all women can relate to, but it is a bit fake because you know that they are driven by profit”. Based on these claims, Monki seems to be missing a sense of authenticity when communicating the campaign. When asked about what the respondents thought would make the advertisement better, the concept of genuineness arose. Because many of the companies that were discussed during the focus groups are built on a fast fashion business model, people questioned how they can claim that they are sustainable.

#### Olivia

The core of fast fashion is not sustainable which makes it difficult to communicate that [it is sustainable]. But I guess it is good that they are doing something good. A little good is better than a lot of bad things.

Because Olivia does not trust fast fashion companies to be sustainable she does not seem to care about what they are communicating in terms of sustainability. She simply does not believe that fast fashion companies can act sustainably because of the business model. This perception showcases an acceptance from Olivia, meaning that she has come to terms with the idea that the fast fashion industry is problematic and therefore struggles to communicate in what she experiences as an authentic manner.

Another aspect is that the participants tend to prefer when there is a personification to the brand, where they seem to appreciate a spokesperson for a brand rather than just the brand itself. Granting all this, huge corporations are not perceived to appear as authentic when communicating sustainable or feminist values in comparison to small personified brands with a distinct main character or where influencers act as spokespersons for brands. This is exemplified when Iris discusses how she feels more pride when she wears a garment produced by a single mother than if she were to buy clothes from H&M.

I’m very tired of greenwashing, that H&M always talks about that they have a “conscious collection” that is ecological and stuff. It annoys me, and then I don’t want

to buy from them. But I get very happy, for example, I have a dress that is made of recycled silk made by a single mother, and she buys it from a family business in Italy, then I become proud and want to tell people when I wear it that there is a thought behind it.

Aligning with this, Molly discusses how she does not trust when a company like H&M speaks about their brand, but when there is a person behind the brand it appears more genuine. The participants seem to have a hard time trusting big corporations and experience that their motives are mostly linked with financial growth rather than an honest will to change and improve the world. This might be because they find it hard to relate to the brand without a clear personal identity that they can relate to, creating a brand uniqueness, which in turn makes it difficult to build brand loyalty (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022).

Molly

[...] Now that we've mentioned influencers and such, and it feels like when they are saying something about their brand it feels more trustworthy, if there is a person behind it rather than when H&M says something. Because then it is just like, "okay, so how can I trust this?"

An insight from the focus groups is that the participants do not express any form of loyalty towards fast fashion brands, rather that they buy something when there is a discount code or a sale, or simply where they offer an item that they are fond of. When talking about more expensive brands they claimed to feel more empowered by these clothes and maybe that could indicate a higher level of loyalty towards these brands. Generation Z tend to be less loyal towards brands (Reisenwitz, 2021), which does not speak in favour of the fast fashion companies.

## 4.4 The walk of shame

Shame around fashion consumption and particularly consumption of fast fashion was something that was brought up frequently in the focus groups. When asked if clothing and consumption of fashion is something that they talked about with friends or family a majority of the participants said if they talked about it it was with friends. Most of the participants mention how they often discuss fashion consumption with friends and how they give each

other advice on what to buy and not to buy. Something that became apparent was that there was a stronger sense of shame around consumption among family and especially older family members like parents and grandparents in comparison to friends. For example Ella expressed that “I think it is nice that you can order online by yourself, without no one noticing in the same way as when you lived at home with your parents” which argues that she experiences shame around consuming fashion towards her family and that her consumption is something she would prefer to hide from her family.

My

I grew up in a home where my family bought a lot of second hand clothes and I often went to flea markets and so with my grandmother and if I do that she will pay for my stuff because she supports that. She would never support me buying from a website like Nelly.com [fast fashion retailer] or similar [...]

My describes how her grandmother would not support her if she bought from fast fashion companies because of their standing tradition to go to flea markets. However, there is a difference from other participants who, instead of lack of support, describe it as being judged by their family. Furthermore, Ebba distinguishes another perspective when she discusses how she would not talk about fashion consumption with her family besides her sister. This points towards the fact that it is more of a matter of generation than it is about family members, where we can assume that Ebba’s sister is closer to her in age than her parents. She also describes how she gladly discusses new purchases with her friends and often wants to share it with them as a moment of joy and pride, whereas she tries to not discuss it with her parents because of the feeling of judgement.

Ebba

I try to not talk about it [fashion consumption] with my family because I feel like they are judging me, but when I have purchased something new I immediately come running to my friends that I meet daily to show them what I bought if I believe they have interest in it or if it is something I am really happy about [...] So a lot with my friends but not as much with my family besides my sister.



Moreover, some participants argued that their experienced shame around fashion consumption was dependent on the context they were in and what kind of people they interacted with.

Ida

[...] Since I started to work for the PR-firm where I work I feel ashamed about shopping because all of my colleagues are really good at buying second hand or not shop at all. So if I buy something new I don't tell them or even pretend it is second hand. So I would say that I don't talk about fashion consumption with friends nor family, but it of course depends on which friend it is, when I lived in Lund I spoke quite a lot about it with my friends.

What Ida expressed here is clearly manifests the shame experienced around fast fashion consumption and that the level of shame is dependent on surroundings. Something that strikes as interesting is that prior to surrounding herself with ethical consumers she spoke more openly about her consumption and it was not associated with shame to the same extent. This further indicates that the level of shame experienced is affected by the people you are surrounded by. Moreover, Ida even admits that she has pretended that something she purchased is second hand when in fact it is new, which in addition to shame, also affirms the pressure for young consumers to act in an ethical manner. Thereby, it can be argued that as a young consumer of fashion you experience a pressure to be an ethical consumer, particularly in certain contexts, and if this is not complied with it can result in shame. Moreover, Idas reasoning indicates that young female consumers not only need to cope with the responsibility for sustainability matters that fast fashion companies push them to adopt but also pressures from their surroundings e.g. colleagues, friends and family. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Alice claims she is the person who make her friends feel ashamed of their consumption.

[...] I think I am the person in my friend group that makes people feel bad for their consumption, but it is mostly because I look at the fashion industry in a kind of black and white way, which can be challenging as well since it is not always positive to be the one preaching morality. But I believe that I talk more about the fashion industry in a negative way, in order to promote second hand shopping or to only purchase clothes that you really want.

Something that strikes as interesting with what Alice is saying is that individuals or groups of individuals can potentially push other people to adopt their values of being an ethical consumer, which even though experienced as shameful, may result in a shift towards ethical consumption. For example in the previously discussed statement by Ida she indicates that because she surrounds herself with people who values ethical consumption she has started to question her own consumption pattern which eventually could lead to a change in behaviour. Hence, experiencing shame has the potential to lead to a change in behaviour towards ethical consumption.

Another aspect of consumption that can cultivate shame is the financial aspects of consumption, this is embodied by Ilse:

I don't really tell my family when I bought something new but rather colleagues and friends. If my mom asks if something I'm wearing is new I might not want to admit that it is new because I want her to think I have more control over my money than I actually have. But if fashion consumption is brought up I am open with how much I shop, but it is not something that I bring up myself.

What strikes as interesting is the fact that among the respondents that experience shame towards their family it is in the majority of the cases not because of sustainability factors but rather financial aspects, for example, that their parents expect them to take care of their money in an attentive way. Thereby, the participants insinuate that attentiveness with money is not equivalent to consuming fashion in the way that they are currently doing which is why they are feeling ashamed in front of their parents. We therefore argue that some of the participants are aware of the fact that they are consuming more fashion than needed. Based on what was detected throughout the focus groups we argue that shame can be derived from many places; it can be a result of your upbringing, social pressures and colleagues or friends.

Another finding that demonstrates shame is that a majority of respondents that were consumers of fast fashion argued that one of the reasons as to why they still consumed fast fashion was that they did not have the time or money to shop more sustainably. But perhaps these arguments are rather defence mechanisms to continue their consumption of fast fashion. If you have an interest in fashion and an intention to consume more sustainably, it would act

as an incentive to be willing to spend more time and maybe even money on it. Albeit, the participants of the study might be ashamed but instead of admitting this feeling of shame they blame other factors, such as the earlier established barriers (4.1).

Hence, the fact that there is shame around consumption argues for that these young female consumers are aware of the drawbacks of the fast fashion industry and that people are opinionated about it, which makes them consume fashion in secret to avoid being judged by society or their families. This feeling of shame also indicates that the respondents feel like they have a responsibility to not consume fast fashion to the extent they currently are doing and that they try to suppress this responsibility by not talking about their consumption patterns.

## 4.5 The self

A significant theme that arose throughout the focus groups was that egoistic thoughts or *the self* played a crucial role in consumption of fashion. The respondents' answers indicated a concern for sustainability factors, particularly when it came to poor working conditions in factories, but that the awareness of this was not enough to decrease consumption. Hence, even though a majority of these young female consumers were conscious and showed compassion towards people, and particularly women working in factories, the look and price of the piece of clothing was still of higher value. The following reasoning clearly showcases these conflicting values:

Ella

[...] Well this sounds terrible, but for me it is like I prioritise usability ahead of working conditions and factors like that, which sounds awful but I think that we maybe don't discuss it enough or that it is hard to find the information, but maybe it is up to me as a consumer to find the information. However, I wouldn't say that it is something that I don't prioritise on purpose it is more like it falls through the cracks.

What we can learn from this is that the social sustainability factors draw the shortest straw compared to self-benefiting. Albeit, a mentality of 'I know I should not do it but I do it anyway' was something that was detected among the participants' reasoning. This mentality is manifested in this statement by Sara during one of the focus groups: "Weirdly enough I keep

purchasing from the fast fashion companies even though I know they have poor working conditions for people in other countries which is a bit messed up”. The participants show great awareness of industrial issues, but tend to prioritise themselves when consuming. However, de-prioritising ethical consumption is not a conscious action, but more described as something that happens because it is easy to look past when you prioritise yourself.

Nonetheless, another finding is that when the respondents were asked if they ever felt empowered by fast fashion advertising, every participant agreed that they had not. However, a majority of the respondents claimed that something they experienced as empowering was shopping second hand. For example Astrid, among other participants, pointed out that “I have felt more empowered when shopping second hand, when I have found something unique” and “when I buy second hand I don’t feel like I contribute as much to polluting the environment”.

Hence, the participants showed tendencies of feeling empowered when consuming second hand clothing rather than when seeing advertisements from fast fashion companies that intend to empower women. The interesting notion here is that the participants claimed to be more empowered when consuming in a more sustainable way but they still choose to consume fast fashion. This means that even though fast fashion companies through femvertising activities aim to empower female consumers it is rather sustainable and second hand consumption that makes them feel empowered. We argue that being empowered is a desirable feeling and something that people seek to achieve.

Almost none of the participants mentioned that they feel empowered by consuming clothing from companies who communicate femvertising or environmental sustainability messages, which is contrary to companies’ intention (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020; Drake, 2017). Although most of the participants discussed second hand shopping as an empowering activity, very few engaged in such activities. Perhaps, feeling empowered was not an aim they continuously strived for when consuming clothes. At the same time, many of the respondents claimed to feel empowered when they wore something they got compliments for, or simply as a result of wearing something they thought looked good on them. My exemplifies this: “If you get compliments and such you feel extra empowered, but I don’t know, there is also the ‘high’ sometimes when you buy things”. This sense of empowerment might override second hand purchases, since it is easier to accomplish, in accordance with the barriers relating to second hand shopping discussed in the first theme. Separately, Ilse says that she tends to feel

empowered when “[...] if I buy something that is a bit more sustainable, that I can use for a longer time, it feels good in the soul, that you’ve done something good kind of”. This claim further showcases that some of the participants consider sustainability as an empowering factor and could potentially be a result of sustainable communication from companies.

Moreover, a possible explanation for the continued consumption of fast fashion was to justify consumption by avoidance. For example one respondent pointed out that if a company claims that a piece of clothing was made of sustainable material or was to some extent recycled this was enough for her to feel better for purchasing fast fashion. Meaning that she believed that the claim a company made regarding sustainability was convincing and comforting, even though she might not fully trust it. This also relates to the time barrier since she claimed not having enough time to do research on that particular company's working conditions and level of pollution. However, it can also be argued that she was scared of what she might find if more research had been done and therefore it might be easier to just trust the companies to maintain a good consciousness when it comes to consuming fashion. Albeit, to justify consumption by avoiding or dodging the truth was something we detected among several respondents in the focus groups and that this avoidance was primarily due to feeling better about their consumption.

Ebba

Of course you feel better if you shop somewhere where the company claims that it is sustainable, for example if you buy something from H&M where it says *conscious* it feels better even though I know that it is not as sustainable as they make it seem.

This reasoning clearly manifests how consumption can be justified by avoidance since Ebba says that she feels better consuming clothing that claims to be conscious even though she does not perceive it as completely authentic. Ida reasons in a similar way by pointing out that “on a subconscious level it feels better if it says that something is sustainable even though you know it’s not”. These statements showcase the opportunities for fast fashion companies to capitalise on people's tendencies to neglect or avoid the truth. This results in a win-win situation where the fast fashion companies manage to sell clothing they claim to be sustainable and the consumers can maintain their consumption while upholding a self-image of being a sustainable consumer. So in the end everybody is happy? Well maybe not. This state of denial allows for the fast fashion companies to get away with their poor working

companies for people in the Global South since consumers tend to look past this and not value it enough.

## 5. Discussion

The themes discussed in the analysis constitute the background for how the participants in this study navigate themselves as consumers of fashion, in relation to responsibility and ethical consumption. By understanding this the study also provides further insights into the fast fashion industry and how they should cope with sustainability communication. This chapter aims to theorise and further elaborate on the findings discovered in the empirical material and analysed in the previous chapter.

### 5.1 Assuming the responsibility

The responsibility that the fast fashion companies impose on the individual consumer is for example affirmed through marketing initiatives. Returning to the previous example regarding H&M's club system, they do in some sense transfer the responsibility onto the individual consumer by e.g. rewarding consumers for bringing their own shopping bags or purchasing something from the conscious collections. Furthermore, Holt (2012) discusses the concept of unsustainable consumption as a development of market ideologies. As for the fast fashion industry, there seems to be a congruent understanding among the participants that neither consumers or companies act ethically. According to Holt (2012), market ideologies that are characterised by unsustainable consumption need to be aimed at one market at the time rather than as an objective to achieve overall change in consumer society. This strategy does not align with Chant's (2014) feminisation of responsibility, which entails that females across different markets are targets for sustainable behaviour. It seems that both in terms of market institutions and consumer practices, the fashion market is characterised by a sense of guilt for not being responsible enough.

According to previous literature, we can establish that one way to manage this issue for the companies is to circumvent said responsibility through communicating empowering values for the consumers and inducing individual responsibility (Sobande, 2019; Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). As for the female consumers, who are the main prospect in this study, a way to manage said guilt is by assuming this individual responsibility on different levels, which is further discussed along with the theory proposed by McNeill and Moore (2015). The respondents of our study describe fast fashion companies as being somewhat bland and they put themselves and their demands at the forefront, in line with the idea of the female

consumer as the protagonist of the industry (Horton, 2018). When the consumer acts as a protagonist in the market segment, it might be difficult to assert responsibility to the industry itself. Entwistle (2014) discusses that there is a lingering belief that young women as passive fashion consumers, controlled by the industry, which does not align with the thought of women being protagonists and main characters in the market segment. If women are the main characters of the industry, we argue that they ought to have some power in its development, which is also discussed by the participants since many of them tend to avoid certain brands as basic practice.

In a macro perspective, the stance of femvertising assumes an idea that women as consumers of fashion are in need of empowerment. In line with the opinions of the participants, it might be presumptuous for the fashion companies to act like a knight in shining armour. What should said empowerment lead to and what actions or change could the sense of empowerment result in? We argue that the empowerment of female consumers in the Global North will not lead to change for women working in the supply chain in the Global South, which is the main pressing issue in the fast fashion supply chain according to Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020).

## 5.2 Lack of brand loyalty

Something that was frequently brought up as determining factors of fashion consumption was price and easy accessibility, mentioned in terms of online shopping being more available. According to Su and Chang (2017) price and availability are two factors of perceived value that in turn act as predictors of young consumers' loyalty towards fast fashion companies. However, our study does not show any signs of these people being loyal towards specific fashion companies but rather that you purchase when a company offers a discount code or when you come across a brand in social media. Moreover, our respondents' answers indicate that they were somewhat indifferent towards which brand they purchased from, which aligns with Reisenwitz (2021) description of Generation Z. This contradicts Su and Chang's (2017) findings since our study indicates that young female consumers do not tend to be loyal to fast fashion companies but are rather loyal to the industry itself, in the sense that they still purchase a majority of their clothing from different companies within the industry.



Su and Chang (2017) does not acknowledge sustainability as something that can function as a predictor of brand loyalty. Nonetheless, the results of our study indicates that sustainability could act as a unique selling point for fast fashion brands, compared to price and availability, which are core assets for fast fashion companies. Especially since there is a need for uniqueness when consumers are less involved with a brand (Nunes, Ordanini & Giambastiani, 2021) and that Generation Z prefer subtle marketing messages communicated in a creative way (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). This is due to the fact that our respondents pointed out that they avoided certain fast fashion companies that they perceived as more unsustainable because of e.g. previous scandals regarding sustainability matters. Hence, one can argue that if these fast fashion companies were to engage in sustainability matters they might generate more loyal young female consumers. Thereby, we suggest that a potential extension of Su and Chang's (2017) findings is that sustainability could be a predictor of brand loyalty towards fast fashion companies. However, as discussed throughout this study, the business model of fast fashion is in nature unsustainable (Di Benedetto, 2017), but generating loyal consumers could be a greater incentive for these companies to strive for sustainability, since it can attract a wider and maybe more sceptical consumer group.

Generation Z is described as a sceptical generation concerned with companies walking the talk (Scholtz, 2019; Patel, 2017). Considering the movement towards ethical consumption (Horton, 2018; Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2013), there is a belief among the participants that fast fashion companies are trying to appropriate whatever subject is considered ethical at the time to comply with trends among consumers. Furthermore, the more trendy topics the companies appropriate, the more they will need to internalise a consistent behaviour with what they actually communicate. Adopting too many different values with a deficient business model, in terms of sustainability, might be too much of a challenge for said companies. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) discuss that the strongly competitive environment requires that suppliers within the fast fashion industry constantly need to adapt to current demands. The fast fashion business model is to, as quickly as possible, translate current trends into products. However, it might be too difficult to translate both clothing trends and trending humanitarian topics at the same time. Moreover, a driver for greenwashing is in fact competitive pressure (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), which entails why the fast fashion industry is so interlinked with the greenwashing, being part of a strongly competitive environment. We argue that the same goes for femwashing because of its similarity to greenwashing (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019).

Furthermore, the respondents discussed how Monki was using contemporary phenomena for capitalistic motives without making an actual impact, which strongly speaks to the fact that it is a complicated process to communicate such initiatives in an authentic manner (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022; Jeon & An, 2019). According to the findings in this study, Generation Z is showing clear signs of being strongly sceptical towards communication about environmental sustainability issues from fast fashion companies. The fundamental sceptical attitude regarding CSR initiatives might also limit future similar marketing initiatives, such as femvertising. Communicating femvertised values might be problematic for these companies, because it puts further pressure on them to coordinate their prosocial corporate practice with what they are saying (Vredenburg et al. 2020). If labelling it as greenwashing is close at hand for the respondents, femwashing might be as well. Specifically, combining CSR practices and femvertising can be argued to be overwhelming for fast fashion companies. In consonance with the definitions presented by Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen (2017), Sarkar and Searcy, (2016) as well as Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007), we suggest that the two marketing strategies are similar in the way that the concept is to go beyond bare legal minimum for charitable causes when complying to expectations from society, while also hopefully improving the reputation of the brand. At the same time, for both CSR communication and femvertising, there is the risk of being accused of greenwashing as well as femwashing.

Contrastively to the many similarities between CSR activities and femvertising detected in this study, Abitbol and Sternadori (2019) describe how the two concepts differ in the sense that femvertising is frequently performed through narrative self-referencing, dissimilar to environmental sustainability. Rialti et al. (2017) describe how females tend to build stronger loyalty to brands that implements elements of personalisation into advertisements, which is a notion acknowledged by our respondents. However, the respondents claim that personification also gives a sense of trustworthiness for sustainability initiatives, which contradicts the practical contrast Abitbol and Sternadori (2019) discuss. At the same time Pillay (2021) discusses how Generation Z prefer content that is authentic and genuine and preferably generated by other consumers, which indicates that they want a personification that they can relate to.

### 5.3 The contradictions of authenticity

The respondents in this study seem to demand authenticity and trustworthiness in advertising, which resonates with what Scholtz (2019) and Wolf (2020) argues to be distinctive for Generation Z. However, when it comes to making a purchasing decision authenticity and trusting the company does not seem to play a pivotal role. When assessing the respondents' reasoning concerning the Monki campaign 'Salute Sisterhood' none of the respondents perceived it as authentic. This is not only a perception among the participants but also within the research community (Varghese & Kumar, 2020; Lima & Casais, 2021). In accordance with Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot (2022), lack of trustworthiness and transparency were pointed out as reasons for this during the focus groups. It comes to show that the criteria, authenticity and trustworthiness are highly relevant and something that companies should consider when implementing femvertising initiatives. Additionally, similar criteria were mentioned regarding environmental sustainability from multiple respondents, which indicates that criteria for both femvertising and sustainability communication are similar. Accordingly, Szabo and Webster (2021) conclude that transparency, when it comes to sustainability communication, can reduce the risk of companies being accused of greenwashing. However Abitbol and Sternadori (2019) argue that consumers who enjoy femvertising generally do not question the authenticity and thereby are less critical towards these initiatives. Thus, if the respondents of the study would have had a positive attitude towards femvertising, they might not have questioned the advertisement by Monki to the same extent. According to Grau and Zotos (2016) as well as Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen (2017), femvertising makes the brand more authentic and less prone to reluctance from females, which does not align with the reactions from the respondents when exposed to the Monki campaign.

Moreover, the respondents claimed that they would not buy clothes with prints like the ones in the 'Salute Sisterhood' campaign, since it was believed to be created for capitalistic reasons rather than a genuine concern. Nonetheless, they still purchased clothing from Monki or brands that have created similar femvertising campaigns; just not the pieces with the prints on them. This leads us to the fact that young female consumers still purchase from the brands they perceive as untrustworthy or inauthentic which means that authentic femvertising, as suggested by Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot (2022), does not appear to have particular influence on consumers' purchases. Consequently, this allows fast fashion

companies to, even when perceived as inauthentic, retain consumers that claim to be or have the intention to be ethical consumers. Given this discussion, there is a contradictory perception of the importance of authenticity when it comes to femvertising and CSR between our participants, who are a part of Generation Z, and the research community. The primary drawback for companies being considered inauthentic is that they can be accused of femwashing (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022) and greenwashing (Szabo & Webster, 2021) which according to our study does not prohibit young female consumers from purchasing. Thus, authenticity does not seem to affect purchase decisions among our respondents, however, it is still a notion they value highly and can help increase perceived brand value.

## 5.4 Keeping up with cognitive consistency

McNeill and Moore (2015) discuss three levels of fashion consumers, which are all identified among the participants in this study. However, very few were fully aligning with the indicators for the ‘Self’ consumer, since most of the participants disclosed an inner responsibility for sustainability issues as discussed in the paragraph above. The ones identified as the ‘Social’ consumers and the ‘Self’ consumers act similarly in many situations, whereas the ‘Sacrifice’ consumers differ strongly from the other participants because of how their attitudes play a major role when consuming. Most of the participants agreed that there is a gap between their behaviour and attitude and express that they experience what can be described as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), when they purchase fast fashion clothing, because they are aware of the fact that it is not sustainable. Even though most of the participants did not disclose that they feel empowered by the companies who produce and advertise these kinds of clothes, there might be reason to think that they are in some way trying to reduce this dissonance. One example of this is that instead of listening to marketing initiatives from fast fashion companies, some of the participants state how they avoid digesting information altogether. This could be considered a method of reducing said cognitive dissonance. Moreover, avoiding this information could be a way for young female consumers to justify consumption and ultimately make themselves feel better about their purchases.

According to Holt (2012), unsustainable consumption is embossed by the market it takes place in. He states that the same consumers could act differently in different markets,

depending on what characterises that specific market in terms of unsustainable or sustainable consumption. Considering that the fast fashion industry is strongly characterised by non sustainable practices (Wei & Jung, 2022), it makes sense to assume that consumers feel less pressured to act in a sustainable manner on that market. This resonates with what Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) conclude, namely that ethical and environmental concerns do not have significant effect on brand avoidance when it comes to fast fashion, which our study endorses. On the other hand, young female consumers might still consume more ethically in other markets, which could be a result of them trying to keep cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1957), because of how they are acting as consumers of fashion. Many of the respondents show a major environmental concern, but do not necessarily act upon it when consuming fashion in particular. One possible reason could be that they are in fact acting on their environmental concern as consumers in other markets and therefore experience less of a cognitive dissonance.

Based on the participant discussions, there is a recurring sense of cognitive dissonance among the female consumers. According to theory, one could say that the companies are through empowering marketing providing the consumers with tools to reduce said cognitive dissonance (Southwell, 2014). However, most participants do not adopt the values that the companies are communicating and instead turn to their own methods to maintain cognitive consistency. This is done in multiple ways, as described by the participants. For example, the participants use the barriers for sustainable consumption as a way to reduce inconsistency, such as blaming their current consumption as inhibited by price, lack of both time and knowledge. They also, in some instances, lied or avoided telling their surroundings about their consumption.

## 5.5 The difficulties of being a fashion consumer

Instead of utilising the tools provided by fast fashion companies, to make consumers feel empowered and conscious, most of the respondents seemed to be avoiding them. We suggest that one reason might be that the fast fashion industry is not communicating them in an appropriate way for this specific target group. Another reason could be that the consumers are aware of both greenwashing and femwashing, calling the lies of the industry as soon as they see them. For this scenario, the consumer segment might be questioning all sorts of communication by companies in the industry, not considering any of the messages authentic.

An additional reason for this might be that they are too knowledgeable about the shortcomings of the industry historically, assuming that all sorts of CSR communication is fundamentally false and exaggerated for the purpose of profit. If this is the case, they might also be adopting full responsibility as individual consumers, because these consumers are not entrusting the industry to assume actual responsibility. This can be problematic for female consumers, referring to the already established feminisation of responsibility (Chant, 2014). If there is already a tendency for a specific consumer group to assume responsibility, there is the risk of the fast fashion companies letting them do precisely that instead of taking the responsibility themselves. This creates an uneven distribution of responsibility, considering that the unsustainable consumption is a consequence of the actions of both the consumers and the industry itself (Holt, 2012).

In accordance with Blake (1999) the study detected a gap between values and actions among a vast majority of the respondents and that the experience of practical barriers were the main cause of this gap. Meaning that even when there is an intention to be an ethical consumer, practicalities such as lack of information, time and money prohibit pro-environmental actions (Blake, 1999). Thus, we suggest if fast fashion companies want to make ethical consumption more accessible they need to consider being more transparent with their consumers to reduce the practical barriers. Particularly the experienced barriers of lack of information and ethical consumption demanding a lot of time. Furthermore, transparency can result in fast fashion companies being perceived as more authentic among young female consumers (Hainneville, Guévremont & Robinot, 2022). Nonetheless, authenticity does not seem to act as a crucial factor for predicting a purchase decision which potentially could mean that the fast fashion industry does not have strong enough incentives to be more transparent and authentic when communicating around sustainability. Based on the respondents of this study, only a few of them were determined to boycott the fast fashion industry due to their insufficient sustainability actions. This in turn means that the fast fashion companies can continue to capitalise on a large part of the consumer segment of young female consumers while maintaining inauthentic and untrustworthy communication. Ultimately this enables the feminised sustainability paradox to continue existing (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). In terms of bridging the value action gap that was detected among the respondents of the study we suggest that the practical barriers time and information could be reduced by fast fashion companies themselves but the incentives to do so are not profound enough. By making information easily accessible, time would not be as much of a barrier. Consequently,

this argues that the gap between values and actions among young female consumers will remain.

## 5.6 Extending on the paradox of feminised sustainability

Based on the analysis of the respondents' answers it can be argued that the paradox of feminised sustainability, introduced by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020), does exist but on an industry level rather than in the minds of consumers. This is because the respondents did not show any signs of feeling empowered by the advertisements aimed to make young female customers feel empowered; they instead pointed out that, as mentioned in the analysis, they felt more empowered when consuming second hand clothing which can be argued to be the opposite of fast fashion. This contradicts the research conducted by Drake (2017) that pointed towards increased purchase intention among females compared to non-females when brands promote female empowerment.

Moreover, according to the paradox of feminised sustainability, companies aim to create a sense of empowerment for women when they are consuming clothes (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020). However, the empirical material from this study clearly states that the participants seldom feel empowered when purchasing newly produced clothes, and especially not when the clothes are produced by fast fashion companies. Instead, the participants frequently spoke about purchasing second hand as a source of empowerment, which aligns strongly with the assumed responsibility for the environment that fashion companies push onto their female consumer segment (Horton, 2018; Chant, 2014). This notion demonstrates how the consumers might underlyingly be affected by the assumed responsibility created by the fast fashion industry but not be aware of the sender of the message, considering that none of the participants mentioned the industry as a potential influencing factor, but rather society as a whole.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter discloses the most important empirical findings and revisits the research questions to then explain theoretical contributions, practical implications and future research directions as well as limitations of this particular study.

### 6.1 Research findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how young females as part of Generation Z navigate as consumers of fashion and how they manage ethical considerations. In order to fulfil the purpose, we conducted focus groups with young females where they in dialogue with each other made sense of their fashion consumption. This allowed us to examine in-depth how they navigate as well as to what extent they experience a responsibility for ethical consumption. Understanding how young female consumers navigate furthermore allowed us to extend on the paradox presented by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) by incorporating a consumer perspective.

We conclude that young females are faced with conflicting values when navigating in the fashion industry; there is a pressure to be an ethical consumer but also an experienced pressure to dress according to trends. These conflicting values can find expression in the form of valuing and demanding authenticity and transparency from the fast fashion brands while still purchasing from these brands even though they do not deliver these values. While managing a need to act ethically when consuming, the respondents face barriers such as high prices, lack of time and lack of knowledge. The conflicting relationship between their attitudes and what they do results in a cognitive dissonance and allows the fast fashion companies to capitalise on young female consumers while maintaining an unsustainable business model, because the participants mostly blame themselves. Consequently, this means that the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing (Takedomi Karlsson & Ramasar, 2020) can continue to exist.

As for the experienced responsibility, we can conclude that the respondents assume an obligation to consume ethically. Among a vast majority of the participants, there is a constant feeling of guilt along with a pressure to act responsible. Although the respondents assume different levels of responsibility, the sense of responsibility is never absent in their minds.



According to Holt's (2012) market construction paradigm responsibility needs to be evenly distributed between consumers and the industry for actual development within the market segment. The theory indicates that the most successful strategy would be to divide responsibility between the two. However, our results along with previous research indicate that both individual consumers and the fast fashion industry tend to put the onus on consumers, and especially female consumers (Horton, 2018). Solely assuming responsibility to the consumers would not be viable in the long run for actual development of the market segment. Therefore, there is a continuous need for the industry to assume further responsibility rather than pushing it onto the consumer segment. However, it is crucial to stress that we do not intend to argue that the fast fashion neglects sustainability matters and that they do in fact commit to improve themselves or at least possess the intention to do so. Despite this, as concluded in this study, consumers experience that fast fashion companies put the onus for sustainability matters on the individual consumer which stresses the individual responsibility instead of an industrial one.

## 6.2 Theoretical contributions

The thesis introduces three main theoretical contributions. Firstly, this study provides new insights to the paradox presented by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) by including a consumer perspective. By including consumer culture, we step away from the political ecology perspective that is the main focus of the previous study, and enter into the marketing research spectrum. Considering that the paradox was coined by Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020), there has not yet been much research on the phenomenon making this study a pioneer in marketing and consumer culture research. Moreover, we initiate a discussion regarding how consumers as well as the fast fashion industry are maintaining the existence of the paradox through their current consumer patterns. Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) "criticise the way in which sustainably branded clothing is being pushed onto consumers, entangled with vague suggestions that more consumption can lead to female empowerment or environmental sustainability" (p.355). We extend this criticism by introducing a sole consumer perspective and question whether the female consumers disclose a sense of empowerment when consuming sustainably branded clothing produced by fast fashion companies and untangle an extensive scepticism from the consumer perspective. This is done through a sample of Generation Z females, which differs from Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar's (2020) sample, introducing a new consumer group in relation to the phenomenon.

Secondly, as stated by Southwell (2014) sustainability and fashion research often takes on a gender-neutral perspective. Our research discloses that gender is an essential part of sustainable development, which is not only relevant for the paradox of feminised sustainability marketing but also for sustainability research in general as well as consumerism. The market is under development whereas a lot has happened in recent years. Because of that, there is a need for extensive continuous research. Our study extends the currently existing sustainability marketing literature by incorporating a clear gender perspective. Thus, by incorporating the gender perspective this study constitutes a starting point for future researchers to explore the role of gender in fashion marketing and communication, with regards to ethical consumption.

Thirdly, this study finds that lack of authenticity and trustworthiness might not prohibit Generation Z from consuming fast fashion even though current research suggests that these are factors that are highly regarded among this generation e.g. Scholtz (2019) and Wolf (2020). Generation Z is an interesting consumer segment to study since practitioners within academia oftentimes return to the stakeholder power this generation has, whereas previous literature discuss a deep-rooted belief that young females are passive consumers of fashion, controlled by the industry (Entwistle, 2014). With increased purchasing power in the next few years, making them an even more crucial stakeholder, this study contributes to an understanding of how this generation navigates as consumers of fashion and what they consider to be of importance.

### 6.3 Practical implications

Based on the knowledge gained in this study, there were several practical implications made. For example, marketers need to carefully consider how they are communicating CSR initiatives for future references considering the challenging aspects that come with Generation Z. As confirmed by our participants, Generation Z is sceptical and constantly questions whether fast fashion companies walk the talk and if said initiatives are authentic or solely self-benefiting (Patel, 2017; Jeon & An, 2019). Although most of the participants still purchase clothing from fast fashion companies, they would prefer not to. Many of the consumers belonging to Generation Z have yet to enter adulthood and have therefore not yet become emancipated consumers, which means that the challenge meeting this important

customer segment will become even bigger in the near future. What consumers ask for in terms of external communication is for example increased transparency and openly disclosed information about production processes. Furthermore, combining too many contemporary trends as part of the marketing activities might be unnecessarily heavy for the organisation to endure. Our participants clearly disclosed how they consider fast fashion companies to be exploiting values they consider important by incorporating contemporary trends in their marketing, there is a high risk of failure. Because of the highly competitive environment the fast fashion industry experiences, it might be more beneficial to focus solely on a few aspects of CSR and/or feminism with a clear identified angle. The participants of this study experienced that initiatives to adopt values such as social and environmental sustainability as well as feminism tend to melt together in a unified chaos. This could be because they are missing the element of personalisation that is both discussed by Rialti et al. (2017) and confirmed by the participants of this study.

## 6.4 Future research and limitations

Albeit the main findings of this study cannot be statistically generalised, they contribute to a solid foundation from which to embark on quantitative studies. Future research could therefore take on a quantitative approach, examining the consumer segment in a numerical sense, looking at females' attitudes regarding both sustainability and femvertising in a combination with the paradox as the basis. This would provide a more extensive foundation in motivating how the paradox exists and functions, where this qualitative work could act as a forerunner. A limitation for this study is that it is situated in Sweden, therefore it would be interesting to conduct a similar study in other countries, or perhaps a study where the respondents are situated in multiple countries making the study even more dynamic. With quantitative methods, it would allow for the sample to be more extensive, including a different range of respondents as well as other nationalities.

Additionally, future research could examine other consumer groups since a limitation of this study is that it only includes females as part of Generation Z. Additionally, Southwell (2014) also discusses how younger generations are increasingly bending social gender norms. For example, it would therefore be interesting to look into how and if men are experiencing responsibility as consumers of fashion and to what extent. As stated by Southwell (2014), sustainability and fashion is often discussed in gender-neutral contexts, which also argues for

a further need for research within sustainability marketing, where gender plays the main character. We have already established the feminisation of responsibility and how it discloses itself especially in the fast fashion market. However, as the question of climate and social issues is continuing to pressure the industry and society as a whole, one could speculate that more consumer groups will enter this spectrum and therefore be relevant for further investigation. Therefore, other generations would be relevant for future research as well.

Lastly, research within this area could function as an incentive for the fast fashion industry to challenge itself, continuing the pressuring development towards a more sustainable business model. Whereas the issue is a widespread phenomenon, the current research is still limited.

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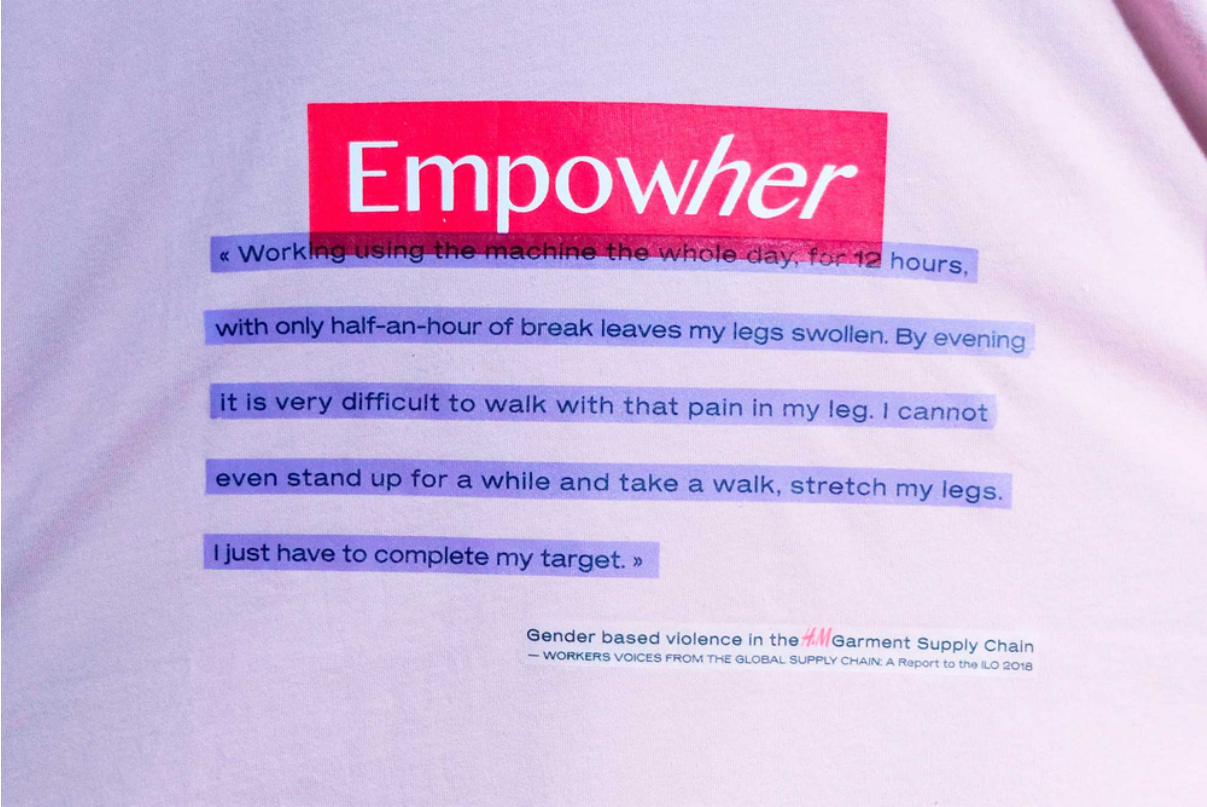
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# Appendix A ‘Salute Sisterhood’



(Êkhô Studio, 2019)



(Êkhô Studio, 2019)



(Êkhô Studio, 2019)

# Appendix B - Interview Guide Focus Groups

*(Translated from Swedish to English)*

## **Themes:**

‘You - the fashion consumer’

- ★ What does your thought process look like when you make decisions regarding purchasing clothes or not?
- ★ What are the three most important factors when deciding to purchase clothes?
- ★ If you had an endless amount of money - what kind of clothes would you buy?

‘Experienced external pressures’

- ★ Why do you consume clothes? For whom?
  - Do you experience any external pressures to consume a certain type of clothing or style?
- ★ Is it something you think about, why you consume clothes?
- ★ Who influences your clothing purchases?
- ★ Do you experience that you practise what you preach when it comes to consumption of clothes?

‘Female empowerment and sustainability’

- ★ How do you discuss clothing consumption with people surrounding you?
- ★ Do you experience marketing of sustainability initiatives as trustworthy? In regards to both environmental and social sustainability.
- ★ Is there something specific that makes you feel empowered or that you are doing something good when you buy clothes?

## **(Additional theme)**

‘An example of femvertising’

Monki, a company owned by the H&M group, has a campaign that they call “Salute Sisterhood”. With this campaign they want to strengthen and empower young women and in turn strengthen our society and the world we live in. The campaign includes elements of social sustainability, body rights, mental health, periods and so on. [Shows the participants examples from the campaign, see appendix D]

- ★ What are your thoughts on the campaign?
- ★ Is this sort of campaign something that speaks to you?
- ★ What type of communication from fashion companies speaks to you?
  - Is there a pattern in what you tend to be drawn to?



# Appendix C - Interview Consent Form



LUND UNIVERSITY  
School of Economics and Management

***The Sisterhood Saving the World Through Shopping***  
***Filippa Kjellberg & Amanda Nordlander***  
***Interview Consent Form.***

I have been given information about the master thesis and discussed the research project with *Filippa Kjellberg and Amanda Nordlander* who are conducting this research as a part of a Master's in International Marketing and Brand Management supervised by Annette Cerne.

I understand that, if I consent to participate in this project I will be asked to give the researcher a duration of approximately *one hour* of my time to participate in the process.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to participate in the research as it has been described to me. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and journal publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Name:.....

Email: .....

Telephone: .....

Signature:.....

**Preparatory questions:**

1. Which year were you born?

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2. What is your primary occupation?

- Student
- Working

3. Is it okay that we record this discussion with both sound and video?

- Yes
- No

4. Level of education?

- High school graduate
- Bachelor's degree (ongoing or completed)
- Master's degree (ongoing or completed)

## Appendix D - Example of femvertising



(Êkhô Studio, 2019)